

## FOOD SECURITY IN BANGLADESH

### TOWARDS A COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAMME OF INTEGRATED ACTIONS

#### **Abbreviations:**

**FPMU**-Food Planning and Monitoring Unit

**MoFDM**-Ministry of Food and Disaster Management

**NFPSCSP**- National Food Policy capacity Strengthening Programme

**UNCT**-United Nations' Country Team

#### **Background to the note:**

*Discussion between FPMU (MOFDM) and WFP in late May resulted in an understanding that the MoFDM and WFP will join hands to take stock of the Food Security situation and strategise further. The note proposes to take this idea further through a Strategy Workshop.*

The challenge of food security in Bangladesh is huge; there are about 60 million people who go hungry, the third largest number after China and India and about 25 million of these are chronically malnourished, suffering from the silent disaster; unable to consume 1805 Kcal of food. Such large-scale hunger and malnutrition results in preventable suffering, disease and the attendant GDP losses. Nearly half of Bangladesh's children are still underweight and about 20% stunted. Demographic changes in upcoming years are likely to affect poverty and hunger in more adverse ways.

According to the United Nations' Country Team's Report on Bangladesh's progress towards the MDGs, although some progress has been made in reducing income and hunger poverty, achieving the MDGs within the next decade will require Bangladesh to develop and implement more ambitious and effective strategies.

Halving the proportion of people who suffer from hunger is a challenging task and it is inextricably related to reduction of poverty; hence policies enhancing food security or promoting hunger reduction have to have a substantial thrust on poverty reduction. A twin track policy that aims at increasing per capita income growth and providing a targeted safety net programme is needed for increased household food intake and enhanced food security.

#### **A complex challenge**

Overall, the following issues, which can be variously categorized as availability, access and utilization, are central to addressing the Food Security challenge in the country<sup>1</sup>:

1. Sustaining strong growth of domestic food
2. Production and implementing a liberalized regime for food imports.
3. Promoting change in food habits for increasing nutritional intake of vulnerable people.
4. Promoting improved infant feeding practices, including breast-feeding practices.
5. Supporting maternal schooling and hygienic practices.

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<sup>1</sup> UNCT MDG Report

6. Improving access to safe drinking water, especially by addressing the threat of arsenic contamination of underground water.
7. Improving access to sanitation.
8. Improving access to basic health facilities.
9. Supporting safety nets for protection against natural disasters;
10. Promoting partnership among the Government, private sector and NGOs in
11. Designing and implementing interventions to promote food security.

### **Recent efforts**

The government of Bangladesh and the various development partners have of late made some concerted efforts to improve the Food Security Policy environment. There are some important initiatives about to take off. The front ranking among these are the Early Warning Project of the GoB /MofDM and the NFPSCSP<sup>2</sup> (funded by USAID and EC and implemented by FAO).

Earlier in 2000, a Task Force on Comprehensive Food Security was set up which came with a strategy paper for Future Food Security policy of the GoB.

It will be timely now to take stock of the progress since the recommendations of that task force. Specifically this workshop should achieve the following objectives:

- ✓ Help us take stock of where we are in terms of national food security
- ✓ Where we want to be –the challenges for food security
- ✓ How we can get there- a strategic vision
- ✓ Revise the Food Policy
- ✓ And an action plan for the next six months—starting with the prioritization of the objectives and outcomes

### **The workshop proposal:**

It is proposed that a one and a half a day workshop is organized jointly by WFP and MOFDM to take stock of Food Security and streamline our efforts at realizing it, including prioritization of objectives, outcomes and outputs.

Three different sessions are being proposed

1. Current Food Security and Challenges
2. A Food Security paradigm (Food Availability-production (agricultural policy), food import policy, stocks-both public and private; Food Access And Utilization - poverty reduction, nutrition and food safety; food security and disasters including early warning systems)
3. Recommendations and Research Agenda

Following the workshop the MoFDM will set up a task team to work further on food security policy, strategy and action plan. The taskforce can meet periodically to take stock of the progress on the action plan and recommend mid-course connections.

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<sup>2</sup> National Food Policy Capacity Strengthening Programme