

## Event Report: Annual Review and Re-Planning Meeting (2025)



**Project: Building an Inclusive and Sustainable Supply Chain for Responsibly  
Produced High-Quality Vegetables (ISCHV)**

**Date: December 14–16, 2025**

**Venue: Malik Farm (R&D-ARMS), Pran Nagar, Birganj, Dinajpur**

**Organized by: ODSD (Organization of Development Services for Distressed) and  
ABALAMBAN in collaboration with A R Malik Seeds (Pvt.) Ltd.**

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## 1. Executive Summary

The Annual Review and Re-Planning Meeting (2025) for the ISCHV Project was convened from December 14 to 16, 2025, at the Malik Farm R&D Center in Birganj, Dinajpur. This high-level assembly served as a critical milestone to evaluate project performance over the 2023–2025 cycle, resolve multi-level implementation bottlenecks, and architect a strategic roadmap for the upcoming phase.

The meeting was attended by 39 core project staff, members of the Executive Committee (EC), and 4 specialists from the ARMS Market Development team. Additionally, observers from the ARMS Sales and R&D teams participated to provide technical oversight. Key outcomes of the three-day session included a comprehensive analysis of socio-technical barriers at the farmer level, a status audit of GlobalGAP certification targets, and the finalization of a revised implementation strategy designed to enhance supply chain resilience.

## 2. Introduction and Project Context

The ISCHV Project (Building an Inclusive and Sustainable Supply Chain for Responsibly Produced High-Quality Vegetables) is a transformative initiative dedicated to transitioning the agricultural landscape of Northwest Bangladesh from subsistence farming to a commercially competitive, safe, and sustainable value chain.

The project's operational footprint covers four strategic Upazilas:

- **Gaibandha District:** Sadullapur, Palashbari, and Gobindaganj.
- **Bogura District:** Shibganj.

### 2.1 Objectives of the Review Meeting

The 2025 assembly was structured around six primary objectives to ensure project alignment and operational excellence:

- **Performance Review:** Conduct a comprehensive review of project activities and milestones achieved between 2023 and 2025.
- **Problem Identification:** Pinpoint grassroots social, technical, and infrastructural challenges hindering progress.
- **Strategic Resolution:** Analyze existing "overcome mechanisms" to determine their effectiveness in addressing identified hurdles.
- **Knowledge Management:** Document key lessons learned to prevent recurring inefficiencies.
- **Stakeholder Consultation:** Gather technical recommendations and feedback from management and partner teams.
- **Strategic Planning:** Finalize the operational plan and budget allocations for the 2026 fiscal year.

## 3. Day 1: Proceedings – Review and Learning Session (December 14, 2025)

The inaugural day focused on transition logistics and high-level strategic retrospection, facilitating a shift from field operations to critical assessment.

### 3.1 Logistics and Cultural Integration

- **Transit to R&D Center:** The project team successfully relocated to the ARMS R&D Center in Pran Nagar, Birganj, which served as the technical hub for the meeting.
- **Cultural Site Visit (Kantajew Temple):** As part of the team-building and cultural appreciation segment, participants visited the historic Kantajew Temple (Kantojir Munder). This visit

allowed the team to engage with local heritage, fostering a collaborative atmosphere before the commencement of the formal technical sessions.

### 3.2 Opening Session

The meeting commenced at 3:00 PM with a formal welcome by the project leadership. The introductory remarks set the context for the annual review, emphasizing that the project is now entering a critical scaling phase where quality compliance and market consistency are paramount. Vice Chairperson and Treasurer of ODSD, Manager Market development of ARMS, Executive Director of ABALAMBAN and Manager Admin of R&D give welcome speech in the opening session.

### 3.3 Progress Review of the Project (2023-2025)

**Presented by:** Md. Shah Jamal Choudhury, Supply and value chain coordinator

Supply and value chain coordinator review the overall project performance and present status against the target. The following area was covered in overall project review:

#### WP I: Vegetable's growers mobilisation and group formation

| Particulars                                                                                               | Status                    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Select target unions within the 4 project upazilas together with the Department of Agricultural Extension | Completed                 |
| Conduct 150 community meetings to raise general awareness                                                 | 2400                      |
| Form 150 farmer groups with (on average) at least 50% female members                                      | 150                       |
| Create a database for traceability and project management purposes                                        | Completed                 |
| Form and register 4 cooperatives at upazila level with farmer groups as members                           | 3 completed 1 on process  |
| Train 20 cooperative leaders in management of their cooperative                                           | Completed                 |
| Conduct a baseline study to survey a representative sample of 250 participating farmers                   | Completed                 |
| Monitor farmers surveyed for the baseline study                                                           | On track                  |
| Conduct an end-line study to measure impact of the project on participating farmers                       | At the end of the project |

#### WP II: Training of vegetables growers in Good Agricultural Practices

| Particulars                                                                                                                  | Status    |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Set up 4 demonstration farms                                                                                                 | Completed |
| Train 25 ODSD field officers and 50 DAE officers in imparting Good Agricultural Practices                                    | Completed |
| Support ODSD field officers and DAE officers to train 150 Lead Farmers in applying and promoting Good Agricultural Practices | Completed |
| Support Lead Farmers to train 5,000 vegetable growers in Good Agricultural Practices                                         | Completed |
| Guide 150 farmer groups in planting crops on the basis of the crop production calendar                                       | Completed |
| Provide crop and fertilizer recommendations to 1,000 farmers, based soil testing in farmer fields                            | Completed |
| Provide additional training and technical assistance to 1,000 selected farmers on GAP                                        | Completed |
| Organise GlobalGAP auditing and certification of 1,000 trained farmers                                                       | 1000 (80) |

