

ASMIH-Bangladesh Contribution in formulating Govt. Policy on Subsidy of Combine Harvesters and Confronting Challenges of Paddy Harvesting during COVID-19 Pandemic

Human civilization is encountering enormous challenge for surviving against Corona virus pandemic. Most of the countries of the world are struggling to fight this pandemic; Bangladesh is not an exceptional case. Restriction of movement of people caused an acute shortage of farm laborers for harvesting of paddy in this ongoing *Boro* (April-May) season. Harvesting of paddy in Bangladesh is still predominantly manual, although mechanical intervention has been initiated recently. To save the ripen paddy at farmers' field the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) acted promptly by facilitating the movement of farm laborers and vigorously promoting small to medium size combine harvesters to farmers through government subsidy program. This program provided 50% subsidy all over the country and 70% in the *haor* areas on combine harvesters. Under this program private sector machinery marketing companies to date sold out about 1067 small to medium size combine harvesters. The market shares of the companies are ACI Motors Ltd. 780, the Metal Private Ltd. 144, Abedin Group 120, Chittagong Builders 16 and Alim Industries 7. Special emphasis was given to *Haor* (low laying area) area. The program has been successfully executed and earns appreciation from all corners.

Appropriate Scale Mechanization Innovation Hub (ASMIH)-Bangladesh has been working since its inception to identify and assess appropriate scale harvesting machines suitable for Bangladesh condition. Initially, Reaper and Mini-combine harvester models were identified and assessed. In subsequent sessions, it was identified that the repair and maintenance cost of mini-combine harvester models increasing rapidly and robustness of the machines was questionable. On this ground, ASMIH-BD consulted its private sector collaborators ACI Motors Ltd. and the Metal Private Ltd. and suggested them to import small to medium scale combine harvesters that might have good market demand in Bangladesh. In collaboration with the companies, ASMIH-BD made technical and financial assessments and recommend two models of small to medium size combine harvesters for Bangladesh condition (reports are annexed). At that stage, ASMIH-BD raised the concern to the policy level of MoA in collaboration with the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), private sector actors ACI Motors Ltd. and the Metal Private Ltd. Two major policy changes have been agreed at the national level mechanization committee of MoA, one, small to medium size combine harvester models have been included in the subsidy program, two, 50% subsidy all over the country and 70% at the *haor* areas have been allowed on combine harvester, before it was maximum of BDT 0.5 million on any single machine. The Project Director of ASMIH-BD (Monjurul Alam) is one of the members of National Mechanization Committee and Technical Committee of the MoA and the DAE mechanization program, respectively.