

Strategic Review of **FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION IN BANGLADESH**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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INTRODUCTION

Food security and adequate nutrition are among the basic needs of every human being. Their fundamental importance has been underscored by the world community through the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)*, which enshrines the right to food and the right to adequate nutrition, as among the inalienable rights that every human person can claim.

It also makes economic sense to pay attention to food security and nutrition. No country can expect to build a thriving economy on the backs of hungry and undernourished people. According to a joint study of the Government of Bangladesh and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), undernutrition already costs Bangladesh more than US\$1 billion in lost productivity every year and even more in health costs. Thus, if Bangladesh aspires to be a developed country by 2041 (as the government has proclaimed), it must commit to investing heavily and effectively in food security and nutrition. This strategic review is intended to strengthen the efforts of the government in this regard. In so doing, the review takes a medium-term perspective consistent with the timeframe of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are meant to be achieved by the year 2030.

PROGRESS TO DATE

Bangladesh has come a long way from being a chronically food deficit country in the 1970s. In the last three decades, even as its population has more than doubled, food production has more than kept pace with population growth. There are still important shortfalls in the production of certain non-cereal crops as well as some non-crop foods relative to demand, but overall it is fair to say that Bangladesh has attained food self-sufficiency at the aggregate level—at least in terms of calorie availability. Thus, per capita calorie intake in 2010 was 2,318 kilocalories (kcal) per day, which was comfortably higher than the estimated minimum requirement of 2,122 kcal per day.

Alongside availability, people's access to food has also improved, including people in the poorer segments of the population. This is evident from rapid decline in poverty, which has fallen from 56.6 percent in 1991–92 to 31.5 percent in 2010. Data on other economic indicators, such as real wages, suggest that the purchasing power of the poorer segments of the population has continued to improve in more recent years.

The other dimension of food security—namely, food utilization—is closely related to nutritional outcomes, and there has been significant progress on that front as well. Until the mid-1990s, Bangladesh's stunting rates, along with those of the rest of South Asia, were significantly higher than those of Sub-Saharan Africa, where people were both poorer and less educated than in South Asia. UNICEF christened this anomaly as the "Asian Enigma." Since then, Bangladesh has achieved a great deal by way of improving the state of nutrition. A recent cross-country study has concluded that from 1997 to 2007 Bangladesh had achieved one of the fastest prolonged reductions in child undernutrition in recorded history. The rate of stunting (low height-for-age) among children under five, which reflects the state of chronic undernutrition, has decreased from 55 percent in 1996–97 to 36 percent in 2014. Maternal undernutrition, as measured by "low" body mass index (BMI) has also declined sharply from 52 percent to 17 percent during the same period.

A large number of factors have contributed to the observed improvement in nutritional status. Careful quantitative analyses have identified the following major factors: growth of income and wealth, education (especially maternal education), expansion of healthcare coverage, and improved sanitation. However, taken together these factors explain only about half of the observed improvement, which implies that there are other factors that remain to be clearly identified. Various sources of evidence suggest that women's empowerment is one of them.

REMAINING CONCERNS

Despite the impressive gains achieved over the last few decades, a number of concerns still remain. First of all, an alarmingly large number of people still remain food insecure and hungry. Using a composite index of several dimensions of food insecurity, a recent study found that one-quarter of the population was food insecure in 2014, which amounts to 40 million people in absolute number. Among them, some 11 million people were found to suffer from acute hunger. Even larger numbers remain vulnerable to food insecurity in the face of periodic shocks. Furthermore, progress has been uneven across population groups—poorer groups have gained more slowly than richer groups, and women still bear the brunt when there is not enough food for the family. A further concern arises from recent slowdown in agricultural growth: in the past five years, agriculture has only grown at half the rate of the preceding five years.

A final remaining concern with food security is that, among the general population, very little improvement has occurred in the quality and diversity of diet. Cereals still occupy a preeminent place in the diet; their contribution to total energy supply has fallen very slowly—from 79.6 percent in 1995–96 to 77 percent in 2009–11.

There are several concerns on the nutritional front as well. Stunting still afflicts more than one-third of children; acute malnutrition (or “wasting”) has remained worryingly stubborn over a long period; and serious inequalities exist in nutritional outcomes between the rich and the poor, with the degree of inequality seeming to increase over time. According to the *Global Hunger Index*, an internationally comparable composite indicator of nutritional status, Bangladesh’s situation was found to be in the “serious” category in 2014.

