The Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and the ICCO Consortium are involved in a strategic partnership – Civic Engagement Alliance (CEA). The partnership aims to ensure that in and by this partnership, the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and the civil society at large, both in the ‘Global South’ as well as the overall global context, can contribute to reducing inequality and injustice in societies for fair economic, social and political development. Central in this partnership are the women as (productive) actors in their communities, as well as caretakers and consumers who have specific needs. This partnership is all about countering the worldwide tendency of limited and decreasing political space for CSOs. Strengthening the lobbying and advocacy capacity of CSOs is central in our Theory of Change (ToC), as described in our application Convening and Convincing. The themes of our Theory of Change are closely related to the Multi Annual Strategic Plan (MASP) of the ICCO Cooperation with two main pillars: Justice and Dignity for All and Sustainable Livelihoods.

With this perspective, a consortium was formulated to implement this program from the year 2016 – 2020. In Bangladesh, the CEA consists of the following members: ICCO (lead), Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation, The Leprosy Mission International Bangladesh (TLMIB), Nijera Kori, Civil Society Alliance for Scaling up Nutrition (CSA- SUN).

In this context, three pathways of change have been identified in Bangladesh:

1. Accessing *Khas* Land for Poor and Landless Farmers
2. Realizing the Right to Adequate Food and Nutrition
Civic Engagement Alliance (CEA) believes that by building partnership among Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and civil society, it can contribute to reducing inequality and injustice in society. With this vision, daylong workshops were arranged in Khulna, Barisal and Rangpur to introduce CEA interventions mainly focusing on 'Realizing the Right to Adequate Food and Nutrition' (Pathway-2) of the CEA program but partner stakeholders focusing on 'Access to Khas Land for Poor and Landless Farmers' (Pathway-1) and 'Intervene to Small Producer Empowerment and Inclusive Market' (Pathway-3) were also present during the workshops. Through group work and interactive discussions, these workshops also aimed to compile current issues around the topics and identified potential solutions as well as accumulate commitment from Government line departments, NGOs, community based organizations, and professional associations / allies that are relevant to health and nutrition, access to khas land, agricultural production, processing and marketing interventions. As a result, we now have a list of relevant agenda points that need to be addressed through this project.

A total of 36 members from CSA for SUN (Civil Society Alliance for Scaling up Nutrition) actively participated and provided necessary support to organize the events in all three divisions, including the CEA pathway partners representatives (Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation, Nijera Kori, The Leprosy Mission).

Among others participants, noteworthy mentions are concerned Division level Government officials, including Divisional Director - Health, Divisional Director - Department of Livestock Services, Additional Director - Department of Agriculture Extension, Civil Surgeon and Deputy Civil Surgeon, Director- Family Planning, Assistant Director - Health, Additional Director - Fisheries, Assistant Engineer- DPHE, Social Welfare Officer, District Women Affairs Officer-, media representatives, and the respective INGOs (Concern Worldwide, Plan International, UNICEF, IDE, Save The Children), business associations leaders and some private sector representatives.

Through these events, participants of all spheres suggested that all relevant stakeholders should be familiar with the government's National Nutrition Policy as well as “khas” land distribution policy, national policies on Agriculture, Livestock & Fisheries, Health and services available at different level and undertake joint initiatives following an integrated approach at all levels (union, district, divisional and national). In addition, it was suggested that in order to achieve the goal of CEA project, all stakeholders from different sectors, including health, nutrition, agriculture, etc. should be brought under one umbrella, and the role of different stakeholders, such as government, CSOs, and private sector, should be clearly defined in order to avoid duplication.
These sessions strengthened the understanding of the government officials towards provision for health and nutrition facilities and other pathway agendas of CEA project. This will enable us to carry out our interventions successfully in the future.

Building Capacity on Lobby and Advocacy at Grassroots

In Bangladesh, Civic Engagement Alliance (CEA) emphasizes on developing capacity on lobby and advocacy for partners and primary stakeholders involved in all three pathways of change outlined in the program. Pathway 1 focuses on access to khas land for poor and landless farmers, while pathway 2 emphasizes the right to adequate food and nutrition, and pathway 3 intervenes to empower small producers and make markets more inclusive.

Through building capacity and knowledge on lobby and advocacy, CEA program believes that stakeholders can identify and address their own barriers for establishing their rights and entitlements. As such a Train the Trainers (ToT) on Mobilizing Support Cycle and Inclusive Facilitation was used as one of the means to build capacity and increase knowledge on facilitation of stakeholders to understand the steps required for implementing a lobby and advocacy agenda.

