

# BANGLADESH

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## SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE FOR SANTAL COMMUNITIES

**Syngenta Foundation Bangladesh (SFB)** currently runs four projects for the improvement of livelihoods among resource-poor Bengali and ethnic Santal communities in northwestern Bangladesh. One of these is the Sustainable Agriculture for Santal Communities (SASC) project.

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# PROJECT

The Santal are one of the oldest and largest indigenous communities in the northwest of Bangladesh. They are disadvantaged, vulnerable, poor, and often suffer exploitation and injustice. They are detached from the mainstream, suffer discrimination and are dominated by the local majority communities, led by mahajons (landlords). The Santal do not have any real access to education or income-generation activities.

Santals are predominantly dependent on agriculture; the whole family works hard to farm what it can. Many are keen to learn new farming techniques, such as using modern agricultural implements and methods, and planting better-quality seeds. However, help from the government or private organizations is rare.

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# OBJECTIVES

SASC educates smallholders about modern crop cultivation and post-harvest technologies, as well as agricultural marketing and facilitation. The objective is to enhance Santal livelihoods through agribusiness development.

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# PROGRESS

SFB has been implementing ‘Sustainable Agriculture for Santal Communities (SASC)’ with 500 selected poor farming families in the Dinajpur district. SFB designed both on- and off-farm activities for project farmers. Farmers preparing annual and seasonal production plans were supported by SFB with crop selection and implementation. Other key activities involve:

- production planning
- technical support
- product aggregation
- local service provider development
- linking farmers to markets.

In 2016, 420 metric tons of vegetables were produced by 316 farmers and sold to local markets. 41 Santal farmers are being developed as Local Service Providers (LSPs) for agriculture. Farmers are now collecting Bashok leaves (medicinal plants) from 80,200 plants planted along 13 km of roadsides.

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