

- Safety net programmes help fight hunger
- Insufficient coordination between programmes reduces their potential impact
- An integrated policy could increase overall effectiveness

Working together for better safety nets

Safety net programmes have proved to be a useful instrument to tackle hunger and malnutrition in Bangladesh. However, insufficient co-ordination between the manifold initiatives causes inefficiencies and limits coverage of poor households suffering from hunger. The Government should adopt a policy to streamline public safety net programmes and encourage Development Partners to align their interventions.

Casting many nets

About 55 million people in Bangladesh are undernourished. Safety net programmes, which include direct cash and/or food transfers to those in need, are thus of crucial importance in ensuring households' access to nutritious food, and allowing them to invest in improving their livelihoods.

The Government of Bangladesh, Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and official Development Partners are investing heavily in such programmes. Over the last three years, as much as one sixth of the Government's budget has been allocated to safety nets, involving a range of innovative approaches. While these efforts should be applauded, the coverage of programmes remains inadequate compared to needs. About 16 million poor and hungry people are currently excluded from safety nets.

Holes and tangles in the nets

Challenges associated with the targeting, administration, monitoring and transparency of safety nets are well known in Bangladesh. However, one of the most important – and frequently neglected – factors reducing their impact is insufficient coordination. According to Zohir et al., close to 70

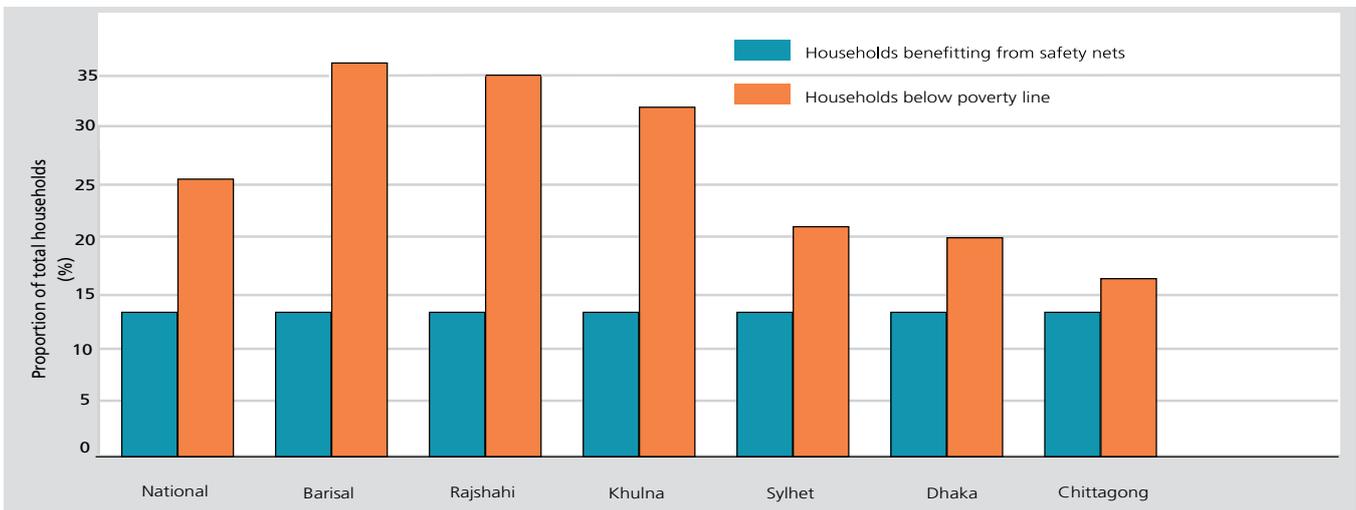
Name of agency	Infrastructure	Technical support	Credit	Relief/food	Training/ skills development	Social mobilisation	Health
Department of Women Affairs			✓		✓	✓	
Department of Social Services		✓	✓		✓	✓	
Ministry of Social Welfare			✓		✓	✓	✓
Directorate of Relief and Rehabilitation	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Department of Food				✓		✓	✓
Local Government Engineering Department	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
City Corporation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Department of Primary Education				✓	✓		✓
Department of Agricultural Extension			✓		✓		
Directorate General of Health Services					✓		✓
Department of Livestock Services			✓		✓		
Department of Fisheries				✓	✓	✓	
Department of Youth Development			✓		✓	✓	
Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation			✓		✓		
Bangladesh Rural Development Board	✓			✓	✓	✓	

Many agencies are implementing many different safety net programmes

Source: Adapted from Zohir et al. (2007), Chronic Poverty Research Centre

Government safety net programmes are currently scattered across more than 15 different Government agencies. In addition, a vast number of programmes – reaching into the thousands – is being operated by an extensive network of NGOs and development partners. Frequently, the design of one agency's safety net programme does not take into account the interventions and beneficiaries of another agency. This way, opportunities to exploit complementarities are often missed. An obvious example of this is microfinance, which can go much further in improving people's livelihoods when coupled with programmes that increase access to agricultural extension services and markets. These types of synergies will not materialize without better coordination.

Even within the Government, programmes are not streamlined. At least 13 agencies are involved in safety net operations to provide training and skills development for example. At the same time, each



Safety net programmes over target some areas and neglect others

Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (2005)

agency covers a wide range of interventions, which stretch from infrastructure, technical support, credit and social mobilisation (Figure 1). This scattering of programmes across and within agencies raises administrative costs and reduces the ability of each agency to specialise in the delivery of a specific type of service.

Failing to streamline interventions also leads to problems at the implementation stage. At the local level, where different programmes are often passed onto a single government office, staff is frequently stretched beyond their capacities. A policy that clearly defines the respective role of each agency could help exploit their comparative advantage and reduce the administrative burden on local-level government offices.

The need for an integrated policy

An integrated policy on safety nets could increase the overall effectiveness of programmes. Such a policy should set common objectives and identify target groups, the associated programming priorities and institutional responsibilities at national and sub-national levels. This policy should guide the planning of Government and non-government interventions in order to establish complementarities and identify areas for collaboration. It should be implemented and coordinated by a lead agency within the Government that has the necessary capacities and authority.

Examples of inter-agency collaboration are rare, but they already exist. The Income Generation for Vulnerable Group Development Programme (IGVGD)

shows how safety net programmes can build on the comparative advantage of different agencies. The local government carries out the targeting and distribution of benefits to beneficiaries through the existing local government committees that it established. This is complemented by an NGO (BRAC) which, through its strong field presence and knowledge of the local context, assists the Government in monitoring that this process follows fair principles.

Better collaboration requires better information on existing programmes and beneficiary groups and their characteristics. Government and Development Partners have taken steps to collect this information. This will be crucial for identifying duplications of efforts, gaps in programming, opportunities for collaboration and ways in which safety nets may be distributed more equitably across the country.

The level of investment in safety net programmes in Bangladesh is impressive. Building on this foundation, it is now important to further improve their effectiveness. Efforts to better coordinate existing programmes will help to cast the net further, and improve coverage of the urban poor ●

Key sources: ● Zohir, S. Harun, A., Farid, N. and Huq, I. (2007) Implementation of Policies for Reducing Chronic Poverty PRS Country Study ● BBS. (2005). Report of the Household Expenditure Survey ● BBS. (2007). Survey on Social Safety Nets Programmes (SSNP) in Bangladesh ● Jahangirnagar University, Transparency and accountability for ensuring food security in Bangladesh : a study on field institutions, available on www.nfpcsp.org