ToT on Mobilizing Support Cycle

A total of 18 participants received the ten-day ToT on “Mobilizing Support Cycle (MSC)” which was organized in early 2017. MDF, a consulting firm facilitated the ToT, with technical support from Wild Geese, a consortium member of the CEA program.

The key objectives of the ToT was:

- Preparing and motivating a team of trainers to conduct quality training and make the program sustainable.
- Increasing Mobilizing Support (MS) capacity and acquire experience in designing and implementing MS initiatives for leaders and staff members of local organizations.

A trainer pool was formed, who later developed the contextual module on lobby and advocacy for all three pathways and facilitated the training for beneficiaries at the field level.

ToT on Inclusive Facilitation

To understand the importance of inclusion in CEA program, another three-day ToT on “Inclusion of People with Disabilities in Trainings & Workshops” was organized. The objective for the training was to ensure inclusion and participation of people with disabilities (PWD) in program activities. Through this training, the participants gained...
of the program.

The training was conducted with the vision of:

- Rights of people with a disability
- Basic principles of inclusion: Attitude, Communication, Accessibility & Participation (ACAP)
- Identifying barriers that block equal participation of people with disabilities in training settings
- Inclusive facilitation methods
- Addressing different learning styles
- Preparing & facilitating an inclusive training session together (mock up)
- Feedback & suggestions for self training practice

**Lobby and Advocacy Training**

In order to strengthen lobby and advocacy work at all levels, including national, regional and local, a four-day training on lobby and advocacy was offered to the target groups working with our local implementing partners, Nijera Kori, Civil-Society Alliance for Scaling Up Nutrition (CSA-SUN), Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation and The Leprosy Mission International - Bangladesh (TLMIB). The training was organized throughout the country, including Rangpur, Gaibandha, Nilphamari, Khulna and Barisal. The target groups were representative from landless groups, producers group, traders association, service providers association, self-help groups etc. A total of 10 batches, including 256 participants (186 male and 70 female) received the training.

The aim of the training was to develop a basic idea on lobby and advocacy, through different modules on picture & mind mapping, experience learning cycle, mobilizing support, problem and solution tree analysis, policy and legal context, stakeholder analysis, mobilizing allies, mobilizing support tactics, write a complaint letter, mapping the policy process, monitoring & evaluation, negotiation skill, framing message and disability inclusion.

Through this training participants learned to design and plan an activities on lobby and advocacy. They are now able to apply a number of analytical tools to sharpen their approach to an issue that needs to be addressed. They also acquired knowledge on communication, networking and negotiation skills. To evaluate the understanding, participants developed lobby and advocacy plan for their respective groups and organization after the training.

**Public Private Initiative (PPI) Benefits Smallholders**
through the Civic Engagement Alliance (CEA) program, ICCO Cooperation and Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation promote the concept of establishing Public Private Initiative (PPI) for lobby and advocacy. In a PPI, multiple stakeholders, including Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE), Service Provider Association (SPA), as well as leaders from producer groups and federations collaborate to address issues faced by small producer groups in markets.

ACME Laboratories Limited manufactures herbal medicines using “Basak” (or malabar nut, a medicinal plant) leaves and has a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the local SPA. Today, through the local SPA, 150 small-holder farmers supply Basak leaves to ACME Laboratories Limited. The SPA, which is mandated to work with the producer group, suggested the smallholders to supply leaves to the private sector as this would be a source for additional income for the smallholders. The Association planned to plant approximately 18,000 medicinal saplings in Mohadipur union under Palashbari upazila, Sreepur and Konchibari union under Sundarganj upazila under Gaibandha district. However, using crop land to grow Basak instead of rice will bring less profit to the farmers. They then realized that using raised and fallow land would be more suitable (and profitable) for growing Basak. As such, 14 kilometer-long road side seemed to be the best alternative for this.

Since the Union Parishad, in coordination with Upazila Nirbahi Office (UNO), allocates and maintains these roadside land, the PPI committee made regular visits to the relevant authorities to lobby for permission for growing the medicine plants on the road-sides. Considering the positive environmental impact, demand and economic benefits to the producer group, the Union Parishad allocated the requested land for Basak plantation for 15 years. As a result, 135 male and 15 female farmers planted 18,000 saplings in August and September 2017. The SPA further plans to expand this plantation area through similar lobby and advocacy efforts.

