



INTERNATIONAL FOOD POLICY
RESEARCH INSTITUTE
sustainable solutions for ending hunger and poverty
A member of the CGIAR Consortium

REDUCING POVERTY and HUNGER through Food Policy Research



Highlights of IFPRI's Research and
Partnerships in Bangladesh

Foreword

In the wake of the food crises of the early 1970s and the resulting World Food Conference of 1974, a group of innovators realized that food security depends not only on crop production but also on the policies that affect food systems, from farm to table. In 1975, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) was founded and has consistently worked to provide solid research and evidence-based policy options to partners in donor and recipient countries. As global food policy issues have changed over time—from food subsidies and commercialization of agriculture in the early years to social safety net programs, maternal and childhood nutrition interventions, and public/private partnerships in more recent years—so, too, has the focus of IFPRI’s policy research. What remains a constant, however, is the need to ensure that those research findings make their way to those who can put them to best use in sound policies and successful programs. This requires focusing on issues at the country level, conducting relevant and context-specific food policy research, strengthening local capacity, and communicating results.

Since its independence in 1971, Bangladesh has made enormous progress in food production, market development, employment growth, and social protection programs targeted to the poor. The nation has transformed itself from a country of chronic food shortages to a country of food self-sufficiency. It has successfully increased secondary school enrollment by using one of the earliest conditional cash transfer programs in existence. Since 1988, IFPRI has had a strong presence in the country, conducting food policy research, providing policy support, and strengthening stakeholders’ capacity. This on-the-ground presence has allowed IFPRI to generate evidence-based research results on critical on-going food security issues as well as on major unforeseen events—such as the 1998 floods that ravaged the country’s rice supply. Since 2010, IFPRI has scaled up its support to Bangladesh with the Policy Research and Strategy Support Program, which provides policy options and advisory services to the country’s policymakers. This brochure highlights some of IFPRI’s major projects in Bangladesh during the past few decades, and describes major new initiatives with the potential to positively influence food security policies that benefit the poorest.



Minister of Agriculture Matia Chowdhury cuts the ribbon at the grand opening of the Agricultural Policy Support Unit in Dhaka, accompanied by, from left to right, USAID/Bangladesh Mission Director Richard Greene, Minister of Food and Disaster Management Muhammad Abdur Razzaque, and IFPRI-PRSSP Chief of Party Akhter Ahmed.

Providing Food Policy Support

Policy Research and Strategy Support Program

MOTIVATION

The Bangladesh Policy Research and Strategy Support Program for Food Security and Agricultural Development, funded by USAID, is the largest project IFPRI has ever had in Bangladesh. Building on previous work in the country alongside government partners in the Ministry of Food and Disaster Management and the Ministry of Agriculture, IFPRI launched the program in October 2010. It fills the need for demand-driven food and agriculture research in response to Bangladesh's country investment plan for agriculture, food security, and nutrition. It aims to generate information on critical issues, strengthen analytical capacity within the country, and stimulate policy dialogue. Its main objectives are to provide policy options and advisory services,

collaborate with national institutions—including the Economic Research Group, BRAC, and the Bangladesh Rice Foundation—to evaluate and explain evidence, and find effective ways to deliver options and evidence to decisionmakers and stakeholders.

OUTCOMES

- ▶ IFPRI researchers worked with colleagues from the Ministry of Agriculture to launch in November 2012 the Agricultural Policy Support Unit. This Unit can better support policymakers by delivering real-time information—for example, on the likely size of the next rice crop—that is extremely useful to accurate decisionmaking.
- ▶ To streamline Bangladesh's current social safety net system and to provide evidence to support preparation of the national social protection strategy, IFPRI designed a one-year experimental pilot program that is being implemented by the World

Food Programme. The participants—4,000 ultra-poor women and their 18,000 family members—have received substantial benefits since May 2012. Researchers are evaluating which benefit type is most effective: (1) cash, (2) food, (3) a combination of cash and food, or (4) a combination of cash and food along with nutrition education.

