



CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

Governance and Gender

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CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES: GOVERNANCE AND GENDER

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Achieving food security is a central goal of the Government of Bangladesh. In 2006, the government adopted a National Food Policy (NFP), which was followed up by a Plan of Action (PoA) in 2008 and a Monitoring Report in 2009. Governance and gender issues are concerns that cut across all the core objectives and areas of intervention specified in the Plan of Action.

Strengthening governance for food security and agricultural development

The government interventions that are required to achieve food security and agricultural development present three types of governance challenges: (1) the human-resource management challenge, caused by the difficulty of supervising staff in large-scale programs that need to be demand driven and cannot easily be standardized; (2) the targeting challenge, particularly pronounced in hierarchical societies; and (3) the leakage challenge, which especially affects programs that involve the distribution of private goods such as food and subsidized inputs, or the handing of financial resources as in cash for work or income transfer programs. For programs implemented by public-sector staff, meeting these governance challenges requires adequate investments in developing capacity and providing incentives for the staff involved. Strategies to achieve this goal involve performance measurement based on feedback from program beneficiaries, in combination with adequate salaries, opportunities for merit-based promotion, and training and capacity development.

Governance challenges can also be addressed by outsourcing service provision and program implementation to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and private-sector organizations, but this strategy requires the investments in the capacity of public-sector agencies to effectively manage contracts and meet the procurement challenges involved. The use of technologies such as e-governance can play an important role in addressing the governance challenges in food and agriculture. Special attention needs to be paid to demand-based approaches, which empower the rural poor to demand better services and hold service providers accountable. In this regard, Bangladesh can build on a strong track record in using group-based approaches to deliver services and implement programs for food security and agricultural development.

Addressing the gender issues in food and agriculture

The gender dimension of poverty and malnutrition in Bangladesh is well recognized. Moreover, women are also affected by the perception that they are not involved in agricultural production, which persists in spite of ample contradictory evidence. Strategies to address the gender issues in food and agriculture require a two-pronged approach. First, measures are needed to eliminate gender discrimination in ownership and access to economically productive assets. Examples include the ability to inherit land, to join a credit and savings club, to join a water users' group, to access extension advice, to start up a small enterprise, and to survive in the event of a family breakdown. Second, there is a need to actively promote a catch up in women's status, even in areas where redistributing resources to women may be controversial. Bangladesh has already made significant strides in areas such as primary education through its conditional food/cash transfer programs (implemented by the public sector), as well as in targeting credit through women's groups (through the NGO sector). Considering the intervention areas in the National Food Policy Plan of Action, efforts to design and implement gender-sensitive strategies for achieving food security include: (a) acknowledging that women need to be recognized as agricultural producers and as key partners in achieving food security; (b) evaluating, learning from, and scaling up successful innovations undertaken by the NGO sector; and (c) continuing to adapt and modify successful government programs that seek to eliminate gender inequality, adapting them to the food and agriculture sector. Strategies may target both the providers of services (for example, hiring female extension agents or program staff) and the beneficiaries (for example, involving women's groups in program implementation).

INTRODUCTION

Background

Achieving food security is high on the agenda of the Government of Bangladesh. In 2006, the government passed a National Food Policy (NFP), which was followed up in 2008 by a Plan of Action (PoA). Governance and gender issues are concerns that cut across the three core objectives and 26 areas of intervention of the Plan of Action, both explicitly and implicitly. This paper aims to address the governance and gender issues that are embedded within the Plan of Action, by discussing how these two concerns are relevant to the four identified priority areas, by pointing out the opportunities and challenges for Bangladesh within each area, and by summarizing key policy recommendations to better address governance and gender issues to achieve food security.

Conceptual considerations: Governance challenges in food and agriculture

Ensuring that government interventions in the food and agriculture sector are effective involves a number of governance challenges, which reflect the characteristics of the agricultural and rural sectors. Activities such as providing agricultural extension, implementing rural employment programs, or organizing community-based nutrition services have two basic characteristics. First, they are “transaction intensive,” which means they have to be carried out on a daily basis throughout the entire country, even in remote areas. Second, they require discretion to adjust services to the needs of the clients, which differ across regions and across categories of households. Interventions with these two characteristics cannot easily be standardized, which makes it difficult to supervise and monitor the staff responsible for carrying out such activities (Pritchett and Woolcock 2004; Birner et al. 2009). Providing sufficient incentives to field staff to provide high-quality services in rural areas and preventing absenteeism is a major challenge in this respect.

Agricultural and food security programs often involve an additional challenge: They provide support services (such as agricultural input subsidies or subsidized food supplies) that have the characteristics of private goods. As compared to local public goods, such as school buildings or drinking water facilities, private goods are more likely to be “captured” by better-off elites, especially in hierarchical societies and in situations where social exclusion based on gender, religion, land ownership, or other factors is widespread.

Another governance challenge in agricultural and food security programs, which is linked to the challenge of monitoring such large-scale rural programs, is the potential for embezzlement of funds, or “leakage.” This problem is inherent in all programs that involve public funding; depending on the type of program, it may take different forms, ranging from major procurement issues at the national level to leakages in handling program funds at the

community level. This challenge may be linked to problems of the wider political and administrative system. For example, it is well known that the absence of public funding for political parties can be a driving force for problems encountered in public procurement (Lal 2006).

Against this background, this paper focuses on strategies that the government can use to address the three types of governance challenges that are inherent in all publicly financed interventions in food and agriculture.

1. *The human resource management challenge:* Ensure that the field staff involved in providing food security and agriculture-related services has sufficient incentives, capacity, and resources to provide high-quality and demand-driven services in rural areas.
2. *The targeting challenge:* Ensure that public interventions that aim to support food security and agricultural development reach the poor and marginalized groups, including women.
3. *The leakage challenge:* Ensure that the public funds dedicated for agricultural and food security programs are used effectively for their intended purpose.

To address these three challenges, one can distinguish between “demand-side” approaches, which aim to improve rural people’s ability to demand better services and hold service providers accountable, and “supply-side” approaches, which aim to improve the incentives and capacity of service providers (Birner 2009; World Bank 2007a). Examples of the demand-side approach include involving user groups in service provision, using citizen report cards, and increasing the right to information. Supply-side approaches include civil service reforms, decentralization, outsourcing service provision or program implementation to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and deregulation designed to encourage private-sector provision of agricultural and rural services. The literature clearly shows that there is no “silver bullet” in improving governance, since each of these reform strategies involves its own challenges. Hence, the key is to identify strategies that best fit particular conditions (Levy 2004; Birner et al. 2009).