**WP III: Establishment of vegetables supply chain infrastructure and traceability system**

| Particulars                                                                                                                                                          | Status    |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Set up 8 vegetables collection centres                                                                                                                               | Completed |
| Set up 1 processing centre for sorting, grading, cleaning and repacking of vegetables                                                                                | On Track  |
| Set up a vegetables traceability system                                                                                                                              | On track  |
| Protocols for food safe vegetables handling based on Quality Management System (QMS) and HACCP standards developed                                                   | On track  |
| Recruit and train 56 persons (40% women) to operate the collection centres and quality management                                                                    | On track  |
| Recruit and train 16 persons (40% women) to operate the processing centre and quality management                                                                     | On track  |
| Demonstrate the use of kits for rapid detection of chemical residues to 9 collection and processing centre operators and 5 representatives of relevant organisations | On Track  |
| Facilitate the HACCP audit and certification of the processing centre                                                                                                | On track  |

**WP IV: Connecting the vegetables supply chain to the formal market**

| Particulars                                                                                                                                                               | Status          |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Engage with 5 formal buyers in the domestic market to agree on vegetables supply programme including indicative requirements (quantity, quality, packaging, etc.)         | On Track        |
| Engage with 2 formal buyers in the regional export market to agree on vegetables supply programme including indicative requirements (quantity, quality, packaging, etc.)  | On Track        |
| Organise 2 site visits by formal buyers to meet participating farms, farmer groups, cooperatives and show supply chain infrastructure (collection and processing centres) | Planned in 2026 |
| Facilitate the supply of vegetables to buyers in the formal market                                                                                                        | Partially Done  |

**WP V: Promotion of national food safety standards for vegetable production**

| Particulars                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Status          |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Organise 3 multilateral meetings with the Ministry of Agriculture, the Seed Certification Agency, the Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institute (BSTI), the Bangladesh Food Safety Authority (BFSA), and relevant other agencies | Planned in 2026 |
| Organise a national level seminar to share experience, build consensus, and disseminate project results with regard to food safety standards for vegetable production                                                             | Planned in 2026 |
| Publish project results and learnings on a dedicated website                                                                                                                                                                      | Completed       |

**WP VI: Completing the food-safe vegetables supply chain (new)**

| Activities                                                                                                 | Status |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| Add and install wrapping, packing and labelling equipment and a cold storage room at the processing centre | 2026   |

| Activities                                                                                                                                 | Status  |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|
| Install a cold room in a rented building equipped to receive and hold vegetables for distribution to customers in Dhaka                    | 2026    |
| Purchase and deploy two refrigerated vans to transport vegetables at optimal temperature, traceable, and without risk of contamination     | 2026    |
| Set up (4) branded outlets in Dhaka city for increased visibility, awareness raising among consumers, and direct sales to consumers        | 03/2026 |
| Design and implement promotional campaign including development of video and social media content                                          | 03/2026 |
| Supply chain digitalised by a farmer facing app for real-time access to actionable data and a consumer facing app for last-mile connection | 06/2026 |
| Recruit and train 20 additional permanent staff to perform their role in the vegetables supply chain                                       | 06/2026 |
| Recruit and train 16 commission-based marketing agents                                                                                     | 06/2026 |
| Events organised to promote the certified food-safe vegetables supply chain concept among stakeholders                                     | 12/2026 |
| Obtain HACCP certificate for supply chain facilities                                                                                       | 06/2026 |

### 3.4 Upazila-Wise Performance Review

#### 3.4.1 Upazila wise Presentation: Sadullapur

**Presented by:** Md. Mostafizar Rahman (Collection Hub Manager)

##### Basic Information:

- **Farmer Groups:** 38
- **Total Members:** 1,301 farmers
- **Collection Hubs:** 02
- **Model Farm:** 01
- **GAP Farmers:** 189
- **Cooperative:** 01

##### Key Achievements:

- **Operational Collection Hubs:** Successfully facilitated regular vegetable sales through two established collection hubs.
- **Technology Adoption:** Increased adoption of modern agricultural technologies among participating farmers.
- **Safe Food Production:** High farmer interest in safe vegetable production, evidenced by 189 farmers achieving GlobalGAP certification.

##### Challenges and Targeted Overcoming Strategies:

- **Challenge:** Difficulty in implementing collective, group-based decisions on vegetable production.
- **Overcome:** Developing yearly group-based crop calendars and establishing specific production groups to ensure synchronized implementation of cultivation plans.
- **Challenge:** Limited utilization of hybrid, disease, and stress-resistant varieties among all member farmers.
- **Overcome:** Conducting awareness programs to highlight the benefits of high-yielding seeds and installing mini-demonstration farms through Lead Farmers to showcase superior varieties.

