

# AGRO-INPUTS PROJECT IN BANGLADESH

Quarterly Progress Report  
Year 5: January 1, 2017 - March 31, 2017



Prepared for the United States Agency for International Development under USAID Cooperative Agreement No. AID-388-A-12-00005, Agro-Inputs Project in Bangladesh implemented by CNFA.

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# USAID Agro-Inputs Project in Bangladesh

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Year 5, Quarter 2: January 1, 2017-March 31, 2017

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*Cover photo: Farmers meet in the field to discuss crop protection.  
Photo Credit: AIP*

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## Acronyms

ACI	Advanced Chemical Industries
AIP	USAID’s Agro-Inputs Project in Bangladesh
AIS	Agriculture Information Services
AIRN	Agro-Inputs Retailers Network
BCPA	Bangladesh Crop Protection Association
BFA	Bangladesh Fertilizer Association
BOD	Board of Directors
CBSG	Capacity Building Services Group
CIMMYT	International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center
CSISA	Cereal Systems Initiative for South Asia
DAE	Department of Agricultural Extension
ECM	Empty Container Management
EMMP	Environmental Mitigation and Monitoring Plan
FFD	Farmer Field Days
FTF	Feed the Future
GIS	Geographic Information System
GOB	Government of Bangladesh
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
LOP	Life of Project
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MIS	Market Information System
MOA	Ministry of Agriculture
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MPOB	Monthly Price Outlook Bulletin
NAAFCO	National Agricultural Fertilizer Company
NSB	National Seed Board
OCA	Organizational Capacity Assessment
OCD	Organizational Capacity Development
PNGO	Partner Non-Governmental Organization
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
PSA	Public Service Announcements
PIRS	Performance Indicator Reference Sheet
SAPLING	Sustainable Agriculture and Production Linked to Improved Nutrition Status, Resilience, and Gender Equity
SMS	Short Message Service
STS	Standard Traceability System
RDC	USAID/Rice and Diversified Crops
TOT	Training of Trainers
UCN	Unique Code Number
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USG	United States Government

## Project Background

### Key Project Details

<b>Title:</b>	Agro-Inputs Project (AIP) in Bangladesh
<b>Start Date:</b>	September 17, 2012
<b>Project Duration:</b>	Five Years
<b>Type of Award:</b>	Cooperative Agreement No. AID-388-A-12-00005
<b>Award Amount:</b>	\$14,028,602
<b>Prime Implementer:</b>	CNFA
<b>Sub-Implementers (long-term):</b>	Spatial Systems Associates Capacity Building Service Group GMark Ashroy Foundation Banchte Shekha Association of Voluntary Actions for Society

### Project Objectives and Interventions

The objective of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Agro-Inputs Project (AIP) in Bangladesh is to improve the supply of quality agricultural inputs through input retailers. Its central effort is the creation of a sustainable Agro-Input Retailers Network (AIRN) through Intervention 1. Interventions 2-4 are designed to work in concert and holistically with Intervention 1. AIP's four interventions and key activities include:

- **Establish an Agro-Inputs Retailers Network:** Creation of AIRN, a first-of-its-kind agro-inputs training organization serving retailers in the Feed the Future (FTF) zone;
- **Improve Effectiveness of Agricultural Inputs Market Information Systems:** Distribution of 115,000 hard copy (e-copies will be used when possible) Monthly Price Outlook Bulletins (MPOB), supported by an innovative Geographic Information System (GIS)-based input market information system (MIS); demand creation for improved quality inputs through 500 demonstration plots;
- **Enhance Knowledge and Application of Quality Standards:** Promotion of input quality standards to 50 input supply companies and 3,000 AIRN retailers. Eight new input quality standards developed by industry associations (with public and private stakeholders) presented to USAID for referral to the Bangladesh Policy Research and Strategy Support Program; knowledge and demand for quality inputs increased through communications and outreach campaign;
- **Strengthen Local Organizations' Institutional Capacity:** Three organizations receive comprehensive organizational capacity assessment (OCA) and necessary assistance in organizational capacity development (OCD); organizational strengthening of these organizations, and utilization of their technical expertise to implement AIP-related activities via sub-award.

## Executive Summary

### **Intervention 1: Establish an Agro-Input Retailers Network (AIRN)**

During the quarter, AIP focused on strengthening AIRN's relationship with local government stakeholders in addition to exploring new business opportunities. AIP organized two regional workshops in Barisal and Faridpur with government counterparts from 37 *upazilas*. As of this quarter, AIP has trained and accredited 94% of retailers from the most recent roster of AIRN members (2,964 out of 3,157).

In order to promote independent, sustainable activities, AIRN embarked on pilot distribution hub activities for micro-nutrient fertilizers as well as provided fee-based training on agro-inputs and business management to two development organizations. AIP reached a milestone during the quarter, exceeding its target for sales of quality inputs (\$100m). In addition, 222 trainings were delivered to retailers during the quarter, achieving a cumulative 3,943 trainings delivered to retailers, aligned with the set target.

### **Intervention 2: Improve Effectiveness of Agricultural Inputs Market Information Systems**

AIP is working with private sector partners, USAID, and other projects to ensure proper disposition of its Market Information Systems (MIS) tool, which will serve as a relevant and useful instrument for other FTF projects upon closure of AIP.

Three Monthly Price Outlook Bulletins (MPOB) containing a list of the mostly sold agro-inputs and their prices were disseminated among AIRN retailers and other stakeholders. To demonstrate high yielding varieties of winter vegetables and rice seeds, AIP, in collaboration with Supreme Seed Company Ltd, established eight demo plots in four districts.

### **Intervention 3: Enhance Knowledge and Application of Quality Standards**

In order to spread messages of quality seed, fertilizer and safe use of pesticides among AIRN retailers and farmers, AIP aired four episodes of "Connecting Bangladesh" - a question and answer based program that connected AIRN retailers (and farmers) with subject matter experts in Dhaka. In addition, AIP continued broadcasting three Public Service Announcements (PSAs) on three leading national TV channels. AIP also sent approximately 174,000 AIRN-branded SMSs to retailers and farmers intended to establish AIRN as a trusted source for agricultural information and inputs.

AIP and Win Miaki, an IT service provider continues to work with NAAFPO to create and test a standard inputs traceability system.

### **Intervention 4: Strengthening Local Organizations' Institutional Capacity**

This quarter, AIP completed its activities under this intervention. Through a sub-contractor, AIP completed the drafting of HR and financial manuals for AIRN to support its upcoming divestment from AIP.

