

Access to Food Transfers and Social Protection in Bangladesh

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Abstract: *This paper addresses the issue of targeting, participation, and accountability in governance for food transfer programs in Bangladesh. Acknowledging Sen, De Herdt the paper signifies the theoretical claim that 'appearing to the public without shame' might be one of the most important determinants of human agency on behavioral response toward a social policy which brings changes in livelihood challenges of the poor. The targeting and participation issue in social policies is crucial to achieve an efficient outcome. It is a general argument that if the supply of goods is inadequate, and the demand is very high then the service provision does not work properly and vice-versa. This study uncovered the claim that the MDG target-1 in Bangladesh is about to be achieved. By 2010, the headcount poverty has fallen to 31.5 percent compared 56.6 in 1991-1992, and will reach at the target of 29% well before 2015. The study finds the prevalence of remarkable errors in targeting, participation and accountability in governance regarding food aid provisions toward poor. After tracing the issues and prospects of public service provisions in Bangladesh, the study proposes six policy recommendations using experiential connections; inclusionary practices, maintaining citizen charter, institutional change, social capital and flow of information, system of M&E, and reducing factors that constrains human agency to participate in programs.*

Keywords: Food transfer, Social protection, Public policy

Introduction

This paper aims to shed light on the public service provisions on food transfers prevailing in Bangladesh to help the poor to restore their livelihood from acute food vulnerability. The country has lifted more than two-thirds of its poor population out of poverty and achieved the MDG-1 well before the deadline. About thirty-one Social Safety Net programs are designed for the most vulnerable segment of population in the country. Throughout these processes of public services, *targeting*, *participation*, and *system of accountability* are repeatedly mentioned as prominent issues by academic and policy researches. In this paper, it has been tried to critically address these issues. The paper also offers a few policy recommendations for further research and areas of actions. It is a common dictum that under-provision of essential public goods makes development slow and might

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cause inequality in a larger extent. In Bangladesh, by 2010, the headcount poverty decreased to 31.5% (GoB, 2012) with an average fall of 1% from 1992 for consecutive 15 years. The Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) program is divided into two provisions, Income Generation for Vulnerable Group Development (IGVGD) and Food Security and Vulnerable Group Development (FSVGD). Development thinkers and policy practitioners in Bangladesh claim that these programs might enhance the possibility to transform the potential excluded segment of the population toward productive human resources.

It is argued that the provision of food transfers within major social safety net programs taken up by the government(s) focusing on food vulnerable segment(s) of the country might contribute to the challenging fight against poverty. But the success of an intervention necessarily depends on proper targeting, recipient's appearing to the public without shame, and on the accountability in governance. Taking the theoretical underpinning from capability approach and actor oriented development theories, the present paper seeks to analyze critically where does the food aid come in and whether these aids are effective to restore livelihoods of the poor.

Research Question, Objectives and Methodology

This paper aims to address the question, where does the food aid come in and whether these aids are effective to meet the vulnerability of the poor in Bangladesh? To that end, it focuses on policy and institutional gaps that may paradoxically affect the effectiveness and efficiency of food transfer provisions. The study mainly covers the period from 1992-2010 when several social safety net programs were implemented to tackle poverty.

Specifically, based on several theoretical arguments, the paper examines relevant strategies and policies on food security provision in Bangladesh to identify the gaps in their contents and implementation. To set a background for discussion, the paper summarizes the perspectives on targeting, appearing to the public without shame, and accountability in governance along with empirical findings from current literature on the linkage among these three processes. Last, but not the least, the paper tries to seek implications and policy lessons from the analytical findings, with the hope that they are useful for Bangladesh and for other developing countries.

This paper takes advantage of an intensive single-case study to gain an insight into policy factors in the causal relationship between public service and poverty reduction. By a thorough process tracing, it also explores issues that have been underreported by existing studies such as the "hidden transcripts" of the poor and the allies in governance. The analysis is based on related strategy and policy documents, secondary data from studies on social safety nets and poverty reduction in Bangladesh and general literatures on this topic. Both quantitative and qualitative data from secondary sources are used to highlight a few policy recommendations.

Concepts and Definitions

Food Transfers: Food transfer is a public process to ensure supply of food for the poor in Bangladesh under social safety nets. After its inauguration in 1975, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) emphasized to identify and analyze alternative national and international strategies and policies for meeting food needs of the developing countries on a sustainable basis with particular emphasis on the poorer section of the population (Ahmed *et al.*, 2009). In Bangladesh, there are differences across programs in the types of food the households receive. For example, only rice is given through FFA and makes up about 60 percent of the food given through IGVGD. In contrast, the food provided by FSVGD is almost entirely micronutrient-fortified *atta* (wheat) covered by the food transfers provision (Ahmed *et al.*, 2009).