At the current rate of progress, Bangladesh will fail to meet several targets it has committed itself to. For example, stunting will need to decline by 5.3 percent per year if the government’s target for the year 2021 is to be achieved, but the rate at which it has actually declined in the recent past is only about 2.5 percent. According to the *2014 Global Nutrition Report*, Bangladesh is not on course for meeting any of the 2025 targets agreed upon at the World Health Assembly in 2012.

EMERGING CONCERNS

On top of the challenges that already remain, new concerns with food security and nutrition are emerging as a result of the socioeconomic and climatic evolution that the country is undergoing. In particular, increasing pace of urbanization and the ongoing process of climate change have some worrying implications for the future trend of food security and nutrition.

The preponderance of slums, where the poorest urban people live, makes for extreme polarization in urban life, with some of the poorest and some of the richest people in the country living side by side. According to the Bangladesh Urban Health Survey of 2013, as many as 50 percent of the children in urban slums were stunted, in comparison with 33 percent among the residents of non-slum urban areas.

Some new problems are emerging in the wake of urbanization, which although not unique to urban life, are especially relevant to it. These are (a) lack of food safety, (b) increasing obesity, especially among women, and (c) increasing difficulty of combining the pursuit of work outside the home with caregiving, which is essential for the nutritional well-being of children.

The ongoing pattern of climate change also has ominous consequences for food security and nutrition. It has been estimated that, as a result of climate change, crop production might be reduced by 30 percent by the end of the century. In addition, rising carbon dioxide emission is going to make Bangladesh’s staple food crops less nutritious. About half of the population already suffer from iron and zinc deficiencies, which cause serious

damage to health and nutrition, especially for small children and pregnant women. There is a genuine concern that rising carbon dioxide in the atmosphere will exacerbate the problem of micronutrient deficiencies further.

Increased salinity in the coastal zones might also alter the micronutrient content of foods, including rice, which may become deficient in zinc and other micronutrients. Furthermore, one can expect to witness increased prevalence of preeclampsia in pregnant women due to hypertension caused by intake of saline water, which, in turn, would aggravate the problem of low birthweight and malnutrition of babies in the coastal zones.

STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION CHALLENGES

The battle against the challenges with food security and nutrition will have to be fought on many fronts at the same time. In general, anything that promotes broad-based or inclusive growth, thereby raising the real incomes of the poor, will help because it will improve access to more and better food for those who need it the most. In this sense, there is considerable overlap between policies needed for inclusive growth and policies needed for ensuring food security and better nutrition. However, this strategic review abstains from launching into a full-fledged discussion of policies needed for inclusive growth, on the presumption that the broad contours of such a policy framework are by now relatively well understood. Instead, the review chooses to focus on some aspects of public policy that are especially relevant for food security and nutrition, in all their dimensions. These are discussed below under three broad groupings: agriculture, social protection, and nutrition-specific interventions.

Creating a More Diversified, Resilient, and Nutrition-Sensitive Agriculture

A flourishing agriculture can play an essential role in improving food security and nutrition through several pathways: (a) *the production pathway*: farming practices can improve the quantity, diversity and quality of foods; (b) *the income pathway*: since agriculture and related activities still provide a substantial part of rural income, a flourishing agriculture will improve the rural poor's access to food; (c) *the market pathway*: rapid growth in food production can help improve non-producers' access too by keeping the price of food affordable, and (d) *the public food distribution system (PFDS) pathway*: a strong public distribution system is needed for stabilizing foodgrain prices and bolstering the social safety net—both of which are essential for improving food security, and a flourishing agriculture sector is needed to feed the public distribution system without upsetting the normal functioning of the market.

Several features of the necessary agricultural strategy may be highlighted. First, agriculture must be encouraged to grow with a diversified production structure. By enabling the production of more high-value products, diversification will raise the incomes of smallholder farmers and thus improve the access dimension of their food security. At

the same time, diversification will also improve the nutrition dimension for the population in general by increasing the availability of products rich in micronutrients. The problem, however, is that farmers face a number of constraints in their efforts to diversify, which is where the policy interventions need to focus. These constraints include lack of access to credit, technology, and the market on one hand and price instability of high-value products (because of a thin market) on the other.

The government has already established policies and programmes for providing agricultural credit and extension services for the adoption of better technology and farming practices. It is well-known, however, that these programmes, as they are currently being implemented, primarily serve the “better off” farmers and leave the large majority of smallholder farmers inadequately covered. The same problem exists with respect to agricultural credit access. Serious attention will have to be paid towards remedying the existing bias against smallholders.