## **Intervention 1: Establish an Agro-Input Retailers Network**

### **1.1 Develop AIRN as a High Quality Technical Training and Advisory Services Center**

#### **1.1.1 Create Modules and Train Master Trainers to Conduct Quality Training**

##### **Retailers' Training**

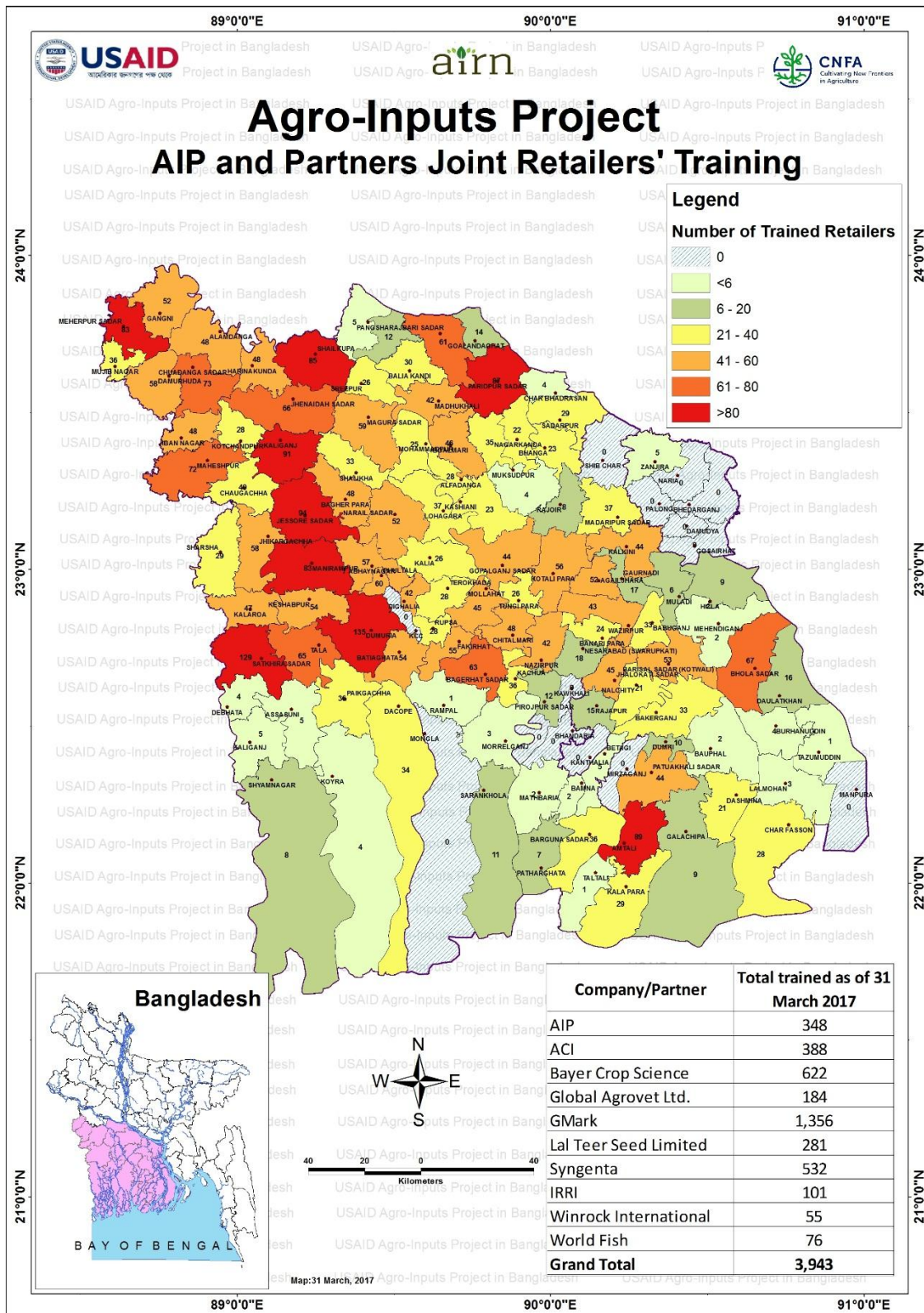
AIRN/AIP Program Officers, with technical support from Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) officials, trained 142 AIRN retailers (including 32 women) on the appropriate use and sales of agricultural inputs in Barisal, Dhaka, and Khulna during Y5Q2. The retailers reviewed best practices in agribusiness and ethics, nutrition awareness, importance of quality inputs, and basics of crop management as well as safe and judicious use of pesticides.

In addition, 80 women retailers in Barisal, Dhaka and Khulna received a refresher training focusing on the identification and management of pests and diseases of rice, mung bean, and vegetables. The training participants also received orientation on using vegetable and rice flash cards.

#### **1.1.2 Illustrate Best Practices via Domestic and International Study Tours**

No study tours were conducted as AIP completed its targeted study tours in Y4.

**Figure 1: District-wise Training of AIRN Members**





## **1.2 Develop Governance, Membership Structure, and Training and Services Strategy for AIRN**

### **1.2.1 Identify Flexible Governance**

The AIRN Board of Directors (BOD) formed an executive committee comprising seven members to speed up business related decision making of the network. After having received all the proper approvals (membership in the Bangladesh Fertilizer Association (BFA), for example), AIRN marketed its first product “AIRN zinc sulphate” among its members during this quarter. The BOD also discussed launching other new AIRN products such as compost fertilizer, chelated zinc, boron, nitrobenzene, and corn seed.

### **1.2.2 Define Membership Structure**

As of March 2017, AIRN has attained 94% accredited members (2,964 out of 3,157; 221 women), with the remaining members to be accredited by early next quarter.

### **1.2.3 Build Additional Services**

#### **AIRN Training Services**

On behalf of CIMMYT’s Cereal Systems Initiative for South Asia (CSISA) III project, AIRN provided fee-based training services to 166 retailers (17 women) on “integrated weed management” in six districts i.e. Meherpur, Rajbari, Faridpur, Barisal, Jhalokati and Bhola. This training developed capacity among participants to identify different types of weeds, herbicides, sprayer and nozzles, weed management methods, and sprayer calibration techniques. In addition, AIRN submitted its final report on this training to CIMMYT after completion of this training for a total of 818 retailers (including 51 women) over Y5Q1 and Y5Q2.

To support AIRN future trainings, AIP (through a contract with Creative Media Ltd.) completed an instructional training video (on business management and technical issues) for AIRN, to be used for the onboarding of future AIRN members (during basic training) and for external fee-based trainings.

#### **AIRN Call Center**

AIRN call center gradually started its involvement in the Standard Traceability System (STS) pilot, by taking calls related to verification of the Unique Code Number (UCN) on authentic products covered under a joint pilot with the National Agricultural Fertilizer Company (NAAFCO).

In addition, in Y5Q2, the call center received 246 calls related to agronomic queries which were referred to other relevant service providers, including other agricultural hotlines, such as the Agricultural Information Service (AIS).

#### **Other**

AIP was one of the projects visited by external audience comprised of donors, policy makers, academics, and other development partners during an Embassy of the Kingdom of Netherlands’ event “Market Transformation Workshop”. Participants interacted with Khadija Khatun, a female retailer from Bakerganj, Barisal and expressed that they were impressed by the organization of her shop, her perseverance, and her attitude towards business. Her stakeholders

such as local farmers, family members and government officials were also present to provide accolades for her accomplishments. The entire interaction helped the practitioners learn more about how AIRN women retailers are becoming strong market actors and contributing to quality supply of agro-inputs in their communities.

In January 2017, AIRN retailers participated in three DAE Agro-Tech Fairs sponsored in Bagerhat to introduce AIRN to various local stakeholders. AIRN's Mollahat *upazila* also organized a meeting with their DAE *upazila* Agriculture Office to introduce themselves and describe AIRN's activities, its membership structure, as well as to raise the issue of fertilizer licenses for women retailers. Due to the current quota system, many women retailers are unable to access fertilizer licenses, limiting their ability to sell fertilizer and reducing their competitiveness on the market. During the meeting, the DAE officials committed to assist with fertilizer licenses as they become available.

