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**FOOD SECURITY INTERVENTIONS BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS  
AND NGOS IN BANGLADESH: CASES FROM SOME DISADVANTAGED AREAS**

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**Abstract:**

This paper makes the case for why interventions by Local Government Institutions and non-government organizations are important tools for managing the risk of food security. The use of intervention is advocated to prevent and mitigate the impact of food insecurity related hazards and to cope with the impacts of its implications. Firstly, the paper explores the implications of food insecurity. Learning from the responses of a number of recent cases we plan to map the intervention mechanisms by Local Government Institutions and non-government organization. Secondly, the paper considers what Local Government Institutions and non-government organizations are doing to overcome food insecurity. Finally, recommendations are offered for more effective intervention mechanism.

**Key Words:**

*Food Security, Social Safety Net,  
Hardcore Poor, Local Government  
Institutions-NGO Intervention.*

## **1. Introduction**

Bangladesh sits one of the largest deltas of the world, covering 147,570 square-kilometers with a population of 148,692 thousand (IFPRI 2011) with a labor force of 76038745 in 2012 (World Bank Report 2012) and in it around 52% of the civilian labor force is engaged in agriculture (Disaster Management Bureau 2010) and 75% of whom live at rural areas (GoB 2007). It has GDP 111,879,121,731\$ in 2011 (IFPRI 2011) and it maintains an economic growth rate of average 6.5%. Bangladesh emerged as an independent country in 1971, even though it is still one of the poorest countries of the world. It has a poverty rate of 31.51% in 2011 (IFPRI 2011). In spite of having a great wealth of natural resources, about half of the population subsists below the “food-based” poverty line (or 2122 kcal/cap/day), and approximately 25% is considered to be Ultra Poor (<1600kcal/cap/day) (ICCO 2008). The government declares that the government has enough cereal as in 2009 there was 2481 calorie supply per capita (IFPRI 2011).

More than 17 percent of the population (160 million) is still extremely poor and high levels of inequality have persisted over the same period. More than 40 million Bangladeshis are undernourished by FAO’s definition – not having access to adequate amount of safe, nutritious food to sustain a healthy and productive life (FAO 2012). Bangladesh is ranked 129th out of 169 countries in the 2010 Human development Index (HDI), and 68th in a list of 79 countries in the 2012 Global Hunger Index (GHI) (IFPRI 2011).

When individuals or groups of people suffer from food insecurity all the time, then they can be said to suffer from chronic food insecurity. In other words, chronic food insecurity is a continuous inadequacy of diet caused by the inability to acquire food. It affects households that persistently lack the ability either to buy or produce enough food. Hence poverty is considered the root cause of chronic food insecurity (Khan 2012).

Food security in Bangladesh is characterized by considerable regional variations. Factors such as vulnerability to natural disasters, distribution and quality of agricultural land, access to education and health facilities, level of infrastructure development, employment opportunities, and dietary and caring practices provide possible explanations for this (WFP 2005).

In recent years (2009-2012) Bangladesh has made significant progress in the areas of economic, social and cultural rights (UPR 2013). There are a number of major factors keeping people trapped in the vicious circle of poverty and thus food insecurity, such as access to

government services, gender, people with disabilities (PWD), and people are affected by leprosy and natural disasters (ICCO 2008).

Furthermore, a 2004 RDRS a national NGO survey in the whole district of Gaibandha revealed that approximately 35% of the total households should be considered Ultra Poor (ICCO 2008). Hence it is near about 180,000 households.

Government is trying to assist the poor through its Local Government Institutions. But in many cases, government's social safety net programs, they hardly succeed. In addition, the poor remain out of the reach of social safety net programs of the government. Therefore, helping the poor and ultra-poor is a critical issue (Smillie 2009). In 2010, the percentage of Bangladeshis living below the poverty line dropped to 31.5 percent, down from 40 percent in 2005 (World Food Program 2012). However, more than 17 percent of the population (160 million) is still extremely poor and high levels of inequality have persisted (International Food Policy Research Institute 2012).

