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**Study on the first phase of the 100-Day Employment  
Generation Programme**

10/02/09

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study was conducted in response to a request by the Ministry of Food and Disaster Management of the Government of Bangladesh. The National Food Policy Capacity Strengthening Programme (NFPCSP), BRAC Research and Evaluation Division (RED) and BRAC Development Institute (BDI) of BRAC University worked together to complete the study.

The study was led jointly by Dr. Ciro Fiorillo, Chief Technical Advisor, NFPCSP and Dr. Imran Matin, Deputy Executive Director, BRAC.

The NFPCSP team consisted of Dr. Marie Jo A. Cortijo, Dr. Lalita Bhattacharjee, Dr. Nathalie Bouché, Prof. Rezaul Karim Talukder, Prof. Harun K. Yusuf, Prof. Ferdous Alam and Prof. Shaikh A. Sabur played a crucial role in translating the Implementation Guidelines from Bengali to English.

The BRAC-RED team comprised Dr. Chowdhury S.B. Jalal, Mr. Munshi Sulaiman, Mr. Narayan C. Das, and Mr. Hasanur Rahman. BRAC University's BDI team consisted of Dr. Ferdous Jahan, Mr. Mamun-ur-Rashid, Mr. Omar Faruque Siddike and Ms. Ashna Chowdhury. Prof. Syed Hashemi, Director of BU-BDI provided support and guidance to the BDI research team.

Mr. Abdul Khaleque and Mr. Hajiul Islam, Research Directors, FPMU, both contributed to the work, particularly during field visits carried out by NFPCSP.

This study benefited from the guidance of the Technical Advisory Committee formed of Dr. Mahub Hossain, Executive Director of BRAC, Dr. Simeen Mahmud, Research Director, Population Studies Division, Bangladesh Institute of Development Institute (BIDS), Prof. Abdus Sattar Mandal, Vice-Chancellor, Bangladesh Agricultural University, and Dr. Rushidan Islam Rahman, Research Director, Agriculture and Rural Development Division, BIDS. We thank them for their helpful advice.

This report would not have seen the light without the extensive discussions carried out with Dr. A.M.M. Shawkat Ali, Honorable Advisor, Ministry of Food and Disaster Management and Mr. Shafiqul Islam, Joint Secretary, Ministry of the Food and Disaster Management. Special thanks are due to Mr. Md. Abdul Wazed, Programme Director of the 100-day EGP who devoted a significant amount of time and effort in answering to the researchers' questions and readily responding to our constant requests for information. He was also instrumental in facilitating the fieldwork. Mr Arastoo Khan, Joint Secretary, Finance Division, Ministry of Finance also gave us interesting insights into the programme. Mr. Munir Chowdhury and Mr. Md. Sultan Ul Islam Chowdhury, Deputy Secretaries, Ministry of Food and Disaster Management were helpful in providing monitoring and other relevant data.

Thanks are also due to the Deputy Commissioners Mr. Md. Abdul Mabud (Jamalpur), Mr. Ziaur Rahman Khan (Mymensingh), Mr. Md. Ashraf Ali (Sirajgonj) and Mr. Md. Asaduzzaman, (Kurigram) for welcoming the research teams and facilitating exchanges with field level officials through the organisation of group discussions with them. We are grateful to all those who gave us their time on this occasion and to all the local level officials who collaborated with us to make this study possible in general.

This report would not have been possible without the cooperation of more than 3000 individuals (both beneficiaries of the programme and non beneficiaries) who took some of their precious time to respond to the, sometimes delicate, questions of the survey.

Finally, NFPCSP, which is implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in close collaboration with the Food Planning and Monitoring Unit of the Ministry of Food and Disaster Management, would like to thank the EC and USAID for their financial support. BRAC would like to express its gratitude to DFID, CIDA, AUSAID and OXFAM NOVIB for their continued support to research on the Challenging the Frontiers of Poverty Reduction (CFPR) Programme and extreme poverty in Bangladesh.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

In September 2008, the Government of Bangladesh embarked on the first phase of a 100-day Employment Generation Programme (EGP) for the poorest and jobless poor. This endeavour came in response to the soaring food price. NFPCSP was requested by the Government to assist in the appraisal of the programme through an evaluation of its first phase and the preparation for the assessment of the impact of the entire programme.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The review of the design entailed an assessment of the objectives and design of the programme, mainly based on the analysis of the Implementation Guidelines produced by the Government. Interviews with a selected number of government officials at Ministry and district levels were also needed to understand implementation processes. Another source of information was a nationally representative survey carried out especially for this study. Extensive in-depth qualitative research was also undertaken at field level.

