

FACE-TO-FACE

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"I could see a lot of scope for enhancing the quality and coverage of Extension and Advisory Services through forging partnerships between the public and private sectors, and the Bangladesh Agricultural Extension Network (BAEN) could facilitate the development of such partnerships."

*Dr. F. H. Ansarey
President, ACI Agribusiness Division*

STRENGTHENING EAS IN BANGLADESH THROUGH PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

The [Agribusiness Division of ACI](#) Limited is the largest integrator in Bangladesh for agriculture, livestock, and fisheries. It is involved in distributing seeds, fertilizers, agro-machineries, animal health services, and trading agri-produce. Its services reach more than one million farmers across the country. Dr. F. H. Ansarey has been part of ACI's evolution over the past three decades.

Md. Afzal Hossain Bhuiyan recently interviewed Dr. F. H. Ansarey to explore the contributions of ACI to agricultural extension and advisory services in Bangladesh. Below are excerpts from the interview.

As I understand, you started your career with the plant protection industry in Bangladesh. Tell us how it all started.

After my graduation in Zoology and post-graduation (both Master's and PhD) in Ecology, I joined Ciba-Geigy (now Syngenta Switzerland) in 1981, working in its Bangladesh operations. I progressed to the position of Marketing Operation Manager before leaving this agri-input company in 1992. Subsequently, I joined Shetu Corporation as General Manager of the Agri Division, managing the distribution of crop protection products from Sumitomo Corporation, Japan.

When did you join ACI?

I started my association with ACI Limited in 1995 as the Head of the Crop Protection Business. In this role, I led the establishment of ACI Formulations Limited, focusing on manufacturing crop protection and public health products.

In 1997, I introduced the Animal Health Business, marking the second diversification of ACI Limited. The following year, in 1998, I set up the Animal Health Product Manufacturing Facility at the Narayanganj factory, equipped to produce solid, liquid, and injectable products.

In 2002, as Head of the Project, I established ACI's corporate head office in Tejgaon. The next year, in 2003, I upgraded and set up a state-of-the-art GMP-standard solid area in the pharmaceuticals factory. That same year, I also established the Tetley Tea factory, a joint venture with Tetley UK.

In 2004, I led the establishment of Bangladesh's first Salt Refinery with Vapor-Evaporation Technology, revolutionizing salt production in the country. Additionally, I set up the Dabur factory in Narayanganj, a joint venture with Asian Consumer Care. In the same year, I initiated another joint venture, ACI Godrej Agrovet (Pvt) Limited, which involved setting up a world-class animal feed mill in Sirajganj. Continuing this partnership, I established a Poultry Breeding Farm in Panchagarh and a Poultry Hatchery in Valuka in 2005.

So, when did you move to the Agribusiness Division of ACI?

In 2007, I conceptualized the mission of ACI Agribusiness: "*Wealth Creation for Farmers.*" To realize this vision, I progressively introduced complete solutions to address the challenges faced by farmers, ensuring their growth and sustainability. That same year, I launched ACI Motors to drive a systemic transformation in the agricultural sector by promoting the mechanization of farming processes.

In which aspects of agribusiness is ACI currently involved?

ACI operates across the entire agri-food value chain, encompassing agri-research and development, agri-input supply and practices, agri-production, post-harvest management, agri-communications, and forward linkages.

ACI has a strong presence in field crops, vegetables, orchards, fish, poultry, and cattle. Presently, we serve a large customer base in both domestic and international markets.



Farmers celebrating the performance of ACI's High-Yielding, Virus-Resistant Bitter Gourd (Papiya Super Gold) in Gopalganj

In agribusiness, ACI has successful joint ventures (JV) with Godrej India in integrated poultry, cattle, and aqua farming, and with a Danish company, CORO, for fruit processing.

Our market share in 2023 across various sectors in Bangladesh is Seeds (9%), Foliar Fertilizer (25%), Animal Health (14%), Animal Genetics (24%), Crop Protection (12%), Agri-Machinery (35%), Animal Feed (10%), and Retail Chain - [Shwapno](#) (56%)

Additionally, ACI Motors' agricultural machinery is used to cultivate one-third of the total agricultural land in Bangladesh.

How do you facilitate the distribution of such a wide range of products in the country?

ACI operates through an extensive network of over 100,000 dealers and retailers nationwide. We ensure superior products and services are available at the right locations and times, offering credit support to dealers to facilitate distribution.

How do you inform farmers about your products and their effective use?

We organize awareness programs, demonstrations, and training sessions for farmers. We also develop promotional materials like posters, festoons, digital banners, leaflets, and booklets to promote our products and their usage.



Product Demonstration of ACIs Bumper Tricho (Powder) in Eliotganj, Cumilla

Additionally, we host caravans and mega field days to extend our services to remote and far-flung areas. Capacity development initiatives are conducted for dealers, retailers, and farmers to strengthen their knowledge and skills.

Through these efforts, ACI Agribusiness remains committed to developing the market and fostering greater adoption of agricultural inputs and services.

How are your extension interventions supporting farmers?

We actively work with farmers to create wealth through the responsible application of skills, knowledge, and technology. All our developed technologies are tailored to meet farmers' needs and enhance productivity.

For instance, a small-scale farmer can benefit from our comprehensive agricultural ecosystem. ACI Motors offers tractors, water pumps, and tools for land preparation. ACI Seed provides high-quality seeds for better yields, while ACI Fertilizer supplies the nutrients for soil enrichment. Our Crop Protection division safeguards crop against pests and diseases, and ACI Motors supports efficient harvesting with advanced machinery.

