

Moderate Livelihood and Food Security of Rural People: In Light of Some Food Security Programs in Bangladesh

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Abstract This qualitative paper focuses on the objective of effectiveness, setbacks and gap of several food security programs in Bangladesh mainly on Care's Shouhardo II program and several Government programs. The paper used qualitative data of Midterm survey of Shouhardo II program specified on specific objective 1 which was on food security. FGDs were conducted among 124 participants of four livelihood categories of Shouhardo II program and the findings are programs has improved the food insecurity condition in a extent by providing a moderate livelihood to the beneficiaries by supporting from various level and government programs just work in emergency and periodic to save people from crisis.

Keywords: food security, Shouhardo II program, government program, midterm survey, agriculture, fishery, comprehensive home stead development, income generating activities, VGF, cash for work, rural area

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1. Introduction

Bangladesh, one of the most densely populated countries in the world, has been suffering from food deficiency for a long time. Among all South Asian nations, Bangladesh faces the most severe food crisis due to current food security challenges such as cyclone, flood, salinity intrusion, high food prices, and middlemen intervention in the market system, illegal trading of Bangladeshi food products across the Indian border, lack of food supply etc. These factors are severely affecting Bangladesh's agriculture and its attempt to attain food security and self-sufficiency. Since the world food crisis of 2008, the agricultural production growth of Bangladesh declined 4.7 percent. At present, the gradual rising of food prices is creating a great challenge to the food security of Bangladesh. Different environmental and social challenges are regarded as most severe threats to the food security of Bangladesh. Like the climate change - the changing monsoon, rising sea level, and increasing temperature cause damage to food production, also poses serious threats to the livelihoods of the Bangladeshi people. And boldly the impact of food insecurity is malnutrition and poor health condition, debt crisis, lack of economic growth in current Bangladesh. [5]

In Bangladesh, about twenty to thirty four percent people are 'hardcore'/'ultra poor' and they face severe food insecurity every year. Different studies show that approximately thirty three million of the 140 million people of Bangladesh cannot afford an average daily intake of more than 1800 kilocalories, the minimum set by the World Food Programme. For an average Bangladeshi, the average daily intake is 2190 kilocalories while the

average for the other developing economies is 2828 kilocalories. This section of people cannot take adequate food everyday for their active and healthy lives. Taken into consideration the acute food crisis and chronic malnutrition that prevail in the country, Government of Bangladesh formulated a food policy in 1988 aimed at achieving food security for all. The focus of that policy was only to ensure the availability of food grain. Later, it has been modified and eventually the National Food Policy 2006 was formulated in the light of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) of the country. This new Food Policy emphasizes to "enhance" the coverage of the Social Safety Net (SSN) Programs targeting the "hard core poor" and "disadvantaged" groups and putting them into effect in an efficient way. In recent times, the issue of food insecurity has become a burning problem in Bangladesh for increased price of rice and other essential foods necessary for survival. In spite of making considerable socio-economic progress over the years, Bangladesh still has the third largest number of poor after China and India, a segment of which is chronically malnourished, suffering from silent disaster. [7]

To reduce the food insecurity there are various food security programs functioning in rural areas of Bangladesh whether run by government or non-government organization or in partnership of government and non-government organizations. Such programs first initiated in 1975 for the crisis of post war food scarcity. But the question is - do these programs pleasing to reduce food insecurity or there are constraints to achieve the goal or need to add more components? Objectives of this paper are: 1. to understand the effectiveness of such programs 2. to find out the setback or gap.

Though a large portion of Bangladeshi population lives in extreme poverty (between 20 and 34 percent), that is an

