

**Short comments on the IPRSP of Bangladesh,
By the LCG sub-group Food Security and Nutrition**

Overall analysis. The PRSP highlights the critical importance of food security to poverty reduction in Bangladesh. The paper is particularly strong on highlighting the dramatic situation with regard to malnutrition in especially the extreme poor and girl children (among the highest in the world). The paper is weak on articulating the kinds of institutional and programmatic reforms required to ensure improved access to food and nutrition. The paper also fails to address the issue of poor nutrition adequately. The focus on increased production of rice and self-sufficiency in cereals will only address improvements in calorie deficiency levels. Finally, the paper does not make the case for investment in food security monitoring (including appropriate indicators). Investment in this type of monitoring is essential if strategies are to be targeted and overall progress is to be assessed.

1. Goals

The paper displays the ambition to reach the millennium development goals, including “halving poverty” and “halving hunger (malnutrition)” which seem to be the most difficult ones to reach in Bangladesh, and taking 2000 as starting point instead of 1990. It even proposes a more ambitious target for reduction of extreme poverty, namely from 19% in 2000 to 5% in 2015. If the present trends are prolonged, extreme poverty would still be at a level of 11% in 2015, and the percentage of children underweight at 34% (instead of the target of 28%).

The targets are very ambitious. However, if sufficient means are not put in place to achieve these goals, they could be considered as unrealistic.

2. Reform Agenda

The IPRSP does not give sufficient emphasis to the inter-ministerial coordination required to address the food security challenge facing Bangladesh. Clearer linkages are required between agricultural growth, food availability and prices, income poverty, nutrition and health. In each of these fields, maximizing the impact on access to food by the poor and on Nutrition should be a common concern. Where relevant, this may mean a shift from pure production targets to equitable access related targets.

A useful first step would be to adopt formally the draft new Food Policy, outcome of the task force on ‘comprehensive food security policy for Bangladesh’, which constitutes a shift of emphasis from ‘availability of food’ to ‘access and utilisation’.

4 – Access to food

The main determinants of access to food are income levels (and their unequal distribution) and the prices of essential food items. While other LCG sub-groups will have commented on growth, rural development, etc... this sub-group would like to emphasise the need to address the inequality issue, and make more effective the so-called “targeted programmes”.

4.1 Inequality

- According to available data, inequality is not very high in Bangladesh compared to other developing countries (Gini coefficient of 0.306 for private expenditure), but inequality has been increasing together with growth. However, the paper does not foresee any increase of the redistributing character of the fiscal system. It is not clear how current inequality will be addressed without redistribution.
- Ownership of assets is even more unequally distributed (Gini coefficient of 0.7), but also here very little seems to be foreseen in the paper to address this. In particular access to land for a homestead is critical for the most vulnerable among the extreme poor.