- ▶ To assess its operational performance, IFPRI researchers carried out a process evaluation of Bangladesh's largest safety net program, Employment Generation Programme for the Poorest, which offers people provisions for work during the two lean periods each year. The results of the evaluation influenced the Bangladeshi government's decisions to renew the program for an additional term. The field-based performance study found that the program is successful throughout most of the country, with minimal levels of fund misappropriation and effectively reaching women and the poorest communities. The program generates employment for about 1.5 million people every year, and roughly one-third of them are women.



- ▶ The Bangladesh Integrated Household Survey, developed by IFPRI research staff in 2011, is the most comprehensive, nationally representative household survey conducted to date. The survey provides useful data in an integrated format that allows users to answer a variety of the research questions posed in the Policy Research and Support Strategy Program's studies. Moreover, a part of the survey has been designed to provide the baseline data for the USAID's Feed the Future zone of influence.

Closing the Food Gap

Improving Public Food Distribution

MOTIVATION

In 2002, IFPRI collaborated with seven Bangladeshi ministries, the World Food Programme, and other food-aid donors to evaluate the operational performance of four large safety net programs throughout the country. To gather the information needed to prevent food aid leakage, the study solicited and incorporated feedback from stakeholders through workshops, retreats, surveys, and policy dialogues.

OUTCOMES

- ▶ Policy recommendations included specifics on enforcing scheduled food aid arrivals and monitoring transit losses and national food-stock levels, among other issues. The recommendations saw a high degree of acceptance by the Bangladesh government and the food aid donor community.
- ▶ According to the World Food Programme Mission in Bangladesh's Country Program Summary for 2007–2010, "Substantial lessons for improving the Public Food Distribution System have been learned from a leakage study by the International Food Policy Research Institute, whose recommendations



are being implemented in partnership with the Government. A technical committee comprising seven ministries and WFP has been established to develop an action plan and monitor implementation of these recommendations.”

Establishing a Framework for Food Security

MOTIVATION

In 2001, IFPRI helped prepare a comprehensive report on national food security. This framework examined the “food gap”—that is, the difference between the country’s total food grain requirement (based on normative consumption rates for the entire population) and the total domestic production of food grains—food aid requirements, and the overall availability and accessibility of nutritious foods.

OUTCOMES

- The Food Planning and Monitoring Unit of the Ministry of Food alongside other government agencies developed the draft into its National Food Policy

Statement, which was approved by a bipartisan parliamentary committee in 2001.

Building Human Capital through Access to Food

Food for Education

MOTIVATION

In 1991 IFPRI conducted a comprehensive study of a targeted food subsidy program in Bangladesh known as *palli* (rural) rationing. The Institute found that subsidies equivalent to US\$60 million were being provided each year to run the program but about 70 percent of the subsidized food (mostly rice) was not actually making its way to the poor people who needed it. Subsequently the government abolished the *Palli* Rationing Program in May 1992, primarily due to these findings. IFPRI’s objective documentation of the food rations missing their intended targets provided a timely rationale for the program’s abolition.

But, without the food rationing program, the Public Food Distribution System was imbalanced, since it had distributed 20 percent of all public food grains. Moreover, the government was concerned about the food security of the 6.1 million households that were formerly entitled to food rations. To be able to more effectively target food subsidies to the poor, the Ministry of Finance asked IFPRI to conduct a systematic review of alternative options. The Working Group on Targeted Food Interventions, which was chaired by IFPRI, introduced the concept of the Food for Education program in August 1992, where, families were given food in exchange for their children's continued attendance in school. At that time, this was a new idea in international development, so there were no international precedents to draw on. The IFPRI-chaired working group's innovative concept of the program was endorsed by the World Bank as a promising program for implementation by the Government of Bangladesh.