AIRN signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with NAAFCO and Bank Asia to make loans available to AIRN retailers who distribute NAAFCO products. Loans will be provided to retailers via a mobile wallet which will be used to pay NAAFCO directly when purchasing their inputs.

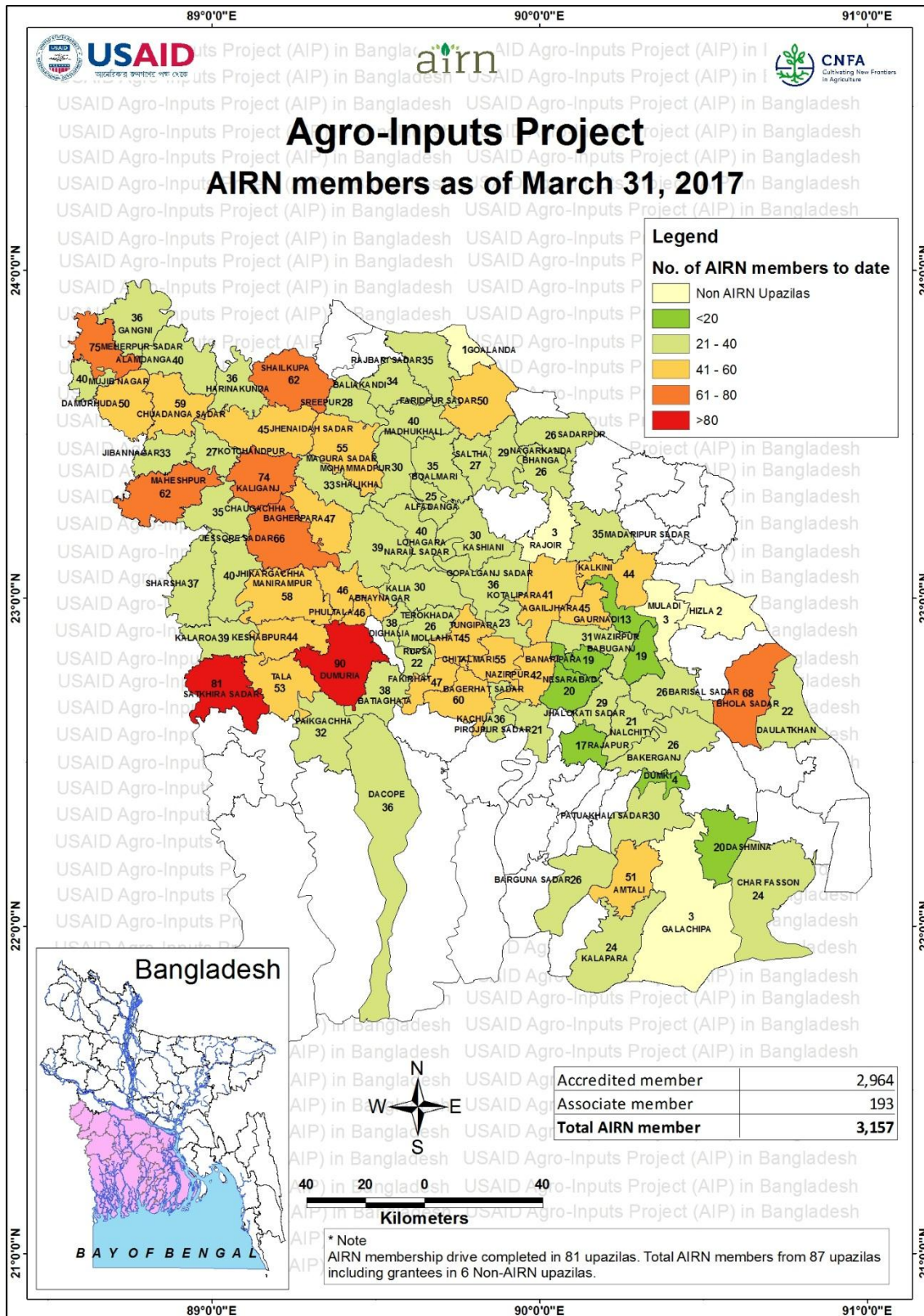
### **1.3 Promote AIRN among Agro-Input Dealers in the FTF Zone**

#### **1.3.1 Increase AIRN Membership among Agro-Retailers**

##### **Membership Drive**

AIP no longer conducts special membership drives to allow AIRN, in order to allow AIRN to develop formal and informal membership recruitment strategies independent from AIP. During the quarter, 54 retailers were recruited via word of mouth or other means (such as advertisements in local markets) and joined AIRN as accredited members.

Figure 2: AIRN Retailer Distribution



## **Summary of Intervention 1 Key Activities for Next Quarter**

### **Retailers' Training**

AIP will meet its target of 3,000 fully accredited (trained) AIRN members by providing basic training to 100 associate members next quarter in Faridpur and Jessore. In addition, refresher trainings will be organized for 65 women retailers focusing on their individualized technical needs.

### **Identify Flexible Governance**

In May 2017, an AIRN Board of Directors (BOD) meeting followed by the AIRN second annual conference will be organized in Khulna with active participation of 140 retailers from 19 districts. The conference will update members on current activities as well as provide a forum to discuss AIRN's future direction. Representatives of DAE, private companies, and other stakeholders will be invited to attend the conference. AIRN will also organize another BOD meeting in June 2017 with support of AIP.

### **AIRN Call Center**

Aside from its stated goal to collect complaints related to purchased agro-inputs, the AIRN Call Center will also be used in the standard inputs traceability system designed to identify and manage counterfeiting products in the marketplace. Farmers or retailers will report to the Call Center agent a UCN which will be labeled on the agro-inputs packets. After the code's verification, the Call Center agent will respond to the caller via phone to communicate whether the product being purchased is genuine.

In addition, the agronomic queries that are being collected through AIRN Call Center will be compiled in Bangla and shared with the DAE AIS for coverage via their call center.

### **Build Additional Services**

AIRN's training services will provide basic training to 80 retailers and community members in Chittagong Hill Tracts, under the USAID-funded Sustainable Agriculture and Production Linked to Improved Nutrition Status, Resilience, and Gender Equity (SAPLING) project.

### **Capacity Building**

On April 1, 2017, AIRN entered into a Fixed Amount Award with AIP to provide AIRN with capacity building funds to independently make preparations for the impending close of AIP. AIP's primary objective is to ensure the sustainability of AIRN through building the Network's capacity to become a unique training and services organization, providing quality inputs and related information to retailers and farmers. This Fixed Amount Award will directly assist AIRN through providing a grant to support the start-up costs associated with the independent operation of the Network. During Y5Q3, the award will result in the successful start-up of an independently functioning AIRN, including office space, key personnel, and preparations for the upcoming AIRN Annual General Meeting.

## **Intervention 2: Improve Effectiveness of Agricultural Inputs Market Information Systems**

### **2.1 Develop GIS for Agricultural Input Supply and Demand**

#### **2.1.1 Develop Input-Specific MIS Tool**

It is anticipated that AIP will transfer the MIS tool to a local partner or USAID FTF project after the conclusion of AIP. To that end, AIP created access to its MIS for ACI Seed Ltd and USAID/Rice and Diversified Crops (RDC) to visualize AIRN retailers, established demo plots, cropping patterns and land use in the FTF zone. Access to the system will help partners assess the system's adaptability for future use.