Eradicating extreme poverty is no longer a pipe dream. However, first government organizations must agree on their approach (The Economist 2013). The article from the Economist has given some example, from the Third World developing countries like Nepal. Furthermore, "An alternative vision is possible, of inclusive and sustainable growth that provides livelihoods for all, preserves the environment and is sustainable over time" (EU 2012).

## **2. Methodology of the Study**

We have used a qualitative research to see the causal relationship between dependent and independent variables. Both quantitative and qualitative methods have been employed to assemble primary data from the field. The study has followed a cross sectional-survey approach where both primary and secondary data have been collected. Different government policy documents and relevant data have been used as secondary source. The analysis has given a general overview on the issues required for the study as much depth as possible.

### **2.1 Data Collection Tools**

The issues the quantitative data collection tool has covered the development through activities of the project. To tap quantitative issues, it has covered 30 interviewees (20 beneficiaries and 10 officials) at household level has been selected from project area of a NGO with a semi-

structured data collection tool. The respondents have been selected randomly from among the members of the team of told project.

## **2.2 Qualitative Data Collection**

Besides quantitative issues, qualitative issues have been covered using separate data collection tools, namely, case study and Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) methods. To document qualitative issues a FGD checklist was developed incorporating select indicators from the given data collection tool.

## **2.3 Data Collection Procedure and Analysis**

It was estimated that investigator would be able to collect seven (7) semi-structured interviews in one day. In addition there has been one day to facilitate a FGD. To facilitate analysis extensive notes have been taken by the investigator during each of the interview, discussion, document verification and conversation. Keeping the need of the survey a most suitable program has been used and analysis was undertaken using data analytical computer software.

With the objective to answer the ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions-analysis takes a qualitative (narrative-based) turn with the support of quantitative means. This qualitative quantitative intersection helped to analyze relationships amongst dependent and independent variables such as effectiveness and efficiency of told project beneficiaries and officials. To identify issues related to objectives notes were taken during field sessions.

## **2.4 Study Area**

Food security for rural poor is a very complex issue and there are lacks of initiatives to mitigate the condition of the poor and ensure food security. In the district of Gaibandha a certain number of people remain unemployed for a certain period of the year. The Gaibandha district is located in the North-Western part of Bangladesh. Still it is one of the poorest and most food insecure regions in Bangladesh. On 2,179 sqkm, there is an estimated population of 2.3 million in Gaibandha district (GoB 2007) (ICCO 2008). Lack of advocacy and social mobilization of people in this region are the causes to why people remain poor and lack food security. The district of Gaibandha has different social safety net programs run by the Local Government Institutions and NGOs.

### **3. Causes of Food Insecurity**

Food security for Bangladesh has got the global attention just after the crisis created by the November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2007 cyclone (Hulme 2007). This cyclone caused horrific suffering, but the country also faced a more dangerous and slowly unfolding crisis during the last caretaker government backed by army. That time there was global food price increase and has pushed the poor people into an enormous pressure however Bangladesh has faced a ‘near famine’ (Hulme 2007).

Food prices in Bangladesh are galloping by the day, and essential commodities, such as rice, wheat flour, cooking oil, onion and lentil are now well beyond the reach of the people. There was no control over the essential products. These have been continuously creating all time high records during the last one year. It was in the perception of the people that international development partners, took over in Bangladesh.

The Table 1 shows the causes of unemployment and sector-wise distribution of the labor force in Bangladesh. If we see the table, there are two sectors in the employment distribution.