Social Protection: As a complement to its policies to promote growth, investment in human and physical capital, and most importantly for institutional and governance reforms, the Government aims to develop effective social protection policies and program to address poverty/vulnerability of its population. These policies and programs help the poor to cope with shocks and move toward livelihood restoration. These programs include safety nets, social insurance (e.g., pensions, unemployment) and labor market policies/programs (WB, 2006). Relying on different formal and informal institutions, the government of Bangladesh also implements few food transfer provisions for the social protection of the poor (Ahmed *et al.*, 2009).

Perspectives on Public Service

Institutionalism opines for the critical and important roles of the state, civil society and market toward public good provisioning in development intervention. Sen (2000) is a little critical on those 'who have tended to take the market mechanisms as to be the best solution of each and every economic problem might inquire what the limits of that mechanism may be' (Sen, 2000:127-128). The dimension of market mechanism over emphasizes the principle that everything, every commodity on which welfare depends is saleable and buyable. Taking the instances from environmental preservations, epidemiology and public health, Sen argues that everything does not hold those characteristics, for instance malaria free environment (Sen, 2000:128).

In response to Sen's 'instrumental argument' of 'appearing to the public without shame', De Herdt (2005) complements that the success or failure of poverty programs crucially depends on the behavioral response they generate from both the 'poor' and the 'non-poor'. De Herdt challenges this instrumental argument and proposes a more complex use of capability-oriented reasoning emphasizing the *plurality of concerns*, which is in fact also part and parcel of Sen's approach. He explains that the effectiveness of targeting sometimes depends, wholly or partly, on decisions by the potential and would-be clients of targeted programs (De Herdt 2005:29).

Participation in public good provisions tends toward the optimistic Giddenesque approach (Cleaver, 2007) to agency, emphasizing the instrument, empowering and transformatory effects of individual participation in collective action. Agency can be seen as the capability or the power to be the originators of acts purposively/intentionally, a commonly feature in definitions. Thus, the coexistence of factors of enablement and constraint is a tension addressed by several theorists exploring the ways in which individual agents are formed and explaining the intermittence and unpredictability of change effected through agency (Henriques, *et al.*, 1984 and Mac Nay, 2000 in Cleaver, 2007).

From the above theoretical arguments it might be asserted that both intrinsic and extrinsic factors create obstacles toward the enablement of human agency in a collective action. The important notion of *discursive* and *recursive* actions (Giddens, 1984) from individual and structural point of view is needed to ameliorate the efficiency of a development program, especially in the case of social insurance program like food transfer provision under social safety nets. The World Bank (WDR, 2004) proposes a general accountability framework which explains the process, prospects and issues of public service provisions. The following figures explain the features of accountability relationships along with short and long route accountability of public service provisions.

A tentative analysis of food service provisions might be explained using this general (sometimes ideal) accountability framework for poor. According to the Figure1 below the poor delegate their demand for food (appear to the public) to the service provider (Figure 2). As state is the service provider (as the source of direct entitlement), so the feature of financing from clients is not obligatory here. The performance of service provider (i.e. providing quantity, quality and types of food) toward the poor might determine whether they will inform others to participate or not in the service provision.

If satisfactory services are provided then the process of enforceability emerges and the social protection of these poor takes a sustainable form of existence, otherwise a kind of sanction might be applied. According to the Figure-2, clients or citizens might follow or can be obliged by two routes of

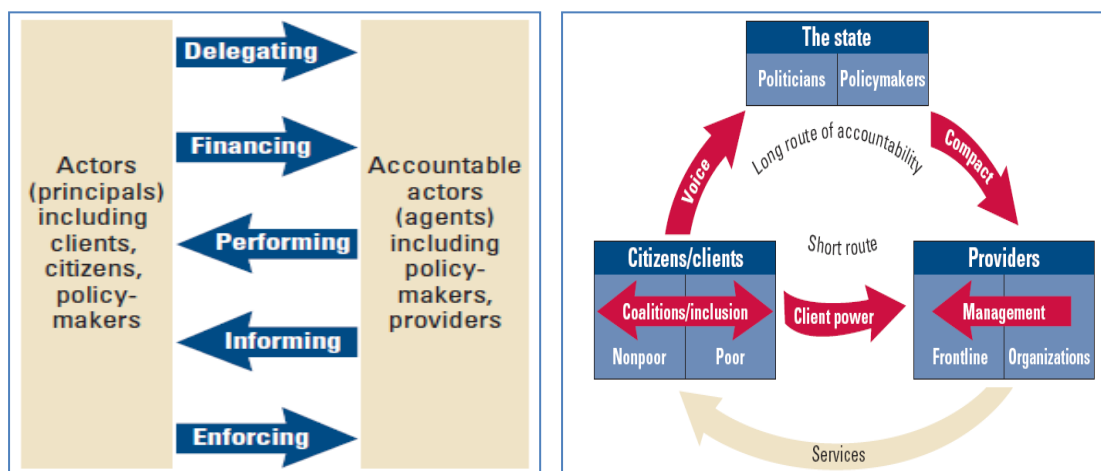


Figure1: Five Features of Accountability Relationship Figure 2: Accountability Framework

(Source: Adapted from WDR, 2004)

accountability. The short route accountability relationships exist directly between clients and local service providers whereas the long route accountability follows different channels firstly straight to the state (politicians and policy makers) and then to the local service providers. In the next section a brief analysis of issues and prospects of public service provision has been explained.