issue requiring immediate and special attention whether Bangladesh to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Yet this group of extremely poor people faces a complex structure of constraints that mainstream development approaches have found difficult to address. While microfinance has provided an important opportunity for moderately poor households to overcome poverty and reduce vulnerability, these approaches largely bypass the extremely poor. Other market-related opportunities may also miss this group, because the extremely poor lack the human or social capital needed to participate and benefit from them. Because they live in areas, or belong to ethnic groups that are bypassed or excluded, their lack of voice and representation in policy-making structures is exacerbated. By all the standard measurements of poverty in Bangladesh - landownership, food security, health, and nutritional and educational status - the ultra-poor are substantially worse off than the national average in rural areas. [2] Following the above constraints the objectives of Shouhardo II (Strengthening Households Ability to Respond to Development Opportunities) is effective to take back the poor and extreme poor in main stream of society or to have a moderate livelihood. Base on Care Shouhardo II program and government's food security programs which helping the marginal people (e.g. vulnerable group feeding programme (VGF), vulnerable group development programme (VGD), cash for work (CFW), widow and elderly allowance, this paper like to flash on whether these are effective to reduce food insecurity in rural Bangladesh or there are constraints or other issues. SHOUHARDO II Program remained one of the largest non-emergency food security programs in the world funded by the USAID Office for 2010-2015. The Program operates in four major regions of Bangladesh – the North Char, the Mid Char, the Haor area, and the Coastal belt of Cox's Bazaar. The overall goal of the program was to: *"Transform the lives of 370,000 Poor and Extreme Poor (PEP) households (HH) in eleven of the poorest and marginalized districts in Bangladesh by reducing their vulnerability to food insecurity"*.

The paper is divided into five sections. Section I is introduction and methodology, the next section (Section II) opens with a discussion of literature on food security and trend in Bangladesh. In Section III, there is findings and insights from a brief fieldwork. The IV section concludes with a summary of the main arguments.

1.1. Methodology

In this paper the qualitative data (FGDs) of Mid Term Survey of Shouhardo II Program is used. The survey was conducted on December 2012. The data which collected on Specific Objective (SO) 1 been used; SO1: *"Availability of" and "access to" nutritious foods enhanced and protected for 370,000 PEP households*.

In SHOUHARDO II program village dwellers divided into poor and extreme poor group. Then these people are fixed into four livelihood groups according to their potential. Those who have some lands or share cropper are in the agricultural group, who have no land except the homestead are in the integrated homestead group. Those who don't have any open space around their homestead but have pond are in the fishery group. And those who were involved in small business earlier but poor are in the Income Generating Activities (IGA) group members.

There were eight focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted among 124 participants from the above four categories and each FGD session had ten to twenty three beneficiary participants. The districts were Mymensing, Kurigram, Sirajgonj, & Cox's Bazar and the Upazillas covered Swaregong, Vurungamari, Kazipur, Ullapara, and Ukiha of the respective districts. All FGDs were conducted in separate village

Firstly, on the elaborated field notes, content analysis was done means the focus group discussions (FGDs) were divide in major four major themes like -

1. Main livelihood challenges
2. Livelihood support received from SHOUHARDO II including training, support provided by Community Agriculture Volunteers & village development committee,
3. Changes in production and income resulting from SHOUHARDO II participation including support for savings groups and Food security during lean season/following a natural disaster
4. Livelihood support provided by local government

Then the responses are categorized in ascending order like which issue appear most, keep it on top and hold it most significant and then the 2nd most and so on. Then prepare several tables following the above major themes. The analysis is done manually, no software been used.

1.2. Limitations

This paper has some limitations like it works on only a small portion of data on specific objective 1: Availability of" and "access to" nutritious foods enhanced and protected for 370,000 PEP households, there were other FGDs on arena of lactating and pregnant mother, Ekata group for women's empowerment, EVAW members who get knowledge on violence against women if we consider these data in our paper then could be said how livelihoods is interrelated with other aspects of human life and how it put impact of these sector also.

2. Background and Rationale

In 2010-11 total allocation was Taka 20893.52 Crores on safety net programmes in Bangladesh which is approximately 2.6% of GDP and here the highest allocation - 44.3% - was for Food Security and Disaster Assistance programmes and in FY 2014-15 it is 2.3% of GDP and Food security programme alone constitute almost 28.09 percent of the total safety net spending in the proposed budget. Though the allocation for the SSNPs is increasing in every budget, but yet it is very small comparing to poor population of the country. However, such programs are mostly rural-based, although the country is getting urbanized day by day with an increasing proportion of the urban poor living in informal settlements. There are ten major social safety net (SSN) programmes are - VGD, Old Age Allowance, Widow Allowance, Secondary Stipend, EGPP, CLP, TUP, REOPA, SHOUHARDO, VGDUP and accounting for 80.5% of total SSNP allocations for 2010-11. Among these six major programmes are primarily NGO/DP programmes, include REOPA, SHOUHARDO, SHIREE, TUP, VGDUP, & CLP. Despite the burgeoning focus on social safety nets (SSN) on the part of both government and non-