In addition, during the quarter, AIP updated new data in the MIS, such as AIRN retailer shop locations and completed a documentation of MIS activities for AIP's final evaluation.

### **2.2 Improve Dissemination of Input Supply Information**

#### **2.2.1 Create and Distribute Directory of Input Supply Companies and Wholesalers**

AIP completed this task in Y4Q2.

### **2.3 Improve Agro-Inputs Monthly Price Information**

#### **2.3.1 Create and Distribute Agro-Inputs Monthly Price Outlook Bulletin (MPOB)**

AIP shared printed copies of three Monthly Price Outlook Bulletins (MPOB) with stakeholders, including news on various AIRN activities. In addition to price information on widely used inputs, these bulletins included agronomic tips about pre-harvest maintenance for vegetables and features on retailer participation in "Connecting Bangladesh," a TV program hosted by ATN Bangla.

### **2.4 Increase Awareness and Demand for Quality Inputs**

#### **2.4.1 Conduct Collaborative Demos and Field Days**

In Pirojpur, Bhola, Chudanga, Gopalganj, and Jhenaidah districts, eight farmers field days (FFDs) were organized in demo plots of pumpkin, radish, cabbage, brinjal, gourds, potato, radish, and tomato in collaboration with Supreme Seed Company Ltd. In these FFDs, 1,120 farmers were oriented through demonstration on the results of high yield seed varieties.

## **Summary of Intervention 2 Key Activities for Next Quarter**

### **GIS**

AIP will work with USAID's RDC project to handover its MIS considering maintenance of the system after closure of AIP. In addition, drop-outs among AIRN members will be updated in the MIS.

## **MPOB**

In Q3, three editions of the MPOB will be published, including price data for popular agro-inputs and questions and answers on agronomic issues collected through the AIRN Call Center.

## **Demonstrations**

AIP will organize 29 field days in Jessore, Faridpur, and Barisal regions in collaboration with Supreme Seed Company Limited to demonstrate the benefit of using quality seed for better yields of wheat, maize, watermelon and vegetables.

## **Intervention 3: Enhance Knowledge and Application of Quality Standards**

### **3.1 Enhance Stakeholders Knowledge on Industry Quality Standards**

#### **3.1.1 Promote Quality Inputs through Multi-Media Campaigns**

In this quarter, AIP concluded its multi-media campaign “Did You Know: Quality Inputs are Around You?” Apart from airing three PSAs on quality seed, fertilizer and safe use of pesticides, AIP also broadcasted two episodes of “Connecting Bangladesh” program which linked AIRN retailers to technical experts in Dhaka.

#### **3.1.2 Reach Agro-Retailers and Farmers via Development and Distribution of Publications on Quality Standards**

#### **Media coverage**

During the quarter, AIP/AIRN received coverage on two TV channels (ATN Bangla and NTV) promoting AIRN, its safe use practices, and success of women grantees.

#### **Public Service Announcement (PSAs)**

In March 2017, AIP completed the airing of three PSAs on quality seeds, fertilizers, and safe use of pesticides on three leading national TV channels i.e. Channel i, ATN Bangla and NTV. The PSAs aired for 7-9 months<sup>1</sup> on these TV channels to raise awareness on quality agro-inputs among retailers and farmers.

#### **Discussion on TV program**

Jointly with ATN News, AIP aired two episodes of “Connecting Bangladesh” a Q&A session program that connected AIRN retailers (and farmers) with subject matter experts in Dhaka. These episodes focused on safe use of pesticides and fertilizer, and 50 AIRN retailers and farmers from Barisal and Chuadanga posed their queries to the DAE Deputy Director of the Plant Protection Wing and the DAE Director, Field Services (in Dhaka) via satellite. AIRN retailers were happy to connect with the high officials of DAE through this program since it generated an opportunity to ask direct questions and receive immediate responses to common agronomic problems.

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<sup>1</sup> PSAs aired from July and September 2016 on three national channels

## **Billboards**

AIP continued its communication efforts through 29 existing billboards on two key messages: “be aware while using pesticides: be healthy and keep the environment sound” as well as “use quality agro-inputs following the right quantity and methods for higher yield.”

## **Short Message Services (SMS)**

More than 170,000 branded SMSs intended to create “AIRN” as a trusted source for agricultural information were have been sent to 27,000 retailers and farmers. These SMSs promoted AIRN’s membership services and new bushiness initiative, applying fertilizer on rice field, and maintenance of pre-harvest interval of crops after applying pesticides.

## **3.2 Better Quality Adherence among Private Sector Agro-Input Companies**

### **3.2.1 Improve Supply-Side Quality through Certification and Traceability**

#### **ISO certification**

As a part of assisting five agro-inputs companies for their need assessment on international certification “ISO 9001”, AIP completed assessment of three companies including Supreme Seed Ltd., Partex Agro Ltd and AR Malik & Co (Pvt) Ltd. in February 2017.

#### **Traceability**

To develop and pilot a Standard Traceability System (STS) for assuring authenticity of the purchased agro-inputs, Win Miaki, an IT service provider, issued 100,000 unique code numbers to NAAFCO for verification by farmers when purchasing product from AIRN retailers.

## **3.3 Promote Knowledge of Quality Standards through Agricultural Exhibitions**

### **3.3.1 Conduct AIRN Agro-Tech Fairs**

AIP cut the activities for its Agro-Tech Fair due to a reduced obligation of funds for Year 5.

## **3.4 Analyze Agricultural Inputs Policy and Regulatory Constraints**

### **3.4.1 Analyze Standards and Policy Implementation**

#### **Seed Health Standards**

AIP, as a member of the Seed Health Committee worked to set health standards for sugarcane, potato and wheat, which is now under consideration of the National Seed Board (NSB) Technical Committee, a body of the Ministry of Agriculture. In order to hasten NSB’s approval, a meeting was held in March 2017 with the presence of the NSB Technical committee chairman. AIP now awaits final approval of these standards from the NSB, which it hopes to obtain in Q3.

#### **Policy and Regulatory Constraints**

The Seed Policy and Act is in the process of receiving approval from the National Parliament. Therefore, no activity was required by AIP during this quarter.

## **Summary of Intervention 3 Key Activities for Next Quarter**

### **Multimedia Campaign**

Upon completion of AIP's multimedia campaign in Y5Q2, AIP will continue its regular communication activities such as quarterly reports and monthly photo contests during the quarter. AIP plans to conduct a limited post-campaign survey to assess retailer and farmer's recall of the main campaign messages on quality inputs.

### **International Certification Assistance and Traceability**

AIP will continue its support to NAAFCO Ltd. and Advanced Chemical Industries (ACI) Ltd for implementing ISO standards in their production and distribution process. AIP will complete the remaining five (of ten) companies for assessing their need for ISO and/or other international certifications.

The pilot program of STS will continue in the next quarter.

### **Policy and Regulatory Constraints**

AIP will disseminate seed health standards for sugarcane, potato and wheat following their approval from the National Seed Board Technical Committee, a body of the Ministry of Agriculture among retailers and relevant stakeholders.

## **Intervention 4: Strengthening Local Organizations' Institutional Capacity**

### **4.1 Assess Organizational Capacity of Selected Local Organizations**

#### **4.1.1 Conduct Organizational Capacity Assessments**

Work under this sub-component was completed in Y3.