Gender issues in food security

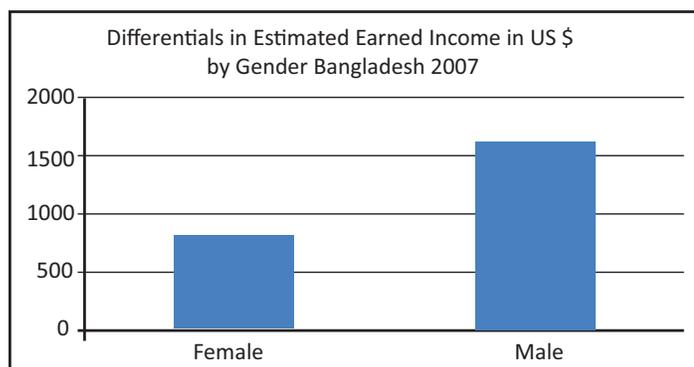
Addressing gender inequality is central to achieving sustainable development. Governments and civil society need to pay attention to gender inequality for four basic reasons. First, gender equality is a basic human right. Second, many of the disparities in development outcomes arise from gender differences. Third, gender inequality can have significant effects on the efficiency and welfare outcomes of project and policy interventions. Fourth, part of the urgent challenge of improving food security in Bangladesh is related to population growth. A long-term decline in

the population growth rate will require improvement in the long-term determinants of population growth—women’s education, women’s opportunities, and the health and nutrition of children.

Women are specifically mentioned only in NFP Objective 3 (“Adequate nutrition for all individuals, especially women and children”) and in two of the priority areas of intervention (“effectiveness of targeted food security programs and safety nets,” and “income generation for women and the disabled”). Nevertheless, the importance of understanding gender relations—the socially constructed relationships between women and men—and the challenge of addressing gender inequality permeate all issues related to food security in Bangladesh.

There is a well-recognized gender dimension to poverty and malnutrition in Bangladesh. In a cross-country review of 43 studies, Haddad et al. (1996) found that pro-male bias in nutrient allocations and nonfood health inputs appear to be most prevalent in South Asia. Furthermore, this is the only region of the world where girls have higher child mortality rates than boys.¹ A study by Smith et al. (2003), based on nationally representative data sets from 39 developing countries, also found that the low status of women relative to men is an important factor explaining higher child malnutrition rates in South Asia relative to Sub-Saharan Africa. Women also lag behind in terms of education: more than one in three women have no schooling, compared to one in four men (Bangladesh DHS 2007). Lack of education in adult women in Bangladesh is a strong correlate of being “ultra-poor”: 80 percent of adult women with no education live on less than half a dollar a day (Ahmed et al. 2007). Women in Bangladesh also have fewer assets than men, including land (Quisumbing and Maluccio 2003). With lower levels of human and physical resources, it is no surprise that the estimated earned income of women is roughly half that of men (Figure 1). Without addressing the roots of the social bias that disadvantage women in many spheres of social and economic life, the ultimate goal of sustainable development cannot be reached.

Figure 1—Income differences by gender



Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics 2009.

Reducing gender inequalities is key to reducing hunger and achieving food security. A report by the International Food

¹ Boys are biologically more vulnerable to infections and mortality during their first few years of life.

Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) on the 2009 Global Hunger Index (von Grebmer et al. 2009) demonstrated that countries where gender inequality is prevalent also fare worse in terms of hunger. Bangladesh has improved its performance with respect to the Global Hunger Index—the GHI decreased from 35.9 to 24.7 between 1990 and 2009; and gender inequality has declined between 2008 and 2009. Although the extent of gender inequality is still high in Bangladesh, the only country in South Asia with lower levels of gender inequality is Sri Lanka.

Objectives

This paper reviews the gender and governance issues that are relevant to the four themes that have been identified as priority issues for food security, for discussion in the Forum. The four themes are: (1) agricultural growth, productivity and climate change; (2) markets, trade, and value chains; (3) income generation and social protection; and (4) nutrition security. For each theme, this paper will address the following three questions:

- a) What are the major governance and gender issues for this theme?
- b) What efforts have been made so far to address them, and what do we know about what worked or did not work: where, and why?
- c) What are the priority recommendations to ensure that investments are gender-sensitive and address the governance issues in this area?

The paper is based on a review of the relevant literature, statistical data, and project reports documenting previous experience with interventions in the four areas covered in this paper.

THEME 1: AGRICULTURAL GROWTH, PRODUCTIVITY, AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Governance issues

The National Food Policy (NFP) identifies a number of strategic elements to achieve agricultural growth, increase agricultural productivity, and increase the capacity of agriculture to deal with climate change. This paper focuses on two areas of strategic intervention that are essential to reach these goals but pose specific governance challenges: agricultural research and agricultural extension.

In the NFP, *agricultural development and extension services* are identified as an essential element to meet Objective 1: “Adequate and stable supply of safe and nutritious food.” In this area, the objectives of the NFP are: “to provide adequate funding for adaptive agricultural research and strengthen agricultural extension services to enable the development and dissemination

of appropriate technology” (1.1.1 i); and “to develop required human resources for agricultural research and extension and their effective utilization in disseminating appropriate production technology” (1.1.1 iv).

Current situation

Research: Government-based agricultural research in Bangladesh is coordinated by the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC). An assessment by Beintema and Wais (2006) identified 41 public-sector research agencies in the country. In 2002, the 40 agencies for which data were available employed altogether nearly 1,800 full-time-equivalent researchers. The review found that although the percentage of staff with post-graduate training was higher than in other Asian countries, Bangladesh’s agricultural research capacity had deteriorated as a result of a recruitment freeze, along with the departure (“brain drain”) of qualified and experienced researchers. The private sector plays a minimal role in agricultural research in Bangladesh, though greater involvement is anticipated in the future (Beintema and Wais 2006). Until 2006, funding for public-sector agricultural research had been erratic, but the current government shows a high commitment to funding agricultural research. An Agricultural Research Trust Fund—Krishi Gobeshona Endowment Trust (BKGET)—and an Agriculture Research Foundation—Krishi Gobeshona Foundation—were created to improve the funding situation. The World Bank-funded National Agricultural Technology Program, approved in 2008, has a funding volume of US\$62.6 million.²

Extension: The major provider of public-sector extension services is the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE), which is responsible for carrying out extension activities under the supervision of Ministry of Agriculture. Related educational and research activities are undertaken by other organizations as well, including the Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU) and the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI). There are also various bilateral programs/projects that provide farm-management extension services to farmers and target groups, including rural women.