Issues in public services

Targeting: The issue of targeting in a social policy complicates it and results in a poor outcome. Based on information distortions, type-I and type-II errors occur in targeting (Sen, 1995). Considering the following diagram, we can explain this issue,

	TYPE II	TYPE I
Ex-ante: Hidden information	People under-Reporting income	Undetectable/ Hiding people
Ex-post: Hidden behaviour	People that don't re-marry again	people opting out themselves

Figure 3: Example of Targeting Problem

According to Sen (1995), if anti-poverty policy is to alleviate poverty more efficiently then it is reasonable to make sure that the subsidies reach the poor and only the poor. So viewing poor as agent rather than patient might contribute to a social program to become more efficient. Also it is arguable that social and political feasibility of public services are complex in developing countries, sometime better connected individuals gain from the policy where the *really needy* remain apart.

Governance: The issue of governance in public service provision in developing countries is one of the dominant obstacles, which hamper development interventions. In the case of Niger, de Sardan (2011) explains the issue of governance with a speculative analysis with practical norms. A persistent form of informal dealings prevails and different modes of governance open avenues to encourage informal provision for public services. Studying Malawi, Niger, Rwanda, and Uganda, Booth (2011) finds that incoherence, chaos and disengagement are serious issues in these countries. After experiencing coherent functioning among line ministries in Rwanda, Booth conceptualizes that local governance and public good provisions should be demonstrated through a coherent vision, corporate performance discipline, and it must be locally anchored. A type of political mediation sometime entrench complications in governance (Berenschot, 2011). Again, based on clientele sometime *informal formalization* generates encroachment for both the powerless and the powerful (Hackenbroch and Hossain, 2012).

Analytical Framework

Access to food transfers and the protection of the poor is a simultaneous process. If the adequate supply of food is available from the providers but if insufficient demand occurs from recipients, it

creates complication within the institutional arrangements to tackle poverty within the society. Securing proper supply of food is the responsibility of the state and entitlements set out by the rules of the game within the state is a continuum of public service provision. Therefore, intentional and unintentional targeting error causes issues in public service provisions, which require further scrutiny. For recipients, there might be some structural factors which constrains their agency to participate in the program (Johnson, 2012) and conversely there might be some more structural elements which enable those agency to create a room

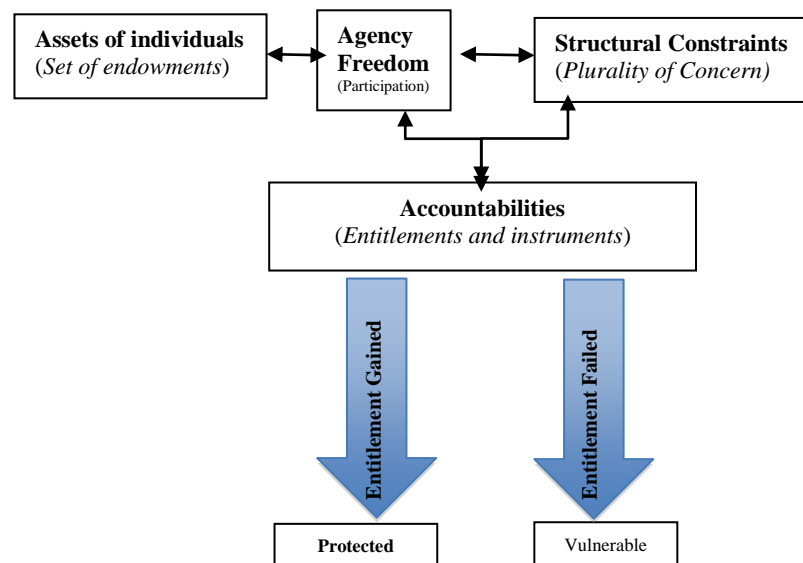


Figure 4: Moving out of Food Vulnerability

(Source: Author's compilation)

for maneuver (Clever, 2005). To answer the research question of the paper considering the above theoretical arguments, a framework (Figure4) has been adopted to analyze the social protection in Bangladesh in relation to vulnerability and access to food transfers.

The figure (Figure 4) explains that social protection systems is characterized and determined by entitlements within the rules of the game with limited public instruments focused on risk coping. If the level of risk (food vulnerability) decreases, a promotional measure might take place from basic to diversified instruments in order to move the poor out from the chronic vulnerability situation to one step further in the livelihood trajectory. A crude implication can be asserted that based on their set of endowments, individuals take their decisions to participate into a social program. Hence, their agency freedom might be either enabled or constrained by structural elements. For the second, they will not be able to engage their agencies in the program and will remain vulnerable. In every stage, reverse arrow indicates adversities. Based on this analytical framework, a critical analysis will be put forward to explain where do the food aid come in and how effective it is?