government actors, independent and comprehensive assessments on results have been relatively limited. [6,7]. However, food security programmes initiated since a long time by the World Food Programme in 1975 named as the Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) Programme, in the wake of the 1974 famine in Bangladesh. World Food Programme Carries out a mapping exercise that categorizes upazillas with respect to food insecurity, targeting instrument to allocate the VGF cards at the upazillas level. Primarily aimed at feeding those people who were at highest risk of hunger, the poorest and especially women-headed households. The VGF program provided 31.25 kg of wheat per month to a certain number of these households in highly food insecure areas for a specified period. After further coups and a change in government from 1982, the VGF programme began a reorientation from relief to a focus on development, to be called the Vulnerable Group Development programme (VGD). Influences behind this reorientation donors were discouraged by the slow pace of progress on poverty and pushing for a stronger poverty focus and more development orientation in food security policies. [1,3]

Following the changing policy and MDGs, GoB, different INGO and NGOS such as Brac, Care, WFP, Action Aid, Save the Children, Concern Worldwide, Solidarites International etc. and many national NGOs in Bangladesh are working on food security which are focused on sustainable development like give emphasis on fair livelihood pattern by providing training, assistance for input and instruments, financial assistance, make link with market and make access to local government. Most of these focus mainly on process issues i.e. coverage, the benefit package, targeting and the profile of beneficiaries, rather than on outcomes. [6,7,8]

Also from our empirical study from different non government organizations are put emphasis on couple of issues, not all the issues jointly. But SHOUHARDO II has covered various issues to reduce food insecurity like their selection of target group is overall free from inclusion and exclusion error, taken an initiative for maximizing the agricultural production of poor and extreme poor (PEP) households through promoting new technologies and flood/drought tolerant crop varieties to reduce the risk of cultivation from the flood and the cold prone community and water saving technology for Boro rice cultivation. Besides improved health, hygiene and nutrition status of 281,000 children under two years. PEP women and adolescent girls empowered in their families, communities

and Union Parishad. Local elected bodies and government service providers' responsiveness and accountability to the PEP increased. The Program has an ambitious effort to integrate more traditional food security interventions with those aimed specifically at enhancing the social and economic empowerment of vulnerable populations in eleven of the poorest and most marginalized districts.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1. Obstacles and Initiative to Overcome

In First Table I place the livelihood challenges of the study people in ascending order. The challenges which appear for the most time for agriculture, fisheries, comprehensive homestead development and for income generating activities is fixed in number 1. It is assumed that which challenges are emerged frequently are most acute and significant than the other challenges which are come out in least. This frame is similar for Table 3 and Table 4 also. But Table 2 is exception as it is about the livelihood support received from ShouharDO II and here for the specific livelihood groups supports are alike, e.g. for agriculture or fishery or income generating activities (IGA) it seems analogous. So, I just list the support of ShouharDO II for the specific livelihood categories.

Let's notice the Table 1, Scarcity of instruments & input comes in highest number in agriculture (17) and Comprehensive homestead development group (10), in fisheries group fingerlings is not perfect size/lack of high yield comes as highest, but in fishery group scarcity of input and instrument comes in 3rd. Lastly in Income generating activities (IGA) group short of capital and women are not allow to go outside for pardah (4) appear as first challenges and I keep the frequency of the answers on the right corner of relevant tables in italic font. One respondent insisted on after the FGD session, "Please sir cut off my name from the CHD (Comprehensive homestead development) group because my husband doesn't allow me to attend the meeting and go outside." Along with other challenges like economic, environmental, communicable, lack of skill & knowledge & access; this social stigma and patriarchal view restricts women's mobility which seems extreme as a threat on livelihood of rural people, and these increase the risk of food insecurity. (See Table 1 for larger view).