According to an estimate by an international expert panel, Bangladesh has about 13,000 agricultural extension workers; most have only diplomas, and there are less than 300 subject matter specialists. About 84 percent of the resources for extension are spent on salaries, leaving few resources for travel, buildings, and in-service training. Only 1.5 percent of the budget goes to special extension programs (demonstrations, farmer training, and the like). More than 25 percent of the extension funding is covered by donors.

The private-sector agencies related to agriculture extension and advisory services include the seed-growing companies, fertilizer dealers, and pesticide dealers. Other private agencies are small

plant nurseries, which are often owned by individual farmers. In addition, more than 100 local, national, and international NGOs are involved in agricultural extension and advisory activities.

NGOs were initially associated with small-scale vegetable production, poultry, fisheries, and agroforestry or social forestry; they are now increasingly moving toward advisory activities in such major crops as hybrid rice and maize. NGOs form groups of target farmers—especially landless farmers and those outside the scope of other extension services—often focusing on poor women. Services provided by NGOs usually include credit, input supply, and training. Unlike the public-sector extension and advisory agencies with specialized portfolios (DAE focusing on crops, Department of Livestock Services on livestock, Department of Fisheries on fisheries, and so on), NGOs often provide multiple services, addressing such needs as health awareness and skill development as well as agricultural extension. Constrained by the limited land area of their beneficiaries (landless and marginal farmers), most NGOs operate at a small scale, with the exception of the large national NGOs.

Provisions in policy documents to meet governance challenges

Of the three governance challenges mentioned above, human-resource management may be the most serious challenge affecting agricultural research, extension, and education. The “targeting challenge” of reaching poor, marginalized, and female farmers is also significant; the “leakage challenge,” however, is low, as long as extension services do not include the distribution of goods (such as subsidized inputs).

For *agricultural research*, the NFP Plan of Action (PoA) increased investment in research, to upgrade research facilities and enhance scientists’ skills. The PoA also calls for strengthening biotechnology and greater focus on agroecological zones and rain-fed production systems. The PoA also recommends a thorough assessment of the linkages between research and extension services to identify areas for improvement.

The New Agricultural Extension Policy (NAEP), passed in 1996,³ identifies two *extension strategies*: decentralization (without specifying the level of decentralization); and demand-led extension approaches, to be achieved through participatory methods. The policy also encourages the extension service to work with groups of all kinds, to use a variety of extension methods, to strengthen research–extension linkages, and to foster integration across agencies. The policy also addresses the targeting challenge by emphasizing that extension services need to be tailored to different client groups, including women farmers and small and medium farmers. NAEP does not, however, focus exclusively on these groups; it also mentions medium- and large-scale farmers.

The Action Plan, which explicitly adopts a pro-poor approach, goes a step further by recommending new extension methods such as farmer schools, and calling for expanding

² All dollar figures are USD.

³ The 1996 policy is the latest posted on the DAE website.

community-based extension services and strengthening collaboration with the private sector and with NGOs.

Experiences and investment options

Research

Past reform efforts focused on reforming the institutional structure and management of the agricultural research system. A review of the Agricultural Research Management Project (World Bank 2003: 8) found that a number of BARC's efforts to improve research efficiency were successful. The review highlights the increased use of prioritizing procedures, including the use of ex-ante economic analysis, and notes "some evidence of research teams and assessment criteria being modified in response to feedback from farmers by the Farming System Research programs." The use of competitive grant funding was found to be well managed, even though the share of funds that went to partner organizations outside the public sector remained limited. In contrast, the review noted the limited success of efforts to reduce overlaps in the mandates of agricultural research agencies (World Bank 2003). The World Bank-funded Agricultural Technology Management Project, approved in 2008, maintains a focus on institutional restructuring while instituting other measures, such as a competitive grants program designed to make research more demand-led by involving farmers in identifying priority areas for research (World Bank 2008).

There is little information available on past efforts to increase the incentives for agricultural research staff, an important investment area. Meeting the human-resource management challenge in agricultural research not only requires adequate salaries and up-to-date research equipment, but also working conditions that connect researchers with the international research community: access to high-speed internet, access to international journals, and opportunities to be part of professional networks and to attend international conferences. Research collaboration with international organizations is a particularly promising strategy to create incentives for researchers and build their capacity.

Extension

An important aspect of human-resource management for extension is ensuring sufficient numbers of extension staff—whether employed by the public sector or contracted to NGOs or the private sector—to stimulate agricultural productivity and enable farmers to adapt to climate change. According to an impact study conducted by DFID (the United Kingdom Department of International Development; quoted in World Bank 2003), the percentage of farmers contacted by the DAE rose from 2.8 percent in the study's baseline year to 9 percent in 1997–98, but then dropped back to 5 percent in 1999 (World Bank 2003: 4). The same report also indicated that the World Bank Agricultural Support Services Project imposed a ceiling on staff numbers in the agricultural extension service in the 1990s, through a freeze on hiring. To assess the investment needs in human resource capacity for extension, it would be important to know extension

agent-to-farmer ratios, the current training level of extension agents, and the current farmer-contact ratios. (These figures would be needed for the public, private, and NGO sectors, if possible on a gender-disaggregated basis.) The figures quoted above suggest a need for increasing the training and capacity of current public-sector extension field staff, and for increasing the share of resources for implementing extension activities.

One strategy to meet the human-resource management challenge is outsourcing services to NGOs. This strategy makes it possible to pay higher salaries to contractual extension agents who can be terminated for poor performance. A World Bank evaluation of the Agricultural Services Innovation and Reform Project found positive effects of local-level partnerships with NGOs, reporting "enthusiastic views regarding the *upazila* partnership program": "Some 6860 *upazila*-level partnerships, spread over 460 *upazilas*, were established during the project period—an impressive achievement in only three and a half years." The report noted that partnerships at the national and regional level were less successful, pointing to specific challenges to be resolved.

In a review of NAEP, Karim et al. (2009) found a "growing recognition by all the line departments that an integrated and decentralized extension approach involving all the stakeholders would be needed to effectively respond to varying needs of all categories of farmers." The review also reported that "bottom-up planning, introduced at *upazila* level, was observed as a good culture of inter-agency planning"; but even after many years, there were still major challenges to be met in communicating the policy and its institutional provisions to the staffs of all the agricultural sector agencies.