Similarly, for cattle farmers, ACI Animal Genetics delivers high-quality bovine semen through a network of 4,300 livestock assistants, ensuring access to superior genetic resources. Additionally, our Animal Health business offers complete solutions for chicken, cattle, and aqua farmers, enabling improved outcomes across sectors.



Demonstration of ACI Animal Health's Poultry Medicine in Keraniganj, Dhaka

Do you use digital solutions to reach farmers? If so, how?

Yes, ACI uses digital solutions, such as the [Fosholi platform](#), to connect with farmers. Fosholi provides free, intelligent advisory services to 16.8 million farming families in Bangladesh.

The platform delivers information on crop suitability, modern agronomic practices, pest and disease alerts, and weather forecasts. It helps farmers make better decisions, improving productivity and supporting national food security. Currently, 2.6 million users are registered with the Fosholi app. Approximately 105,000 farmers from 4,200 farmers' clubs in 12 districts regularly access advisory services via the app.

ACI also uses its website and active social media channels (including Facebook and YouTube) to share success stories, demonstrations, and educational content, ensuring accessibility and engagement.

Do you have any programs specifically targeting women farmers?

Yes, ACI has several programs tailored to women farmers. For instance, through the ACI Seed Business, rural women participate in high-value seed production. This initiative allows them to earn an income of BDT 6,000–8,000 per month by producing hybrid vegetable seeds like bottle gourd, pumpkin, and sponge gourd.

Additionally, ACI's Genetics Research and Development Centre has distributed 1,260,000 improved calves (655,200 heifers and 604,800 male calves) to marginal female farmers, boosting their agricultural productivity. Many women raise dairy cattle, and ACI Animal Health & Genetics supports them in enhancing their productivity.

As I understand, ACI also has several CSR initiatives targeting farmer livelihoods. Could you elaborate?

ACI actively engages in CSR initiatives focused on food safety and enhancing farmers' livelihoods. In August 2024, heavy rainfall triggered severe flooding in several districts. ACI Seed organized medical campaigns, distributed free seeds through BSA as part of flood rehabilitation, and conducted training programs to build farmers' resilience.

ACI Motors collaborated with the Yamaha Riders Club (YRC) for significant relief efforts to aid farmers affected by the floods. Similarly, ACI Fertilizer played an active role in rescue and relief efforts in the worst-hit districts, including Feni, Khagrachhari, and Habiganj.



Training youth on motor repair and maintenance at ACI Motors Agri Learning Hub, Boliarpur, Savar

How do you collaborate with other organizations involved in research and extension in Bangladesh?

ACI collaborates extensively with government agencies, universities, and research institutes to advance agriculture in Bangladesh. We've signed MoUs with BRRI and BARI to facilitate germplasm sharing, knowledge transfer, and technology dissemination.

In partnership with USAID and IRRI, ACI is developing improved rice varieties through advanced genetic research and breeding, targeting a 20–25% yield increase. This collaboration has introduced two high-yielding inbred rice varieties, RABI dhan 1 and BAU dhan 3, through public-private partnerships.

ACI also works with SIDA, Winrock International, USAID, and Swisscontact on projects to improve agricultural practices, promote stress-tolerant seed varieties, and empower communities. For instance, the Women Empowerment Activity has benefited 40,500 participants by strengthening skills and market linkages, while the AESA project supports 110,000 farmers through private extension services.

How do you view the quality and coverage of agricultural extension in Bangladesh?

The public sector extension agencies, like the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), play a crucial role in providing advisory services on crop production, soil health, and pest management. Similarly, DLS and DoF provide targeted advice on livestock and aquaculture.

Private companies like ACI, Lalteer, and Supreme contribute by promoting high-yielding seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides, often accompanied by field extension activities.

However, there is significant scope to enhance the quality and coverage of EAS through public-private partnerships (PPPs).

In what ways do you think PPPs can amplify the contribution of current EAS?

PPPs present opportunities in areas like developing drought-resistant crops, training in climate-smart agriculture and mechanization, and providing digital tools for weather alerts and pest updates.

Other avenues include supporting contract farming, facilitating market access, and offering soft loans for seed processing, storage, and R&D. Reforms to support sustainable farming and robust systems for evaluating extension services are also critical.

ACI has been part of the Bangladesh Agricultural Extension Network (BAEN). What are your expectations from BAEN in strengthening EAS in Bangladesh?

BAEN can play a pivotal role in forming PPPs under the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), driving collaboration in financing and delivering EAS.



Dr Ansarey participating in the Cheque Handover ceremony of BAEN

It should focus on capacity development for EAS providers, reviewing performance, and promoting good practices through regional and global networks like AESA and GFRAS. Strengthening its linkages with NGOs, the private sector, and donors will further its mission to enhance EAS in Bangladesh.



Md. Afzal Hossain Bhuiyan, an agriculturist with over three decades of experience in agricultural extension, has worked across public-private, national, and international organizations. As the organizing secretary of BAEN since its inception, he has played a pivotal role in strengthening BAEN's network for delivering EAS in Bangladesh and fostering regional and global collaborations. Mr. Afzal also successfully led the implementation of the LMP project as its coordinator. He can be contacted at ah.bhuiyan@ideglobal.org

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