Vertically integrated value chains will also help, by reducing the risk of diversification. An example is contract farming, in which the farmer supplies agreed upon quantities to an agribusiness firm, usually at a price negotiated in advance. Agribusiness firms can also support farmers through a variety of services, such as input supply, extension advice, and transportation of produce. Some private sector initiatives in this regard are already evident; the public sector should complement them by ensuring an enabling policy environment.

The government should also encourage technological research on the development of a range of products rich in micronutrients. Bangladesh is in fact the first country in the world to develop a rice variety biologically fortified with zinc—a micronutrient that can help reduce child mortality and stunting rates by reducing the prevalence of diarrhoea and pneumonia. Similar efforts should be intensified

Another aspect of the agricultural strategy that needs special emphasis is women’s empowerment. Recent research has produced robust evidence that there are at least two ways in which women’s empowerment can help develop a nutrition-sensitive agriculture. First, when women are empowered, farming households are more likely to opt for greater diversity of production. Second, women’s empowerment, when combined with behavioural change communication (BCC) on nutrition also increases the likelihood that farmers who produce diversified products will also consume a diversified diet instead of selling the micronutrient-rich products for the sake of higher income.

Based on these research findings, the Ministry of Agriculture is currently implementing a pilot project called “Orienting Agriculture towards Improved Nutrition and Women’s Empowerment.” The project seeks to draw on the large agricultural extension network that already exists in the country, and attempts to “top-up” its current portfolio with nutrition activities and messages. There are, however, reasons to be sceptical of the strategy of relying exclusively on extension workers as the change agents. In rural Bangladesh,

the nongovernmental organization (NGO) community has a proven track record of acting successfully as behavioural change agent, especially with regard to women's empowerment. It seems wasteful not to make use of this readily available asset, especially for a task that it is eminently well-suited for.

A final element of agricultural strategy that needs emphasis is its ability to acquire resilience against the impacts of climate change. Resilience must be achieved through both choice of crops and use of appropriate farming practices. No less important, however, is the recognition that efforts must go beyond agriculture to embrace all aspects of rural life, by fostering community-based adaptation to climate change. The NGO community should once again be viewed as an ally of the government in this enterprise.

Social Protection

Social protection and safety net programmes are potentially an important vehicle for promoting food security and nutrition. Bangladesh possesses significant experience in providing assistance to the poor through social protection programmes. Currently, public spending on social protection amounts to around 2.2 percent of GDP, accounting for 12 percent of annual government budget. The proportion of households covered by the safety net programmes has increased from 13 percent in 2005 to 24 percent in 2010.

Despite increased coverage, however, social protection in Bangladesh still faces the following serious shortcomings: (a) its impact is diluted owing partly to very thin spreading of resources and partly to diversion of resources to non-poor households, (b) it fails in one of its most crucial functions, namely, to enable poor households to cope with shocks better, and (c) it bypasses the urban poor.

In recognition of these shortcomings, the Government of Bangladesh has set out the guiding principles for its future interventions for social protection in a new *National Social Security Strategy (NSSS)*. In implementing this strategy, priority will have to be given to those interventions most capable of reaching those in greatest need and have the greatest scope for being nutrition-sensitive. Some illustrations are provided below by discussing four major types of interventions: the Public Food Distribution System (PFDS), programmes for poor and vulnerable women, a safety net for small children, and the School Feeding Programme.

The Public Food Distribution System (PFDS) should continue to remain a core component of the social protection system. In the early 2000s, a presumption was growing in favour of watering down the PFDS, partly on the grounds of cost and partly on the assumption that a liberalized food market should be able to deal effectively with price instability. However, in the aftermath of the food price shocks of 2008 and 2011, it has been recognised that in an increasingly globalized and unstable food market, which is going to become even more unstable due to climatic shocks, the market mechanism may fail to smooth out severe fluctuations in price. PFDS can play a crucial role in complementing the market.

A new concern for PFDS has recently arisen from the proposal put forward by the new NSSS to shift away from food transfers to cash transfers on efficiency grounds. Such a move will jeopardise the economic viability of PFDS as it might be saddled with huge stocks that cannot be unloaded without serious repercussions on the market. Since Bangladesh will have to maintain the PFDS in the foreseeable future to deal with unstable food markets, the safety net system ought to maintain a sensible mix of food and cash transfers.