### **4.2 Design and Implement Capacity Building Program for Selected Local Organizations**

#### **4.2.1 Design and Implement Organizational Capacity Development (OCD) and Improved Membership Services for Business Associations and AIRN**

Field information was collected to design the pilot project on Empty Container Management (ECM) in collaboration with BCPA. Names of possible recycling companies/industries were also explored. However, it was decided that this pilot will not be conducted due to lack of remaining project time and inability to garner full participation from required entities, such as the plastic recyclers.

AIP, via Capacity Building Services Group (CBSG), has been working to develop the human resources manual for AIRN in consultation with AIP/AIRN staff and AIRN members. A draft manual included provisions related to staff, salary structure, leave time, job responsibilities and others.



## Summary of Intervention 4 Key Activities for Next Quarter

AIP will work with AIRN to complete and operationalize its HR and financial manuals.

## Cross-Cutting Themes and Project Management

### Gender and Grants

In order to introduce new AIRN women agro-retailers (grantees) at the community level, as well as to ensure ongoing support from local leaders, 70 community-based “garnering sessions” were organized. As participants, the Deputy Director of DAE, *upazila* Agriculture Officers, Assistant Agriculture Officers, local government representatives, local elites, religious leaders, farmers, and community members expressed their commitment to provide the women retailers business-related support.

In order to increase sales and number of client farmers, AIP assisted 84 women retailers to organize courtyard meetings with both farmers and retailers participating. These meetings resulted in better inventory plans for the grantees as they learned about seasonal needs directly from their potential farmer customers; at the same time farmers received information related to quality agro-inputs and safe use practices.

Three progress sharing meetings were held in Barisal, Khulna and Jessore with participation from 206 women retailers to provide support in preparing the retailer’s seasonal inputs inventory plan, while also mitigating challenges by increasing coordination and collaboration among grantees.

During the quarter, six married couples’ sessions were held in Barisal, Khulna and Jessore. The sessions were designed to share messages from supportive husbands, identify opportunities for husbands to assist their wives’ new agro-businesses, and create a joint six-month plan for the female retailers to improve their businesses (see success story on page 19).

Three quarterly meetings at Barisal, Khulna and Jessore were held with women “champions” (more experienced retailers) to share progress, report on field findings, and make recommendations after their mentoring visits to other grantee retailers.

To date, 202 women retailers have received in-kind support for shop establishment including 41 in this quarter.

### Environment

Following AIP’s Environmental Mitigation and Monitoring Plan (EMMP), 18 (including 10 women) shops were monitored using AIP monitoring checklists. Shops were found organized in product arrangements, cleanliness, and hand washing arrangements.

In presence of 1,120 community farmers (including five women) one session on “safe use of pesticides” was organized during a FFD. The farmers enjoyed a quiz competition during the session, while learning about safe application procedures of pesticides, proper doses, precautions during mixing, loading and applying pesticides and using personal protective equipment (PPE).

## **Summary of Crosscutting Key Activities for Next Quarter**

### **Gender and Grants**

To introduce new women retailers to potential farmer customers, AIP will organize 236 courtyard meetings. Apart from this, 17 learning visits will be organized during the quarter to improve grantees business management and technical knowledge through the experience of other successful grantee-retailers. In addition, three “learning and sharing” meetings with 214 women grantees will be organized to demonstrate how women are successful in making joint decisions with their family members. Remaining in-kind grant procurements will be finalized.

### **Environment**

Shops of 51 AIRN retailers (including 32 women) will be monitored following EMMP checklist of AIP. Refresher trainings on safe use of pesticides will be organized for 75 AIRN retailers. AIP will also organize 29 sessions on safe use of pesticides during FFDs.

### **Closeout Planning**

CNFA recognizes that early planning and action are key to successfully closing out projects. Therefore, our closeout planning activities began during Y5Q1 in order to effectively manage the closure of AIP over the course of Y5. During the next quarter, AIP will prepare its asset disposition plan and begin other administrative and financial close-out procedures, including the closure of the project’s two field based offices in Khulna and Barisal.

## Success Story

### Family Support and Joint Decision Making Enhances Business for Female Agro-Retailers

The USAID-funded Agro-Inputs Project (AIP) has facilitated 225 women into agro-retailing, a sector which traditionally has not hosted many female entrepreneurs. These female retailers are now members of the Agro-Input Retailers Network (AIRN), a network of over 3,000 retailers designed to increase the knowledge and availability of quality agricultural inputs. Due to both perceived and actual barriers for women entering the formal employment sector, women retailers require strong support from family members. This support, especially from husbands, can ease the burden for women as they juggle new responsibilities with pre-existing ones from other business ventures, and especially, household obligations.

In this regard, AIP arranged six family-level decision making meetings in Jessore, Khulna and Barisal districts to encourage husbands (and other relatives) to take an active supporting role in the woman retailer as she runs her new agro-retailership. At each meeting, 10 “supportive couples” (wife and husband) participated to share their experiences. Retailers described their marital relationship dynamics while husbands discussed their concerns as well as how they have been supportive to their wife. Yousuf Ali, a businessman and husband of successful retailer Parveena Begum shared, “I have a general concern for the mobility of my wife [women generally do not travel alone in rural Bangladesh], where and when she goes out, and with whom she is interacting. But after attending this family-level decision making meeting, I have realized I can provide support to my wife by helping her source and transport inputs, which reduces my worry”. In the various sessions, women retailers shared that their husbands had begun to assume some of the child care and household activities.

At times, they even cooked, which is very unusual in rural Bangladesh. In one of the meetings, Mr. Chinmoy Roy from Avaynagar *upazila* (sub-district) Jessore said, “My wife Deepika had to join several outside trainings for AIRN. During those times, I looked after all the household chores.” Sheerina Begum from Katakali shared that after joining AIRN she was involved with so many things that she didn’t have much time to look after her household. While this can be a burden if women are not provided with additional support, Sheerina has



**Female AIRN retailers work with their husbands to discuss family-level decision making.**

**Photo Caption: USAID/AIP**

been given support during the high sales season when her husband helps her in the shop and her mother-in-law looks after their family.

Supportive husbands also help facilitate the purchase inputs from district or *upazila*-level dealers and arrange transportation of goods (female retailers may have limited access to large markets). They sometimes act as temporary shop keepers in absence of the

female retailer, especially when she is busy with training or family duties. They are also involved in making joint business decisions with new (male) counterparts. In the rural Bangladesh context, this type of help constitutes a major shift in roles and responsibilities.

From the decision-making meetings, new AIRN members heard first hand that supportive husbands can help the women retailers to communicate with the local agriculture offices and private companies for quality products. Abdul Halim, farmer and husband of Aklima Khatun said, "I took the risk to lease out a piece of family property in order to support starting power and to build strong, respectful rappings with the dealers (who were men)." my wife's business. In the early days of her business, input suppliers didn't give importance to her even though she wanted to purchase inputs with

cash because she was new to this business and a woman. So, initially I accompanied her for to boost her negotiation.

Now that women are bringing income to the family, many husbands have begun to see that their wife's endeavour is a boon for the family overall. Because of this, while the retailer is in the field or dealing with farmer customers, more husbands are willing to take on support roles at the shop or at home. Some husbands have begun to appreciate the long-term benefits of the business, as the profit can be used to take care of children's school fees or other family expenses. While the role of women in the household continues to be viewed traditionally, ongoing support from husbands and family members will be vital for the success of female retailers and their businesses.