Table-1: Employment by Sector (Million)

	<b>Year</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
Formal Sector	2002-2003	9.2	7.3	2
	2005-2006	10.2	8.6	1.6
	2010	6.8	5.5	1.3
Informal Sector	2002-2003	35.1	27.2	7.9
	2005-2006	37.2	27.5	9.7
	2010	47.3	32.4	14.9

Source: Labor Force Survey, 2010

As we can see from the table, major share of the labor force is depending on the informal sector and which has no grantee of jobs. Those jobs are mostly unsecured and unstable. Sometimes people do suffer for jobs in the informal sector due to the political instability. Due to the political instability the informal sector collapses. From the above table we can see that there is female labor, which are increasingly depending and coming to the informal sector then the male force (Labor Fource Survey 2010).

Indeed, with various reforms, including a crackdown on corruption, it was widely expected that economic development would further pick up, and there would be an accelerated reduction of poverty in Bangladesh. Unfortunately, the records show an unmistakable downturn in the economy with dwindling investments, both internal and external (Hulme 2007).

The poor economic mismanagement under the caretaker government started with indiscriminate raids on the warehouses of large food dealers and importers on the pretext of cracking down on food adulteration. Adulteration of food is certainly a problem in Bangladesh, and action against it was progressing quite impressively during the rule of the last elected government. Many food importers and food merchants stopped importing and distributing food (The New Age 2012).

The slow and complicated policy making and implementation mechanism might hamper the food import from the other countries. When there is indeed a food crisis, the reserve comes in handy in the form of open market operations, modified rationing, test relief, vulnerable group development, etc. all designed to stabilize food prices, on the one hand, and address the lack of access to food by the poorest sections in the society, on the other (Hulme 2007). At the recent time we can see the onion crisis is caused by complicated policy making and implementation mechanism (The Daily Prothom Alo 2013).

Sometimes international food price goes high and sources of food supply are unable to supply food in Bangladesh. India, our biggest supplier of food grains, is unable to supply food. Generally, food from India, obtained mostly through informal channels, has a cushioning effect on food scarcity in Bangladesh (Hulme 2007).

Corruption around the Bangladesh borders and in most cases our subsidized foods are smuggled through our borders and it creates a price hike in the local market. In addition, sometimes there is only one channel to distribute subsidized food and that is not adequate, but there is no public confidence in such distribution system.

Despite the fact that many politicians are generally corrupt, they stand by the people at crisis times with party-organized relief. However, during crisis time in the last cyclone in 2007 there was no politician to help the pro-poor and that also widen the food insecurity in Bangladesh (Hulme 2007).

The natural calamities like flood, cyclone, and any other, high level of subsidy and smuggling of those foods and fertilizer, and low visional decisions of the interim governments has sometimes made our food crises bigger. Likewise, to say these are the main causes of food insecurity in Bangladesh.

#### **4. Government Intervention for Food Security**

Since from the very beginning of Bangladesh's history this country has been struggling to stay food secured. Moreover, in different times Bangladesh government has initiated different

social safety net programs to mitigate food insecurity. The focused food insecurity intervention programs are-

**Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF)** VGF program is the vulnerable group feeding program. It provides food to selected households in the months following a disaster when agricultural production has been severely disrupted. It began in the mid-1990s and has been rapidly expanded through supply monetary food aid from the WFP (WFP 2010).

Table-2: Allocation of Money to different program (amount in crore)

Name of Program	Coverage		Budget		
	2011-12 (Revised)	2012-13	2011-12 (Revised)	2012-13	Growth
OMS	220.63	220.26	1758.00	1755.00	-0.17
VGD	88.33	90.00	781.02	806.84	3.31
VGF	88.00	85.00	1355.50	1355.50	0.00
TR	39.00	39.00	1074.44	1162.70	8.21
GR	80.00	80.00	271.10	274.88	1.39
Food Assistance to CHT	7.14	7.14	234.33	237.09	1.18
FFW	40.00	50.00	1283.70	1439.04	12.10
Total			6758.09	7027.76	3.99

Source: Compiled by the Author from the National Budget 2011-12 & 2012-13

**Vulnerable Group Development (VGD)** VGD is the Vulnerable Group Development programmed. It assists about 480000 households by providing food for the poor since its inauguration.