An outsourcing strategy in agricultural extension involves the governance challenges of public procurement, such as leakages and political interference in contracting, which are not otherwise a problem in public sector extension. Experience in other countries shows that this challenge has to be taken seriously (Parkinson 2009). Strengthening procurement for outsourcing of extension services may therefore be an important area of investment, if the government is to pursue outsourcing as a major strategy to meet the human resource management challenge.

It is also important to identify strategies that create sufficient incentives for extension staff employed in the public sector. Although the reviewed policy documents do not explicitly address this issue, some elements are well known: competitive salaries, merit-based promotion opportunities, sufficient resources to conduct field work, and adequate training—as well as effective supervision and sanctions. In the past, the hiring freeze made it difficult to create such incentives. A World Bank publication noted: "While, in theory, performance is now a factor considered in promotions, in practice, with the long-standing national recruitment freeze, constraints on movement between institutes, low salaries, and wide fluctuations in availability of operating funds, there are few incentives for performance that can be offered. Moreover, there are still no common service and promotion criteria across institutions" (World Bank 2003: 14). It remains

unclear to what extent these challenges have yet been addressed. Nevertheless, even in view of outsourcing possibilities, public-sector extension agents will continue to play a role in extension; improving the incentives for public-sector staff thus constitutes an important investment area. It may be useful also to try innovative approaches to increase incentives for public-sector staff, such as mechanisms to include feedback from farmers or their organizations in the performance assessment of extension agents.

An important demand-side strategy to improve agricultural extension services is the involvement of farmers' organizations. This strategy, highlighted in the PoA, is equally important whether extension service is provided by the public sector or by NGOs. This is an important investment area, as considerable efforts are needed to create farmer-based organizations that are inclusive and sustainable. Investments in Common Interest Groups are supported under the current World Bank-funded Agricultural Technology project, and additional investments may support these efforts. Bangladesh has the advantage that it already has a dense network of community-based organizations, including women's groups. Another useful strategy is therefore to link extension services with existing groups, as noted in the extension policy.

In terms of research-extension linkages, Agricultural Technical Committees (ATCs) have been created to provide a forum for linkage between extension and research staff at the regional level, while the National Agricultural Technology Coordination Committee (NATCC) constitutes highest forum the national level. Future investments in research-extension linkages might consider a further decentralization of these committees, exploring options to ensure that research-extension linkages are also effective at the *upazila* level. In designing an appropriate institutional structure at the local level, it might also be important to consider the role that local governments can play in coordination and in promoting agricultural development.

Gender issues

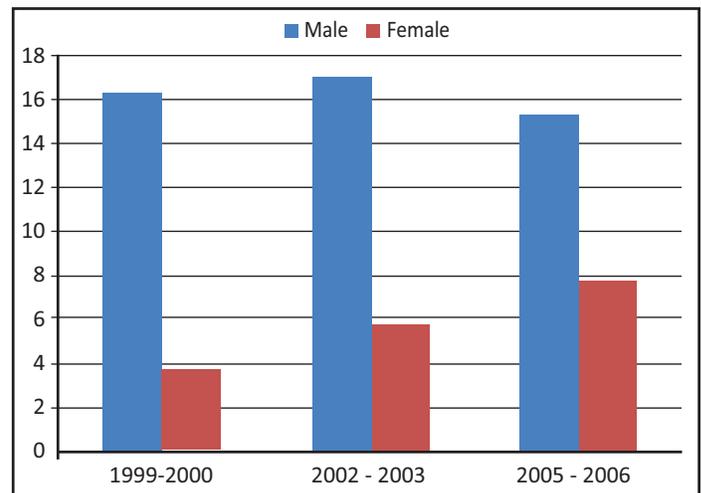
Role of women in agriculture

Women tend to be “invisible” in the agricultural sector in Bangladesh, reflecting the assumption that women are not involved in agricultural production and also reflecting cultural norms that value female seclusion and undervalue female labor. This assumption is challenged by data from various studies (for example, Ahmed et al. 2009).⁴ Participation of women in agriculture has also increased over time. Between 1999/2000 and 2005/06, the number of employed persons in agriculture increased from 19.99 to 22.93 million (Figure 2)—about 15 percent. For male labor,

⁴ A profile of poor households eligible for a variety of food and cash transfers shows that while only about 2 percent of women participants in public works programs are self-employed in agriculture, almost 29 percent of women in the Food Security Vulnerable Group Development Program are self-employed in agriculture. Across different types of program participants, as well as eligible households who did not participate in the program, between 3 and 11 percent of women work as agricultural wage laborers (Ahmed et al. 2009).

there has been an absolute decrease of about 6 percent, while for females the number has increased from 3.76 to 7.71 million—that is, by more than 100 percent. As a result of such changes, the proportion of women in agricultural labor force has increased from less than 20 percent to 33.6 percent of the total. This is indeed a phenomenal change, although it is not yet clear how much of this change resulted from a true secular increase as opposed to better measurement of women's participation.

Figure 2—Employed labor force (15 + years) in agriculture, by gender (mn)

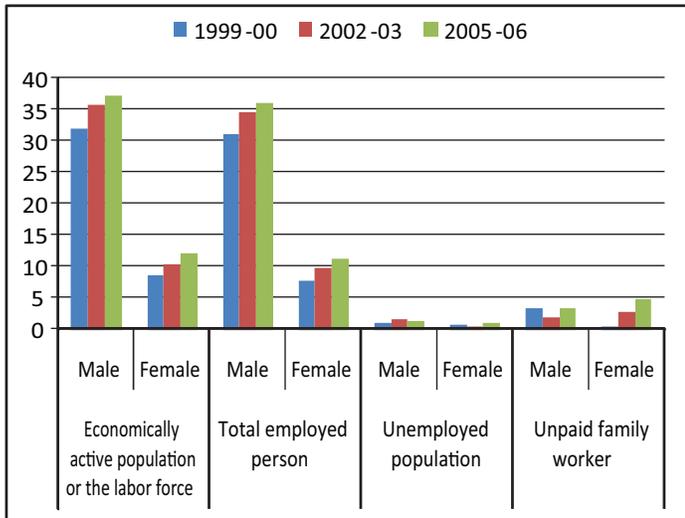


Source: BBS, Labour Force Survey, 1999/00, 2002/03 and 2005/06

The rural employed women are mainly unpaid family labor. In 2005/06, these women comprised about 72 percent of all employed women, increased from 34 percent in 1999/2000 and 51 percent in 2002/03. Asaduzzaman (2010) posits that with regard to family labor, women are increasingly replacing males, who may be seeking more profitable employment elsewhere (including through migration). Women tend to be more involved in homestead agriculture, while men are more engaged in field-based agriculture. There may be important implications for nutrition of the possible transition of women from homestead to field-based agriculture. It is possible that this transition may lead to the neglect of homestead agriculture, which serves as an important source of nutrient-rich vegetables. Moreover, if women become increasingly involved in field-based agriculture, they may have to undertake harder physical labor. Developing technologies to ease women's double burden of field work and domestic work will be important.