## Annex 1: Monitoring and Evaluation

In Y5Q2, the AIP’s Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) Team conducted a two day-long workshop with AIP/AIRN team members to identify best practices and lesson learned, and to prepare project implementation that are related to monitoring and evaluation reports. This exercise was done as a part of a planned final evaluation, scheduled in May/June 2017.

The MEL Team plans to conduct a survey of AIP’s recently concluded multimedia communication campaign to assess its efficacy in enhancing knowledge and application of quality inputs and standards. The MEL Team will work together with AIP/AIRN team members (and enumerators) to conduct the survey at the AIRN retailers level. The assessment is scheduled in May-June 2017.

As of the end of Y5Q2, AIP has made the following progress against its indicators:

### 1. Total sales of quality inputs by AIRN retailers (custom indicator)

AIP set a target to induct and certify 3,000 agro-input retailers over the life of the project who sell quality agricultural inputs in the 20 FTF working districts. This indicator directly collects the sales amount from the accredited retailers’ sales registers (logbooks), where the retailers record client-wise sales. AIP is tracking the progress of its objective titled “improved supply of quality agricultural inputs through input retailers” through this indicator. Measuring the progress through this custom indicator is a bit challenging, as the major responsibility rests with project beneficiaries, who are asked to record all transactions in the logbook (provided by the project); this can be difficult for the retailers, particularly during the peak cropping season.

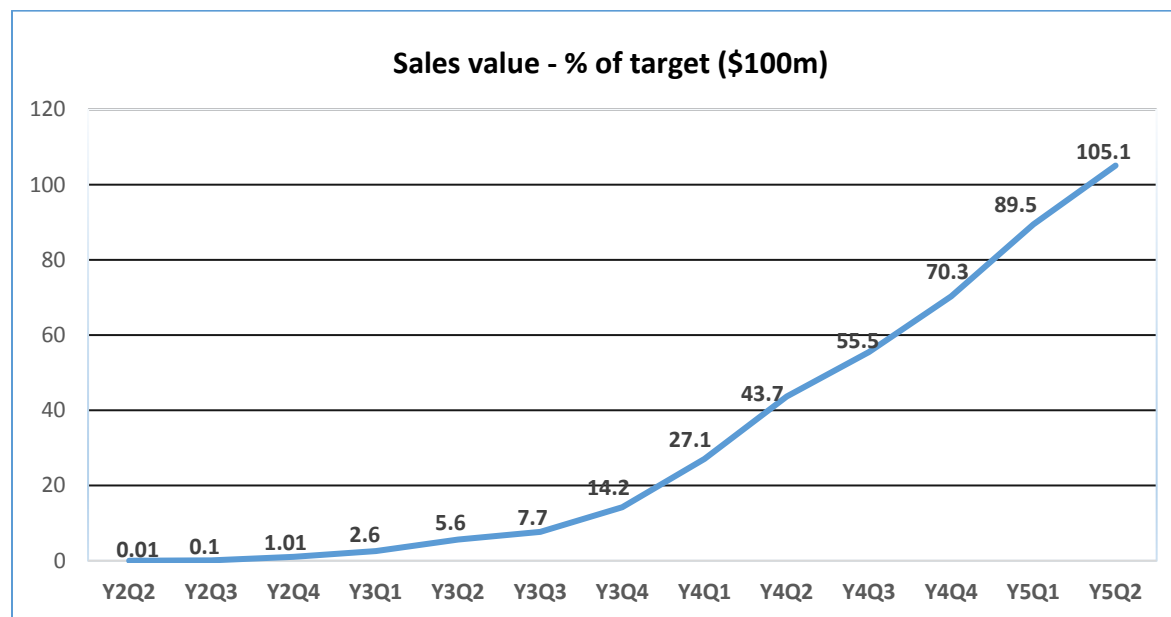
**Table 1: Total sales of quality inputs by AIRN accredited retailers**

	LOP Target (\$)	Achieved in Y5Q2 (\$)	Achievement (Cumulative) (\$)	Cumulative Sales (\$), disaggregated by sex
Sales of quality inputs	100 million	15,570,318	105,118,180	Male retailers – 103,311,417 Female retailers -1,806,763
Sales of quality inputs per retailer	33,333	5,253	35,465	Male retailers – 37,664 Female retailers – 8,175

In Y5Q2, AIP exceeded its target for sales of quality inputs (\$100m). Apart from meeting the target of total sales (cumulative value) by the AIRN retailers, the retailers also exceeded the per retailer Life of Project (LOP) target in this reporting quarter, as shown in the Table 1 (\$33,333 vs \$35,465).

Figure 1 shows the trends in sales over the life of project.

**Figure 1: Trend of sales compared to the LOP target**



Meeting the target in sales is a unique achievement for AIP, especially given that the main responsibilities to record the sales (the primary source of data) was vested with the project beneficiaries (AIRN retailers) who are not paid by the project. The success behind this was: convincing the retailers about the benefits of keeping records for themselves for multiple purposes of promoting their business and for improved client relations; strengthening the process of conducting internal data quality assessments; conducting a categorization exercise of accredited retailers with high emphasis on record keeping practices; and finally, joint efforts among the AIP/AIRN and MEL teams to make it happen at the retailer level.

## **2. Number of farmers purchasing inputs from AIRN retailers (custom indicator)**

Over the LOP, 3,000 certified retailers are projected to reach 1 million smallholder farmers with quality inputs and embedded services in 20 FTF districts. This indicator counts the number of smallholder farmers (owning five hectares or less of arable land) who purchase agricultural inputs from AIRN accredited retailers. Measuring the indicator requires counting the unique number of farmers, irrespective of number of purchases.

As of March 31, 2017, 2,964 certified retailers had joined AIRN, bringing the number to 88.6% of the total target. The critical aspect of measuring this indicator is to segregate farmers into two categories: “new” and “old” farmers<sup>2</sup> by the respective retailers. AIP avoids double counting of farmers via a database storing the farmers’ cell phone numbers as a “matching variable” by each retailer and across retailers. This way of avoiding double counting is not a full-proof solution, as many farmers reported that they share cell phone numbers among family

<sup>2</sup> In the case where a farmer purchases more than once from a certified retailer, he or she is still counted only once (old), while he or she will be treated as ‘new’ in case of first purchase. In addition, if more than one farmer in a household is purchasing inputs, all the farmers in a household will be counted individually.

members. However, AIP POs are following up with retailers to continually procure accurate data.

**Table 2: No. of AIRN farmer customers (as of March 31, 2017)**

Target – No. of farmers over LOP	Target – No. of farmers per retailer over LOP	Achievement – No. of farmers in Y5Q2	Achievement - No. of farmers (cumulative)	Achievement - No. of farmers per retailer, as of Y5Q2
1,000,000	333	61,289	886,219	299

The number of farmer customers per retailer currently stands at 299, which is slightly less than the LOP target (333/per retailer). As mentioned earlier, AIP has already exceeded its set target in sales (\$105m against \$100m), while the target on farmers’ coverage is slightly behind. Implementation experience revealed two important points for lagging behind the target: a) In many cases, a farmer used to purchase on behalf of another farmer, when one goes to market for inputs, with retailers recording only the person who purchased the input items; and b) the target of one million farmers could be overambitious. However, it may be possible to minimize the gap between the target and achievement in the next reporting quarter.