- **Challenge:** Inconsistent adherence to soil treatment and recommended fertilizer protocols.
- **Overcome:** Establishing Model Farms for practical demonstrations and organizing exposure visits and learning-sharing sessions to validate the results of proper soil management.
- **Challenge:** Difficulty in maintaining cluster-based cultivation of homogeneous vegetables for processing plant supply.
- **Overcome:** Motivating farmers within clusters to cultivate identical varieties to ensure the batch uniformity required by formal buyers.
- **Challenge:** Non-compliance with standardized post-harvest management procedures.
- **Overcome:** Conducting local market surveys and result-sharing meetings to demonstrate the higher market value of properly graded and handled vegetables.

#### **Key Learnings:**

- **Batch Homogeneity:** Producing uniform vegetables in batches significantly facilitates efficient purchasing, sales, and marketing.
- **Cluster Advantage:** Cluster-based cultivation ensures a steady supply of specific varieties, which creates higher demand in professional markets.
- **Mobilization Impact:** Organized farmer groups simplify overall production management and market linkage.

#### **Management Recommendations:**

- **Terminology Adjustment:** The term "group-based vegetable production" should be changed to "group-based decision on vegetable production" to avoid confusion.
- **Logical Linkage:** Strategies listed to "overcome" obstacles must be specifically and perfectly linked to the corresponding challenges identified.
- **Specific Problem-Solving:** Overcome strategies must be direct and specifically linked to the faced challenges.
- **Avoiding Contradictions:** Presentations should ensure there is no contradiction between listed challenges, learnings, and achievements.

### **3.4.2 Upazila wise Presentation: Palashbari**

**Presented by:** Md. Mehdi Hasan Manik (Upazila Manager Technical)

#### **Basic Information:**

- **Farmer Groups:** 35
- **Total Members:** 1,077 farmers
- **Collection Hubs:** 02
- **Model Farm:** 01
- **GAP Farmers:** 200
- **Cooperative:** 01

#### **Key Achievements:**

- **Hub Functionality:** Established a consistent sales channel through functioning collection hubs.
- **Advanced Cultivation:** Increased adoption of modern technology and GlobalGAP standards among group members.
- **Resilient Varieties:** Successful expansion of high-yielding, disease, and stress-resistant vegetable varieties.

### Challenges and Targeted Overcoming Strategies:

- **Challenge:** Inconsistent application of fertilizers according to recommended doses and soil health cards.
- **Overcome:** Providing intensive training on fertilizer recommendation cards and using water testing reports to justify technical adjustments to farmers.
- **Challenge:** Difficulty in ensuring strict adherence to group-based decisions on vegetable production and GAP record-keeping.
- **Overcome:** Completing GlobalGAP internal audits and providing specialized training to ensure every farmer follows the established policies.
- **Challenge:** Hesitation to adopt new crop varieties due to perceived risks.
- **Overcome:** Motivating farmers to trial new varieties on a small scale (small land parcels) to evaluate regional suitability before full-scale adoption.
- **Challenge:** Technical and pest-related problems occurring at the field level during the production cycle.
- **Overcome:** Collaborating closely with the Upazila Agriculture Office—specifically involving Sub-Assistant Agriculture Officers (SAAO)—and the ARMS R&D team for sustainable, rapid field-level problem solving.
- **Challenge:** Low participation in collective buying and selling through the Collection Hubs.
- **Overcome:** Facilitating direct negotiation by bringing wholesalers and buyers to the hub centers and strengthening the business capacity of hub committees.

### Major Learnings:

- **Trial-Based Adoption:** Small-scale cultivation is an essential step for promoting new seeds and minimizing farmer risk.
- **Response Time:** Rapid intervention in field-level problems is critical to maintaining crop health and farmer trust.
- **Seasonality:** The use of area-specific seasonal seeds is a key factor in production success.

### Upcoming Challenges:

- **Traceability and Standards:** Ensuring that selected farmers maintain all GAP policies and record-keeping for every harvest.
- **Infrastructure Utilization:** Optimizing sorting and grading facilities at the collection centers to manage all grades of member produce.
- **Financial Sustainability:** Increasing the capital funds of cooperatives to support larger-scale vegetable purchase and sale operations.

### Management Recommendations

- **Technical Clarity:** The generic "resistance" term should be replaced with "disease and stress resistance varieties" for better definition.
- **Standardized Terminology:** Consistent with other regions, the phrase "group-based decision on vegetable production" should be used instead of "group based vegetable production".
- **Specific Problem-Solving:** Overcome strategies must be direct and specifically linked to the faced challenges.
- **Avoiding Contradictions:** Presentations should ensure there is no contradiction between listed challenges, learnings, and achievements.
- **Risk Mitigation for New Varieties:** For any new vegetable variety, farmers should be motivated to cultivate only a small amount of land initially to verify the variety's suitability for the local area.

- **Sustainability of Support:** To ensure long-term sustainability in field-level problem solving, the project should involve the Upazila Agriculture Department, specifically the Sub Assistant Agriculture Officers (SAAO).

### 3.4.3 Upazila wise Presentation: Gobindaganj

**Presented by:** Md. Mazedul Haque (Collection Hub Supervisor)

#### Basic Information:

- **Farmer Groups:** 40 groups.
- **Total Members:** 1,340 farmers.
- **Collection Hubs:** 02.
- **Model Farm:** 01.
- **GAP Farmers:** 320.
- **Clusters:** 42.
- **Cooperative:** 01.

#### Key Achievements:

- **Numerical Success:** Established 42 production clusters and successfully certified 320 farmers under GlobalGAP standards.
- **Market Preparedness:** Significant increase in farmer interest for safe vegetable production and the cultivation of high-yielding, weather-resistant varieties.
- **Systematic Cultivation:** Successful implementation of cluster-wise vegetable cultivation across the upazila.

