



Experience with the DCED STANDARD FOR RESULTS MEASUREMENT: The Case of Samriddhi in Bangladesh



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**Experience with the
DCED STANDARD FOR RESULTS MEASUREMENT:
The Case of Samriddhi in Bangladesh**

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Samriddhi
enhancing rural prosperity through
market systems development in Bangladesh

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Text

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Samriddhi archives
Photos represent Samriddhi's process undertaken and results achieved,
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Abbreviations and acronyms

DCED	Donor Committee for Enterprise Development
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GWG	Gender Working Group
IA	International Adviser
LEAF	Livelihoods, Empowerment and Agroforestry
MRM	Monitoring and Results Measurement
MRMW	Monitoring and Results Measurement Working group
MS	Monitoring Specialist
M4P	Making Market Work for the Poor
MtR	Mid-term Review
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NGOAB	NGO Affairs Bureau of Bangladesh
PC	Project Coordinator
PSMU	Project Support and Management Unit
RC	Regional Coordinator
SAAKTI	Sustainable Access to Agro-forestry Knowledge, Technology & Information
SC	Steering Committee
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
ToR	Terms of References
VC	Value Chain
VCS	Value Chain Specialist
VCC	Value Chain Coordinator
VCCW	Value Chain Coordination Working group

1. Introduction

The agricultural sector in Bangladesh is one of the single largest sectors of the economy. As in many agrarian societies, this sector is estimated to be four times more effective in engaging in poverty reduction by raising income than the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth from other sectors.¹ Agriculture supports more than 75% of the population in Bangladesh as direct and indirect sources of livelihoods. More than 75%² of the population still lives in the rural areas which makes the economy predominately agrarian.

Rural markets in Bangladesh are quite dynamic. For producers, there is a good potential to sell their products at good prices at local, regional and national level markets. However, these opportunities are rarely tapped into. Accessing potential and higher markets and accordingly better price remains an obstacle for different reasons. The producers more often sell their products to middlemen, at farm gate. The low price they then get does not lead them to invest in quality, quantity and long-term viable businesses. The producers are not well organised and therefore they do not buy inputs in bulk amount, or sell products collectively. This increases production costs and decreases sales price further exacerbating their weak position.

Why some markets function well and others underperform or fail is a question that many development organisations, policy makers and researchers have been asking for long. Markets are crucial to the livelihoods of the poor for selling their produce and labour and buying inputs and other services. With increased globalisation, poverty has come to represent complex dimensions, posing challenges to approaches and strategies of poverty alleviation and more so to effectively and efficiently measuring impacts. This, in addition to global financial austerity, has made the work of development agencies like Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) more challenging in terms of effectively measuring results and managing projects. The challenge had therefore increasingly brought the work of these development agencies under closer scrutiny, especially from major donors eager to see the “value for money” in terms of addressing poverty.³

Samriddhi project is funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and implemented by HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation Bangladesh (HELVETAS hereafter). The project aims to contribute to sustainable well-being and resilience of poor and extreme poor households through economic empowerment. Based on the Making Markets Work for the Poor (M4P) approach, the main strategic focus of the project is a strong adherence to pro-poor market system development. It perceives poor people as economic actors either in their function as producers, consumers or labourers, but at the same time as members of communities striving for collective improvement of their livelihoods. The project specifically targets marginal groups like women and the extreme poor to address glaring gender and social inequalities in economic opportunities, access to services and decision-making processes.

According to the Mid-term Review (MtR) of Samriddhi conducted in May 2012, the project has been successful in its result delivery, strategic focus, as well as project set-up and organisational

¹ World Bank (2008). *World Development Report: Agriculture for Development*. Washington, D.C.

² BBS, statistical pocket book of Bangladesh 2013

³ Uraguchi, Z. (2013). “Payments for Marine Ecosystem Services and Food Security: Lessons from Income Transfer Programmes,” in Mohammed, E. Y. (ed.) *Economic Incentives for Marine and Coastal Conservation Prospects, Challenges and Policy Implications*. London: Routledge.

competency.⁴ Samriddhi was generally seen as effective in facilitating improved market system changes for larger and deeper impacts. The outreach of the project has expanded to more than a million households. Functional linkages are established with more than one hundred private sector enterprises in the input and output markets through private rural service provision system. Most targets of the project have achieved by June 2014.

Against the backdrop of good progress made by Samriddhi, designing and strengthening the monitoring and results measurement (MRM) system and accordingly accounting for and measuring impacts due to the project's facilitation has been difficult and time-consuming. Samriddhi evolved from two previous projects which were mainly based on livelihoods approach. The MRM system was initially based on the systems of the two previous projects. At the same time, Samriddhi marks the change market systems development approach. Therefore, the project naturally had to ask whether its interventions lead to any change in the market systems and result in change in poor people's life.

Project staff facilitating the interventions believed that achieving inclusive and sustainable results at scale would require having an effective and efficient system for monitoring and measuring results. There was increased interest by the project staff to measure results in practical and credible way. Subsequent participation of staff in training programmes focusing on measuring results in market systems development provided basic skills and knowledge in designing and managing the MRM system. The significant part of adjusting and/or complying with the Donor Committee for Enterprise Development (DCED) Standard, however, came from "learning by doing".

The process was iterative and mainly based on the self-initiative taken by the project staff. No prescriptions were made either by the donor or HELVETAS (Bangladesh and the Head Office in Switzerland) to follow a particular monitoring system, except the expectation that the project would be able to logically and systematically measure its results. In fact, as Kusek and Rist (2004: 32) noted, for establishing a functional MRM system, "a minimum of interested stakeholders and commitment is necessary for such a system to be established and take hold..."⁵ Extensive brainstorming of case studies and good practices that have already adopted or complied with the DCED Standard was done. Core issues relevant to Samriddhi's context and needs were identified and applied, which contributed to improving the MRM system.