Access to food transfers and social protection in Bangladesh

Profile of extreme poverty and hunger in Bangladesh

After the experience of the famine in 1974 (Hossain, 1999), from 1975 onwards, the GoB and WFP jointly installed some social safety nets for the poorer segment of the population. In order to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, for Bangladesh, Millennium Development Goals set out the target to reduce the incidence of extreme poverty by 2.12% until 2015. Bangladesh claims that it has achieved the target and has reduced incidence of poverty by 2.46%. In 1991-1992, the headcount poverty was 56.6% in

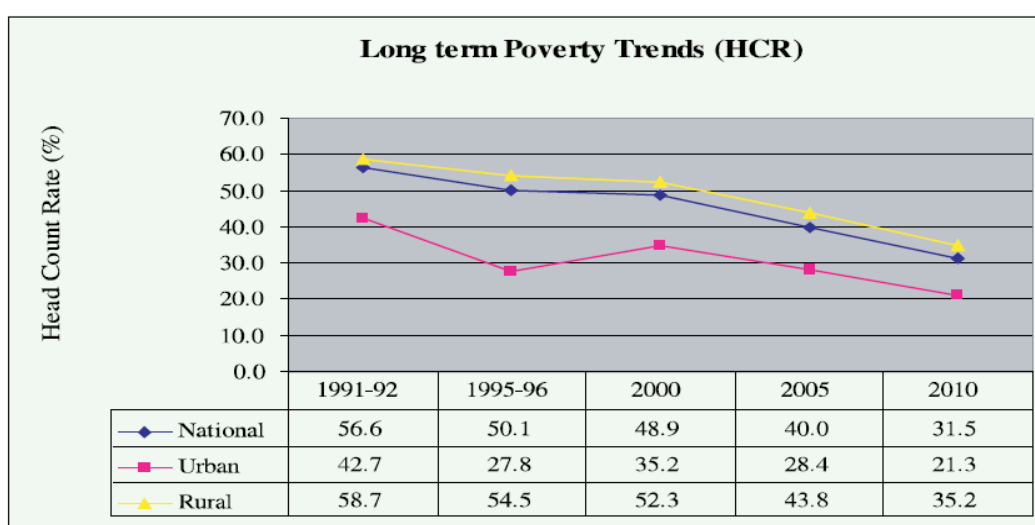


Figure 5: Long-term Poverty Trend (Headcount Rates)

(Source: adapted from MDG progress Report, GoB, 2011)

Bangladesh and in 2010 the number reduced to 31.5% (GoB, 2012), which echoes the above mentioned reduction rates. Adapting from MDG progress report (GoB, 2012), the contemporary trend on hunger and extreme poverty can be explained by the Figure 5. We find that a consistent reduction in headcount poverty take place since 1990 to 2010.

Food Transfer Provisions in Practice

In order to enhance food security and livelihood of the poor in Bangladesh, there are four major food aid programs for the poor (Ahmed, *et al.*, 2009);

- (1) Income Generating VGD (IGVGD, Income generation for vulnerable group development),
- (2) Food Security VGD (FSVGD, Food security for vulnerable group development),
- (3) Food for Asset Creation (FFA), and the
- (4) Rural Maintenance Program (RMP).

Based on four channels, individuals or households in poverty can access these food transfers in Bangladesh: *sympathy*-after a sudden shock, *social network* - within the patron-client relationships, *NGO influence*-for including into their (NGO's) program, and using *personal agency* – by constantly seeking ways of improving their livelihood and reducing their vulnerability (Ibid:658-659)

Analysis

Where does the food aid come in?

The basic food aid provision undertaken by the Government of Bangladesh is served under relief programs focusing on the poor women. In 2006, vulnerable group feeding (VGF) and gratuitous relief (GR) programs covered 830,840 beneficiaries with 3.72 million family members (Ahmed *et al.*, 2009). The IGVDG program exclusively targets poor women receiving two years monthly food ration. FSVGD is a built-in mechanism to provide credit to its participants and provides a combination of food and cash. The FFA distributes a combination of food and cash as wage payments to workers in labor-intensive public works programs. Although both men and women participate in FFA, the program requires that at least 70 percent of the participants be women. In contrast to FFA, RMP targets only women, who receive cash wages for maintaining rural roads (Ahmed *et al.*, 2009).