### **BACKGROUND**

In a context where access to food by many low income, poor and extreme poor people was challenged because of the price hike of essential commodities, the strategy of the Government has been to scale-up existing food-based safety net programs both in terms of coverage and benefits, and to introduce additional targeted schemes including the 100-Day EGP. This programme's intended focus and design finds a strong rationale in the unemployment, food insecurity and poverty context of Bangladesh. The EGP represents a significant effort towards expanding coverage of employment generation-focused safety nets. With an estimated outreach to two million households or about 10 million beneficiaries and with the objective of generating 200 million person days of employment per year, the EGP is the largest Government safety net programme focused on employment generation. It distinguishes itself from others not only by its scale, but also by its intended focus on the extreme poor and the unemployed poor. It is in line with the main policy frameworks dealing with poverty and food security such as the National Food Policy (2006) and the National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction (2008).

### **ASSESSMENT OF THE DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION**

#### ***Preparation of the programme***

Because this programme was devised in response to an emergency situation arising from the hike in food prices, the Government was confronted with a trade-off between acting fast to relieve the suffering of the poor and taking adequate time to prepare the launch of this significant programme. Thus, a recurrent issue that arose at all levels of implementation was the lack of adequate preparation and guidance before initiating the programme.

#### ***Beneficiary selection***

A brief review of the beneficiary selection criteria uncovered elements of inconsistency between the different criteria listed in the Implementation Guidelines as well as between the criteria defined and the objectives set for the programme which reveals, to a certain extent, that too many target groups and issues were intended to be addressed with a single program. In its attempt to focus the programme on the poorest of the country, the program calculated the number of cards to be allocated by upazila using poverty map established by a 2004 study by the Government of Bangladesh in collaboration with the World Food Programme. This method of allocation led to an outcome where total cards allocated per district/upazila amounted to 5% of the extreme poor in each. Although equitable from a national perspective, this is not consistent with the priority set by the Guidelines of putting emphasis on the most vulnerable areas of the country (flood affected, *monga* prone, *haor baor* and *char* areas). The programme does not seem to have been able fulfill its other objective either: tackling seasonal unemployment.

As regards the beneficiary identification process, the intention of the Government was to leave the responsibility of selecting the beneficiaries to the community -albeit to the influential members of the community. A number of in-built mechanisms were put in place to try and ensure that the right people were targeted. Although the involvement of a number of people and consultations with relevant individuals was foreseen in the Guidelines, in several cases, the UP Chairman or members did not consult anyone else in deciding who should be on the list. In depth interviews revealed a preference towards known people in the selection process and this was confirmed by the survey. Interviews with district, upazila and union level Government officials also revealed that the official criteria for selection of beneficiaries had not always been clearly understood and in some cases were not even known.

Results from the survey show that beneficiaries were significantly more likely to be poor than non beneficiaries. On the whole, the age range officially set (18-50) was respected in the listing of beneficiaries but in practice, some adjustments were made. On the whole, the provision excluding individuals benefiting from other safety nets was followed. Paradoxically, it seems the rule was more strictly applied to the poorest section of the population.

Without any administrative gender requirements, 28% of the beneficiaries in the first phase of the 100-day EGP turned out to be women which translates a strong need and demand by women to participate in such a programme. For many of these beneficiary women, this programme turned out to be more than relief from temporary unemployment: it provided them an employment opportunity for the first time in their life.