Furthermore, PFDS should be made more nutrition-sensitive, by strengthening the current efforts to offer micronutrient-fortified foods through both open-market operations and safety-net outlets. International evidence suggests that this is a relatively cheap and effective way to fight micronutrient deficiency and related morbidities.

Support for poor and vulnerable women should constitute another core component of the social protection system. The flagship programme in this sphere is the well-known Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) programme, which originated in the mid-1970s mainly as a relief programme for poor and vulnerable women but has since transformed itself into an instrument for empowering such women by improving their income-earning capacity. In the past, VGD was widely criticised for targeting failures and other inefficiencies. However, under the donor-funded *Strengthening Government Social Protection Systems for the Poor* (SGSP) programme, VGD is being revitalized and enhanced. As part of this process, a significant effort to bolster the government's implementation capacity was started. At the same time, targeting, efficiency, effectiveness and accountability of the programme are being improved. Currently, almost 750,000 women are being served by VGD.

The aim of the current version of the programme is to enable the VGD women, with the help of a cash grant for investment and training, to earn enough for themselves and their families so that they can move out of extreme poverty and food insecurity by the end of the two-year programme cycle. The programme is also being rendered more nutrition-sensitive by adding nutrition-focused approaches, such as BCC on nutrition and providing post-harvest fortified rice. As such, the new version of VGD has great potential to elicit sustained improvement in the food security of poor vulnerable women and their families while simultaneously making a contribution to their nutritional outcomes.

As regards the safety net for children, the programmes with the greatest coverage at present are Primary and Secondary Student Stipends. As of 2015, around 13 million children received stipends, covering around 24 percent of primary school children and 17 percent of secondary school children. However, the transfer level of the stipends is low and has been falling in real terms in recent years. The NSSS, therefore, proposes to make two significant changes to the stipend schemes: (1) extend the coverage to the poorer half of the student body in primary and secondary schools, with no distinction by gender; and (2) increase the amount of transfer while protecting its real value by indexing it to inflation.

In order to make the income transfers more nutrition-sensitive, however, it is necessary to target very young children—especially, those in the first two years of life, when the impact on lifelong nutritional outcomes is likely to be the strongest. Recognising this, the government has decided to prioritise support to young children up to the age of four years, through a large extension of current support by establishing a ground-breaking scheme known as the Child Benefit Programme.

For reasons not entirely clear, the programme has not yet been developed, let alone implemented. Meanwhile, the World Bank has offered to provide support for a programme called the Income Support Programme for the Poorest (ISPP), which contains some of the basic elements of the proposed Child Benefit Programme. There is a danger, however, that the priority of focusing on the first 1,000 days of an infant's life might be lost, or at least diluted, if the age cut-off line is set at four years (as in the original proposal for the Child Benefit Programme) or five years (as in the ISPP). This issue of priority should be given due consideration while planning the phasing of the programme.

For older children, the major intervention is the School Feeding (SF) programme, targeted to poor and vulnerable areas. In this programme, a packet of fortified biscuits (75 grams) is supplied to all students (up to the primary level) six days a week or 240 school days a year. The packet of biscuits meets 67 percent of a child's daily micronutrient requirements, and it is complemented by a range of other services designed to improve the health and nutrition awareness of both the children and their families.

It is sometimes contended that whatever good such a programme might do for children's education, it cannot be counted as a nutrition-sensitive intervention because when the children go to school they are already well past the 1,000-day window beyond which stunting can no longer be reversed. But this argument ignores the fact that stunting is not the only nutritional problem afflicting the children of Bangladesh. Some 2.2 million children under five suffer from acute malnutrition (wasting), and evidence from Bangladesh shows that school feeding can be highly effective in reducing the problem. Even with regard to stunting, international evidence shows that school feeding programmes can reverse it to some extent. One must also recognise the existence of an intergenerational mechanism through which SF might reduce stunting—namely that better educated parents are more likely to ensure better nutritional outcomes for their children. These are all very good reasons for substantially scaling up SF programmes.

Attention also needs to be paid to the modality of the SF programme. The government is considering the option of moving partially or wholly to the provision of cooked meals in the schools, based on locally sourced ingredients. In addition to being more wholesome than biscuits, cooked meal have the added advantage of opening up local value chains for diversified production of food (mainly vegetables, which are often produced by women), as demonstrated in two WFP pilot projects in Bangladesh.