These trends in the agricultural sector mirror the growth in labor force participation of women in the overall labor force. The increase in labor force participation has been higher for females than for males, albeit beginning from a low initial level. Females still account for only a quarter of the total labor force (Figure 3). However, even for the economy as a whole, women are mostly employed as unpaid family workers and account for a smaller absolute share of the total than men.

Figure 3—Characteristics of the labor force, 1999-2000 to 2005-2006



Source: BBS, Labour Force Survey 1999/00, 2002/03, and 2005/06.

Provisions in policy documents to address gender issues

Possibly reflecting the “invisibility” of women as agricultural producers, the NFP gives little explicit attention to women’s possible contribution. There is no mention of women in the discussion of NFP Objective 1 (“Adequate and stable supply of safe and nutritious food”) or in any of its 11 areas for priority action. Some attention is paid to women as agricultural producers in Area of Intervention (Aoi) 2.5, “Income generation for women and the disabled.”⁵ By paying greater attention to gender in these priority areas—and by recognizing the overlap between Objective 1 and Aoi 2.5—Bangladesh can more effectively achieve the objective of guaranteeing a safe and stable supply of nutritious food, while increasing women’s capacity to generate incomes.

In the area of agricultural research and extension (Aoi 1.1), demand-led and pro-poor extension services could be better targeted to female agricultural producers. Similarly, in agricultural diversification (Aoi 1.4), female farmers could become more involved in the production of nutritious food like fish, egg, meat, and especially fruits and vegetables, which can be grown on homestead plots. The PoA discusses several women-focused interventions with a view to expanding women’s access to agricultural extension, as well as targeting women in livestock and fishery projects, increasing women’s participation in new or emerging agricultural and agro-based enterprises, and backing income-generating activities for poor women (National Food Policy Plan of Action: 44). Indeed, adopting a gender lens in examining agricultural supply issues may well reveal unexploited opportunities for agricultural growth.

⁵ Different strategies may be needed for women and for persons with disabilities, however, as the constraints these groups face are quite different.

Experiences and investment options

Many innovative interventions to increase women’s access to agricultural resources have been implemented in Bangladesh. Perhaps the most visible and widely known Bangladeshi innovation is the provision of microfinance services through women’s groups, allowing women to use group liability as a substitute for collateral. Evaluations of the long-term impact of microfinance projects have documented that access to microfinance contributes to poverty reduction, not only for female participants but also at the village level (Khandker 2008).

As indicated above, extension services are mainly provided by the public sector, although NGOs and the private sector also play an important role in this regard. Except for NGOs, most of the extension workers in the public and private sectors are male. It is widely recognized, however, that female extension workers can serve women beneficiaries better (World Bank and IFPRI 2010; World Bank, FAO, and IFAD 2008). Therefore investment is needed for better opportunities and training for women extension workers in the public sector.

In addition to hiring female extension workers, Bangladeshi NGOs have also experimented with various implementation modalities that address gender-specific barriers to agricultural technology adoption. If large initial investments or asset ownership is required, women may be less likely to adopt new agricultural technologies. However, this problem can be overcome by using group-based approaches that allow women to pool resources, as well as by providing complementary assets. Hallman et al. (2007) show that women’s groups were able to adopt improved vegetable varieties for homestead production, as well as poly-culture fish technologies. Neither of these activities requires much land, and in both cases the disseminating NGO also provided microfinance services to its members.

Another intervention for reaching women with extension services is the use of information and communications technology (ICTs). Bangladesh has been an innovator in this regard. The Grameen Village Phone program used ICT to improve the livelihoods of poor women entrepreneurs who received micro-credit financing (Malhotra et al. 2009). Rural women clients of Grameen Bank, provided with financing and training to become operators of mobile phone booths, became key players in a profitable strategic venture to increase telephone access in rural villages. Most women phone operators successfully increased their revenues and improved their household’s wellbeing. Many also raised their profiles in their communities by becoming visible and influential economic agents and marketers of technology.

The spread of cell phones throughout Bangladesh has also led to the development of information services linked to cell phone ownership. For example, there are now around 2,000 telecenters in rural Bangladesh that serve local communities with information and other services. Grameen Phone Community Information Centers throughout the country provide information and advisory services to farmers, who come to the centers with specific requests. Call centers, a relatively recent phenomenon,

provide agricultural information to farmers on a round-the-clock basis and enable farmers to access information using cell phones. For women who may be culturally proscribed from interacting with men, ownership and use of a cell phone has proven to be a culturally sensitive means of obtaining information.

Agricultural interventions that are sensitive to women's multiple roles are also more likely to succeed in general. A good example is the homestead food production (HFP) program, introduced in Bangladesh by Helen Keller International nearly two decades ago. HFP promotes an integrated package of home gardening, small livestock production, and nutrition education, with the aim of increasing household production and the availability and consumption of micronutrient-rich foods, and improving the health and nutritional status of women and children. Implemented by NGO partners and the Government of Bangladesh, HFP has expanded its reach into more than one-half of the country's subdistricts and is now operating in several countries of Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. Evidence shows that HFP in Bangladesh has improved food security for nearly 5 million vulnerable people in diverse agroecological zones. This achievement has several dimensions: increased production and consumption of micronutrient-rich foods; increased income from gardens and increased expenditures on micronutrient-rich foods; women's empowerment; enhanced partner capacity; and enhanced community development. (Iannotti et al. 2009.)

THEME 2: MARKETS, TRADE, AND VALUE CHAINS

Governance issues

Public food grain procurement and buffer stock management

The NFP PoA identifies public stock management as an important strategic element to meet Objective 1, "Adequate and stable supply of safe and nutritious food" (Aol #11.1).