#### ***Targeting effectiveness***

About 37% of the beneficiaries were from the poorest 20% of the population. 67% of the benefits were captured by the poorest 40% of the population. Gross mistargeting occurred for 2.2% of the beneficiaries which belonged to the richest 20% of the population. While safety nets of a similar nature (e.g. IGVD) are incontestably much better at reaching the poorest group, the 100-Day EGP is compared to them in terms of its outreach to the poor (as opposed to the extreme poor). This relatively low outreach to the extreme poor may be explained by a situation where little guidance and tools were given to field level officials as to how to identify the extreme poor and where even the Implementation Guidelines were unclear as to whether *only* the extreme poor should be targeted. Although the focus on the extreme poor was limited, the food security levels of beneficiaries were found to be significantly lower than that of the non participants.

#### ***Selection of works***

As for the beneficiaries, the list of works to be undertaken in the duration of the project was finalised by the end of August 2008. Close to 160,000 works were identified. Again, in the Guidelines, a lot was left to the community level authorities to decide, in an attempt to ensure local conditions were taken into account. In practice, only in some cases was the selection of works done in consultation with relevant local experts. Overall, the selection process was rather *ad hoc* and not part of an integrated local development planning as is the practice in the Indian NREGS for instance. Interestingly, in a number of areas, large scale road constructions were favoured over smaller projects such as heap compost making, as it had been understood that projects undertaken should last 100 days.

In deciding to carry out the programme at a national scale between September to end of November, the uniformity of the lean season throughout the country was assumed, albeit with some scope for flexibility with a 15 day option to delay the start of the programme. The result of this is that in some areas, due to agro ecological characteristics, works could not be started within the timeframe foreseen and the works could not be completed by the end of the first phase of the programme. This late start has meant that on average, less than 60 days' work was in fact provided to the beneficiaries.

### ***Fund release***

Although the allocation of such a large amount of funds throughout the country could have been problematic, the Government opted to use a system which has been operational in other programmes. This procedure ensures all steps are checked by a higher authority to minimise leakage opportunities. Because the system tried to minimise the opportunities for misuse of funds, the transactions costs involved were substantial. In particular, the fact that every single daily payment of the benefit involves a form to be signed by six officials mobilises immense resources. The fieldwork also revealed that often, the amount to be received by the upazila authorities towards the administration of the programme had only been received in early November, affecting the logistics and supervision of the work. The flat rate applied for all upazilas was questioned because some areas had to manage many more beneficiaries than others. In practice, only one district distributed the unemployment benefit. The in depth-study carried out revealed a pervasive lack of understanding of how this benefit should function.

### ***Monitoring***

The monitoring of the programme as per the Guidelines involves a substantial number of actors at all levels and is quite complex in the linkages that exist between them. At times, this may have translated into over burdened systems which have difficulty in functioning or which have ended up diverging from the Guidelines to adapt to the realities of the field. Also, there seems to have been duplication of effort in the production of the Daily Achievement Report. As regards this Report, an important part of it seemed redundant after a few days of beginning the programme and would be more suited to a weekly/monthly report. Other inefficiencies were observed such as the lack of use of Information and Communication Technologies. One clear remark based on field observations was that monitoring activities monopolised a great amount of human resources, not always matched by the financial resources available. This reported deficiency in resources was exacerbated by the delay in the receipt of the allocated amounts towards administrative costs and heavily constrained supervision and monitoring of the field project works.

### ***Accountability mechanisms and transparency***

The lack of adequate preparation for the 100-Day EGP not only affected those implementing the programme at the field level but also the potential beneficiaries: unaware of the official criteria on which the selection of beneficiaries would be based, it was difficult for anyone to challenge the decisions taken. While many thought to complain, they were unsure as to how to go about it. Because of the design of the programme which covers 5% of the extreme poor in each region, by definition, eligible people will be excluded, with inevitable disgruntlement by those left out. Given this, many people were likely to complain. Nevertheless, the issue of grievances was taken very seriously at the Ministry level and Upazila Nirbahi Officer were advised to follow all complaints by an enquiry signalling the Governments intention to maximize transparency of the procedures. However, the in-depth qualitative study gathered information on a number of irregularities for which, even though attempts were made to complain, no grievance was recorded. Other efforts towards ensuring transparency were made (albeit late) with the posting of the Implementation Guidelines on the Ministry of Food and Disaster Management website. Following the end of the first phase, the final Achievement Report was also posted there.