### 3. Number of agro-input retailers in the network (custom indicator)

This indicator counts the number of retailers who join the AIRN to offer quality inputs and embedded services to smallholder farmers. AIP created two types of membership, associate members and accredited members. The associate members are those who are committed to sell quality inputs, and have a retail shop with a government license. For an associate retailer to become an AIRN accredited retailer (symbolized by use of the AIRN logo), he/she must complete/pass AIRN’s business management, ethics, and technical training. This process indicator counts both types of retailers.

**Table 3: Number of agro-input retailers in the network**

Division	Target	Achievement in Y5Q2	Achievement (Cumulative)
Barisal	3,000	16	606
Dhaka		17	540
Khulna		21	2011
<b>Total</b>		<b>54</b>	<b>3,157</b>

A total of 54 members joined as AIRN associate retailers in the reporting period and become accredited in this quarter. Thus, the final number of retailers stands at 3,157 at the end of this reporting quarter. Out of 3,157 retailers, 2,964 have become accredited (trained) retailers to date.

#### 4. Number of firms receiving USG-funded technical assistance for improving business performance (FTF Indicator)

This new FTF indicator (# EG. 5.2-1) included in the FTF Handbook Definition Sheets, published in June 2016, replaced the dropped indicator titled “Number of Micro, Medium and Small Enterprises, including farmers, receiving business development services from United States Government (USG)-assisted sources.” The new indicator incorporated the achievements reported under the dropped-out indicator, as the core meaning of “indicator definition” of both the indicators are essentially the same. However, a few important changes impact AIP’s way of measurement under the new indicator, including the elimination of counting participants as “new” and “continuing” and simplifying the type of service recipients. AIP adjusted this counting method accordingly, which means a beneficiary/stakeholder will be counted each time s/he participates in a course/learning, as opposed to count once a year, irrespective of how many times a participant/stakeholder attends in a reporting year (which was the counting method in case of previous indicator). Also changed is the type of service recipients (only “formal” and “informal”).

This FTF indicator counts the number of retailers completing Business Management Training (BMT). AIP has jointly organized this customized training course with five agro-input companies. The topics include: business management, safe use of pesticide, agronomics, and nutrition. AIP also organizes training through a pool of trainers associated with GMark Consulting Ltd. In Y3, AIP introduced “Advanced Training” for retailers to further strengthen their skills on selected technical aspects and business management. In Y5, AIP provisioned for a follow up BMT training course for the retailers who received the BMT training in the initial years (Y2 and Y3) of implementation. This has been included in the Performance Indicator Reference Sheet (PIRS) of the new indicator and included in the reporting from Y5 accordingly.

**Table 4: Number of firms receiving USG-funded technical assistance for improving business performance by division**

Division	Target	Achievement in Y5Q2	Achievement (Cumulative)
<b>A. Business Management Training (BMT) (for retailers)</b>			
Barisal	3,000	32	743
Dhaka		21	591
Khulna		89	2272
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,000</b>	<b>142</b>	<b>3,606</b>
<b>B. Advance Training (for retailers)</b>			
Barisal		-	44
Dhaka		-	58
Khulna		-	147
<b>Total</b>		<b>-</b>	<b>249</b>
<b>C. Refresher of BMT Training (for retailers)</b>			
Barisal		32	32
Dhaka		6	6
Khulna		42	67



<b>Total</b>		<b>80</b>	<b>105</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>3,000</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>3,960</b>
<b>Over reported in Y5Q1</b>			<b>-17</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>			<b>3,943</b>

As of end of Y5Q2, AIP's achievements are in line with the set target, achieving a cumulative 3,943 trainings delivered to retailers.

### **5. Number of AIRN retailers with increasing application and adoption of quality standards for agricultural inputs (custom indicator)**

AIP tracks the number of retailers who apply and adopt quality standards for each input category (seed, fertilizer and crop protection product) as a result of AIP/AIRN facilitation. This custom indicator also measures the smallholder farmers served by AIRN retailers to see the level of application and adoption based on information received from AIRN retailers.

To determine the attribution to AIP, this measurement includes control experimentation, which means four separate groups: AIRN retailers and smallholder farmers served by AIRN retailers (program groups), and non-AIRN retailers and smallholder farmers served by non-AIRN retailers (control groups). In Y3Q4, AIP measured the progress by designing a proxy indicator (survey document) which is closely related to the government standard documents as its measure of this indicator, conducted by a third party. AIP will repeat the study in Y5 as a follow up to compare the progress over the period. The findings of the study were shared in a previous reporting quarter (Y3Q4). AIP will share the next round of findings, once the study will take place again in Y5.

### **6. Number of retailers who adopted the Seal of Quality (new) (custom indicator)**

This indicator counts the number of AIRN accredited retailers who joined AIRN in order to offer quality inputs and embedded services to smallholder farmers. For a retailer, the prerequisite to receive AIRN certification (and the ability to display the AIRN logo) is passing AIRN's business, ethics, and technical training.

**Table 5: No. of retailers who adopted the Seal of Quality by Division**

<b>Division</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Achievement in Y5 Q2</b>	<b>Achievement (Cumulative)</b>
Barisal	3,000	28	558
Dhaka		56	495
Khulna		102	1911
<b>Total</b>		<b>186</b>	<b>2,964</b>

In Y5Q2, a total of 186 associate retailers were promoted to accredited retailers, bringing the total number of accredited retailers reached to 2,964. AIRN will fulfil its target (3,000) by early next quarter.

### **7. Number of accredited retailers who are declared as Champion Retailers**

AIP adopted this indicator in the revised M&E plan (revised in Sept. 2015) and finalized a set of selection criterion for these championships, included in the Implementation Plan. The activity was initially planned to take place in Y4Q4, which has been deferred to Y5Q1 in order to capitalize the findings of internal and external categorization exercise of retailers.

**Table 6: No. of retailers who declared as champion retailers**

#	Division	Sex of Retailers		Total
		Male	Female	
1	Barisal	17	6	23
2	Dhaka	15	5	20
3	Khulna	60	23	93
<b>Total</b>		<b>92</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>126</b>

The AIRN Team declared the first list of “champion retailers” in Y5Q1 combining with the findings of categorization exercise and an internal assessment based on the set criteria. As of Y5Q2, a total of 126 retailers were declared as “champions” of whom 34 are women. It is highly expected that the champion retailers will serve as “role models” among the AIRN retailers to disseminate the best practices for replication in the remaining project period.

**8. Number of analysis and stakeholder consultation conducted on policies regulating agricultural input industry (custom indicator)**

AIP engages national level input associations and private companies to strengthen input supply chains and guard the interest of both farmers and input retailers. Since the program inception, AIP has completed a review of the 11 sections of the National Seed Policy of 1993 with the Bangladesh Seed Association and leading agro-input companies, and formally submitted this review to the Seed Wing of the Ministry of Agriculture. As part of the process, AIP successfully analyzed (Stage 1) the existing policy, and organized public debate (Stage 2) with relevant agro-input associations, companies, and BPRSSP in order to engage in a dialogue around modifications to the seed policy that could benefit stakeholders.