Of the three governance challenges identified above, the problem of leakages is the most important one in this policy area. Considering the magnitude of the program, the human-resource management challenge also needs consideration, as the capacity and incentives of the staff managing the program will be crucial to its success.

The PoA identifies three broad strategies to address this challenge: modernizing public storage; ensuring transparent use of public foodgrain stocks; and improving monitoring of private stocks and imports. The plan also emphasizes technological options, recommending "greater reliance on computerized systems at both local and central levels, to more effectively monitor and control storage and stock positions." The plan also recommends exploring the possibility of introducing public-private partnerships to develop cost-effective expansion storage

capacities related to the Public Food Distribution System. For the medium and long term, the plan recommends greater emphasis on private storage and calls for leasing underutilized public storage facilities to the private sector.

There is not much documented experience with these approaches regarding food grain procurement in Bangladesh. The experience of using e-governance approaches in other areas of agricultural development has been very promising (World Bank 2007a). Therefore, it seems useful to invest in computerized systems for creating accountability and improving governance in buffer stock management. Another important area for investment would be to improve the capacity and the incentives of the staff in charge of the Public Food Distribution System, for example by filling vacancies and investing in appropriate training (including training in e-government techniques).

Development of value chains

The PoA calls for "Promotion of Agro-based/Agro-processing and Micro/Small Rural Enterprises" (Aol #2.6) and "Market-driven Skill Development" (Aol #2.7). These are identified as strategic elements to meet Objective 2, "Increased purchasing power and access to food of the people."

Supporting small-scale private-sector enterprises in value chains will depend on a conducive business climate. (This is also an important governance issue in other investment areas covered in the PoA, which are outside the scope of this paper.) The governance challenges involved will depend on the specific strategy chosen to reach this goal. The PoA recommends the provision of support services similar to those provided to farm enterprises, such as skill development, advisory services, and support for the formation of associations. The PoA does not identify the agencies that would implement such support services; in principle, these might be either public sector agencies or contracted entities (NGOs and private sector enterprises). The considerations for meeting the governance challenges in agricultural extension apply equally to this area.

Gender issues

In Bangladesh, prevailing norms value women's seclusion from public spheres, implying that women are traditionally excluded from markets. Although the division between "inside" and "outside" domains has increasingly been eroded over the years, women's mobility is still limited relative to men; men traditionally market the household's agricultural produce, even that produced by women. This means that even if women produce commodities, they do not necessarily control the proceeds. Moreover, lack of physical and financial resources often excludes women from the production and marketing of high-value agricultural commodities, which may offer more sustained income growth than commodities with low output value per hectare, such as cereals. Because the poor—and particularly poor women—have relatively less access to land, the home-based, high-value, labor-

intensive enterprises are extremely important, such as backyard livestock reared for milk or fish raised in homestead fishponds.

Provisions in policy documents to address gender issues

With the exception of Aol #2.5 (“Income generation for women and the disabled”), little attention is paid to gender issues in markets, trade, and value chains. This may be a missed opportunity for policy intervention, to address gender-specific barriers that prevent women from participating in markets (discussed above). Nevertheless, this is by no means an inactive area in Bangladesh.

Experiences and investment options

NGOs have experimented with gender-sensitive and culturally appropriate mechanisms to increase women’s access to markets as well as their control of proceeds from sales of produce. As noted above, social norms that value female seclusion mean that women do not traditionally take produce to the market. NGOs have taken various approaches to overcome this constraint, such as collecting the produce from members’ houses and marketing the commodities for women’s groups; or encouraging traders to come to homes, villages, or the NGO office to procure the commodities. Cell phone ownership offers a way to overcome information barriers in a culturally sensitive manner, because women can obtain the information from a location close to their homes, or even from within their homes.

THEME 3: INCOME GENERATION AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Governance issues

The PoA recommends public employment programs (for example, Cash For Work (CFW) and Food For Work (FFW)) as a strategy to combine social protection with employment-generation goals (Aol #2.4). In such programs, all three governance challenges identified in the introduction are relevant. The PoA itself states: “There is evidence of relatively high leakage from food-based programs.” The document points to additional problems: “Furthermore, there are too many layers of decision-making in the selection of beneficiaries and too many Government departments involved in running the programs, resulting in a large administrative costs which needs to be streamlined.” (National Food Policy Plan of Action: 42–43). For public works programs (food-for-work or cash-for-work), another governance challenge is to ensure the quality of the infrastructure being created. The targeting challenge of such programs is discussed in more detail below.

Provisions in policy documents to meet governance challenges

The PoA specifies that the expansion of such programs “should go along with a set of governance-focused interventions for strengthening accountability mechanisms, the capacity of implementing institutions at national and local levels and monitoring and evaluation systems, as well as the participation of local communities in program design, implementation and monitoring, on a continuous basis” (National Food Policy Plan of Action: 43). Thus, the plan recommends a combination of demand-side and supply-side approaches to improve the governance of these programs.

Experience and investment options

The combination of monitoring and evaluation with women’s empowerment has been considered a successful approach in addressing the governance challenges of food-based programs. Cash-for-work programs pose special difficulties for governance. India’s Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme encountered various leakage challenges (Raabe et al. 2010), and several Indian states have resorted to direct transfers to accounts of beneficiaries, reducing opportunities for leakage. Since access to bank accounts through microcredit institutions is widespread in Bangladesh, this might be a useful strategy to consider. Other strategies include social audits and right-to-information approaches. Investment options to address the governance challenges include capacity development for monitoring and evaluation within the public administration and capacity development among community-based organizations.

Gender issues

Income generation and social protection are two aspects of policy efforts to increase well-being. Income generation aims to increase the resources available to households (and individuals within those households); social protection is designed to protect the household’s resources from negative events such as floods, illness, and death. Both approaches raise important gender issues. (1) How effective are income-generation programs in targeting vulnerable women and enabling them to build up their resources? (2) Are social protection programs well targeted to vulnerable women? More specifically, do social protection implementation modalities address gender inequalities and provide assistance in a form that is effective in assisting women? And are these programs effective in protecting women’s physical and human resources from negative shocks? Some important aspects of women’s participation in income-generating activities have already been discussed. This section will therefore focus on the different ways that shocks impact men and women, and how social protection might address the different needs of men and women.