#### Challenges and Targeted Overcoming Strategies:

- **Challenge:** Transition of traditional vegetable farming land to sugarcane, banana, and tobacco cultivation.
  - **Overcome:** Utilizing result sharing and video demonstrations to prove the higher profitability of safe vegetable cultivation compared to cash crops.
- **Challenge:** Low demand for quality vegetable seeds during the Kharif-1 season due to extreme temperatures.
  - **Overcome:** Organizing cluster-based meetings to motivate farmers toward cultivating climate-tolerant and bacterial wilt-resistant varieties.
- **Challenge:** Difficulty in aligning buyer and seller prices at the hubs, leading to inconsistent hub functionality.
  - **Overcome:** Coordinating specialized meetings between wholesalers, retailers, and hub committees to bridge price gaps and ensure regular operations.
- **Challenge:** Low farmer adherence to hygiene standards and formal soil management protocols.
  - **Overcome:** Implementing continuous awareness sessions on hygiene and using issue-based group meetings focused on crop calendars to integrate soil health into regular practice.
- **Challenge:** Difficulty in ensuring all group members adopt high-yielding varieties simultaneously.
  - **Overcome:** Utilizing issue-based crop calendar meetings to synchronize group production decisions.

#### Major Learnings:

- **Operational Agility:** Rapid field-level intervention is critical to solving production problems and maintaining crop health.
- **Timing:** Harvesting at the precise maturity stage is vital for meeting the quality standards of formal buyers.
- **Risk Management:** Small-scale cultivation is essential when promoting new seeds to verify local suitability.

#### **Management Recommendations:**

- **Restructure Challenge Narratives:** The current phrasing of challenges does not clearly define the obstacles. The management suggests restructuring the sentences and themes to explicitly state the barrier being faced .
- **Quantify Achievements:** Achievements must be specific and presented numerically.
- **Synchronization of Data:** There is a lack of alignment between the reported achievements and the identified challenges. The report should show how the achievements directly relate to overcoming the stated obstacles.
- **Strategic Focus:** The presentation currently focuses too heavily on general activities. It needs to be rebalanced to place more emphasis on Specific Challenges and the Targeted Overcoming Strategies.

#### **3.4.4 1.1.4 Upazila wise Presentation: Shibganj**

**Presented by:** Md. Mahbubur Rahman (Value Addition Quality Controller)

#### **Basic Information:**

- **Farmer Groups:** 37 groups.
- **Total Members:** 1,282 farmers.
- **Collection Hubs:** 02.
- **Model Farm:** 01.
- **GAP Farmers:** 291.
- **Clusters:** 38.
- **Cooperative:** 01 (Registration in progress).

#### **Key Achievements:**

- **Export Milestone:** Successfully facilitated potato sales to international markets and initiated the export of "ready-to-cook" processed vegetables.
- **Technical Adoption:** Increased utilization of modern agricultural technologies and GlobalGAP procedures for safe vegetable production.
- **Inclusive Employment:** These export and processing activities support the project's goal of creating formal employment for 62 staff (targeting 30-40% women).

#### **Challenges and Targeted Overcoming Strategies:**

- **Challenge:** Wholesaler reluctance to use collection hubs due to leaseholder fees/market rent imposed by local market authorities (Mahasthan/Shibganj).
  - **Overcome:** Facilitating direct coordination between buyers, hub committees, and market lessors to minimize double-taxation or rent barriers.
- **Challenge:** Reluctance among commercial farmers to use organic pest management due to high costs and limited availability compared to chemical alternatives.
  - **Overcome:** Demonstrating the long-term cost-effectiveness and market premium of "safe" vegetables to motivate a shift away from chemical dependency.

- **Challenge:** Farmers' lack of interest in the rigorous record-keeping required for GAP compliance.
  - **Overcome:** Enlisting the support of literate family members to maintain record books and providing constant motivation on the necessity of traceability for high-value markets.
- **Challenge:** Yield instability caused by significant weather variations.
  - **Overcome:** Ensuring direct supply of high-quality seeds to farmer groups and providing technical advisory services throughout the production period to mitigate environmental risks.

#### Major Learnings:

- **Incentive-Driven Change:** Farmers are significantly more interested in safe vegetable production when it results in a price premium or "extra benefit".
- **Stakeholder Synergy:** Developing strong relationships with the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), NGOs, and agro-input vendors is essential for sustainable technical support.

#### Management Recommendations:

- **Gender and Employment Metrics:** For the high-impact achievements (such as potato exports and ready-to-cook vegetable processing), the report must include the number of jobs generated and the specific involvement of women.
- **Evidence-Based Reporting:** The claim that "the same variety of seeds are sold at different prices" requires more sufficient evidence or market data to be included as a formal challenge.
- **Strengthen Farmer Support:** Management emphasized that more robust and sufficient technical support must be ensured and documented to assist farmers in meeting export standards.
- **Logical Linkage:** Overcoming strategies must be perfectly and specifically linked to the challenges they address. Generic solutions should be replaced with site-specific actions.
- **Internal Consistency:** Ensure there are no contradictions in the report. Currently, some items are presented as "learnings" or "achievements" while simultaneously being listed as "challenges." These should be clarified to show progress.

