

## KEY POINTS

- The project provided support to the Government of Bangladesh to improve food security and to meet unforeseen high expenditures for safety net programs.
- Improved access to rice and other food grains for the poor and vulnerable was made through different safety net programs and the creation of additional employment.

## SOCIAL PROTECTION BRIEF

## Social Safety Net—Emergency Assistance for Food Security in Bangladesh

## BACKGROUND

In 2007, Bangladesh was adversely affected by severe flooding and a devastating cyclone which triggered a 1.2-million-ton shortfall in the country's rice production. This situation resulted in the exposure of 25 million people to acute food insecurity. Following the subsequent surge in food prices as a result of these natural disasters, a further 12 million people fell below the poverty line.

To rectify and improve upon the food security of the poor and vulnerable in Bangladesh, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) approved a loan project and technical assistance grant to provide short-term transitional support to help the Government of Bangladesh meet unexpected high expenditures for safety net programs.<sup>1</sup>

## THE PROJECT

The focus of the project was to improve the social protection of 5 million poor and vulnerable people. It helped provide access to food, income, and livelihood support. The project's goals were (i) greater open market sales of food grains, with wider coverage to ensure food security for targeted poor and vulnerable people; (ii) food entitlements to cover short-term food deficits; (iii) generating rural employment; and (iv) establishing a more effective and efficient food security monitoring system. The majority of social assistance delivered was through different safety net programs, such as vulnerable group development, vulnerable group feeding, test relief, gratuitous relief, and food for work.

## KEY RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Upon completion of the project in 2010, the project's achievements, corresponding to their respective outputs, included the following:<sup>2</sup>

- *The strengthening of open market sales of food grains.* The government successfully sold 194,454 metric tons of rice in the open market to poor and vulnerable people in 2009. This represented special drawing rights (SDR) of 104 million (\$162.4 million) of the ADB loan and was at the time, the equivalent to 1.2 million person-months of employment.
- *Enhancing access to food entitlements for the poor and vulnerable in order to survive short-term food deficits.* The government distributed 1,683,553 metric tons of food grains in 2009, which represented SDR104 million (\$162.4 million). This was equivalent to 5.13 million person-months of employment. This was implemented through social safety net programs like vulnerable group development, vulnerable group feeding, test relief, gratuitous relief, food for work, and hill tracts programs.

<sup>1</sup> ADB. 2008. *Report and Recommendation of the President to the Board of Directors for the Proposed Loan and Technical Assistance Grant to the People's Republic of Bangladesh for the Emergency Assistance for Food Security Project.* Manila.

- *Enhancing the purchasing power of the poor and vulnerable by creating employment for the affected groups in 2009.* This included (i) employment for 0.48 million people through public poverty reduction organizations, (ii) 65.8 million person-days of additional employment under the food for work scheme, and (iii) 50,000 additional jobs annually under the Rural Maintenance Program.
- *Establishing a more effective and efficient food security monitoring system to reduce leakage and hurdles in food security systems.* The project helped strengthen the government's institutional capacity for improving food security by enhancing the capacity of the Directorate General of Food and of the Ministry of Food and Disaster Management in utilizing web-based, food-stock management and distribution systems for improving efficiency and governance. Support was also provided to the Department of Agricultural Extension to improve crop production in the country. The project recommended the utilization of information technology-based solutions for the management of food security, which could be implemented and replicated nationwide in order to ensure good governance. Furthermore, the project stated that line ministries should take steps to enhance the efficiency of concerned agencies, establish necessary budgets, and source the qualified human resources necessary for the operation and maintenance of systems to improve effectiveness. The project also helped update the National Food Policy.

## IMPROVED SOCIAL PROTECTION FOR WOMEN

More than half of the beneficiaries of food safety net programs including the 100-day employment scheme were estimated to be women. Half of the food grains sold in the open market and 841,772 tons of rice went to female beneficiaries. The project's value to female beneficiaries constitutes (i) 0.60 million person-

months of food accessed by female beneficiaries through open market sales, (ii) 0.70 million person-months of food assistance through vulnerable group development, (iii) 1.25 million person-months of food assistance through vulnerable group feeding, (iv) 0.15 million person-months of food accessed through test relief, (v) 0.34 million person-months of food assistance through gratuitous relief, and (vi) 0.32 million person-months of food assistance accessed by women through the food for work program.

The social safety net programs, including food for work, helped widen employment opportunities for rural women. Employment opportunities offered by the food safety programs included the excavation of ponds and canals; the construction and maintenance of roads, embankments, bridges, and culverts; and the improvement of drainage systems in rural areas. It is noteworthy that rural women were employed on a greater scale under the food safety net employment activities than under the usual employment activities in rural areas such as paddy husking, sewing, and cattle rearing.

## CONCLUSIONS

The project successfully supported government efforts in improving accountability and in effective monitoring and governance toward ensuring food security for poor and vulnerable people. Social safety net programs under the project accounted for 15.4% of total food grains procured and distributed during 2009 under the country's safety net programs. The project further helped strengthen social protection for the poor and vulnerable in Bangladesh by increasing their allotment of food entitlements. Food entitlements were delivered through several safety net programs. This aided in improving the purchasing power of the poor and unemployed through the creation of employment opportunities within food for work and rural maintenance services. Overall, the project contributed to, and significantly supported, government efforts in providing food assistance to the poorest and most vulnerable during a serious food crisis following the successive and devastating floods in 2007.

<sup>2</sup> ADB. 2012. *Project Completion Report: Republic of Bangladesh for the Emergency Assistance for Food Security Project*. Manila.

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