Samriddhi ("Prosperity" in Bangla)

- **Duration:** August 2010 – February 2015
- **Location:** North-West & North-East Bangladesh
- **Funded by** SDC and implemented by HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation Bangladesh
- **Goal:** To contribute to sustainable well-being and resilience of poor and extreme poor households through economic empowerment
- **Focus:** market systems development through farm and non-farm value chains and rural service provision system; emphasis on private sector driven market systems
- **Outreach:** Around one million producers; more than 3,500 local service providers and 100 large private companies and local entrepreneurs

⁴ Tarnutzer, A. and Sarwar, R. (2012). Mid-Term Review of the SDC Bangladesh Project Samriddhi. Zurich and Dhaka.

⁵ Kusek, J. Z and Rist, R. C. (2004). *A Handbook for Development Practitioners: Ten Steps to a Results-based Monitoring and Evaluation System*. The World Bank: Washington, D.C.

2. Objective and significance

The main thrust of this paper is to present the experience of Samriddhi project in designing and implementing its MRM system based on the DCED Standard. By reviewing more than three years of “experimenting” with the Standard, this paper seeks to showcase good practices and challenges in designing and implementing the MRM system. While the paper describes and documents the evolution of the MRM system, it does so by critically analysing underlying factors that have contributed to developing and implementing the system. Some of these factors include designing the MRM system to support decision making at all levels, making the MRM system part of everyone’s job by ensuring staff capacity building as a priority and giving equal emphasis to qualitative and quantitative data with core indicators by developing an integrated MRM tool.

The discussion is also normative; it asks and presents what “should” be done for overcoming critical challenges (e.g., missing baselines) in order to gradually comply, as practical as reasonable, with the Standard. The issues discussed are central part of the process to enable facilitators to logically manage and explain their work to address poverty inclusively and sustainably. Such factors include availability of MRM manual describing and elaborating the “nitty-gritty” of the MRM system and cooperation / flexibility from the donor and good steering of the project.

In hindsight, designing and implementing the MRM system of Samriddhi based on the DCED Standard has contributed internally to the learning process. It has provided regular and vital information that Samriddhi needed. It has also improved good decision-making processes in order to increase the impacts. The MRM system has enabled the project to demonstrate impacts to the donor and other stakeholders, and thereby enhancing its credibility. It has enabled the project to convince and engage market actors how their effort and involvement, in addition to accruing benefits to them as private sector enterprises, are contributing to poverty reduction.

The case presented here is significant as it provides an example of gradually complying with the Standard. The issues covered are practical, showing the challenges of understanding key concepts and applying them to practical and sometimes complex field realities. The experience elaborated in the sections that follow have the potential to contribute to advancing knowledge on results measurement in the context of highly dynamic rural markets in which most small-scale farmers and marginal producers still struggle to come out of poverty.

3. Background to the monitoring and evaluation system of Samriddhi

Samriddhi is the merger of two predecessor initiatives: the Livelihoods, Empowerment and Agro Forestry (LEAF) project and the Sustainable Access to Agroforestry Knowledge Technology and Information (SAAKTI) project. These two projects, mainly based on livelihood approach, started in 2004 and increasingly showed complementarities and set-up. An external review carried out in June 2009 recommended to merge both projects to work in a more systemic and programmatic way and achieve efficiency and effectiveness. In order to support the merger from the two projects into one and establish a common project implementation, the project was renamed Samriddhi in August 2010, which means “prosperity” in Bangla. The MRM system of Samriddhi was initially based on the systems of the two previous projects. Samriddhi made the decision to focus more on market system development which therefore required adjusting or revising its monitoring system. To that effect, the results chain for private sector development through which impacting on poverty reduction was newly introduced to Samriddhi, to be included alongside the already defined logical framework.

As shown in Figure-2, the monitoring system of Samriddhi during its start was thorough, even though several process and system-related changes could not be fully captured and reflected. Changes at the level of the producers, local service providers as well as other market actors were identified. How these changes were interlinked together and whether they indicated systemic changes, however, was harder to visualise with just the logical framework. Since Samriddhi was designed in a way to further adopt the principles of facilitation and to follow the M4P approach, a new importance was given to the monitoring of systemic changes. The emphasis was linking interventions on market system level with changes at each level of the results chain.

Most of the targets set and included in the logical framework of Samriddhi were derived from the experiences of the project staff who were involved in implementing LEAF and SAAKTI. Other targets, mainly in relation to market systems development, were set based on the findings of value chain assessments in 12 sub-sectors conducted by the project. What made the process complicated was the lack of inception period for Samriddhi to establish baselines based on the findings of the value chain assessments. The consequence was missing baselines in a number of indicators and unstructured and / or complicated levels that lacked logical flow in terms of how the project would facilitate market system changes to achieve its stated goal.



Figure-1: Impact logic of Samriddhi's intervention

The system had two parallel components. The first was monitoring of outputs, outcomes and goal as per the logical framework of the project, defined *before* any value chain assessment had been carried out. The second was monitoring along the results chain at market trigger, market uptake, enterprise performance, sector growth and poverty reduction levels as per the results chain of the 12 value chain of the project. The results chain was developed *after* the value chain assessments.

In order to simplify and give structure to the monitoring system, Samriddhi decided and subsequently proposed to the donor (SDC) and HELVETAS Bangladesh to revise the logical framework. This was intended to make the logical framework consistent with the results chain and set up one single, coherent monitoring framework. The biggest challenge during the development of the impact logic was not the development of the results chain, but rather the definition of the systemic interventions. After this step was done, the methodology of impact logic development was quickly understood by the staff. Since the methodology of results chain was fairly new to the project, there have not initially been any specific guiding principles. This led, however, to some discrepancies among the value chains that were tackled at a later stage.