### 3.5 Financial Management Presentation

**Presented by:** Md. Sayeed All Ashad Tamim, Manager Finance and Administration

The financial performance for the periods 2023–2025 highlights consistent budget utilization. The project saw a significant increase in both budget allocation and expenditure in 2025, reflecting expanded field operations and infrastructure development.

| Year        | Budget (BDT) | Expenditure (BDT) | Utilization Rate |
|-------------|--------------|-------------------|------------------|
| <b>2023</b> | 19,503,415   | 19,040,332        | 97.6%            |
| <b>2024</b> | 18,092,356   | 16,567,573        | 91.6%            |
| <b>2025</b> | 22,893,980   | 20,419,466        | 89.2%            |

### 3.6 Market Extension: Challenges and Behavioral Observations

**Presented by:** Md. Golam Mostafa, Market Development Coordinator

Despite technical support, several socio-behavioral challenges persist at the farmer level that hinder the transition to modern commercial agriculture:

- **Crop Calendar Non-Compliance:** While crop calendars are prepared with farmer groups, actual cultivation schedules often deviate from the plan, leading to inconsistent supply.

- **Technological Inertia:** Farmers express initial interest in new technologies but remain reluctant to implement them, often reverting to traditional, less efficient farming methods.
- **Fertilizer Protocol Neglect:** Despite soil testing and the provision of customized fertilizer recommendation cards, adherence to prescribed doses remains low.
- **Lack of Knowledge Sharing:** A sense of rivalry among farmers prevents the peer-to-peer sharing of successful techniques or seed varieties.
- **Communication Bias:** Farmers are often reluctant to report successful yields but are highly vocal regarding crop failures, often mobilizing group grievances rather than seeking technical solutions.
- **Reluctance for Collective Action:** There is a persistent hesitation toward "joint cultivation" activities, such as collective seed purchasing and group-based marketing/sales.

### 3.7 Processing Plant: Infrastructure Status and Solutions

**Presented by:** Md. Sajedule Haque, Coordinator Vegetable Processing Plant

The construction of the processing plant faced several logistical hurdles, which have been systematically addressed to ensure project timelines are met.

#### Key Challenges:

- **Weather Disruptions:** Heavy rainfall during the monsoon season delayed the initial phase of infrastructure work.
- **Supply Chain Obstructions:** A local sand-seller syndicate initially blocked sand filling operations.
- **Technical Failures:** 10% of the sand compaction area remained incomplete due to specialized roller equipment failure.
- **Implementation Speed:** Early-stage infrastructure development was slower than projected.

#### Overcoming Strategies:

- **Resource Management:** On-site storage of essential materials (bricks, cement, rod) was implemented to mitigate weather-related delays.
- **Syndicate Resolution:** Negotiations and motivational meetings were held to neutralize the sand-supply syndicate.
- **Water Supply Infrastructure:** Submersible pumps were installed to ensure a consistent water supply for sand compaction.
- **Engineering Oversight:** Strategic meetings were held with CUBE engineers to realign the work schedule with the project deadline.

### 3.8 Institutional Development: Formation and Operation of Cooperatives

**Presented by:** AKM Mahbub ul Alam, Capacity Building Coordinator

The institutional development pillar of the ISCHV project focuses on transitioning informal farmer groups into formal, sustainable cooperative societies. This transition is critical for ensuring long-term market bargaining power and local ownership of project assets like collection hubs.

#### Current Progress and Key Metrics

To date, the project has successfully mobilized a large network of farmers, with significant progress made in formalizing these structures.

| Particulars                          | Status / Achievement |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Total Farmer Groups Mobilized</b> | 150 Groups           |

| Particulars              | Status / Achievement                                |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| Cooperative Registration | 3 Registered; 1 Under Process                       |
| Governance Meetings      | 24 Cooperative Meetings; 71 Collection Hub Meetings |
| Capital Mobilization     | BDT 47,353 (Total Savings)                          |

### Challenges and Strategic Responses

The formalization process has faced several administrative and operational hurdles. Below are the key challenges identified and the strategies implemented to mitigate them:

- **Administrative & Regulatory Barriers:** Delays in Upazila-based registration and navigating complex government regulations for new memberships.
  - *Strategy:* Maintaining rigorous communication with the Cooperative Office and ensuring all filings strictly adhere to legal requirements.
- **Management & Governance Gaps:** Inefficiency in record-keeping and a general lack of management experience among cooperative committee members.
  - *Strategy:* Implementing advanced leadership training and establishing direct links with the Cooperative Office for continuous auditing and record updates.
- **Financial & Operational Integration:** Difficulty in mobilizing members for share purchases and achieving homogeneous (synchronized) vegetable cultivation under a single cooperative umbrella.
  - *Strategy:* Shifting the cooperative focus toward profitability to prove value to members and developing cross-departmental relationships to secure better input prices.

### Key Learnings

- **Profit as a Catalyst:** Farmer engagement increases exponentially when there is a clear, demonstrated profit from selling through the hub.
- **Networking for Empowerment:** Strong relationships with government cooperative offices facilitate access to specialized entrepreneurship training for local leaders.
- **Wholesale Dynamics:** While purchasing from large wholesalers increases hub volume, it creates a "price expectation" conflict; farmers often demand higher prices when hubs buy in bulk, which requires careful market-linkage management.