Table 1. Summary on challenges in livelihood in study areas

	Agriculture	Fisheries	Comprehensive homestead development	Income generating activities (IGA)
1.	Scarcity of instruments & input 17	Fingerlings size is not perfect /high yield 4	Scarcity of input and instruments 10	Short of capital 4 Women are not allowed to outside for pardah 4
2.	Crop/seed damage 10	In dry season ponds become dry 3 Scarcity of instrument 3	Poor communication system 2	Problem in transportation/high cost 2
3.	Far to get seed 2 Poor communication system 2	Far to get fingerlings 2	Inorganic pesticide don't work 1	Scarcity of instrument 1 Diseases of ducks and hens 1 Scarcity of quality goods 1 Women get less wage 1
4.	Paddy sowing disorderly 1 Lack of training in agriculture 1 Short of capital 1	Short of capital 1 Suggestion is not available 1 Fish don't grow big for shade of trees of neighborhood 1		

In Table 2 we will discover how ShouharDO II provides support to fight against these challenges. Firstly they

provide training to all livelihood groups, then a regular meeting for suggestion and to help get inputs and

instruments like seed/stronger paddy seed (give high yield and will survive against natural adversity), free fingerlings, finance for irrigation & small business. Volunteers of Shouhardo (Community Agricultural Volunteers & Village Development Committee) help to get access to local government (union parishad) to have different services and aid like VGF, Cash for work, sanitary latrine, tube well, elderly and widow allowance etc. Also they assist to get access to market and introduce with whole sellers to have fair price for selling and buying products. Some respondents said, “*after the training Carp fish weighing 4.5 kg which sold and money was used for household need.*” Or “*using BINA7 production is more and profit is more.*” (See Table 2 for details) The limitations which we discussed in background section like rural poor and extreme poor people can't overcome their food insecurity for different barriers like along with financial strains, have no access in all field of society, difficult to fight against natural disasters etc, which constraints Shouhardo II has sort out and give specific effort to overcome those barriers.

In considering realities of a program a number of pertinent issues are relevant, notably: how convenient and

useful from a beneficiary perspective is the implementation process? Following the findings of PPRC study on ten safety net programs (Shouhardo II, CLP, VGF, VGD, etc.) on the asset transfer and training i. Asset value differs considerably among the programmes ranging from Taka 6000 to 17000. CLP and TUP provide larger livestock i.e. cattle while the other programmes provide goats/sheep/hens, even within a programme. iii. CLP and TUP score well in terms of beneficiary satisfaction. The worst performer was VGDUP which suffered from major monitoring failures. iv. Poor outcomes in the cases of SHOUHARDO and VGDUP were due to poor maintenance support besides the poor quality of the assets themselves. For all ten programmes most training sessions lack any inter-active quality and serious questions can be raised about the core value-addition of such inputs. [6] But our data of Shouhardo II program has mentioned the trainings are effective, on dissatisfaction about asset maintenance support. During the FGD sessions we observed respondents don't like to explore their dissatisfaction about the program. Here need to use further tools to explore the gap in the program for its further development.

Table 2. Livelihood support received from Shouhardo II

Agriculture	Fisheries	Comprehensive homestead development	Income generating activities (IGA)
2 days training	2 days training	2 days training	2 days training
Community agricultural volunteer (CAV) & government workers give necessary suggestion in each 15 days, assist to get seed	CAV & government workers give necessary suggestion in each 15 days	Community agricultural volunteer (CAV) & government workers give necessary suggestion, assist to get seed in each 15 days	CAV & government workers give necessary suggestion in each 15 days
Village development committee (VDC) help to get VGD & VGF card, widow allowance, sanitary latrine	VDC help to get VGD & VGF card, widow allowance, sanitary latrine	VDC help to get VGD & VGF card, widow allowance, sanitary latrine	VDC help to get VGD & VGF card, widow allowance, sanitary latrine
VDC help to sell crops in market for more price & introduce with wholesaler, to get transport facility, buy jute seed, have irrigation, to go nursery, to have good seed		VDC distribute plants, seed	4 mound paddy, some lentil worth 1500 taka. Ultra poor get 3000 taka to sell vegetable
BR-11 paddy seed & 6000 taka for irrigation	5 kg fingerlings (Rui, Katla, Telapia)	Goats, 4 ducks & hens, 4 fruit & herbal tree	VDC motivate male members to allow their wives to go outside for a better livelihood
ESDO (PNGO) help to produce inorganic fertilizer		ESDO (PNGO) provide treatment for cattle diseases	
VDC motivate male members to allow their wives to go outside for a better livelihood	VDC motivate male members to allow their wives to go outside for a better livelihood	VDC motivate male members to allow their wives to go outside for a better livelihood	
Got spade, hoes		Got spade, hoes	