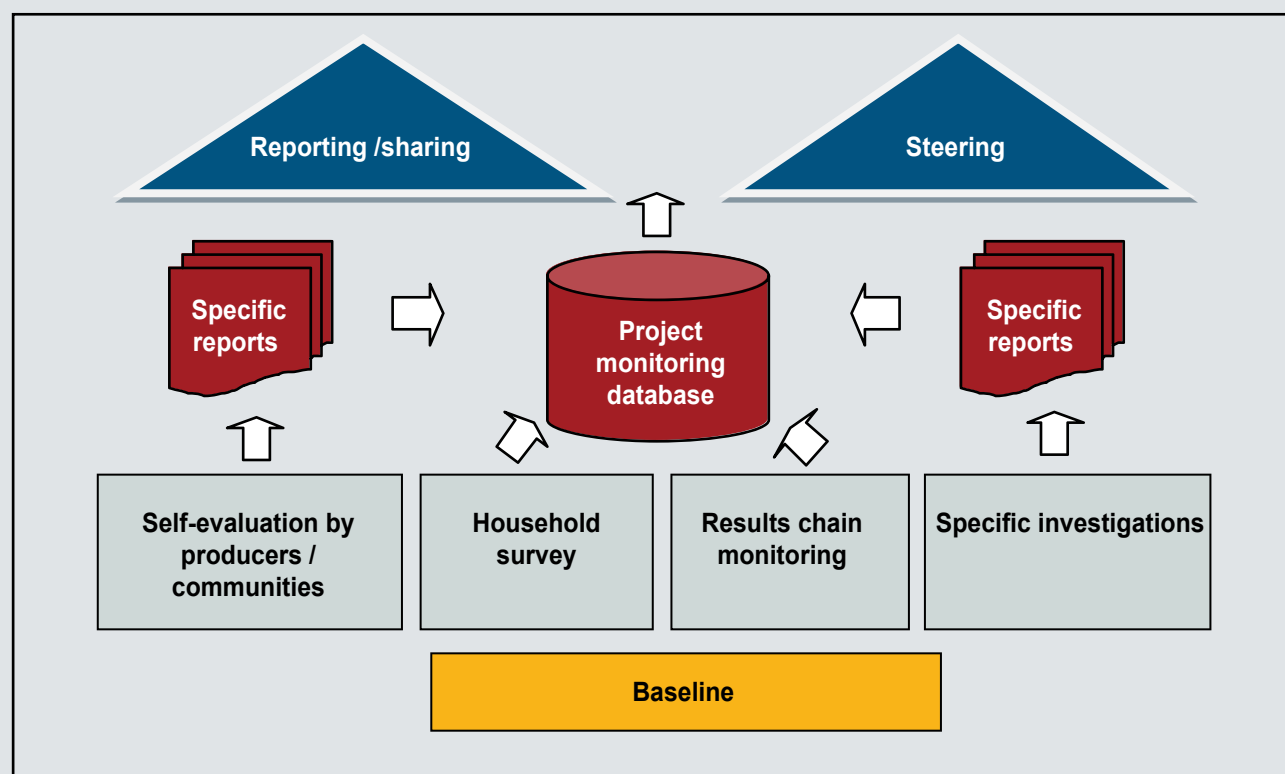


Figure-2: The monitoring system during the start of Samriddhi

Unlike “classical” monitoring and evaluation systems, an MRM system seeks to establish an internal system understood and managed (owned) by projects. What is common in both systems, however, is the importance of inviting external experts from time to time to do reviews of the system and provide feedback.

The project team then developed results chain and the respective indicators. The indicators focused on measuring changes along the results chain to achieve the dual goal: to see whether the links between the steps in the logic are actually working as well as to assess the quantitative changes that are leveraged by the initial interventions. Furthermore, qualitative assessment of actors' perception complemented providing a good picture.

The process has been intensive and time-consuming. Many of the logical framework indicators were reordered, some of them were modified, and new indicators were added. Where needed, the targets, frequency and tools were adjusted. The targets were revised taking into account staff's experience and estimations as well as the baselines. In addition, the indicators for which there were not yet any baseline, the targets were finalised on the basis of the baselines completed in July 2011. Some indicators were deleted because of their lack of relevance, difficulty to monitor or for being "lazy and loose" rather than precise.



4. The DCED Standard

The MRM system of Samriddhi seeks to follow the recommendations of an international Standard for monitoring and evaluation of market development projects, the DCED Standard. The DCED Standard provides a practical framework for projects to monitor their progress towards their objectives, enabling them to better measure, manage and demonstrate results. It specifies eight key elements to be followed for a successful monitoring system for results measurement.⁶ In comparison to traditional monitoring systems that use the logical framework as a tool for monitoring, the DCED Standard requires that each intervention begins by clarifying the logic of what they are doing, and what results they expect to achieve. This is represented in results chains, and indicators are set to measure each key change expected. The elements in DCED Standard are as follows:



⁶ See: <http://enterprise-development.org/page/measuring-and-reporting-results>

5. Rationale for introducing the DCED Standard

An M4P project like Samriddhi facilitates works focusing on improving/ developing market systems. Samriddhi's interventions are with private companies and local level agricultural services providers' associations where being functional the expected market system will make available services to producers resulting in productivity increases towards increase in income and employments of poor people. DCED Standard spells out how the intervention at system level generates results at beneficiary level and how the results could be measured in a credible way. As Samriddhi embraced M4P approach so for making the measurement credible it adopted DCED Standards for results measurement.

Articulating the results chain is the basis for monitoring and results measurement in DCED Standards. The results chain is "The causal sequence for a development intervention that stipulates the necessary sequence to achieve desired objectives beginning with inputs, moving through activities and outputs, and culminating in outcomes, impacts and feedback"⁷. Results chains are developed based on systemic interventions which expect to remove systemic constraints that are identified through market research. Once results chains are developed indicators of change against each of results to be defined. For measuring changes in indicators there is system for baseline and capturing changes. Mechanism for estimating attributable changes is in place in the Standard. As systemic change is key to M4P approach, capturing changes in the system is spelled out. The results is generated with the use of programme cost so in this Standard tracking programme cost is also taken into consideration. There is clear guidance of how the results will be reported. Finally, the guidance on how the results will be is incorporated in the Standard.

The project staff of Samriddhi was introduced to the DCED Standard for results measurement in a two-day workshop at the beginning of the phase. This internal workshop was organised by staff members who had received formal training on *Results Measurement in Private Sector Development* and the M4P approach. In this workshop, the project already developed some results chains for selected sub-sectors. Through this participatory and interactive training, the staff could assess the relevance of results chain for project planning, implementation and monitoring. After completing all sub-sector analyses, the remaining results chain were developed by the concerned 12 value chain teams of the project.