OUTCOMES

- ▶ Based on the recommendation from IFPRI and its partners, the Bangladesh government introduced a pilot Food for Education program in July 1993. It made use of the savings accumulated from the termination of *Palli* Rationing in a more effectively targeted, food-based intervention.
- ▶ In a 1994 assessment of the program, IFPRI documented an increase in primary school enrollment (higher for girls than boys) and attendance and a decrease in dropout rates. The program had also been cost-effective in transferring income benefits to low-income households through food-grain entitlements.
- ▶ Due to effective targeting, the program operated with a low level of food leakage or misuse of food grains in the public food distribution system and the government decided to expand it nationwide.
- ▶ According to a 2004 impact assessment study, the Food for Education program increased school participation in Bangladesh by 30 percent. The experience of developing and implementing the program along with IFPRI's documentation of its effectiveness were influential in the Global Food for Education program established by the US Department of Agriculture and the US Agency for International Development.

Supporting Food Security after Natural Disasters

Responding to Floods

MOTIVATION

In 1998, Bangladesh was hit by "the flood of the century," a natural disaster that led to a shortfall in rice production and, subsequently, a dire food shortage. Policymakers sought ways to make food more readily available in the short term and to better manage public foodgrain stocks in the future. IFPRI conducted a study about the impacts of the flooding by evaluating both household coping mechanisms and recovery rates in addition to examining how effectively national food distribution programs targeted food aid to those in greatest need. Results showed that the poorest people in the country coped with the floods by acquiring loans from the private sector in addition to accepting food transfers from government programs and non-governmental organizations.

OUTCOMES

- ▶ The project's policy recommendations largely contributed to the Bangladeshi government developing a policy that maintained affordable rice prices by enabling the import of approximately two million metric tons of private sector rice. In addition to



stabilizing food markets, this policy contributed to the prevention of a famine.

- ▶ Responding to the government's need for timely, practical policy analysis in the midst of the floods, IFPRI staff members and collaborators from the Food Planning and Monitoring Unit of the Ministry of Food and Disaster Management produced 53 policy advisory memos from 1998 to 2001. The major

purpose of these memos was to offer ready input into current policy decisions that needed to be taken to respond to the impacts of the flooding.

Empowering Women through Food Security

Female Secondary School Assistance

MOTIVATION

In 2004, IFPRI researchers assessed the impacts of two national conditional cash transfer programs supported primarily by the World Bank on primary and secondary school students. The Female Secondary School Assistance Project was a universal program, meaning it was not targeted to those living in poverty but to a wider group of beneficiaries. It provided a monthly cash stipend and tuition waiver to any girl attending secondary school (grades 6–10) in rural Bangladesh in an effort to raise extremely low female enrollment. The project was extremely successful. In

"What I have done during my last 18 months in the Food Ministry is maintain a close liaison with the IFPRI team and tried to equip myself with professional advice and analysis. Then I have gone over to the policymaking bodies with my professional backing and tried to present these policy options, along with their implications. Whatever policy decisions you have seen in the past come out of those policymaking bodies."

—Mahbub Kabir, Former Secretary, Ministry of Food and Disaster Management, October 1999

Source: Dorosh, P., and Shahabuddin, Q. 1999. "Food Policy and Food Security in Bangladesh: Moving Forward after the 1998 Flood. Proceedings of the Second Annual Food Management and Research Support Project Workshop, Dhaka, October 18–19.

fact, girls significantly overtook boys in secondary school enrollment—a rare phenomenon in a developing country.

OUTCOMES

- Based on the program's evaluation, IFPRI recommended that FSSAP target the poor directly, using specific methods, and include boys from poor families as program beneficiaries in addition to girls. The Institute also recommended that transfer amounts be increased to cover education expenses and opportunity costs of attending school.
- By 2010, the Government of Bangladesh and the World Bank had redesigned the US\$130 million program (renamed the Secondary Education Access and Quality Enhance Project) to incorporate all of IFPRI's recommendations.

Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index

MOTIVATION

The Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index was developed in 2011 by IFPRI, the US Agency for International Development, and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative in order to measure the empowerment, agency, and inclusion of women in the agriculture sector. The Index, a significant innovation in its field, aims to increase understanding of the connections between women's empowerment, food security, and agricultural growth.

OUTCOMES

- Bangladesh is the first country to implement the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index on a nationwide scale. It has been incorporated into the





nationally representative survey carried out by IFPRI for USAID's Feed the Future program.