Nutrition-Specific Interventions

Strategies for overcoming the burden of undernutrition must begin from the premise that the aetiology of undernutrition is complex and multidimensional. Households' access to resources is an important determinant of nutritional status, but there are many other forces at work as well. This is evident from the facts that (a) some of the lowest rates of stunting in Bangladesh prevail in regions with some of the highest rates of poverty while some of the highest rates of stunting are found in regions with the lowest rates of poverty, and (b) the problem of undernutrition is not confined to the poorest segments of the population. In fact, about one-fifth of the children under five in the richest wealth quintile were found to suffer from stunting in 2014. Therefore, if the burden of undernutrition is to be reduced faster than in the past, it is essential to look beyond economic and educational progress to first identify other drivers of nutritional status and then to act on them.

One aspect that deserves special attention in this context is the persistently high prevalence of low birthweight since it is well-established that low birthweight babies tend to be more susceptible to stunting in later life. For the past decade, the prevalence of low birthweight in Bangladesh has hovered around 36–37 percent, which is high by international standards. It is notable that neither education nor economic status makes a great deal of difference in this regard. Even among mothers with higher level of education (secondary completed), 32.8 percent of babies are born with low birthweight; among the wealthiest quintile, the proportion is 34.1 percent. The problem of low birthweight is thus both persistent and pervasive. Any strategy for achieving rapid improvement in nutritional status must, therefore, start by addressing this problem.

The main reason for low birthweight in Bangladesh is undernourishment of the foetus, which, in turn, is caused by undernourishment of the mother. It is important to realize, however, that what matters here is not just the nutrition and healthcare the mother receives during pregnancy. The entire biological history of the mother matters—starting from her own birthweight at the beginning of her life, how she was fed and taken care of as a child, her physical stature as an adult, at what stage in life she started childbearing, and the quality of antenatal care and nutrition she received during pregnancy. Actions are required on all these fronts if the prevalence of low birthweight is to be reduced.

A matter of particular concern is the persistently high rate of teenage pregnancy, which is an important cause of low birthweight. It is alarming to note that the proportion of 15–19-year-old young women already bearing children has fallen only marginally in the past two decades—from 33 percent in 1993–94 to 30.8 percent in 2014. A massive social campaign, along with more focussed family planning advice, is clearly needed to bring about a change in behaviour in this respect.

The problem of low birthweight is aggravated by a lack of access to diets of adequate nutritional quantity and quality. More than half the adolescent girls and women of

reproductive age eat diets that are inadequate in both macro- and micronutrients. Even among the richest quintile, nearly one-third of women have inadequate diets. This does not portend well for the nutritional outcomes of either mothers or their children.

Even the children who are born with normal weight often suffer from undernutrition owing to poor feeding practices when they are most vulnerable. According to the recommended infant and young child feeding (IYCF) practices, newborn infants should be exclusively breastfed for the first six months of life but soon thereafter they must be introduced gradually to complementary foods of adequate quantity and quality. These norms of feeding fail to be practised in Bangladesh on a massive scale. Close to half the children are still not exclusively breastfed in the first six months of their lives, 18 percent of children receive complementary foods too early, and nearly 40 percent too late. Even when complementary foods are introduced, they are not given in appropriate amounts or in the right manner, resulting in large-scale micronutrient deficiencies.

The problem is both economic and cultural. The economic problem can be mitigated by promoting agricultural diversification so that a variety of non-cereal foods can become readily available and by ensuring widespread availability of micronutrient-fortified complementary foods at affordable prices. The cultural problem needs to be addressed by adopting nutritional interventions that include a BCC component on nutrition and early childhood development.

The nutritional status of children and adults alike is also influenced massively by the quality of water, sanitation, and hygiene—a group of factors that has collectively come to be known as WASH. Among the three components of WASH, Bangladesh has made the most progress in sanitation, followed by access to safe drinking water (albeit spoiled, to some extent, by arsenic contamination), but remains far below the desired level in terms of personal hygiene. A recent study has found that only 27 percent of caregivers (of children) use appropriate handwashing behaviour; shockingly, even among the top wealth quintile, only 35 percent of caregivers were found to display appropriate handwashing behaviour. Clearly, a key intervention at household and community level is a massive campaign for the promotion of handwashing with soap.