CEA program provided lobby and advocacy training to representatives from producer group, SPA, TA and UFPO. This training developed their negotiation skills and enabled them to mobilize support from local government authorities.

Fighting Irregularities: Access to Khas Water Body

“Sudoher beel”, a 3.09 acres khas (or government-owned) water body, was seized by a fishermen’s group, named Pachiyarpur Fishermen Cooperative Society, with local political support. In 2017, Shaghata Upazila Jalmahal Management Committee circulated an open tender, where ten fishermen’s groups participated. However, with the influence of representatives of the local political party, Pachiyarpur again received the award to lease the water body for three years (2017-2019). Following this incident, Shaghata Upazila Landless Association, which works for both agricultural farmers and fishermen, reviewed the relevant for leasing of water-bodies. From the Jalmahal Management Policy 2009 and circular 6 of the lease notifications, they identified an important clause mentioning that one fisheries society cannot take lease of more than two marshes/water-bodies at the same time. However, Pachiyarpur Fishermen Cooperative Society had already leased two water bodies (Shubkidah and Sutargoi), which was clearly a violation of the policy.

In March 2017, the landless association submitted a memorandum to the Upazila Nirbahi Officer demanding investigation and scrapping of the lease application. A copy of the memorandum was sent to the Deputy...
Commissioner of Gaibandha. The landless association also held a discussion on these irregularities with the relevant authorities. Under the direction of the Deputy Commissioner, the Upazila administration investigated the allegations put forward and it was proven that Pachiyarpur Fishermen Cooperative Society had taken lease of two water-bodies. As a result, their application was rejected.

The Upazila Jalmahal Management Committee accepted the tender application of another landless fishermen’s group, Puthimari Fishermen Cooperative Society, after verification and decided to lease the water body to them as per the rules and regulations. As a result, the Puthimari Fishermen Cooperative Society took lease of “Sudoher Beel” for three years by paying BDT 80,005 from their group savings.

As part of the Civil Engagement Alliance (CEA) Program, our local partner, Nijera Kori, facilitated the training on lobby and advocacy, “Right to Information Act”, as well as the “Agriculture Khas Land Management and Distribution Policy 1997” and “Bangladesh Water Act 2013” to landless associations. The leaders of these groups also received training on negotiation skills and tactics on mobilizing support. They also analyzed all the policies, tendering process, and background of parties involved in land-grabbing. The experience and knowledge from these trainings made them confident and skilled to deal with such irregularities and fight for their own right in a progressive manner.

Inclusion through Civic Engagement Alliance: Story of Arfan Ali

Leprosy is considered to be a life threatening contagious disease in rural Bangladesh and anyone diagnosed with leprosy is most often isolated from the society. Through the Civic Engagement Alliance (CEA) program, we aim to promote inclusion by involving people with leprosy in the Union Parishad Agricultural Committee (also known as the Common Interest Group). As part of the program, our implementing partner, The Leprosy Mission International Bangladesh (TLMIB), arranged a workshop in December 2017 at Khongaon Union Parishad, Pirganj Upazilla, with the intention of making the local government officials aware about inclusion and to include persons with Leprosy in different Standing Committees, especially the Agricultural Committee.

Arfan Ali (33), living in Pirganj upazilla of Rangpur district, was diagnosed with Leprosy in 2001. He is a member of the “Organization for the Development of the Persons with Disability” and also assigned as their Community Resource Person (CRP). Initially, it was not easy for Arfan Ali to get enlisted in the Common Interest Group (CIG). However, through the lobby efforts and capacity building activities of the CEA program, he became a member of the UP Agricultural Committee in December 2017. As a result, according to the policy Agricultural Committee for the marginalized, he received variety of crop seed and chemical fertilizers from the agriculture office.

TLMIB has been in contact with Sub-assistant Agriculture Officer and UP Chairman from the very beginning of the project. The program successfully ensured participation of the government officials through different workshops at the divisional level. Later, the government officials showed interest in inclusion and asked for the list of PWD in the Union. After which it was decided to include persons with Leprosy disability in the CIG. As a result Arfan Ali and 4 other personals with Leprosy were included in the committee. The officials also agreed to provide all means of support for the success of the project.
Arfan Ali is very pleased to have been included in the Committee. He never thought that he would receive any importance in the society but now that he is being able to contribute in the agricultural sector and that his words are being heard with importance.