Poor Bangladeshi households experience a range of negative events, ranging from weather shocks such as floods that affect large localities or even the whole country, to shocks that affect only individuals or families, such as illness, death, or a large dowry payment for a daughter's wedding. A study of the determinants of chronic poverty in Bangladesh found that having older household members makes the household vulnerable to shocks such as illness, death, and property division. Illness—in particular, the income foregone when an income earner falls ill—also contributes to poverty. Dowries also decrease consumption, particularly for those with assets below the median. In a society where consumption levels are already low, dowries represent forced savings, as households with daughters significantly reduce consumption still further to save for dowries. Dowries and illness have different effects on men and women within the household, however, with dowries negatively affecting men's assets, and illness shocks adversely affecting women's assets (Quisumbing 2009).

Provisions in policy documents to address gender issues

Aol #2.1 (“Effectiveness of targeted food programs and other safety nets”) explicitly identifies destitute women as a target group of safety net programs. Indeed, the Government of Bangladesh targets many of its safety net programs to poor women. The challenge and opportunity will be to integrate lessons learned from the implementation of these social protection programs, and to design new instruments that enable poor households—and women within them—to better manage risk and shocks.

Experiences and investment options

Bangladesh has extensive experience in targeting women in safety net programs. For example, both men and women participate in FFW/RD (Food for Work/Rural Development) and TR (Test Relief), and FFA (Food for Assets) requires at least 70 percent of the participants to be women. Only women can participate in the Rural Maintenance Program (RMP), which offers cash wages for maintaining rural earthen roads. The Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) program exclusively targets poor women and provides a monthly food ration over a period of 24 months, while providing training for income-generating activities. Similar to VGD in design, the Food Security Vulnerable Group Development (FSVGD) program also provides a combination of food and cash to program participants. Beneficiaries of VGD and FSVGD programs are selected by administrative review.

A comprehensive evaluation of four large food- and cash-transfer programs revealed that implementation modalities make a difference in terms of their impacts on gender-related outcomes. Comparing programs with similar transfer amounts revealed that, whereas for married women there is greater advantage to having transfers of cash over transfers of food, for women who are widowed, divorced, or separated, there are

some advantages to receiving both food and cash (Ahmed et al. 2009). It is possible that receiving cash allows married women to expand their area of decisionmaking beyond their traditional roles as food providers and caregivers. Qualitative accounts suggest, however, that women feel they have greater control over transfers of food and are concerned that cash transfers would be spent by their husbands. In households of widowed, divorced, and separated women, who make most of the decisions within their households (and who are often the only source of support for their families), having a food transfer (together with a cash transfer) assures the household of food while providing cash for other expenditures. Program designers may want to examine ways of strengthening women's control over cash in VGD programs, perhaps through savings accounts in their own names or through group savings accounts that they can draw upon in times of need. (It seems likely that the RMP's compulsory savings requirement may have contributed substantially to the extremely high impact on women's empowerment indicators.) Other mechanisms to increase women's ability to participate in social safety net programs would address their specific needs arising from their maternal and care-giving responsibilities, such as allowing flexible work hours and providing childcare facilities.

Women's participation in the local government might play an important role in ensuring women's rights and particularly access to safety-net benefits provided by the government. However, political participation of women in local government remains very low, even after various changes in regulations at different times to encourage women's participation. During the past 12 years, however, following regulatory changes in 1997, women have become more active as members of local government. A study by Democracy Watch reveals that female members of the local government actively participate in such activities as distributing Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) and Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) cards and distributing honorarium for widows (Democracy Watch n.d.). However, this accounts for less than 20 percent of such distribution. Most of the women members are also included in various project implementation committees, but they do not have the opportunity to work effectively with their male counterparts. Women leaders could be better utilized for resource allocation in the rural economy.

Given the recent finding that illness shocks disproportionately affect women's asset holdings, an important opportunity in social protection is to provide health insurance. BRAC, for example, has been providing its members microhealth insurance since 2001 (http://www.brac.net/usa/bw_health.php). The goal of this project is to facilitate access for the poor to affordable and quality health services and to empower women as the entry point for their family's access to health care. This project offers voluntary enrollment to village organization (VO) and non-VO members and to the ultra-poor, in three packages (general; prepaid pregnancy care; and an equity package for the ultra-poor). Premium cost varies with VO membership and family size.

THEME 4: NUTRITION SECURITY

Governance issues

The PoA identifies a number of strategies to achieve nutrition security. Of particular interest is Aol # 3.2, “Balanced and Nutritious Food at Minimal Costs for Vulnerable People,” which sets the target of “increased availability through local production of low-cost items; poor, distressed and vulnerable women and children effectively covered by food-based nutrition programs, including Growth Monitoring and Promotion (GMP).” The PoA and the 2009 Monitoring Report for the Plan also emphasize the role of nutrition education interventions, the dissemination of user-friendly nutrition information through mass media, and the expansion of the Area-Based Community Nutrition Program.

Depending on the type of intervention, nutrition programs confront all three governance challenges discussed in the introduction. For the staff involved in providing community-based extension services and education programs, the human resource management challenge is certainly the most important one. All interventions that involve the distribution of food items will involve the targeting challenge and the leakage challenge.

Experience and investment options

Bangladesh has an impressive record in addressing the challenge of leakages in public nutrition programs. In 2004, a study by IFPRI estimated the average leakage in the Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) program (due to short ration and undercoverage) at 8 percent of the total wheat allotment. These losses are low by international standards. The study found that these results were due, in part, to monitoring and evaluation throughout the system and women’s empowerment at the union level to hold program managers accountable (Ahmed et al. 2004).

Some lessons can be also be derived from the World Bank-funded National Nutrition Project. This project used outsourcing to NGOs as a strategy to address governance challenges. The Implementation Completion and Results Report for the project indicates that the project was able to meet the human resource management challenge (World Bank 2007b: 15). More than 23,000 Community Nutrition Promoters were recruited, all of them women, and “they were significantly empowered due to their role in the community and the respect of community members.” However, the review also found that the strategy to contract NGOs involved some challenges: “NGO contracting was delayed further due to an observed lack of transparency in the selection process. Furthermore, though the checks and balances that were in place to detect the few instances of lack of transparency in the sourcing of goods and services and safeguards against undue influence were effective, these could have been more pro-actively implemented” (World Bank 2007b: 5-6). The strategies used by the project to prevent leakages included special audits, withholding of fund disbursement, and requiring refunds

for ineligible expenditures. According to the review, these strategies proved effective in identifying and addressing problems of leakage.