The VGD program in Bangladesh is designated as the world's largest development intervention of its kind that exclusively targets women. The program began in 1975 as a relief program for families affected by natural calamities. The current VGD program seeks to integrate food security and nutrition with development and income generation. It is a collaborative food security intervention jointly managed and implemented by Government of Bangladesh (GoB) and World Food Program (WFP). The VGD program is implemented through two components: IGVDG and FSVGD. Of the 750,100 women served by VGD, 85.4 percent and their family members received IGVDG support and 14.6 percent and their dependents received support under the FSVGD component in 2005–06. Of the total 460 *upazilas* (subdistricts) of Bangladesh in 61 districts, FSVGD operated in 57 *upazilas* in 7 districts in northern Bangladesh and IGVDG operated in 364 *upazilas* in 54 districts (Ahmed *et al.*, 2009:21).

While analyzing the key challenges and policy options for Bangladesh, World Bank (2006) finds that “..the number of people covered under the programs of safety nets represents only a fraction of those in need” (p-12). The World Bank also finds that, in Bangladesh, while programs that base their targets on household/geographical/community characteristics, it leads to exclusion errors (p-21). The survey result of the World Bank indicates that 27 percent of VGD beneficiaries are not poor and those who are poor, they are engaged in other programs at the same time. Another study conducted by

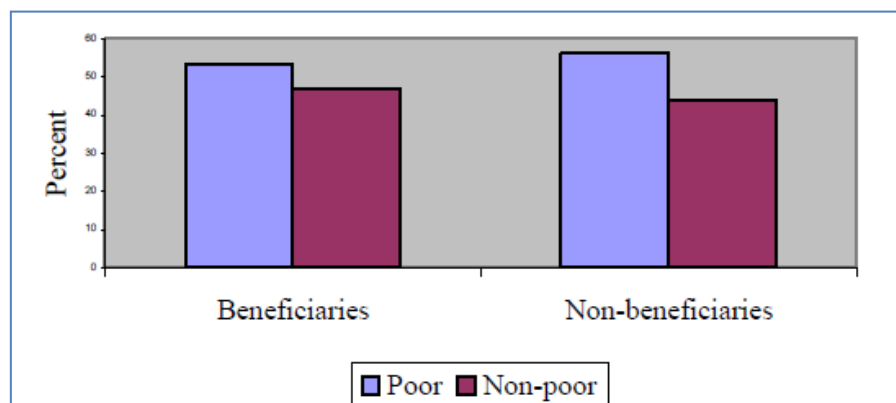


Figure 6: PESP Targeting Performance

(Adapted from World Bank, 2006)

Ahmed (2004b in WB 2006), concluded that “11% of participants of the PESP meet none of the eligibility criteria for program participation while almost none of the beneficiaries meet at least three criteria” (p 21). So, it is a clear prevalence of type I and type II error in targeting, and hence the participation in programs does not reveal that the food aid is being served to those who *really need* it. One more study on PESP divulges the targeting error in Bangladesh and finds that almost 47 percent of beneficiaries (figure-6) of the PESP are non-poor and incorrectly included in the program (Ahmed, 2004a in WB, 2006:21).

A similar type of problem exists with geographical targeting and another complication arises when elites capture the program. The report of the Asian Human Right Commission (AHRC, 2011) reveals these performance bottlenecks of food aid program. The Commission reported to the Government of Bangladesh about one of their findings on VGF program as follows. ‘In the district of Gaibandha, the program VGF failed to reach at the actual poor. In Mohonpur union under Palasbari upazila, out of 13 villages 1000 families were enlisted into the program from only seven villages and six villages were excluded from it. Local level political leaders picked up 600 VGF cards of families who are enlisted beneficiaries but never received any food subsidy. Some of them received only 3 Kilograms of rice instead of 15 Kilograms. After taking VGF cards, the public representatives and the VGF committee members who belong to the political party distribute the cards among themselves to enlist beneficiaries by their own choice (AHRC, 2011).’

This report uncovers the prevalence of hidden transcripts (Scott, 1990) of the ruling allies in a manner of neo-patrimonialism (Cammack, 2007) under cronyism. It also implies that those villages which are not supposed to be excluded from the program, they might have been excluded due to political rivalries. As there are no further evidences available in this report. It can be assumed that some drop outs or who wants to repeat or renew their cards might have been excluded from the program. The report necessarily proves the occurrence of the issue of type I and type II errors within the program. It could be said that, those poor who are lucky (beyond 234, who did not receive any food although they had cards) might have gained their entitlement and can protect their livelihood. The other 234 enlisted beneficiaries might be trapped and could fall into the vulnerabilities.

So it is evident that in Bangladesh, targeting based on sets of endowments of individuals and households are erroneous. The recipients of food aid are not meticulously checked and verified especially for those who really need it. And, even the really needy individuals or households might have been constrained to valorize their agencies to participate in the program due to obscure accountability practices. From the experience of Congo (De Herdt, 2005), it is found that some misuses in food relief programs are a general and ever practicing norm. Perhaps, gaining of entitlements from the rules of the games is rather difficult for the poor who really need it. After exploring the issue of food entitlements in Bangladesh, Sobhan (1991:79) infers that access to food is not only a function of food supply, but is influenced by a variety of factors that affect the capacity of

particular households and social groups to establish entitlements over food. It can be noted that, the food aid in Bangladesh does not properly reach the poor who are actually entitled to access it. In the next section, we find the factors which help people to move out of poverty/vulnerability while analyzing the effectiveness of food aid programs.

