

Vision 2021: Bangladesh Charts a Path toward Food Security

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Motivated by a strong political commitment, Bangladesh has taken a comprehensive and coordinated multi-sectoral approach to the pursuit of food security. The country's policies for ensuring food security are guided by its Vision 2021—a program of policies and actions culminating in the year of Bangladesh's golden jubilee—and its national development goals, as well as the Millennium Development Goals. Among other things, the Vision 2021 seeks to ensure that by 2021 most people have a minimum of 2,122 kilocalories per person per day and that the incidence of poverty is lowered to 15 percent. In addition, the 2007–2008 global food crisis was instrumental in shifting policy toward food self-sufficiency.

Agriculture plays an important role in the country's food security strategy. In 2011–2012 the government continued to promote agriculture by, for example, ensuring easy availability of high-quality seeds and fertilizers; maintaining reduced prices for non-urea fertilizer and a targeted subsidy for diesel fuel; expanding irrigation; developing new high-yielding varieties, including stress-tolerant and short-duration varieties; providing easy access to credit; ensuring remunerative prices for farmers; and allocating funds for research. In June 2012 Bangladesh produced an all-time record of 33.9 million metric tons of rice—more than three times the harvest of 1971, the year of the country's independence. Positive results were also recorded for wheat, vegetables, and potatoes, and the livestock and fishery sectors continued to thrive, bringing agricultural growth to more than 4 percent in recent years. Despite the government's efforts, however, production

centers heavily on rice, and substantial deficits still prevail in the production of pulses, meat, eggs, milk, fruits, and vegetables. To help diversify the food basket at the household level, the government has undertaken the program "One Household, One Farm."

In response to more frequent shocks from natural disasters and more volatile food-grain prices, the government has scaled up public stocks and distribution of food grains. The country's effective storage capacity was increased from 1.4 million metric tons in 2009 to 1.8 million metric tons in 2012 and is projected to reach 2.1 million metric tons by the end of 2014. This increased storage capacity should help extend the shelf life of grain, reduce leakage, and improve the country's capacity to respond to shocks.

Bangladesh has also strengthened its safety net. The budget allocation to social safety net programs has risen in recent years, with nearly 25 percent of households covered by some type of safety net program in 2010.¹ Public distribution of food grains rose from 1.3 million tons in 2007–2008 to 2.3 million tons in 2010–2011, largely to help consumers cope with the spike in the price of food grains. Distribution through open market sales and fair price cards proved effective in this regard. When prices fell in 2011–2012, public distribution was reduced. In addition, the 100-Day Employment Generation Program, which employs the extremely poor, accounts for an estimated 4.2 million person-months of employment during lean seasons and has helped eliminate seasonal food insecurity from northwestern Bangladesh. The government's efforts have not only helped reduce food inflation (below 3 percent in September

2012), but also facilitated an increase in the rice-wage equivalent. Overall, the incidence of poverty fell from 40 percent in 2005 to 31.5 percent in 2010–2011, and access to food improved. Nevertheless, the prevalence of malnutrition among children and women is still of paramount concern in Bangladesh.

In 2011, in view of the food security challenges, the government revised the Country Investment Plan, which consists of 12 high-priority programs for improving availability of, access to, and utilization of food. The plan involves investments totaling US\$7.8 billion of which US\$5.1 billion is awaiting funding, including first-priority investments worth US\$3.4 billion.

The country's recent actions have amply reflected its commitment to food security. It is important now to sustain growth and diversify production, drawing on technological innovations and agricultural research, especially to develop stress-tolerant crop varieties. There is a need to expand the knowledge base on agriculture and food security, and continued support from development partners will be crucial. Finally, Bangladesh must enhance its safety net programs and develop effective community-based nutrition programs.

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