### Future Roadmap (2026) and Strategic Objectives

The focus for 2026 will shift from "formation" to "business integration" and "financial independence."

- **Business Integration:** Establishing formal business agreements between cooperatives and the processing center to ensure a steady supply chain.
- **Diversified Income Streams:** Developing business plans for cooperatives to act as input providers—selling high-quality seeds, fertilizers, and modern machinery—to their members.
- **Operational Autonomy:** Handing over the full management and financial operation of the Collection Hubs to the cooperative committees.

### Senior Management Recommendations

To ensure the sustainability of these institutions beyond the project period, the senior team has issued the following directives:

1. **Income Generation:** Cooperatives must be developed as self-sustaining, income-generating entities, not just administrative bodies.

2. **Financial Independence:** Every cooperative must reach a state of independence, managing its own income, expenditure, and investment portfolios.
3. **Governance Excellence:** Committees must become fully capable of handling all documentation and digital record-keeping independently.
4. **Operational Leadership:** Cooperatives are expected to take the lead in group-based purchasing, production planning, and final sales, specifically overseeing the operations of the Vegetable Collection Hubs.

### 3.9 Strategic Re-Planning Session

**Presented by:** Sheikh Mohibullah, Training Coordinator, ARMS

The strategic Re-Planning session covers the following areas:

| SI No | Activities                                                                                                                                                                      | Sub-Activities                                                              |
|-------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1     | The last cooperative at upazila level will have received the formal registration certificate from the Cooperative Department.                                                   | Mobilize the Safe Food Producer Cooperative for preparing the documents     |
|       |                                                                                                                                                                                 | Apply to the Cooperative Department after preparing the necessary Documents |
| 2     | An end line study will have been conducted to measure the impact of the project on participating farmers.                                                                       | Develop TOR                                                                 |
|       |                                                                                                                                                                                 | Select consultant/firm                                                      |
|       |                                                                                                                                                                                 | Conduct End line survey                                                     |
|       |                                                                                                                                                                                 | Finalize the Impact report (End line survey)                                |
| 3     | The last surveillance visits will have taken place and the group GlobalGAP certificate including 920 farmers will have been obtained from the certification body Control Union. | Communicate with the Control Union                                          |
|       |                                                                                                                                                                                 | Organize the visit of Control Union                                         |
|       |                                                                                                                                                                                 | Obtain Certificate from Control Union                                       |
| 4     | Renewal of the 80 previously certified GlobalGAP farmers will have been completed.                                                                                              | Obtain Certificate from Control Union                                       |
| 5     | The construction of the processing centre will have been completed and all equipment will have been imported, installed and will be operational.                                | See work plan for processing center construction                            |
| 6     | The vegetables traceability system will have been integrated at the processing center.                                                                                          | Develop TOR                                                                 |
|       |                                                                                                                                                                                 | Vendor selection                                                            |
|       |                                                                                                                                                                                 | Develop traceability system for demonstration                               |
| 7     | The remaining 4 persons will have been recruited and trained to operate the processing center and quality management.                                                           | Develop TOR                                                                 |
|       |                                                                                                                                                                                 | Complete recruitment following HR policy                                    |
| 8     | Results of the joint research program of Waffan and Cars will have been reported on.                                                                                            | Prepare the research report                                                 |
|       |                                                                                                                                                                                 | Circulate to the potential stakeholders                                     |
| 9     | The use of the quick detection kits (QDK) will have been demonstrated by trained Waffan staff to collection and processing center                                               | Develop QDK by DU                                                           |
|       |                                                                                                                                                                                 | Field level testing for demonstration                                       |
|       |                                                                                                                                                                                 | Staff Capacity development                                                  |

| SI No | Activities                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Sub-Activities                                                                                                                              |
|-------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|       | operators and 5 representatives of relevant organizations.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                             |
| 10    | The HACCP audit and certification of the processing center will have been completed.                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Select consultant/firm for auditing<br>Conduct audit<br>Review the audit report for improvement                                             |
| 11    | Site visits by formal buyers to meet participating farms, farmer groups, cooperatives and the processing plant will have been organized.                                                                                                                                                                      | Listed down the potential buyers<br>Meeting with them<br>Organize visit for them to processing center and farms                             |
| 12    | Vegetables will continue to be supplied to buyers in the formal market                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Mobilize farmers and Hubs for marketing vegetables in the formal market<br>Linkage development with more formal market                      |
| 13    | Multilateral meetings will have been organized with the Ministry of Agriculture, the Seed Certification Agency, the Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institute (BSTI), the Bangladesh Food Safety Authority (BFSA), and relevant other agencies and initiatives to share information on the project outcomes. | Prepare the endline survey/impact/results/ report<br>Organize meeting with the potential stakeholders                                       |
| 14    | A national level seminar will have been organized to share experiences and outcomes.                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Prepare the end line survey/impact/results/ report<br>Listed potentials stakeholders for invitation in this seminar<br>Organize the seminar |
| 15    | Results will have been published on the website: <a href="http://www.ischv.odsdbd.org">www.ischv.odsdbd.org</a> .                                                                                                                                                                                             | Prepare the results as a report<br>Publish it on the website                                                                                |
| 16    | The food-safe vegetables supply chain will have been completed in line with the activities described in work package VI.                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                             |

### 3.10 Overall review of the project activity and deep dive (2023–2025)

**Presentation by:** Md. Shamim Alom, Manager Market Development, ARMS

This session, led by the technical and market development teams, provided a comprehensive performance review of the ISCHV project's first three years. The "Deep Dive" focused on three major concern areas:

- Ensure Responsible Production (GAP certified & GAP),
- Collection Hub Functionality, and
- The Vegetable Supply Chain Functionality.