The MRM system of the project based on the DECD Standard seeks to systematically have vital information about Samriddhi's performance and achieve more clarity on its priorities. Put differently, this relates to knowing what works and what does not, and accordingly how impacts were achieved, or why results did not unfold the way project facilitators had expected.

Senior management as well as field level staff were involved in regular exercises to practically understand the usefulness of the Standard. The keen interest in the DCED Standard has not merely been for measuring results, but also using it for day-to-day planning and project management. A number of staff had initially placed the highest priority on the first three elements of the Standard: articulating the results chain, defining the indicators of change and measuring changes in indicators.

⁷ The DCED Standards for Measuring Achievements in Private Sector Development, Control Points and Compliance Criteria, Version VI, January 2013, The Donor Committee for Enterprise Development.

There has, however, been increased recognition to the usefulness of other elements of the Standard in particular in knowing the actual contribution of the project to the impacts (estimating attributable changes). Equally important is the extensive discussion by the project staff regarding the added value in adopting a rigorous system, and what the implications of this would be in terms of time and resources needed for implementing and managing the system.

The consensus in Samriddhi is to practically and reasonably adopt the Standard to validate the project's assumptions and make its decisions grounded on evidence (e.g., what can / cannot be achieved). The project has found the DCED Standard valuable in building a system that can be managed by the staff who can also “lay claim to owning” it to do their job better as compared to delegating it to external experts. Samriddhi uses the Standard as a framework to correct gaps and make project-wide (and possibly organisational-wide) learning on results measurement easier and more structured. By using the MRM system, Samriddhi is interested to enhance the way it communicates on what and how it works towards achieving its goal.



6. Success factors in adopting the DCED Standard

The MRM system of Samriddhi was reviewed by DCED certified external consultants in March 2013.⁸ The review was based on the DCED Results Measurement Standard version 6 and covered the overall MRM system of Samriddhi, reports and three sample value chains (bull fattening, medicinal plants and cotton crafts). The “mock audit” findings revealed that Samriddhi has clearly made considerable progress in improving its MRM system since it has made the decision to gradually comply with the DCED Standard.

The external review was helpful, among others, in two main ways. First, it provided more thrust to the process of adjusting the MRM system to comply with the Standard. A large number of the control points (out of the 27 must and recommended points) of the Standard were met and partially met by the project. The feedback from the reviewers provided more structured and specific inputs regarding what to prioritise on and how to coordinate the efforts towards improving the system. Second, the current phase of Samriddhi will end in early 2015. The review was helpful in setting strategic direction on firm ground for improving the system through better compliance with the Standard and hence better management of the project’s work in the new phase or incoming related market development projects.

Overall, Samriddhi’s experience with the Standard has been positive. What were the underlying factors that helped the project improve its MRM system based on the Standard? The sections that follow pick up some of the relevant factors and elaborate how they have contributed to the encouraging progress.

6.1. Flexibility from both the donor and the project to try out new ideas

Getting organisational buy-in, both from the donor and project team members, was especially important. It took more than eleven months to revise the logical framework and put in place the system, eventually taking longer time than initially thought. Changing the mind set of project staff from mainly livelihood to market system based approach (as facilitators) required time. Having the support from the donor and HELVETAS Bangladesh to see through the designing and implementation of the system and the flexibility to address concerns along the way were vital to ensure a successful rolling-out of the system.

The revision of the logical framework resulted in changes not only in the outputs, indicators, targets and interventions, but also in the activity based detailed budget. This affected heavily the baseline: data missing for the new and revised indicators, different sampling needs, etc. In short, this exercise implied collecting again a new baseline. The approval of the donor was required to the revised activity based detailed budget, which was the integral part of the mandate agreement.

The Steering Committee consisting of representation from the donor, HELVETAS Bangladesh and Samriddhi took all the initiatives, giving special attention to the finalisation of the results chain, revision of the logical framework and establishment of the MRM system. Common understanding

⁸ Wanitphon, P. and Miehlbradt, A. (2013). “Assessment of the Compliance of Samriddhi’s Monitoring and Results Measurement (MRM) System with the DCED Standard and Review of the Project’s Logical Framework,” HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation Bangladesh.

between SDC and HELVETAS Bangladesh about the vision, approach, strategy and guiding principles of the project was found to be one of the main driving forces to make the process successful.

Getting organisational buy-in or support for effective and efficient MRM system is crucial. However, an MRM system often involves competing demands, including donors. The process should always engage/inform donors, because developing and improving MRM system cannot be delinked from funding decisions.

However, donors or decision-makers in a donor organisation are not monolithic: some prefer just to be informed but are happy as long as contractual obligations (LogFrames) are met; others demand a typical form of MRM system. The bottom line seems to be ensuring return on their investment (“value for money”).

Depending on the positions, this may affect reporting results with candour or the “spirit of honest inquiry”. The challenge is when donors, or key decision-makers within a donor, start “moving the goalposts” with regard to their positions on MRM systems that involve different projects/countries. Experiences in other countries show that projects can explain and negotiate around expectations by making the nitty-gritty of the MRM system internal and demonstrating to the donor that a good system can contribute to achieving better results.

Specifically, results chains are working instruments that projects use to logically structure their work. Projects need to make the point to the donor that these and other instruments should not be part of formal requirements. If SDC would like to verify what is reported based on the logical framework, it is possible to use these instruments to validate how results are achieved.

6.2. Setting up a dynamic and well functioning MRM working group

The Project Support and Management Unit (PSMU) of Samriddhi took the initiative to form MRM working group which consisted of a team made up of different staff from different functions / roles. This was intended to support decision making at all levels. All the members have one common objective: achieving the goal of the project as facilitator. From the outset, the project had thought the working group would be useful by bringing people with different expertise together to address the problem at hand and explore a broad array of possible alternative points of view or solutions. Being a member of the working group did not create additional burden to the members as the members’ day-to-day work was related to what the MRM system accomplishes. Members devoted appropriate time and resources to smoothen the role of the working group.