Are those food aid programs effective in Bangladesh?

Macroeconomic analysis of the relationship between expenditure on food aid and poverty reduction reveals a clear positive impact on poverty reduction (Pradhan, 2011). The following scatter diagram (Figure 7) shows an inverse relation between expenditure on social safety nets and poverty reduction based on upper and lower poverty lines. The result also mentioned that there is an inverse regression coefficient between these two variables. From this result it can be asserted that food aid provision for the poor in Bangladesh has substantial effect on poverty reduction.

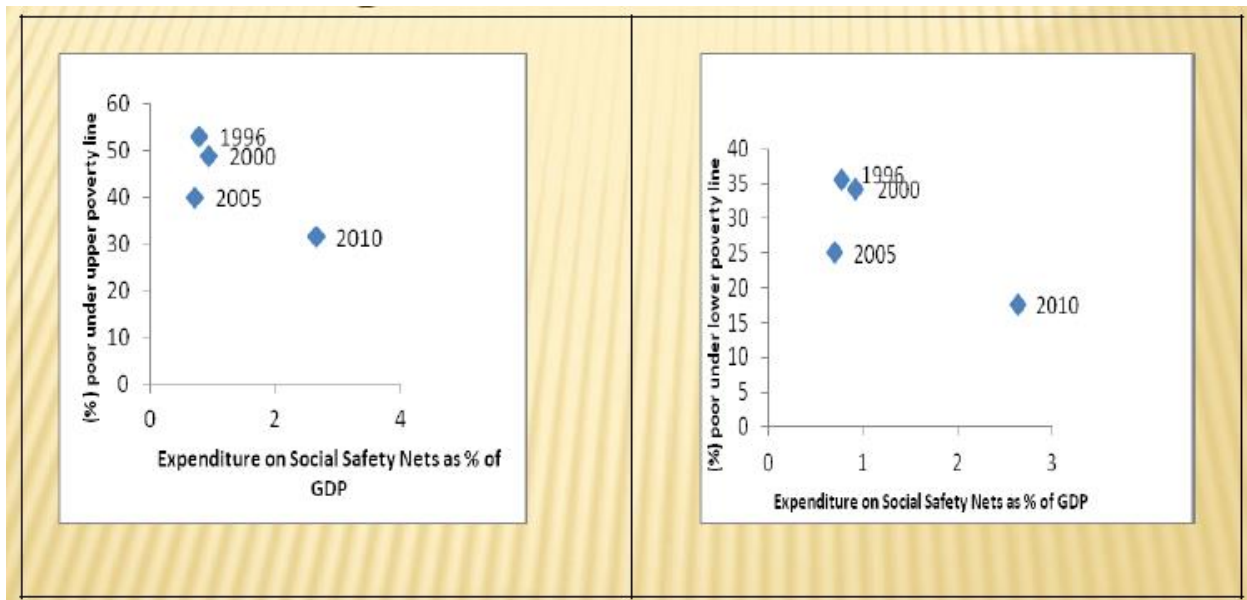


Figure 7: Scatter Diagram on the Relationship between Expenditure on SSNs and Poverty Reduction in Bangladesh

(Adapted from Pradhan, 2011)

While analyzing the dynamics of poverty in rural Bangladesh, Baulch (2009) identified (1) factors which enable individuals and households to escape poverty, (2) factors which prevent individuals and households from escaping chronic poverty, and (3) factors that lead individuals and households to fall into chronic poverty. For the first category, Baulch finds that:

Households that were able to escape poverty were not unaffected by shocks but had the resilience to cope with them due to a combination of land and non-land assets, multiple income sources, and links to important people in the local community. Specific interventions were cited rarely as the reason for households being able to escape poverty. Households that were able to escape chronic poverty were, however, often at stages in their life cycle when they were less likely to experience the negative events described below. Sons growing-up and entering the work force, even if only into unskilled, low-wage jobs, had an important impact on households' poverty status (Baulch, 2009:2).