- ▶ In a 2012 IFPRI report about the index, recommendations were made to establish, among other things, policies and programs that address issues in the three domains that contribute most to women's disempowerment: (1) leadership in the community, (2) control over resources, and (3) control over income.
- ▶ The Index has received widespread support from developing and donor governments alike. US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton recognized it as an example of a tool created to integrate gender equality, and USAID Administrator Rajiv Shah explained that it can serve as a means to help women farmers in poor countries produce more crops and gain greater influence over the agricultural economies of their countries. At the 2012 UN Special Commission on the Status of Women, Bangladesh State Minister of Women's and Children's Affairs Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury described how the Index will be useful in defining the obstacles rural women face in their important work as farmers and caretakers.

Improving Nutrition in Bangladesh

Nutrition research at IFPRI focuses on programs and policies to improve the diet quality, nutritional status, and health of poor people in developing countries, especially women, infants, and young children who are most vulnerable to the effects of malnutrition. In Bangladesh, IFPRI's research involves scaling up direct nutrition interventions; enabling other sectors like health, agriculture, and social protection to help accelerate progress in nutrition; and creating a stable environment to sustain these gains.

Alive & Thrive

MOTIVATION

Malnutrition still affects millions of infants and young children globally, but can be prevented by increasing rates of exclusive breastfeeding and by ensuring the nutritious quality of a child's meals (that is, food other than breast milk or infant formula) between 6–24 months of age. Alive & Thrive is a Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation initiative implemented by IFPRI together with BRAC, Save the Children, the University of California-Davis, World Vision, and consulting firms FHI 360 and GMMB. The program aims to combat global child undernutrition through the promotion of appropriate infant and young child feeding practices, using Bangladesh, Ethiopia, and Vietnam as demonstration countries. It began in 2009 and currently extends through 2014. In Bangladesh, Alive & Thrive interventions make use of both community-based programs and mass media to encourage nutrition-related behavior changes.

ONGOING WORK

IFPRI is evaluating the impact and cost-effectiveness of Alive & Thrive interventions in all three of the pilot countries. In Bangladesh, the impact evaluation for the

community-based interventions uses a randomized cluster design in 20 rural *upazilas* (subdistricts) included in BRAC's Essential Health Care program, a basic and sustainable health volunteer platform that provides basic preventive health services throughout the country.

Marketing of Multiple Micronutrient Powders

MOTIVATION

Micronutrient malnutrition—or, “hidden hunger”—is a chronic lack of vitamins and minerals that can lead to severe physical and mental health problems, especially when it afflicts children who are still growing. Dietary supplements called multiple micronutrient powders can add valuable nutrients to food and potentially prevent iron-deficiency anemia in infants and young children. But, even though these powders have been on the market for some time in Bangladesh, they are still rarely used by the poor people who need them. A new program led by BRAC, has begun a widespread program across Bangladesh to increase access to, and uptake of, these products.

ONGOING WORK

BRAC is implementing a large-scale, community-based project covering almost the entire country (61 out of 64 districts) to promote a brand of powder called *Pushtikona* for use by children between 7 months and five years old. IFPRI is conducting research on the childhood health impacts of using BRAC's Essential Health Care program to sell *Pushtikona*, available in sachets and included with other products that health volunteers make available for sale at a low cost to households. The research investigates the feasibility and impact of using this distributional channel for the nutrition supplement.

Transform Nutrition

MOTIVATION

Undernutrition causes the deaths of millions of young children every year. For children who survive, it disrupts their schooling, and means they're likely to remain poor as adults. The human and economic costs are enormous. Transform Nutrition is a six-year research program (2011–2017) led by IFPRI, in partnership with the Institute of Development Studies, International Centre for Diarrheal Disease Research, Public Health Foundation of India, Save the Children, the University of Nairobi, and the UK Department for International Development, focuses on three focal countries (Bangladesh, Ethiopia, and Kenya). It aims to answer these questions:

- ▶ How can direct nutrition-specific interventions targeted to the window of opportunity be appropriately prioritized, implemented, scaled up, and sustained in different settings?
- ▶ How can social protection, agriculture, and women's empowerment interventions improve nutrition during the window of opportunity—that is, the critical 1,000 days from the beginning of a woman's pregnancy to her child's second birthday when proper nutrition can have a major impact on the child's development?
- ▶ How can an enabling environment be promoted, and existing and enhanced political and economic resources be used most effectively to improve nutrition?