The roles and responsibilities of the working group were defined and developed in clear Terms of References (ToR). The group was tasked with coordinating defining, refining and aligning of different levels of the logical framework and results chain; making the results of the project more “monitorable”; dealing with attribution questions; coordination of MRM events with other activities of the project, i.e. project implementation and steering. To introduce results chain based measurement system, the MRM working group also provided support to other projects of HELVETAS Bangladesh.

As described in 6.4 below, the working group was not solely entrusted to undertake the task of designing and managing the MRM system. Instead, using multiple skills, judgment and experience of the members, the working group took the lead in planning and facilitating the process. It was one

of the different working groups that the project has established to increase horizontal and vertical peer learning. The MRM working group has harnessed the collective efforts of various working group members.

6.3. Development of an integrated MRM manual

In order to promote a common understanding and reliable practice, Samriddhi has drafted its MRM manual. The project periodically revises the manual by incorporating new and innovative ideas, field level experiences and processes of strengthening the MRM system. The manual describes the way in which the MRM system is developed. It is meant to be used as a “resource base” for the project by providing vital information of the MRM system. Since not all staff have the same level of understanding and background in the MRM system, the manual serves as basic reference.

The manual describes the overall process of the MRM system and data collection tools and methods. It also covers detailed guidelines on elements of the results measurement system. The improvement of the manual enables the project to know how information generated from the MRM system is feedback into the management decision-making. From the recent experience of the project, this has contributed to link information generated from the MRM system and the review process where strategies and interventions are reviewed and improved. For example, Samriddhi phased out three value chains (jute craft, cotton craft and goat) in July 2013. This decision was mainly based on evidence gathered, analysed and documented using the MRM system. Similarly the project also dropped some interventions (mainly policy related) in the fish, dairy and poultry value chains. In line with the recommendation of the review of the MRM system, Samriddhi has started revising the manual by expanding it to cover all sections of the DCED Standard. The revised manual has the following structure:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Project Objectives, Overall Project Logic and Logical Framework | 5. Indicators |
| 2. Project Management, MRM System and Use of Information | 6. Measurement Tools |
| 3. Staff Roles and Responsibilities in MRM | 7. Estimating Attributable Changes |
| 4. Results Chain | 8. Market System Changes |
| | 9. Tracking Costs |
| | 10. Aggregation of Results and Reporting |

6.4. Making MRM part of everyone’s job

One of the challenges for designing and improving the MRM system was that the Monitoring Specialist of the project was seen by other staff as the only responsible person for doing everything related to the MRM system. PSMU took the lead in changing such perception by including MRM responsibilities in job descriptions and annual staff performance review (Annual Staff Talk). This was followed by regular coaching of staff to inculcate clarity and responsibility on their MRM tasks.⁹ The fact that the PSMU is based closer to the field has contributed to working closely with implementing team of the project and enhancing efficiency in implementation.

⁹ Staff turnover among development agencies in Bangladesh is high, and thereby posing the dilemma of costly investment in capacity development and losing the knowledge base.

Table-1: Staff roles and responsibilities in specific areas of the MRM system

Task/Line of activity	Lead Responsibility	Backstopping	Approved by
Planning			
Value Chain (VC) assessment	Value Chain Specialist (VCS)	Value Chain Coordinator (VCC)/ International Adviser (IA)/ Project Coordinator (PC)	Value Chain Coordination Working group (VCCW)
Systemic intervention identification	VCS / Regional Coordinator (RC)	VCC/ IA/PC	Monitoring and Result Measurement Working group (MRMW)
Result chain development and / or adjustment	VCS / Associate Coordinator for MRM (AC-MRM)	Monitoring Specialist (MS)/VCC/IA/PC	MRMW
Measurement plan with Annual Plan of Operation (APO) development	AC-MRM /VCS/ RC	VCC/MS/IA/PC	MRMW/VCCW
Data Collection			
Baseline data	MS and AC-MRM with support from field level staff / implementing team	MS/IA/PC	MRMW
Intervention level data collection	AC-MRM with support from field level staff / implementing team	MS/VCC	MRMW/VCCW
Periodic data (half yearly and yearly)	MS and AC-MRM with support from field level staff / implementing team	MS/IA/PC	MRMW
Data Processing and Analysis			
Data management	MS/AC-MRM	IA/MS	MRMW
Compiling qualitative research results	AC-MRM with support from field level staff / implementing team	MS/VCC	MRMW
Periodic data (half yearly and yearly)	MS/AC-MRM	IA/MS	MRMW
Reporting			
Reviewing and compiling information on interventions	AC-MRM with the support of VCS	RC/MS/IA	MRMW
Preparing cases	VCS	VCC/MS/IA	MRMW/VCCW/Gender Working Group (GWG)
Special study & experience Capitalisation	VCC	IA/MS/PC	VCCW
Half yearly and Annual report	MS/VCC	IA/PC	Steering Committee (SC)
Value chain report	VCS	VCC/ MS/ IA/ PC	VCCW
Decision Making			
Intervention level	VCC	IA/ PC	VCCW
Strategic direction	MRMW	IA / PC	SC

6.5. Capacity development in MRM as a priority

Samriddhi attaches high importance to capacity building of staff. For the project, capacity building is more than a one-off event that should start as early as possible and continue to bridge major capacity gaps. It periodically assesses and reviews the capacity needs of staff. The PSMU holds regular consultation with Regional Coordinators for setting performance objective, identifying appropriate strategies to address capacity gaps and allocating resources to achieve performance objective.

The project sent staff to participate in international / regional training workshops in MRM. Staff members who received training in turn provided internal training / coaching to other colleagues for mutual sharing of experiences. Exchange visits to other projects and organisations are also used as practical way for building capacity and learning. Annual Staff Talks held in December every year between managers and their colleagues include discussions on capacity development requirements and plans.