This finding of Baulch reiterates the issues explained in the previous section. As the dynamics of poverty is very complex, so a simple linear relation between food aid and social protection might not adequately reflect the entire socio-economic and political processes which affect the relationships. Factors associated with second category includes the proportion of elderly people in the household, low level of education and lower ownership of land and non-land assets which prevent individuals and households from escaping chronic poverty. Other important factors Baulch identified which trigger individuals and households to fall into chronic poverty includes, dowry and wedding, illness expenses, livestock deaths, floods etc. which are temporary in nature. Baulch further explains that monetary intervention in three sites *i.e.* microfinance, agricultural technology and educational transfers affect poverty reduction which are summarized in the following table:

Table1: Changes in Poverty Status over Time

	Microfinance (1994-2006)	Agricultural technology (1996-2006)	Educational transfers (2000-2006)
Poverty headcount			
Poverty in baseline survey	60%	62%	71%
Poverty in 2006/2007	21%	13%	28%
Poverty transitions			
Chronic poor	16%	11%	25%
Falling into poverty	5%	2%	3%
Moving out of poverty	44%	51%	46%
Never poor	35%	36%	26%

Adapted from, Baulch: 2009

The table shows that, approximately half of the people moved out of poverty, around a fifth remained chronically poor. It is found that that between a quarter and a third were never poor, and a small percentage of the people fell into poverty. Bob Baulch (2009) also mentioned from the result of qualitative survey that, poverty transition among the poor is less which has been revealed in this quantitative result. The important aspect we find from Baulch's analysis and result is that food transfers or food aid provision for poor in Bangladesh might have some impact on their consumption level but is not the sole factor which enables them to move out of poverty or vulnerability.

Conclusion

It seems that a parallel coexistence of service provision and its performance bottlenecks are equally inclusive in the realm of food transfers in Bangladesh. From the review, it is evident that the possibility of both type I and type II errors in targeting and participation are prevalent in food related programs. Food services are not reaching the actually needy individuals and households. Factors contributing to

both agency constraints and agency enablement are simultaneously functional within the institutional arrangements. The claim of the Government of Bangladesh of the eradication of extreme poverty is rather consistent with experiential connection of the author but the causes of this eradication do not necessarily employ food transfers. Additional observations such as neo-patrimonial practices and the norms of corruption are the burning issues in governance for Bangladesh. Further researches are strongly recommended to diagnose these issues.

Implication

There is a never ending debate in development studies especially in policy research about the qualitative and quantitative approaches to scale up poverty reduction. Concerning food vulnerability in Bangladesh, first of all, it needs to consider the huge number of the people who live under the worldwide standard poverty line of \$1.25 or \$2 dollar per day. Social protection of poor for the government in Bangladesh is not only the sole responsibility but also a moral duty. A necessary provision of good quality service is required to enhance the agency freedom of individuals who are suffering from severe food vulnerability. In order to scale up poverty reduction regarding food vulnerability, it is important for macro policies to get deep insight into factors that, identified by qualitative inquiries, constraint the agency freedom of participants in food transfer programs.

Matin and Hulme (2003) argue that programs and policies to assist poor people and to overcome their deprivation are represented either implicitly or explicitly by the ideas about “who” is poor and “why” they are poor which necessitates knowledge base about the causes of poverty and how these can be tackled. In this connection, to understand the types of poor and their characteristics is very important for poverty and vulnerability analysis. Hulme and Shepherd (2005:404-405) explain that chronic poverty occurs when individuals experience significant capability deprivation for a certain period of time (Figure 8). Whatever measures are being taken to tackle the vulnerability, it might be asserted that chronic poor remain poor for much of their life course (Ibid: 405). This chronic poor are characteristically different from transient poor and non-poor.

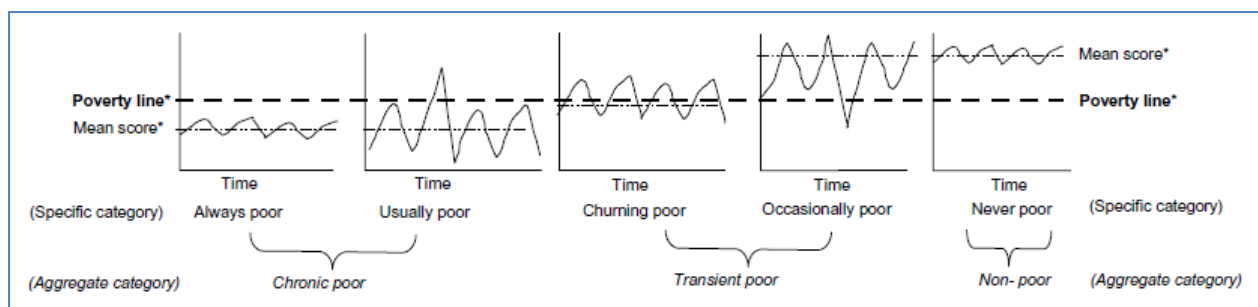


Figure 8: Types of Poor

(Adapted from Hulme and Shepherd, 2005)

However, Matin and Hulme (2003) assume that with the provision of food transfers for the poor, individuals or household may remain close to the poverty line (Figure 9) and further promotional measure might be a significant development to uphold the livelihood of the poor. But, findings from

Baulch (2009) do not support this claim rather the poor are circled around the poverty line. So it is important to uncover the knowledge base out of the socio-political dynamics of the society, how these poor can lift up their livelihood while constrained by numerous factors.