Based on this experience, investments may build on the positive existing programs to address the governance challenges, by promoting women’s empowerment while at the same time strengthening monitoring, evaluation, and audit systems. If the strategy of contracting NGOs is to be continued, investments to improve governance may focus on the capacity for procurement of NGO services. If public-sector staff is used to promote the expansion of community-based nutrition services, strategies to create incentives for public-sector agricultural extension staff, as discussed above, will become essential.

Gender issues

Bangladesh faces an unfinished agenda with regard to nutrition. Child malnutrition rates remain among the highest in the world, with 46 percent of children under five years old considered underweight (DHS 2007). Wasting rates have risen alarmingly in this decade, from 10 percent to 16 percent (DHS 2007). A key underlying factor—maternal malnutrition—remains intractable despite efforts to improve the nutritional status of pregnant women. Iron deficiency anemia affects nearly 50 percent of all pregnant and lactating women. A direct consequence of this, aside from maternal mortality, is low birthweight, which affects 30–50 percent of all newborns. Undernutrition limits children’s growth potential and increases their vulnerability to infectious diseases and non-communicable diseases later in life. It delays their enrollment in school and damages their ability to learn and develop useful skills, which fosters the intergenerational transmission of poverty and undernutrition. Bangladesh is thus characterized by a cycle of intergenerational poverty, ill-health, and malnutrition (World Bank 2009).

The low status of women within the household and in the community has serious implications for the reduction of child malnutrition. Nationally representative statistics and smaller, longitudinal data sets both show that malnutrition among children in Bangladesh—especially chronic malnutrition—is significantly associated with attitudes towards domestic violence as well as past experience of domestic violence (Quisumbing et al. 2009). Attitudes that justify or condone domestic violence are strong indicators that the balance of power is unequally distributed within a household. Domestic violence also has negative effects on maternal nutrition: mothers who have been subjected to domestic violence experience less improvement in body mass index and hemoglobin levels over time.

Addressing gender inequality is therefore central to reducing malnutrition in Bangladesh. However, even if nutrition programs target women, most of these programs do not take into account women’s lack of access to or control of their own resources. In Bangladesh, many women have restricted mobility; with no access to the marketplace, they are not able to purchase food. Only 20 percent of women are able to make decisions related

to their own or their children's health care, and less than half can make decisions about how to spend their own money (DHS 2004).

Provisions in policy documents to address gender issues

Women and children are explicitly identified as targets of NFP Objective 3, "Adequate nutrition for all individuals, especially women and children," particularly in the following Areas of Intervention: AoI #3.2, "Balanced and nutritious food for vulnerable people"; AoI #3.3, "Nutrition education on dietary diversification"; AoI #3.7, "Women's and children's health"; and AoI #3.8, "Promotion and protection of breastfeeding and complementary feeding." In all these areas, women are identified as the entry point for interventions aiming to improve nutrition outcomes. However, even as the targets of interventions, if women do not control household resources they may not have the ability to direct these resources toward child health and nutrition.

Experiences and investment options

Ahmed et al. (2010) discusses implementation experience in nutrition interventions and emphasizes the need to improve women's nutrition and health as essential to improving the nutritional status of the population. Poor maternal nutrition before, during, and after pregnancy is a major determinant of child malnutrition and contributes to women's ill-health and mortality. Interventions to address women's nutrition, starting in early adolescence, are essential to mitigate a major public health bottleneck in Bangladesh, and to set an example for South Asia.

Equally essential is building community support for women's role in assuring good nutrition of their families. Because of the strong link between the low status of women and high rates of child malnutrition, interventions must aim to improve women's status and to build support for women's empowerment within their communities. Innovative approaches will be essential to shift social norms related to early marriage and child-bearing and to promote support within the home during and after pregnancy (Sen et al. 2010). In areas where women's status is known to be low and efforts to increase it are met with resistance, strategies to promote children's nutritional status must include actions to mitigate the negative effects of power inequalities favoring men.

CONCLUSION

Cross-cutting strategies for addressing governance issues

Investments in improved governance of agricultural and food security programs must include three strategic approaches: (a) empowering beneficiaries through user organizations; (b) strengthening capacity for procurement, to support NGO

contracting as an implementation strategy; and (c) using innovative approaches to create performance incentives for public-sector staff. Technologies such as e-governance represent a promising aid, across the different areas of intervention. Additional efforts could focus on the right to information, at the same time promoting people's capacity to use this right. Another innovative strategy is to strengthen the capacity of elected representatives at the local and national level to hold service providers accountable. This requires collecting performance data and training elected officials to interpret such data for accountability purposes.

Cross-cutting strategies for addressing gender issues

Smith et al. (2003) propose a two-pronged approach to eliminate gender inequality: first, eradicate discrimination against women; and second, promote catch-up by implementing more active measures in key areas. This two-pronged approach is applicable to addressing gender issues in Bangladesh's food security strategy.

Policy reform to eradicate gender discrimination aims to create a level playing field for women and men. Improving women's *political voice and participation* is vital to any fundamental shift that increases women's effective participation. Important steps include strengthening democratic institutions via legislation, rewriting constitutions to explicitly disavow discrimination, and establishing and enforcing an anti-discriminatory rule of law. While such declarations do not automatically translate into changes on the ground, they provide an important signal of the government's commitment, to which women can appeal to protect their rights. Eliminating gender discrimination in ownership and access to economically productive assets is a critical step, including the equal ability to inherit land, to join a credit and savings club, to join a water users' group, to access extension advice, to start up a small enterprise, and to survive in the event of a family breakdown. While progress has been made in some of these areas, there are still many opportunities for change.

The active promotion of catch-up in women's status is a more controversial proposition, even if the resulting increase in the overall size of the pie would more than compensate for males' reduced share. Redistributing resources toward females may be especially contentious in areas where gender discrimination against females is well-entrenched. In this regard, Bangladesh has made significant strides in primary education through its conditional food/cash transfer programs (implemented by the public sector), as well as in targeting credit through women's groups (through the NGO sector). Many important lessons can be learned from the successes in these areas.

Based upon our analysis of the National Food Policy Plan of Action, there are additional approaches that the Government of Bangladesh can take to design and implementing gender-sensitive strategies for achieving food security. These include: (a) recognizing women as agricultural producers and key partners in achieving food security; (b) evaluating, learning from, and scaling up successful innovations undertaken by the NGO sector; and (c)

continuing to adapt and modify successful government programs that seek to eliminate gender inequality and to explore their applicability to the food and agriculture sector.

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