3.2. Bit Smile

For the above efforts of Shouhardo II program and the government programs what changes are appeared in the daily life of people on their livelihood and other arenas. All the members of livelihood groups now have a common savings, for emergency like in daughter's wedding, examination fee, emergency treatment etc. get loan from the group without any interest, which protect these people from the trap of micro credit and money lenders. Shouhardo II helps them to open these savings group's common bank account which introduce them and access of formal Banking system and make them free to face any accident to deposit money informally. Some savings group member had complication in delivery and she has been taken to hospital by getting loan from the group instantly which saved the life in critical period.

For all four categories now variety of nutritious food is available, able to spend on children's education, manage family problems, more production for good seed and sathi crops, fish, vegetables, hens and ducks are produced, profit from small business are noticed as significant change. Some respondents wording, “*We get about forty kilo gram paddy more from per bighas than earlier.*” Another significant issue is in scarcity of food in lean season or natural disasters for all categories mostly the agriculture group they anyhow manage this crisis by reserve food, savings, labour work, relatives help and some loan also in previous they only depend on loan from money lenders which is a crucial and significant change but the change is not radical rather it's a gradual change. And all are not suffer in same way still people are not fully able to cope up with food scarcity in crisis or lean season, and some are still suffering. Women are becoming financially self dependent, and some women said, “*if*

husbands or son-in-law does not get work, now we can spend the additional money for family maintenance, needn't depend upon husbands money." But women still have restriction on their mobility which negatively impact on livelihood (See Table 3 for details). From Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC) and UNDP study we find 33.6% positive response on impact of Shouhardo II program, and no positive impact is 8.9%, notice highest positive impact 83.9% for REOPA program and there is no negative impact. Here further research is urgent to explore why REOPA had put great positive impact on the beneficiaries and other programs can follow that procedure. It also come out that Shouhardo II did distinctive contribution in maternal and child nutrition, diversity of community asset created through land improvement, but weak in live stock support strategy. A key issue in understanding programme impact is graduation - i.e. from being poor to becoming a member of the non-poor. While there has been a significant decline in the worst-off category i.e. chronic deficit households, the improvement at the highest end of the poverty scale i.e. the surplus category, has been much more muted. The

overall picture is one of cascading change - major decline in chronic deficit households, small change in the proportion of occasional deficit households, major increase in the proportion of break-even households, and finally, small increase in the proportion of surplus households. However, within this general picture, the multi-component programmes - SHOUHARDO, CLP, REOPA, TUP and VGDUP - have a comparatively higher rate of increase in the 'surplus' category. [6] All the ten major programmes assessed by Power & Participation Research Centre (PPRC) & UNDP have some strength and few weaknesses also which is not discussed here in details. But the concern is some data of Power & Participation Research Centre (PPRC) & UNDP have similar result with our qualitative study of shouhardo II midterm survey but some information has not come, it could be a cause that beneficiaries didn't explore their dissatisfaction or our FGDs missing the reality. To escape such problems we need to use several methods to assess a program to get varieties of data to come closer to the ground realities.