7. Challenges in complying with the DECD Standard

Not everything is rosy and easy in adopting the underlying elements of the DCED Standard. The key challenges stem from the difficulty of complying with some of the elements of the Standard. Some points identified below may be unique to Samriddhi while others seem to be common in many projects and organisations.

7.1. Full compliance vs. prioritising elements of the Standard

The underlying objective of a functional MRM system based on the DCED Standard seeks to ensure that the system is in place with adequate resources – human (technical) and financial. It also aims to put in place:

- MRM plan that should be shared and understood by project staff as well as updated regularly to reflect any changes in the interventions.
- MRM activities are well planned, resourced and carried out, so that relevant and useful information is generated on intervention performance.
- The project staff in the management at all levels of decision-making are familiar and trained in the application of the monitoring processes and instruments; the management uses the system and can transparently assess progress.
- Facilitators are able to know what works and what does not, and accordingly how impacts are achieved, or why results did not unfold the way projects had expected.
- For the purpose of promoting common understanding and good practices, as well as ensuring intervention qualities and sector strategies, projects are able to develop MRM manuals specifically guiding and incorporating the needs/priorities of the projects. Processes and methods that monitor implementation are practiced.
- Projects are able to use the system to come up with analytical reports that document what happened and why by using the values of both quantitative and qualitative data (e.g. stories/cases and numbers).

The DCED Standard has innovatively and successfully created a framework for practitioners to easily follow key steps in measuring results and managing projects effectively and efficiently. Yet for projects the purpose of referring to the Standard is not to set up a (high-flying) system that meets each and every control point, but to initiate a system within the boundaries/objectives that facilitators have set to measure changes and manage the projects.

Right-sizing is not self-selection through downsizing essential elements of the system based on the need and priorities of projects to manage quality projects. Neither is it exclusively concerned about costs. It focuses on setting up a system that meets the goals of projects, but which are at the same time manageable and less cumbersome/complex, i.e. without making the cure worse than the disease! With the risk of oversimplification, it is an attempt to make the system fit to realities (appropriate scope and timeframe for viable initiatives with observable results).

The key goal is to get the MRM system developed properly to enable facilitators to manage their project and the results that they seek to bring about. It is about prioritising which elements of the Standard will effectively and efficiently enable projects to achieve their goals. The challenge will be if the Standard is understood and used (by projects and including the donor) as guiding principles to gauge the success of projects by assigning numerical values to assess which projects meet or do not meet control points.

Samriddhi has been “cautiously optimistic” or even sometimes critical of what it could achieve by trying to comply with a Standard that tends to have “one-size-fits-all straight jacket” and that also lacks flexibility. The scope and complexity of the system also depends on good market research studies that directly lead to designing interventions. By minimising the pitfall of “paralysis by analysis” and taking into account scale, projects have the room to take up the facilitation of a limited number of interventions at a time.

A lingering question among staff of Samriddhi has been, if the project is able to logically explain its work and can relatively show how it measures changes in the indicators, why it is necessary to ensure compliance with all the eight elements and the corresponding control points of the Standard. As mentioned earlier, the project has mainly given priority to the first four elements of the Standard. By using these elements of the Standard, staff of the project believe that it is possible for Samriddhi to show in detail how the facilitation for inclusive and sustainable market system changes are achieved. These practices are innovative which otherwise cannot easily be shown in detail using the conventional logical framework approach. Understanding and using the Standard, for example in preparing the results chain, has broadened and deepened what is broadly included in the logical framework

However, other elements have been part of the long discussion in designing and managing monitoring and evaluation, such as reporting and tracking costs. This does not suggest self-selection of some elements of the Standard and abandoning or ignoring others. It is rather “right-sizing” the scale of the effort by prioritising elements critical to the proper functioning of the MRM system for guiding staff in making decisions. Efforts to meet all control points of the Standard were seen as costly for smaller projects which have difficulty of allocating resources – both human and financial.



7.2. Estimating attributable changes

Attribution refers to extent of change that can be claimed by a project/intervention out of total change that takes place.

One of the most basic ways to determine attribution is to validate the different levels of changes in results chain to ensure that change has occurred triggered by activities of the project.

The diagram on the right taken from the DCED manual shows how activities led to different stages of change. The project has to assess whether the chain of changes has indeed occurred as a result of project activities.