#### 3.10.1 Ensuring Responsible Production (Safe & GAP Certified)

The project has successfully shifted from traditional farming to a more structured "Safe Food" approach. A critical milestone was the development of GlobalGAP-certified models that emphasize end-to-end traceability.

- **Practice Level Improvements:** Significant horizontal expansion was noted in the adoption of Best Agricultural Practices (BAP). Farmers have transitioned from haphazard chemical use to regulated, safe production methods.
- **Traceability Integration:** The deep dive highlighted the shift toward web and app-based record-keeping to ensure digital traceability, which is a prerequisite for premium market entry.
- **Horizontal Learning Sharing and Expansion:**
  - **Peer-to-Peer Knowledge Transfer:** Lead farmers who have successfully implemented Best Agricultural Practices and achieved certification act as mentors, sharing practical insights on soil management, IPM (Integrated Pest Management), and digital record-keeping with neighboring clusters.
  - **Demonstration-Led Expansion:** By witnessing the tangible benefits—such as reduced chemical costs and higher demand from formal buyers—nearby farmers are motivated to adopt the same protocols, creating a "ripple effect" of safe vegetable production across the upazilas.
  - **Cluster-Based Collaboration:** It encourages farmers within a geographical cluster to synchronize their production cycles and varieties, ensuring that the entire group can collectively meet the volume and quality requirements of export markets and processing plants.
- **Productivity & Income:** By introducing high-yielding, disease, and stress-resistant varieties, farm productivity has seen a measurable increase, directly impacting the net income of the 5,000 targeted farmers.

### 3.10.2 Functioning of the Collection Hubs

The review identified the Collection Hubs as the central nervous system of the project, serving as the bridge between rural production and formal markets.

- **Product Sourcing & Marketing:** The hubs now facilitate cleaning, sorting, and grading, which significantly reduces post-harvest losses compared to traditional supply chains. Now major challenges are collection of products perform sorting, grading, cleaning and perform marketing through connecting farmers & buyers and ensure supply the quality product to processing center.
- **Quality Management Systems (QMS):** A major challenges for the coming year is the development of QMS and HACCP standards at the hub level. Staff and farmers received specialized training to ensure that sourced products meet food safety export standards.
- **Agri-Trade & Job Creation:** The hubs need to be moved beyond simple collection points to become centers for agri-trade, creating permanent formal employment, particularly for women in sorting and grading roles.

### 3.10.3 Functioning of the Vegetable Supply Chain

The deep dive analyzed how successfully the project connects the "Farm Gate" to the "Processing Plant" and "Formal Retailers."

- **Cooperative Representation:** The 2023–2025 period saw increased representation of cooperative members in the decision-making processes of the processing centers but the

representation is still below the satisfaction level and need to strengthen the cooperatives to achieve the satisfactory level performance.

- **Market Linkages:** The supply chain has been tested with trial shipments of potatoes to international markets and "ready-to-cook" vegetables to local processors. Now we have to set up permanent market linkage and need to concentrate on linkage with local, national and international markets.
- **Production, Processing & Marketing:** The hubs now facilitate cleaning, sorting, and grading, which significantly reduces post-harvest losses compared to traditional supply chains. Now major challenges are collection of products for processing and marketing the safe product and establish brand value to the national and international markets.
- **Quality Standard & Certification:** A major challenges for the coming year is the complying and continuation of quality standards like GlobalGAP, HACCP, and QMS standards at farmers, Hub and Processing plant level. Staff and farmers received specialized training to ensure that sourced products meet food safety export standards. Now we need to ensure certification and continuation of practices.
- **Supply Chain Reliability:** The review noted that while sourcing is becoming more stable, the "Group-based decisions on vegetable production" need further strengthening to ensure a year-round supply of homogeneous crops.

The 2023–2025 period was defined as a "Capacity Building and Foundation" phase. The project has successfully established the infrastructure (Hubs/Processing) and the human capital (Certified Farmers). The consensus for the 2026 phase is to pivot toward Full Commercialization and Institutional Autonomy for the cooperatives.

#### **4. Closing Note and Vote of Thanks of Project Review & Pre-Planning Meeting Session:**

Annual Review and Re-Planning Meeting concluded with a formal closing session, where project leaders and Executive Committee members reflected on the strategic roadmap established for the 2026 phase.

**Remarks from Malik's Farm Mr. Humayun Wazer,** Manager of Malik's Farm, opened the closing session by expressing his gratitude to the participants from A R Malik Seeds (ARMS). He highlighted the importance of the technical synergy between the R&D team and field staff, noting that the Malik Farm facility remains a dedicated hub for fostering the innovation required to meet GlobalGAP standards.

**Reflections from the Executive Committee** Representing the Executive Committee of ODSD, Most. Mazeda Khatun (Co-Chairman) and Most. Nazma Khatun (Treasurer) shared their concluding remarks. They thanked the project staff for their transparent reporting and tireless work at the grassroots level. They emphasized that the financial and social empowerment of the 5,000 targeted farmers—particularly the 50% women—remains the heart of the organization's mission. They urged the team to maintain the momentum gained during this review to ensure the project's ambitious 2026 targets are met.