Finally, serious attention must be paid to the problem of acute malnutrition (wasting) among children under five, which has shown very little improvement over the years. The Government of Bangladesh has an explicit policy of treating both moderate and severe acute malnutrition at the health centres and in the community, but evidently the efforts have not been effective enough to date. For those who are already in the category of severe acute malnutrition (SAM), and are thus at a very high risk of dying, appropriate therapeutic treatment would be needed, but currently access to such treatment is severely limited.

GOVERNANCE ISSUES FOR FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION

As food security has been a persistent concern in Bangladesh ever since its emergence as an independent nation, the governance structure for managing food security is relatively well advanced. By contrast, since nutrition began to emerge as a matter of public concern only in the 1990s, the related governance structure is much less advanced and is still evolving. Furthermore, since food security and nutrition are interlinked phenomena, their respective governance should also ideally occur through an integrated framework. But, the actual practice falls short of the ideal. A major problem relates to interministerial and interdepartmental coordination of a plethora of nutrition-related interventions. At the national level, at least eight line ministries of the Government of Bangladesh have mandates about nutrition, and it has remained a challenge to ensure collaboration between these ministries.

The reform of nutrition governance would have to focus on two ends of the governance spectrum. At the top, strong and effective coordination will be needed both in order to avoid unnecessary overlaps and to extract possible synergies between various types of interventions. The new National Nutrition Policy marks an important step in this direction by making the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) the lead coordinating agency among the ministries and by reviving the Bangladesh National Nutrition Council (BNNC) as the overarching supra-ministerial coordinating body.

At the bottom—that is, at the field level, where services are actually delivered—a couple of issues deserve emphasis. First, community clinics must remain the lynchpin of any future system of nutrition-service delivery, but their operation must be made more effective by enhancing the skill level of staff, who had previously dealt with health and family planning much more than nutrition. Second, as part of the process of strengthening the community clinics, serious attempt must be made to harness the expertise and specific skills of the many NGOs that are serving the rural people throughout the length and breadth of the country.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

The Government of Bangladesh is committed to freeing its people from the burden of food insecurity and malnutrition. There is no shortage of targets and commitments in this regard, nor any shortage of programmes and policies. However, if the goal is to be achieved in a not-too-distant future, the intentions must be made to count—principally, in terms of money and accountability.

According to the Country Investment Plan (CIP), total resources available for promoting food security and nutrition in the year 2014–15 was US\$8.8 billion, out of which 63 percent was funded by the Government of Bangladesh from its own resources; the remaining 37

percent was funded by development partners. Scaling up the kinds of interventions that have been advocated in this review—with respect to agriculture and social protection as well as nutrition-specific interventions—would require considerable additional investment of resources. Concrete estimates must await the findings of a costing exercise that is currently underway in connection with the implementation of the National Plan of Action for Nutrition (NPAN) for the new National Nutrition Policy. In general, preliminary estimates suggest that the necessary investments are not going to be cheap.

Increased budgetary allocations will have to be accompanied by the establishment of a transparent and effective accountability system. Bangladesh has taken a step in the right direction by joining the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement, which requires the participating countries to first maintain clear and transparent accounts of how they are striving to achieve the targets and then discuss them in multiple stakeholder fora to receive feedback and advice.

This process can be further strengthened by adopting a human-rights based approach. By explicitly recognising people's right to food and adequate nutrition, the government accepts that citizens can hold their government accountable and culpable in the event of avoidable failures. By so doing, the rights-based approach adds a much-needed punch to the accountability system, which it otherwise lacks. There is no better way for the Government of Bangladesh to confirm that it is serious in its commitment towards food security and nutrition than to explicitly adopt the principles of the rights-based approach while formulating its strategies for food security and nutrition with a view to achieving zero hunger by 2030.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The problem of food insecurity and malnutrition is inherently multidimensional. Actions, therefore, must also be taken on many fronts at the same time; as such, any plausible list of detailed recommendations will have to be inordinately long. Instead of going in that direction, this review makes its recommendations in the form of five central messages. Within each message, some detailed recommendations are made, but this is done mainly for illustrative purposes; no attempt is made to be comprehensive. It is expected that if the central messages are found compelling, the government will then be able to proceed to prepare a detailed plan of action. The five core messages are:

1. Promote a diversified, resilient, and nutrition-sensitive agriculture sector.
2. Recognise women as the key to achieving sustainable food security and nutrition.
3. Ensure through the social protection system that no one is left behind.
4. Create and disseminate relevant knowledge.
5. Adopt the human rights-based approach.

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