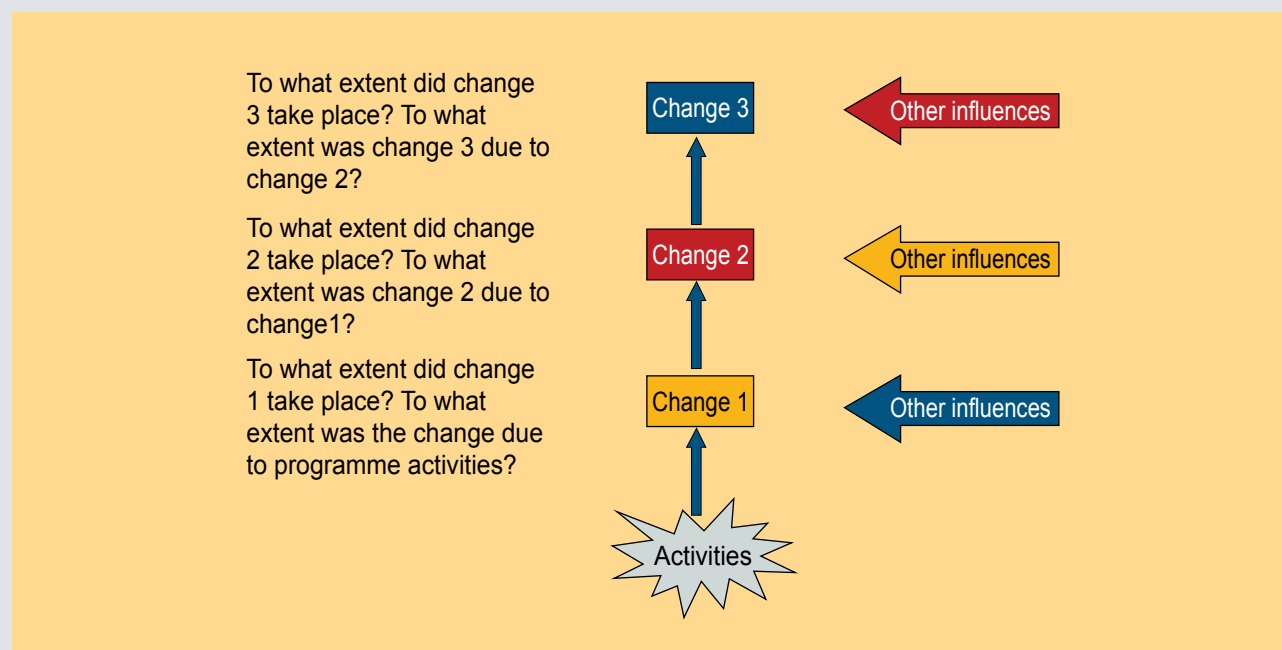


Figure-3: Attribution questions

Measuring each step in the results chain and assessing attribution through qualitative information gathering (asking why change happened at each step) can be sufficient when there are few other factors significantly affecting the change (which can also be assessed qualitatively by asking why). If this chain is broken, then even if there is a higher level of change, it cannot be attributed to the project.

Samriddhi has developed its attribution strategy. This is crucial in demonstrating the causal link between results / changes and interventions by the project. The objective is not to have “airtight proofs”. The strategy simply tries to answer why and how changes happen at each step of the results chain. It relies on a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods for triangulating information. In the first method, the project uses interviews, participant observations, case studies, focus group discussions and trend analysis with actors such as producers and service providers. The project uses quantitative method in order to increase robustness of the causal link between intervention and results. Through this quantitative method, the project seeks to use simple quasi-experimental design (before-after comparison). In relation to other quantitative methods, the project assumes that this is relatively cheaper and less difficult despite the requirement for careful design and measurement.

However, Samriddhi has found estimating attributable changes to be one of the most difficult challenges and an arduous process. The project is active in areas with the highest concentration of poverty. Among the 2,252 NGO registered by the NGO Affairs Bureau (NGOAB) of Bangladesh as of July 2013,¹⁰ a number of these development agencies operate where Samriddhi is working. The assessment by Samriddhi in early 2012 showed more than 100 such actors are involved in rural economic development or related projects. This multiplicity of actors and complex partnerships make measuring attribution difficult and unreliable, if not impossible. Highly seasonal agricultural production systems compounded by frequent threats from disaster affect production and prices. In other words, what can be measured, what can be directly and indirectly attributed to the facilitation of the project becomes complex. Despite the tall order, there is, however, increasing recognition in Samriddhi to report with candour about results. This is in line with what R. Davies succinctly put it as “the main problem with NGO claims to effectiveness of their...work is not the lack of sophisticated methodologies for analysing attribution, but simply that of decontextualised reporting. That is, the omission of what was not achieved by the NGO...”¹¹

7.3. Project experience vs. organisational ownership of the MRM system

Samriddhi has made good progress in establishing and improving its MRM system. Staff employed by HELVETAS Bangladesh as implementing organisation work 100% for the project. Projects are temporary, and when Samriddhi is phased-out, all the knowledge and experience will likely not stay with the organisation. In order for this knowledge and experience repository to stay and be owned by the organisational, it requires strong and consistent MRM champion to introduce the system in the organisation. Put differently, organisational ownership of the system ensures sustainability of the system which can be applied across a range of sectors / areas for measuring results and effectively managing projects.



¹⁰ See http://www.ngoab.gov.bd/Files/NGO_LIST.pdf.

¹¹ “Evaluating the Effectiveness of DFID’s Influence with Multilaterals Part A: A Review of NGO Approaches to the Evaluation of Advocacy Work.” Available: <http://mande.co.uk/blog/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/A-Review-of-NGO-Approaches-To-Advocacy.pdf>

8. Conclusion

The underlying objective of this paper was to present the experiences of Samriddhi project in designing and implementing its MRM system based on the DCED Standard. The presentation documented the aim, process, contributing factors for success and challenges of setting up and improving the system based on the Standard.

The MRM system of Samriddhi was initially based on the systems of the two previous projects. Samriddhi made the decision to focus more on market system development which therefore required adjusting or revising its monitoring system. To that effect, the results chain for private sector development was newly introduced to Samriddhi, to be included alongside the already defined logical framework. The process has been iterative and intensive. Looking back, the learning by doing process contributed to participatory way of setting up and strengthening the system. It also lent a hand to good and solid understanding of what was required and how to internally address the challenges encountered on the way. However, the process was time-consuming. The effort, arguably, could have yielded better results had Samriddhi sought external review of the process at an earlier time.

The main purpose of building and strengthening the MRM system was to practically and reasonably adopt the Standard to validate the project's assumptions and make its decisions grounded on evidence (e.g., what can / cannot be achieved). Samriddhi does not claim to have the objective of complying with the Standard for a perfect or highflying MRM system. Rather the project wants to set up and strengthen the system within the boundaries / objectives that it has set to measure changes and manage the project.

The project has found the DCED Standard valuable in building the system that can be managed by project staff who can also “lay claim to owning” it to do their job better rather than delegating it to external experts. Samriddhi uses the Standard as a framework to correct gaps and make project-wide (and possibly organisational-wide) learning on results measurement easier and more structured. The overall experience of complying with the DCED Standard has contributed to making the MRM system effective in *proving* the relevance of the project to poverty reduction and thus fulfilling its accountability to the donor and other stakeholders. This is also crucial in *improving* the quality of impacts as a result of the facilitation by the project.

The main factors that have contributed to the success of the project in developing and implementing the system include building the system to support decision making at all levels, making the MRM system part of everyone's job by ensuring staff capacity building as a priority, development of an integrated MRM manual and flexibility from both the donor and the project to try out new ideas. Core challenges include full compliance against prioritising elements of the Standard, estimating attributable changes and ensuring organisational ownership of the MRM system.