**Formal Adjournment** The session was officially closed by Mr. Probir Chakraborty, Executive Director of ABALAMBAN. In his final note, he commended the collaborative spirit of the partnership between ODSD, ABALAMBAN, and AR Malik Seeds. He reiterated that the "Safe Food" supply chain is not just a project goal but a sustainable service to the nation. With a final

vote of thanks to the organizers and participants, he declared the meeting adjourned, marking a successful transition from review to action for the final phase of the project.

## **5. Day 2: Practical Learning and Strategic Action (December 15, 2025)**

The second day transitioned from theoretical reviews to field-based technical observation, focusing on the practical application of GlobalGAP standards.

### **5.1 GlobalGAP Model Farm Inspection**

Participants conducted a technical visit to the GlobalGAP-certified model farm at the **Malik Farm R&D Center**.

- **Objective:** To provide staff with a hands-on understanding of the rigorous compliance required for international safety certification.
- **Observations and Training:** Staff examined specialized soil management, record-keeping protocols, and Integrated Pest Management (IPM) techniques. The session served as a learning session, equipping staff with the demonstration skills needed to reach and continue the project's target of 1,000 certified GAP farmers.

### **5.2 Team Building and Strategic Field Trips**

Following the technical sessions, the team engaged in regional visits designed to build morale and broaden their perspective on large-scale agricultural value chains:

- **Tetulia Tea Gardens (Panchagarh):** The team analyzed the commercial cultivation, synchronized harvesting, and industrial processing mechanisms of the tea industry to identify transferable norms for the vegetable sector.
- **Banglabandha Zero Point:** A visit to the international border point provided a broader context for regional trade, emphasizing the potential for future export of responsibly produced vegetables.

## **6. Day 3: Conclusion and Departure (December 16, 2025)**

The final day combined team engagement with the return journey to the project upazilas.

- **Engagement Activities:** Staff visited prominent regional landmarks in Dinajpur, including Ramsagor and the Rubber Dam. These activities served as the annual staff engagement segment, fostering team cohesion before the final departure to their respective field stations.

## **7. Key Learnings and Way Forward**

The 2025 comprehensive review underscored that the project's technical success is inextricably linked to social mobilization and institutional trust. To transition from a pilot phase to a sustainable commercial model, the following strategic pillars have been identified:

### **7.1 Farmer Empowerment through Ownership and Gender Equity**

- **Learning:** Success is not merely measured by yield, but by the farmers' psychological and legal ownership of the supply chain. High levels of "technological inertia" were observed where farmers expressed interest but hesitated to implement new methods without seeing localized results.
- **Way Forward:** The project will move beyond basic group formation to "Cooperative Empowerment." Female participation will be aggressively pushed toward the 50% target by reserving key leadership and decision-making positions within the registered cooperatives. This ensures that the primary labor force in vegetable sorting and grading has a formal voice in management.

## 7.2 Digital Trust, Traceability, and Market Justification

- **Learning:** Traditional supply chains suffer from a lack of transparency, leading to low trust from formal buyers and international exporters.
- **Way Forward:** End-to-end traceability is now a non-negotiable requirement. The project will prioritize the integration of digital record-keeping via web/app interfaces and QR code systems. These tools will allow buyers to verify GlobalGAP compliance instantly, justifying the premium prices necessary to increase farmer income.

## 7.3 Climate Resilience and Post-Harvest Logistics

- **Learning:** Traditional vegetable chains in the northwest currently face a 25–50% post-harvest loss due to improper handling and weather sensitivities.
- **Way Forward:** The roadmap for 2026 includes the widespread introduction of climate-resilient, disease, and stress-resistant varieties. To protect these high-value crops, the project will invest in improved logistics, including the operationalization of "Cool Vans" and specialized sorting-grading facilities at the Upazila Collection Hubs.

## 7.4 Standardized Communication and Terminology

- **Learning:** Ambiguity in terminology led to inconsistent implementation at the field level.
- **Way Forward:** Management has mandated standardized terminology across all field extensions. Moving forward, the focus will be on "Group-based decisions on vegetable production," emphasizing synchronized planting and variety selection to ensure a homogeneous supply for industrial processing plants.

## 8. Conclusion

The Annual Review and Re-Planning Meeting of 2025 has reaffirmed the ISCHV project's status as a transformative force in Bangladesh's agricultural landscape. By evaluating the performance of the past three years (2023–2025), the project has successfully transitioned from foundational mobilization to a sophisticated, market-ready framework.

While significant socio-behavioral challenges remain—specifically regarding farmer rivalry, reluctance to share technology, and the initial slow pace of infrastructure development—the technical foundation established at the Malik Farm R&D Center provides a clear and proven path to success. The commitment shown by the 45 participants, combined with the strategic oversight of the ODSD, ABALAMBAN, and ARMS teams, ensures that the project is no longer a localized experiment but a national model for inclusive growth.

By pivoting toward Market-Centric extension services and unwavering GlobalGAP compliance, the ISCHV project is poised to ensure that "Safe Food" becomes a sustainable national standard. The ultimate goal remains clear: to create a legacy where responsibly produced, high-quality vegetables provide a lucrative and resilient opportunity for the 5,000 participating families in Gaibandha and Bogura, ensuring their prosperity for years to come.