After a critical analysis of empirical evidences, the author believes that Bangladesh could do better and achieved better food security outcomes with a sound quality of services. It is worth mentioning that the case of Gaibhanda referred by the Asian Human Right Commission is a paramount reality in public service provision in Bangladesh. The basis of this belief lies within the prevailing political culture in Bangladesh. It can be assumed that allies/activists of political parties wait to find themselves engaged with local governance to take a share of the cake while services are provided.

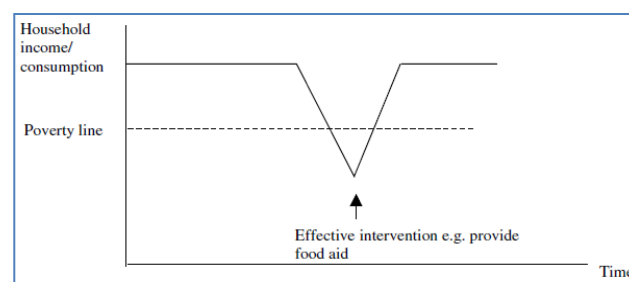


Figure 9: Protection Measure
(Adapted from Matin and Hulme, 2003)

There is no confusion regarding the substantial contribution of food transfer programs in Bangladesh which protects people from acute food vulnerability. Both macro and micro level studies support this claim. While targeting, participation and accountability in governance are the dominant factors for service delivery, the author believes that the critical role of social capital and civil society might contribute to enhance agency freedom of participants like Blair (2005:921) who also believes that *certain forms of civil society advocacy constitute such an alternative that can begin to secure the forms of representation that will lead to pro-poor policy outcome*. It is an inherent belief that the significant role of social capital might trigger the voices of the poor, which could be resulted into an escaping strategy for them to combat acute capability deprivations.

Policy Recommendations

The first and foremost recommendation is to study the issue of food security and moving out of food vulnerability in relation to agency constraint and agency enablement within the complex socio-political arrangements of Bangladesh. The author puts a further voice of qualitative approach for identifying these issues. In the individual, household or community level the regulative role of social institution is a big challenge for policy interventions and change in Bangladesh. The regional and geographical differences complicate the landscape of service 'delivery and receiving'. In order to establish a thorough process for efficient intervention in social protection for the poor in Bangladesh, the author recommends the following arenas and actions which are more viable and efficient –

- 1) **Full development of inclusionary practices:** In local political units, the systematic inclusion of potential and effective social organizations might be installed in order to secure the improved services for the poor. In Bangladesh, as corruption is one of the major challenges in governance, combined inclusionary practices by engaging members from the state, market and civil society can enhance the possibility of efficiency for any program toward the poor. In the case of accessing food transfers in Bangladesh, sometime the people are deprived by the lack of information albeit a huge change is observed in the use of mobile phones in rural areas. This inclusionary practice might reduce the transaction cost for the government and can play a vital role for service provision toward an efficient end. On top of that, the author assumes that the core issues of targeting, participation, and accountability in governance can attain a clearer version for future practices.
- 2) **To maintain the 'Citizen Charter':** A very positive aspect of governance provision in Bangladesh is to initiate the *citizen charter* act of 2007 (GoB, 2010). According to this act, every governance unit is supposed to display the service provision within the stipulated timeframe. As the poor are rather ignorant about their entitlement and sometimes suffer from lack of *imagined autonomy*, the above-mentioned inclusionary practices might lift up the quality of services toward them.
- 3) **Change in institution rather than organization:** Considering the constraints identified by Wood (2000), the governance in Bangladesh should put much effort to institutional change rather than decentralizing the organization keeping to the same rules of the game. Here, the author finds an experiential consistency with Wood that the present structures with their associated norms in Bangladesh fail to offer a substantial quality service for the poor. In this realm, strongly vibrant and vigilant civil societies might open avenues for effective institutional change by developing voice possibilities in order to secure the accountability in governance.
- 4) **Social capital and flow of information:** A dynamic form of social capital at local level might enhance the agency of the poor to exercise it for further change in their livelihoods. In-depth qualitative studies might even uncover the limitation of social capital of the poor. Some social programs consisting of flow of information for the development of consciousness at local level can be implemented. An easy and accessible flow of information might make people more dynamic toward their actions which in turn can also accelerate the capacity of local level social capital for the poor.
- 5) **A system of M&E:** A reliable and efficient system of monitoring and evaluation at *upazila* level could be one of the effective measures for securing quality service provision for the poor, especially, while taking protection measure for tackling food vulnerability. A dynamic

system of M&E can also reduce the errors in targeting, can make sure the participation of really needy and finally can unveil the issues of accountability in governance. An observed difficulty on timeliness of disbursement of food and cash transfers can also be reduced by the installation of M&E. Finally,

- 6) **Look at the factors which constrain the human agency of the poor:** The regulative role of the social institutions, weak physical states, lack of access to natural resources might constrain the human agency of the poor to participate in public policies. In this regard, a scientific scrutiny of obstacles, which constrain the poor to valorize their human agency.

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