Making Markets Work for the Poor:

Market development approach of Samridhhi project

Constraints:

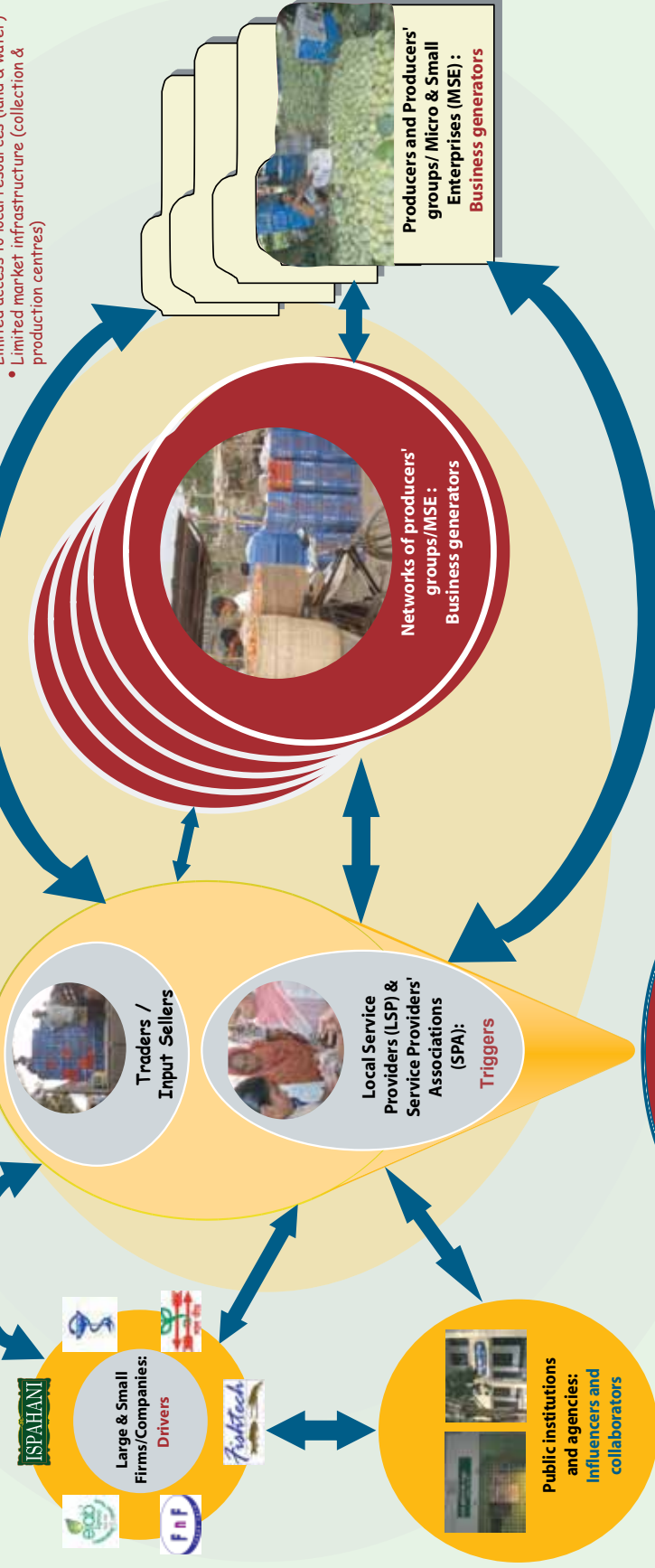
- Limited market penetration
- Few product development
- Low product quality
- Low outreach due to high transaction cost

Constraints:

- Absence of functional linkages
- Limited capacities (technical & business)

Constraints:

- Lack of or weak producers' organisation
- Limited access to quality inputs & technologies
- Low technical knowledge & skills
- Limited functional market linkages
- Limited or no access to adapted finance
- Limited access to local resources (land & water)
- Limited market infrastructure (collection & production centres)



Constraints:

- Low outreach for effective and efficient services due to limited budget & human resources

About the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)

The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) is Switzerland's international cooperation agency within the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. The Swiss development cooperation gives priority to poverty reduction. Globally, SDC endeavours to foster economic self-reliance and state autonomy, contribute to the improvement of production conditions, help in finding solutions to environmental problems, and provide better access to education and basic healthcare services in partner countries.

SDC in Bangladesh:

SDC has been working in Bangladesh since the latter's independence. SDC considers Bangladesh as one of its priority countries in regards to long-term development cooperation efforts.

The overall goal of the Swiss development cooperation in Bangladesh is to contribute to the improvement of wellbeing for the poor and disadvantaged people in Bangladesh. In particular, the Swiss Cooperation Strategy for Bangladesh (2013-2017) emphasises increasing poor peoples' employment and income and strengthening public services and citizens' voice and participation.

SDC Bangladesh seeks to contribute to systemic change through facilitation, capacity building, advocacy and policy dialogue in the fields of Market Development, Skills Development and Local Governance. Outcomes in the three portfolios will focus on (1) citizens' use of improved services, (2) the provision of improved and inclusive services by public and private sector players, and (3) the improvement of the enabling environment.

About HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation

HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation is a membership-based, non-profit association. It emerged in 2011 as a result of the merger of Intercooperation, Swiss Foundation for Development and International Cooperation, and HELVETAS, Swiss Association for International Cooperation.

HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation is present in more than 30 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Central Asia and Eastern Europe. Its vision is a just and peaceful world in which all human beings live in a self-determined way in dignity and safety, are able to satisfy their basic needs, have access to resources and services which are indispensable for life, and take care of the environment.

Thematic working areas of HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation are:

- ☐ ■ Water & Infrastructure
- ☐ ■ Rural Economy
- ☐ ■ Skills Development & Education
- ☐ ■ Governance & Peace
- ☐ ■ Environment & Climate Change

In Bangladesh, HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation Bangladesh started working in 2000 at the request of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation to manage its Sustainable Land Use Programme. Since then, HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation's portfolio has grown to include local governance, livelihoods and market systems development, as well as drinking water and natural resource management projects.

Samridhi

enhancing rural prosperity through
market systems development in Bangladesh

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