**Food for Works (FFW)** FFW is the food for work programmed. It operates in the rural areas and provided about 75,000,000 house of work in 2003-04. FFW programs are run by a number of ministries. Formally, coordination of the program is with the ministry of women's and children's affairs.

They are the main food based social safety net programs taken by the government. Local Government Institutions are the main implementers of these programs taken by the government. There are some other programs such as- Community Nutrition Program;

Maternity Allowance for poor mother; Stipend for primary/ secondary education; subsidy; Old Age allowance scheme and many more. Throughout our study we have seen that these are the mainly cash based and most of the times people used to spend their money on food (Food Security Intervention 2012).

**Open Market Sale:** Government has opened different outlets to sell the daily necessary to the pro poor people through Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB). However, if we can go back to the last caretaker government we can see that there was Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) to sell those products to the mass people. The name of the outlets was “Najjo Muller Dokan” (Shop of Perfect Price). Though there were some criticisms of those shops after the end of the caretaker government.

**The PRSP II ‘Steps towards Change’:** National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction’ emphasized on strategies to tackle food security in the context of recent rise of prices of food grains in the world markets due to, inter alia, diversion of food grains to bio-fuel production and adverse impact of climate change (PRSP II 2010). Food security strategies embrace both physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet dietary needs of the vulnerable groups.

According to the PRSP II document, to ensure food security for the nation and particularly for the hardcore poor, the government would like to maintain an optimum level of food stock; ensure access to food at an affordable price for the hardcore poor, the disadvantaged groups and persons with disabilities (GoB 2006).

In line with the National Food Policy (2006), the Plan of Action (PoA) of the NFP (2006) was prepared based on the aspects like, food availability; physical and social access to food; economic access to food; nutrition/utilization of food (GoB 2006). The NFP Plan of Action (PoA), 2008 translated the provisions of the National Food Policy, 2006 towards achieving its three core objectives into 26 strategic areas of intervention, priority actions to be undertaken in the short-term, medium-term and long-term over the period 2008-2015. It identified responsible actors (Local Government Institutions and non-government) and suggested a set of policy targets and indicators for monitoring progress. Thus, the PoA is the culmination of a set of iterative consultations and analytical work conducted jointly by the four Thematic Research Team (TRTs), (which involve representatives of 12 ministries/ divisions/ departments) and social access of food, economic access to food and utilization of food for nutrition (GoB 2006) (Gill 2003).

## **5. NGO Intervention**

The Gaibandha district data shows the relevant parts of NGOs doing in the field of food security. In our field visit we observed that different non-governmental organizations were involved as beneficiary's selection to ensure food security. The most interesting part of NGO's intervention is that they were doing it in different forms through community members (Peoples Forum on MDG (PFM) 2005).

**Microcredit:** It is one of the most significant tools for developing the food security situation in Bangladesh through NGOs. Now most of the NGOs in Bangladesh are providing microcredit to the poor. According to Grammen Bank (GB) in Bangladesh, it has millions of microcredit lender (Younus 2013). By much efforts GB is trying to change the poor people's lives so that they can have three times meal every day.

**Cash Transfer:** In many cases some NGOs are providing cash to the disadvantaged groups to turn their wheel of luck. A NGO named Unnyan Shojogi Team (UST-Development Partner Team) is doing so in the district Gaibandha. In most cases it tries to find out through this cash how recipients to manage some resources and will be able to secure food for their family (UST 2011).

**Resource Transfer:** Some NGOs like UST also provide resources like- goat, cow and many more to the people. Hence that they can manage nursing it and can sell it into the market with high prices (UST 2011).

**Skill Development:** Through skill development people can be self reliant. This is why BRAC and UCEP the two big NGO in Bangladesh are trying to providing skill training to the disadvantaged group Bangladesh. They have different vocational training institutions in different regions in Bangladesh (BRAC 2010).