As a member of Seed Health Committee of National Seed Board, under Ministry of Agriculture (MOA), AIP has supported the committee to draft a proposal on fixing seed health standards, which has been submitted to the Board in September 2016.

**9. Number of individuals who have received USG supported short-term agricultural sector productivity or food security training (FTF indicator)**

This FTF indicator measures the number of individuals who have gained significant knowledge or skill through interactions that are intentional, structured, and purposed. This includes entrepreneurs (agro-input retailers), representatives of private sectors, agro-inputs companies, and extension agents/specialists of government and non-government organizations. The specific capacity building events include Training of Trainers (ToT), day-long workshops, agricultural exhibitions, and study tour/learning visits.

**Table 7: Number of individuals who have received USG supported short-term agricultural sector productivity or food security training**

<b>Division</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Achievement in Y5Q2</b>	<b>Achievement (Cumulative)</b>
Training of Trainer (ToT)	190	-	147
Study Tour		-	309
<b>Total</b>	<b>190</b>	-	<b>456</b>

AIP completed its planned short-term training courses in Y4.

Indicator-wise data (FTF + Custom with Cross-Cutting) are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

**Summary of MEL Key Activities for Next Quarter:**

1. Finalize the report of the follow up study on “Assessing increasing application and adoption of quality standards for agricultural inputs”.
2. Conduct an assessment to assess the impact of AIP initiated multi-media communication campaign.
3. Facilitate the visit of the final evaluation team.

**Table 1: Feed the Future Indicator**

#	Name of Indicator	Classifications	Unit of Measure	Disaggregated by	Baseline	Target and Achievement				
						Target	Achievement in Y5Q2	Achievement in Y5	Achievement Cumulative (LOP)	
						Y5				
1	Number of firms receiving USG-funded technical assistance for improving business performance	FTF Indicator # EG. 5.2-1	Number	Type of firm	Formal	0	1,550	222	442	3,943
					Informal	0	-	-	-	-
					<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1,550</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>442</b>	<b>3,943</b>
				Duration	New	0	1550	197	417	3,918
					Continuing	0	-	25	25	25
					<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1,550</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>442</b>	<b>3,943<sup>3</sup></b>
2	Number of individuals who have received USG supported short-term agricultural sector productivity or food security training	FTF Indicator # EG. 3.2-1	Number of individuals	Type of individuals	Producers	0	-	-	-	-
					People in government	0	-	-	-	58
					People in private sector firms	0	-	-	-	370
					People in civil society	0	-	-	-	28
					<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>456</b>
				Sex	Male	0	-	-	-	404
					Female	0	-	-	-	52
					<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>456</b>

<sup>3</sup> In Y5Q1, 17 retailers were added wrongly, thus they have been deducted in Y5Q2.

**Table 2: Custom and Cross-cutting Indicators**

#	Name of Indicator	Classifications	Unit of Measure	Disaggregated by	Baseline	Target and Achievement				
						Target	Achievement in Y5Q2	Achievement in Y5	Achievement Cumulative (LOP)	
						Y5				
<i>Custom indicators</i>										
1	Total sales of quality inputs by AIRN accredited retailers	Custom	US dollar	Sex of retailers	Male	0	28,116,463	15,020,302	33,741,172	103,311,417 <sup>4</sup>
					Female	0	1,479,814	550,016	982,728	1,806,763
					<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>29,596,277</b>	<b>15,570,318</b>	<b>34,723,900</b>	<b>105,118,180</b>
2	Number of farmers purchasing inputs from AIRN accredited retailers	Custom	Number of farmers	Sex of farmers	Male	0	261,677	59,863	152,968	875,145
					Female	0	8,372	1,426	3,287	11,074
					<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>270,049</b>	<b>61,289</b>	<b>156,255</b>	<b>886,219</b>
3	Number of Agro-Inputs Retailers in the Network	Custom	Number of retailers	Sex of retailers	Male	0		16	50	2,925
					Female	0		38	83	232
					<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>		<b>54</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>3,157</b>
				Type of retailers	Seed	0				3
					Fertilizer	0				
					CPP	0				1
					<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>		<b>54</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>3,153</b>
4	Number of AIRN retailers with increasing application and adoption of quality standards for agricultural inputs <sup>5</sup>	Custom	Number of retailers and farmers	Sex of retailers	Male	0				
					Female	0				
					<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>				
				Sex of farmers	Male	0				
					<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>				

<sup>4</sup> Exchange rate 1\$=BDT 79.85 as on April 18, 2017, circulated by Bangladesh Bank, the Central Bank of Bangladesh.

<sup>5</sup> A study has been carried out by a third-party consultant in Y3 and the detailed findings were mentioned in the last report (Y3Q4).

				Type of standards	Seeds	0				
					Fertilizer	0				
					CPP	0				
					<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>				
5	Number of retailers who adopted AIRN Logo	Custom	Number of retailers	Sex of retailers	Male	0	375	140	296	2,743
					Female	0	125	46	103	221
					<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>399</b>	<b>2,964</b>
				Type of retailers	Seed	0				3
					Fertilizer	0				
					CPP	0				1
					<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>399</b>	<b>2,964</b>
				6	Number of accredited retailers declared as champion retailers	Custom	Number of retailers	Sex of retailers	Male	0
Female	0		13						13	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>74</b>						<b>74</b>	<b>74</b>
Type of retailers	Seed	0								
	Fertilizer	0								
	CPP	0								
	<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>74</b>				
7	Number of analysis and stakeholder consultation conducted on policies regulating agricultural inputs industry	Custom	Number of policies/regulations/administrative procedures	Sector	Seed	0	1			1
					Fertilizer	0				
					<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>			<b>1<sup>6</sup></b>

<sup>6</sup> AIP successfully advanced Government of Bangladesh (GoB) Seed Policy. The revised draft policy is forwarded to Ministry of Law and Ministry of Agriculture for approval through Seed Regulatory Reform Committee, AIP is one of the members of the committee

<b>Cross cutting indicators</b>										
8	Strengthened organizational capacities of local organizations	Cross cutting (CC)	Percent	None			1		1	3 <sup>7</sup>
9	Collaborative initiatives increased	CC	No. of organization/institute/company	Partner	Category					
					FTF Implementers					5 <sup>8</sup>
					Input Association					4 <sup>9</sup>
					Input private companies					12 <sup>10</sup>
					Government					5
					Private (for-profit) companies			2	2	3 <sup>11</sup>
					<b>Total</b>					<b>29</b>

<sup>7</sup> Bangladesh Fertilizer Association (BFA), Bangladesh Crop Protection Association (BCPA), and AIRN

<sup>8</sup> Organized demonstration plot and training

<sup>9</sup> Four input associations participated with AIP in policy advocacy issues, while three of them participated in int'l study tour and one participated in AIP's organizational capacity strengthening efforts. The number of association/organization/company is counted once, irrespective of number of events they participated in.

<sup>10</sup> Jointly organized demonstration plots with input companies and training courses

<sup>11</sup> Signed MOU with bKash (a mobile financial service provider) to support approximately 100 rural women retailers in supplementing their income through provision of mobile financial services (along with their regular input business). Another 2 MOUs signed in Y5 among Bank Asia, NAAFCO, and AIRN (tripartite) to facilitate financial package to NAAFCO retailers of AIRN, and with Super Star Group (SSG) to promote solar lamp for AIRN retailers.