Table 3. Changes in livelihood for Shouhardo II

	Agriculture	Fisheries	Comprehensive homestead development	Income generating activities (IGA)
1	Form savings group, get loan without interest 8	Form savings group, get loan without interest 8	Form savings group, get loan without interest 8	Form savings group, get loan without interest 8
2	Good health, variety in diet 7 Afford for treatment, children's education, house repair 7 damage crops in crisis months/natural disaster & used to lend money, now can save from Monga to some extent 7	Afford for treatment, children's education, house repair 7 Good health, variety in diet 7	Good health, variety in diet 7	Good health, variety in diet 7
3	More rice produce by BINA 7 which harvest 2 months earlier 5	Growth & quantity of fish is good 5	increase income and spend on children education 6	Income increase, having 3 meal a day and send children to school 4
4	Women don't ask husband's money/support family 2 More profit by SATHI crops /row wise sowing 2 Use of inorganic fertilizer decrease, & compost fertilizer increase the fertility of land 2 Irrigation is easier from long distance 2	damage crops in crisis months/natural disaster & used to lend money, now can save from Monga to some extent 3	damage crops in crisis months/natural disaster & used to lend money, now can save from Monga to some extent 3	damage crops in crisis months/natural disaster & used to lend money, now can save from Monga to some extent 3
5		Women don't ask husband's money/support family 2	Women don't ask husband's money/support family 2	Women don't ask husband's money/support family 2
6		Cultivate fish in derelict land 1		

Now we will get a look how the government program contributes to reduce food insecurity in the study areas. In Table 4, it appears that cash for work contributes the most and all FGD participants have received it which they mentioned as forty days' work scheme. 2nd significant is receive rice in Eid that means most of the people have it which is an initiative from VGF. Also some respondents get rice and other few crops during flood. There is some other services like sanitary latrine, tube well, old age & widow allowance which get a small level of FGD participants. From this data it assumed that government services are periodic and have no long term effect on people's sustainable livelihood, rather it is only for the survival in emergency and our findings also support the findings of PPRC and UNDP study where for old age and widow allowance 49.8% and 51.1% responses on its positive impact. [6] The respondents mentioned that Shouhardo II programs Village development Committee and Community Agricultural Volunteers help them to get cards and communicate then with union parisad, then we

can assume it could be a help to get selected for cards as it is for very limited number people; they had not to pay the fee or get any concession. Though respondents mentioned in FGD session that they get support from VGD program but details data don't support it.

Table 4. Livelihood support from Local Government

1	Cash for work (40 days task) 8
2	In Eid receive 10 kg rice (VGF) 7
3	During flood received rice, lentil, oil (VGF) 3
4	Old age allowance, widow allowance 2 Fertilizer in low cost 2 Received tube well, ring slab and wheat seed 2

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

This paper only focus on the effectiveness and gap of several food security programs in rural areas of Bangladesh mainly on Care's Shouhardo II program and

Governments programs. Reviewing the data it noticed that Governments programs are periodic and emergency based which is incapable to reduce food insecurity in a sustainable way that initiated in 1975 and still going on. But these governments programs is partially helpful as Bangladesh is a disaster prone area and here yearly many emergency situation are appeared when large volume of food distribution is urgent to save the life of people. But food security through moderate livelihood is a sustainable way to reduce the problem of scarcity of food. Care's Shouhardo II is following a holistic approach to make soothe this problem. And the assessment result of other study like PPRC and UNDP also support our view that though there are some short comings, Shouhardo II is doing well to convert the poor people into surplus group and people are graduated. The paper is on Midterm data of the Shouhardo II program, after reviewing the end line data it could be firmly say that it has reached its goal and other non government and government organizations then should follow their approach to alleviate poverty which is one of the prominent goals of MDGs. But there is fear that does the support of local government, access to market, access to different inputs and instruments for agriculture, fishery, Comprehensive homestead development and income generating activities is still easier for the Shouhardo II beneficiaries as it is already ended? If it is not then it will create a vacuum and challenges would gradually grow like the initial stage which found in 2010 of Shouhardo II program or if it partially works, then there would be many challenges also. Here need further research on the post impact of the program and base on the findings of the study, other food security program could mould themselves to achieve long term effect on food security which is essential to efficiently work the food security programs in Bangladesh, otherwise it would be like the repetition of the governments food security programs and will continue to uncertain future.

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Statement of Competing Interests

'The author has no competing interests.'

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