**Scholarships for Disadvantaged:** Some NGOs and some corporate banks are trying to provide scholarships to the poor but meritorious students in Bangladesh. While we were doing study in or survey area we have found that most of the cases the students spend their money on the food matter of their family. Recently Dutch-Bangla Bank Limited has spent 10.02 million taka on this purpose (DBBL 2012).

**Social Business:** A new form of business has been formed by Dr. Mohammad Yunus. It is called social business. Yunus Center has inaugurated has different projects on social business and they are based on food security programs. I have found one project which is based on Shirajgang was about Duck rearing taken by the Yunus Center (Younus 2013).

There are some other forms of food security interventions through NGO. They are- education, logistics support, disaster management, and sustainable development through environment protection, subsidy and many more.

## **6. Local Government Institutions-NGO Collaboration**

The relation between Local Government Institutions and Non-Local Government Institutionsvernmental organizations, throughout most part of the history of Bangladesh, has been oppositional and competitive; particularly, with reference to their role in managing development at the grassroots, thus NGOs and Local Government Institutions are considered in a binary relation framework (Islam 2012). In our study we have found, in order to understand the complex web of interlinked relation between Local Government Institutions and NGOs one needs to look at different levels of policy process with different frameworks.

There we have seen both the parties want to take control over the selection of beneficiary of the different intervention programs (Islam 2012). Shalish (petty disputes) is another interest part of the both two organizations in the rural areas. Most of the times, the local government representatives misuse the power of the power (Somewherein 2010). In the case of selection of beneficiaries (for both project and various safety net programs) the Local Government Institutions authorities and the NGO representatives pressurizes the both parties.

The Local Government Institutions and non-government organizations are well concerned about their works and most of the times they works for eradicating poverty and ensure food security (Shamakal 2011). In other cases the Local Government Institutions authorities work together to select projects and working areas (Islam 2012). Last but not the least the Local Government Institutions and non-government organizations work together to raise their funds for the development works and to ensure food security.

In our study we have found that to form Ward Sava the open budget is being managed and conducted by the UST. A national officials and members as if they are part of the Union Parishad and it is their mandate. Sometimes NGOs are helping to disseminate various information e.g. National Immunization Day, VGD/VGF Card and other safety net beneficiary selection meetings. Likewise, to disseminate disaster early warning NGOs are working with Local Government Institutions officials side by side. Furthermore, NGOs are providing training to Local Government Institutions officials and local leaders on various legal and project management issues.

NGOs also receive help from the government organizations to implement their projects. Furthermore, the Local Government Institutions representatives participate in the NGO meetings. In addition, the Local Government Institutions also provides logistics and human resources support to manage the project activities of the NGOs. Finally the local government authority and government institutions give the legitimacy to the non-government institutions. Government authorities and non-government organizations sometimes work together. They are preparing annual plan together to develop their community. Sometimes, NGO members have been co-opted in local government institution's standing committees. Likewise, NGO and government representatives are representing Bangladesh in the world forums. Negotiated reciprocal relation developed through exchange of resources and legitimacy throughout their activities.

BARC projected that in 2015 there will be a surplus of 1.213 m MT of food grains but an overall deficit of all others food items. While the accurate determination of food gap is a challenge, lack of access is largely responsible for over 60 million people going hungry every day. There are approximately 27 food security and social safety net programs in the country but the coverage is inadequate. Most of these programs are also inflexible, unable to absorb (Khan 2012).

Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. To discuss food security, three important aspects must be considered e.g. availability of adequate food, stability in food supplies, access to food, and nutrition security (Khan 2012). Bangladesh has made a steady progress in the expansion of food production. But because of the increasing population pressure there has been an extensive use of land to meet the growing demand for food. Despite the growth in food production and its availability, food insecurity is still a major problem mainly because of the lack of purchasing power and thus of access to food, especially for the ultra poor community. A major portion of the rural population is landless, and laborers depend on casual earning for their livelihood. Due to the seasonal variation in agricultural employment and limited employment opportunities in nonfarm sector, millions of people still suffer from chronic and transitory food insecurity.