### **PROGRAMME IMPACTS AS PERCEIVED BY BENEFICIARIES**

Results on the initial perceived impact of the programme are very encouraging: more than three-fourths of the participants reported an improvement in their overall economic condition thanks to the programme. 77% of participant households reported an improvement in their food consumption, either in terms of quality, or quantity, or both. Investment in household assets – both productive and non productive- thanks to the programme was reported for some and plans were being made for the future. There was a general consensus among beneficiaries that the programme should continue. For many, joining this programme had allowed them not

to migrate to find employment. This programme was often preferred to safety net programmes not requiring work as the dignity and respect that came from earning income through work outweighed the benefits of charity in the eyes of the beneficiaries. The programme was particularly helpful to women who often, unlike men, are unable to migrate for better work opportunities. This calls for more focussed targeting of women and addressing the gender constraints that women face in participating in labour market. Social impact was also reported, in particular related to conflicts that arose between those competing to become beneficiaries.

#### **CONCLUSION: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FINE TUNING THE PROGRAM DESIGN AND ENHANCING IMPLEMENTATION DURING THE SECOND PHASE**

The outcome of the first phase of this programme is encouraging with a majority of beneficiaries, notably women, reporting positive impacts that included long term impacts such as investment in productive assets. The media have been very positive with some newspapers reporting no *monga* this year in some typically *monga*-prone areas. The programme has been only relatively successful in targeting the extreme poor which, in part, may be explained by some confusion over the selection criteria and little preparation of the field officials. The outreach to the poor (as opposed to the extreme poor) is reasonably good however, and compares to that of other similar safety net programmes.

As expected with a programme of this scale, the programme suffered some weaknesses, as described throughout this report. In the conclusion of the main report, recommendations are split into those that may be taken into account for implementation in the run up to the second phase of the programme, and those that may be considered if the programme is to be repeated in the future.

#### **Short term recommendations are:**

##### **Preparation**

1. The Government may consider producing a leaflet or booklet responding to ‘Frequently Asked Questions’ in order to clarify doubts that the general population and field-level officials may still have on objectives and modalities of the programme. The document(s) may be widely circulated on paper and through the internet.
2. Workshops may be organised at the field level to raise awareness on the programme of the general population and discuss implementation issues with the government officers involved.

##### **Objectives of the programme and intended beneficiaries**

3. To the extent possible given the short time left before the beginning of the second phase of the programme, the list of beneficiaries may be purged from the obvious inclusion errors i.e. the individuals from the richer quintiles. Identifying the richer beneficiaries should be relatively straightforward for local communities.

##### **Selection of the works**

4. Local authorities could be authorized to implement residual working days from the first phase during the second phase. For example, works may start earlier, may continue during week-ends or be completed beyond the official end of the second phase, if this does not create a competing demand for labour in agriculture at harvest time.

##### **Financing**

5. Given the scale of the programme, the system of daily payment of wages may be reconsidered as it is costly and unmanageable. Bi-weekly or weekly payment such as in the Indian Employment Guarantee Scheme may be considered after checking whether this meets the needs of the ultra poor who often, are only able to buy food after receiving their daily wage.

6. Additional human and financial resources may be allocated for the administration of the program in order to match the work load increase.

### **Monitoring**

7. There is scope for improvement in the contents of the monitoring information collected by the Government as well in the effectiveness of the monitoring processes. In the short run, the frequency of the Daily Achievement Report may be decreased to a weekly basis for example.
8. Greater collaboration at the Ministry level would minimise duplication of work and ensure greater transparency.

In the longer run, the outreach and outcome of the programme can be enhanced acting on the following priorities:

1. Rethink the aim of the programme and ensure consistency between its different objectives
2. Review the programme's intended beneficiaries and their characteristics
3. Ensure better preparation of those implementing the programme and greater understanding of the programme by the local communities
4. Adapt the choice of works to be carried out to the local needs and context.
5. Ensure that local level administrations have adequate personnel and funds to implement the program.
6. Assess and enhance the monitoring system.
7. Ensure systematic recording and redressal of grievances recording.

Recommendations on actions needed to address each one of the above priorities are given in the main report. These are followed by a description of possible follow up activities to this report that can be pursued in order to gauge the full impact of the programme.