ONGOING WORK

One of Transform Nutrition's studies in Bangladesh evaluates how each of five different safety-net alternatives affects poverty, livelihood, food security, and nutrition security in the northern and southern regions of the country. These include (1) unconditional food transfers, (2) unconditional cash transfers, (3) a combination of food and cash transfers, and (4) conditional

food transfers based on attendance at nutritional behavior-change communications training sessions. IFPRI is evaluating this work using a randomized controlled trial to compare the impact of the different methods on a series of outcomes, including nutrition. In addition to this ongoing work, IFPRI will be involved in Transform Nutrition's evaluation of research opportunities with the Bangladesh government's new initiative to mainstream nutrition into the health services.

Strengthening Partnerships, Results, and Innovations in Nutrition Globally

MOTIVATION

Ending undernutrition requires more than just producing sufficient nutritious foods; it demands, among other things, that those foods are uncontaminated, accessible to everyone, and actually purchased and consumed by those who need them. To combat undernutrition this way on a global scale, a new USAID-sponsored project called SPRING (Strengthening Partnerships, Results, and Innovations in Nutrition Globally) will work across sectors to incorporate health, agriculture, social protection, and economic growth into country-led nutrition strategies. In partnership with JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc., Helen Keller International, Save the Children, and the Manoff Group, SPRING provides technical support so that high-quality programs are enlarged or adapted to other areas within the country and, ultimately, country-led as well. IFPRI's role is to generate evidence-based learning, monitoring, and evaluation techniques in target countries, including Bangladesh.

ONGOING WORK

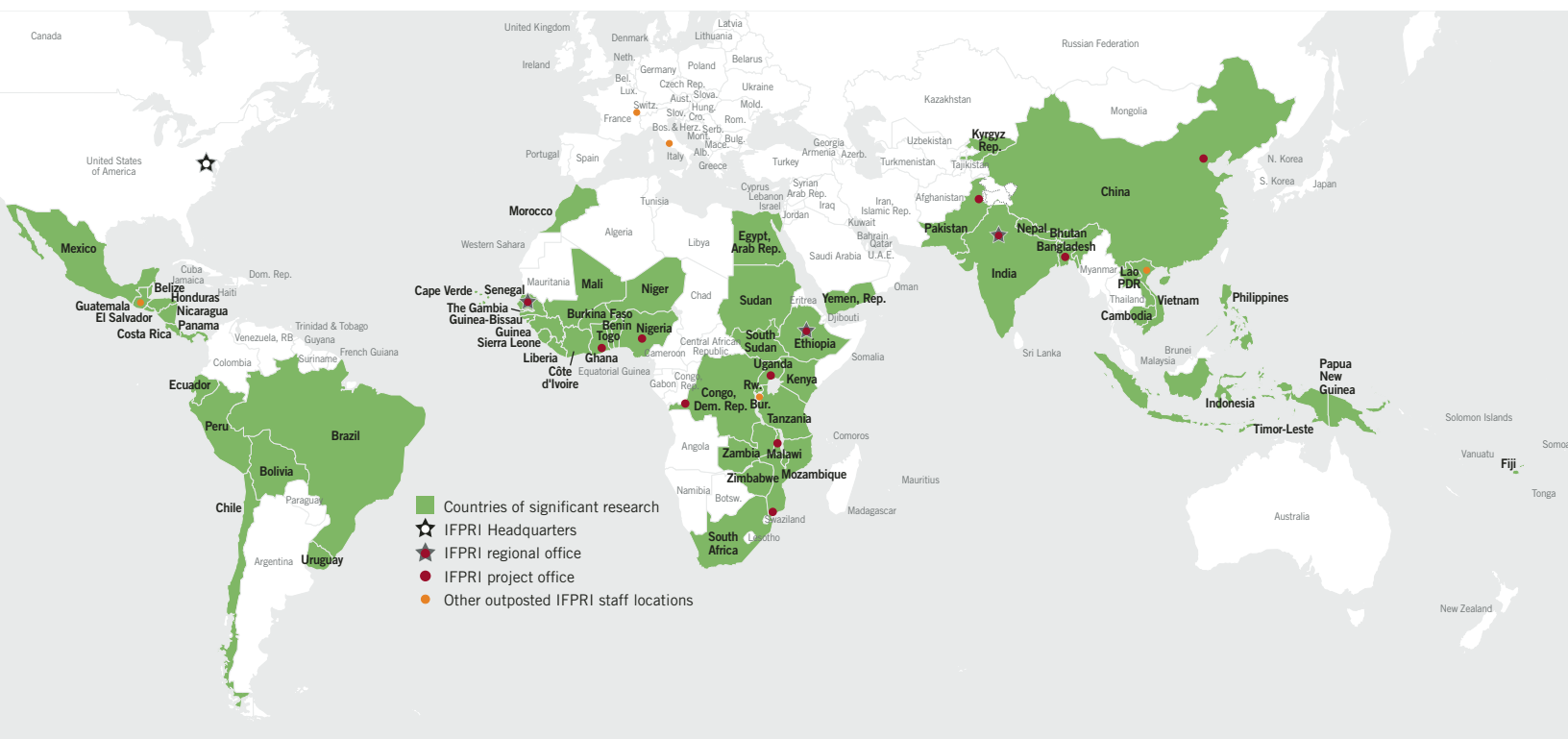
In two divisions or states in Bangladesh, SPRING is focused on improving the nutritional status of pregnant women and children under the age of two. It will promote improved hygiene practices, recognizing that increased access to water, sanitation, and hygiene aimed at diarrheal disease reduction are essential for