## **7. Recommendations**

From the above discussion we can see that throughout our study we have found what Local Government Institutions and non-government organizations are doing to eradicate poverty and ensure food security. Most of the project objective and project's vision leads to ensure food security of the pro-poor. In addition, if within the territory like Bangladesh the Local Government Institutions and Non-government organizations do not work together it would be near to impossible to make it happen. There are some disputes and to mitigate these disputes we are recommending some measures. They are-

Government has to bold policies to make it happen. There must-be some Local Government Institutions representatives in the projects of NGOs while they are working in the field of food security. Likewise, government authorities must welcome some NGO representatives in their working areas of food security interventions.

While we were in the field we have seen in the distribution process there is some nepotism. For example- the government organizations are providing benefits to the ruling party members. Most Open Market Sale (OMS) outlets are controlled by the ruling party members. In this case government organizations can take help from the NGOs in selecting beneficiary of the food security programs. There has to be some policy in place.

There is corruption in every sector in distributing resources to the hardcore poor. Government organizations should be more transparent in disbursing the wealth to the poor people. Non-government organization can be a part of ensuring transparency of the government organizations.

Most of the times, the governmental organizations are not accountable to the stakeholders of its activities. It is very tough to make the governmental organizations accountable to the rural stake holders. However, we can develop a mechanism through NGO. We can make the NGO accountable to the rural people (Field Study 2013).

Most of the policies of governmental organizations are not participatory. Through Local Government Institutions and NGO collaboration we can make the policy making process more participatory so that the policy can work for the mass people. Moreover, we need consensus oriented policy to ensure food security for the pro-poor. Otherwise, there is no meaning of all those food security intervention programs.

We have seen some repetition of programs of food security intervention. Local Government Institutions and non-government organizations should share their views and opinions on those

programs. By this method Local Government Institutions and non-government organizations can escape repetition of programs for food security interventions.

There can be “Ombudsmen” for hardcore poor people. He or she will be selected from among the community. This idea can change the thinking area of food security. In addition, we can arrange “Shadow Food Security Tribunal” (OXFAM Bangladesh 2010).

There can be a committee to ensure food security with the help of Local Government Institutions and non-governmental organizations. We can recommend 15 members for each committee. In that committee there will be representatives from Local Government Institutions organizations, non-governmental organizations, politicians, civil society members, representatives from labor group, representatives of poor people, and representative from women workers, representatives from physically disadvantaged people and as required.

## **8. Conclusion**

Bangladesh is a land of rivers with a 70% working class in the agriculture sector. We are suppose be secured in the field of food security through the year. However, there are different causes which are making us insecure in food. In addition, this insecurity is making them vulnerable to the society and environment. Moreover, women are the worst victim of this insecurity.

Local Government Institutions and non-government organizations are working rigorously to ensure food security for the pro-poor. In our study we have found that, in many cases while they are working together they are facing trouble. However, in most of the cases they are very happy to work together.

The level of government – i.e. central and local is very important for the successful output of the project on food security. In many cases the local government is very co-operative with the NGOs. In addition the central government is not that much co-operative with the non-government organizations. We have also found in our study is that local people mostly really on NGO activities.

Resource base of the NGOs – i. e. the (financial and political capital) is also important part of the ensuring food security project. We have seen that which NGOs are financially solvent and have more political capital is getting projects. One can assume that degree of dependence on external funding is the factor on which it depends on the sustainability of the projects. Ideological alignment between NGO and Local Government Institutions is also another factor for ensuring food security in this agro based economy.

Through political process of democratic developmental state can help to ensure smooth and effective relation between Local Government Institutions and NGO and thus contribute fruitfully towards enhanced well being of people.

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