Livelihood adaptation to climate variability and change in drought-prone areas of Bangladesh

The impacts of climate variability and change are global concerns, but in Bangladesh, where large numbers of the population are chronically exposed and vulnerable to a range of natural hazards, they are particularly critical. In fact, between 1991 and 2000, 93 major disasters were recorded, resulting in nearly 200 000 deaths and causing US$5.9 billion in damage with high losses in agriculture. Agriculture is the largest sector of the Bangladesh economy, accounting for some 35 percent of the GDP and 63 percent of the labour force. Agricultural production is already under pressure from increasing demands for food and the parallel problem of depletion of land and water resources caused by overuse and contamination. The impacts of climate variability and change cause additional risks for agriculture.

Within this context, FAO and the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC) are guiding a project to assess livelihood adaptation to climate variability and change in the drought-prone areas of Northwest Bangladesh. The project, implemented under the Comprehensive Disaster Risk Management Programme (CDMP) and in close collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), specifically looks at: characterization of livelihood systems; profiling of vulnerable groups; assessment of past and current climate impacts; and understanding of local perceptions of climate impacts, local coping capacities and existing adaptation strategies. It is also developing a good practice adaptation option menu, evaluating and field testing locally selected options, and introducing long-lead climate forecasting, capacity building and training of DAE extension staff and community representatives.

This report summarizes the project methodology developed and successfully tested during 2005/06; it discusses interim findings and recommendations resulting from the ongoing pilot learning process.
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