sustainable nutrition outcomes. IFPRI's research will focus on testing and evaluating a "quality improvement" model for multisectoral programming linking agriculture with essential nutrition and hygiene actions, strengthening and adapting monitoring systems to track output level indicators, and analyzing existing survey data to inform multisectoral programming strategies.

Capacity Strengthening

Evidence-based policies can make dramatic, life-saving changes for millions of people. But research and policy alone are not enough to implement lasting change. The capacity to actually turn policies into action is critical, and IFPRI has long focused on strengthening local institutions in Bangladesh. In the 1990s, IFPRI researchers and government representatives trained about 350 people in quantitative analysis of cereal markets and other aspects of food policy. Bangladesh-specific food policy courses focused on in-depth economic analysis have also been offered in the United States at universities and IFPRI's office in Washington, DC. Most recently, the chief of party at IFPRI's Policy Research and Strategy Support Program led two courses on impact evaluation methods at the government's Food Planning and Monitoring Unit and the Planning Commission. In 2011 and 2012, the Policy Research and Strategy Support Program trained nearly 500 enumerators and supervisors—roughly 50 percent of them women—to conduct six surveys. IFPRI staff members in Bangladesh have also given lectures as part of the Masters in Public Health program offered by the James P. Grant School of Public Health at BRAC University. In addition, a part of the USAID funds allocated to the Policy Research and Strategy Support Program has been used to establish and operate the Agricultural Policy Support Unit within the Ministry of Agriculture to provide technical and analytical capacity development support to government officials assigned to the unit.

IFPRI OFFICES AND COUNTRIES OF SIGNIFICANT RESEARCH



Looking Forward

For more than two decades IFPRI's research and policy analysis have been a resource for Bangladesh. Working closely with the Bangladesh Ministry of Food and Disaster Management and its Food Planning and Monitoring Unit, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, BRAC, CARE International, and civil society organizations,

IFPRI has supported Bangladesh in its quest to achieve food security for all citizens. Through its Policy Research and Strategy Support Program, and by building capacity while providing evidence-based research results, IFPRI looks forward to continued collaboration with these and other partners in the years to come.

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