4.1 Introduction

The preceding chapters indicate that somehow at macro-level, Bangladesh is on the path of self-sufficiency, however, with productions fluctuating in recent years. So, the production of food is still not ahead of the requirement. Although a moderate population growth requires more and more food, both in terms of quantity and quality. Since the concept of food security in the South Asian region has wider connotations, therefore one should analyze different aspects other than production and availability of food. The broadened concept of food security, as per the World Food Council (1979), has incorporated income generation, distribution of food and the capacity to earn foreign exchange. This aspect embraces food security in terms of solving poverty and hunger problem. It has been emphasized that the access to enough food should be gauged not only in terms of food storages brought about by shortage in production or increase in price but also in terms of people's ownership and exchange entitlements. This means that people's ability to avoid starvation will depend on both – their ownership and the exchange entitlement.

Actually, this intricate aspect advocates that food security be examined in relation to the patterns of distribution of incomes and wealth. Therefore, to make people capable enough to buy their food requirements needs to be taken care of. Hence, various developmental
programmes which are target specific need to be examined. Public distribution system (PDS) has played a vital role in the past. Its efficiency and effectiveness is now an established fact in improving the consumption level of low-income group. But we have to assess the possibility of food rationing or subsidizing food prices vis-a-vis trade and exchange rate policies. One of the most important imperatives of food security for any government is the moral responsibility it bears towards its population because food is fundamental not only to sustenance of human life but also to the country's overall development.

How a country is prepared for acute and large shortages of food to natural disasters is another dimension of food security system. Bangladesh is one country which is affected by frequent floods and cyclones. Natural disasters are another most important imperative of attaining food security not only in Bangladesh but in the South Asian region as a whole. The frequent occurrences of these calamities are also caused by ecological imbalances or natural overstress. The most seriously affected country is Bangladesh where recurrent heavy floods have become a regular phenomenon.

Another important dimension of food security system in Bangladesh is 'protection of vulnerable groups'. Food insecurity is mostly caused by fall in the level of aggregate consumption and the
problem is faced at the individual household level due to lack of employment opportunities.

Gender is another dimension which needs to be examined carefully. "Gender blindness" and "invisibility" of women's role in and contributions to food security are very important aspects. As the primary food producers in the world, women have a stake in the preservation of the environment and in environmentally sustainable development. So, women should be examined as those who preserve biological diversity, process and prepare food, care for the basic needs of the households and as wage earners.

Food production, availability and accessibility form the base, which we have analyzed in the previous chapters. Role of Public Distribution System becomes very crucial here.

4.2 Role of Public Food Distribution System

The government of any country, whether developed or developing plays a crucial role in securing food for all. Entitlement protection for the majority of the poor in the South Asian countries has been taken care of through subsidized public food distribution system. Bangladesh also has this system prior to its independence. This system's historical and political dimension needs to be examined. How far this programme has succeeded in containing hunger and how
much secured common people are with growing pressure of population pressure?

Historically, public rationing in Bangladesh goes back to 1940s in the undivided colonial India. This public rationing was purely urban in nature. And this was taken up simply to demonstrate an act of benevolence. Rice, edible oil and sugar were initially introduced in the public rationing.¹ Even after the inception of Pakistan, public rationing was retained. Rationing was suspended for a while, and again it started in the year 1953.² Since then the public foodgrain distribution system has occupied significance in the food security system of Bangladesh.

Public food distribution system (PFDS) has expanded and got modified several times. Considering its malnourished and poverty stricken population, the government has been trying hard to secure food for all at subsidized rates. In this regard 12 channels are there to distribute the subsidized food. Out of these twelve channels of public food distribution system, six deal of them dial with rationing. Two of these six are widely known and acknowledged for their regular


² *ibid*, p.86.
operation and large coverage of the common mass. These are 'statutory rationing' and 'modified rationing'.

The Statutory Rationing

Public rationing started in the undivided India with statutory rationing, during the second World War. This was mainly urban-centric. Its beneficiaries were select influential elites of Dhaka, Chittagong, Naryanganj, Khulna and Rajshahi. It was found that the average income of the beneficiaries of SR was well above average,\(^3\) because the beneficiaries comprised civil and military, salaried workers class, workers of large-scale industrial and commercial establishments, schoolteachers, professional and businessmen. Some of the low income daily wage earners like rickshaw pullers, artisans and servants were also beneficiaries, but they constituted only 6 percent of the total.\(^4\) This clearly depicts the intentions of the then existing government. This kind of policy can never be termed as pro-poor. Instead, it can be called as 'establishment saving'. Clearly, the objective this kind of rationing was never to secure entitlement but to serve the politico-administrative interest of the government.

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\(^3\) Nuimuddin Chaudhary, “Accounting for subsidised food resource” *Bangladesh Development studies*, vol.16, no.4.

Even after gaining 'independence' this statutory continued to move on those times. Only one city has been included since then-Ranagamati in 1975. The nature and direction of this channel of the distribution system has remained the same. The non-infusion of those who migrated to the cities depicts the plight of the poor in the urban areas. A large majority of those migrants and landless labourers and small farmers.

The gainers from this SR do not constitute the major bulk. And it shows a declining trend, as compared to other channels (Table-4.1). But its beneficiaries are urban elite. These people are politically very powerful. One of the political dimensions of this rationing is that its beneficiaries have the ability to influence the voters of the rural areas. Since these elite own agricultural land in villages, they have the capacity to create problems for the existing government.
### Table 4.1

**DISTRIBUTION OF FOODGRAINS BY CHANNELS AND THEIR RELATIVE SHARES IN THE PUBLIC FOOD DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM 83/84 - 94/95**

(figures represent percentages of total foodgrains distributed in respective year)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Channels</th>
<th>83/84</th>
<th>85/86</th>
<th>88/89</th>
<th>89/90</th>
<th>91/92</th>
<th>92/93</th>
<th>93/94</th>
<th>94/95</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Statutory rationing</td>
<td>14.28</td>
<td>10.38</td>
<td>6.86</td>
<td>7.25</td>
<td>7.21</td>
<td>5.21</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polly Pour a rationing</td>
<td>19.49</td>
<td>6.75</td>
<td>11.07</td>
<td>19.91</td>
<td>9.25</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other priorities</td>
<td>16.76</td>
<td>13.63</td>
<td>14.37</td>
<td>12.93</td>
<td>9.04</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large employers</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open market sales</td>
<td>5.21</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>7.88</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>11.73</td>
<td>6.70</td>
<td>21.51</td>
<td>14.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing operation</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free sales</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flour mills</td>
<td>6.24</td>
<td>6.75</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>14.04</td>
<td>14.50</td>
<td>8.10</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>2.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atta Chakki</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>2.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total monetized</td>
<td>72071</td>
<td>56.20</td>
<td>51.49</td>
<td>63.37</td>
<td>60.55</td>
<td>42.46</td>
<td>38.59</td>
<td>32.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>food for work</td>
<td>19.01</td>
<td>29.27</td>
<td>20.72</td>
<td>22.36</td>
<td>23.07</td>
<td>34.36</td>
<td>30.81</td>
<td>31.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vuluerahla group development</td>
<td>4.78</td>
<td>12.20</td>
<td>17.22</td>
<td>8.68</td>
<td>9.80</td>
<td>12.29</td>
<td>12.14</td>
<td>11.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total relief</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>1030</td>
<td>5.88</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>5.23</td>
<td>6.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gratuitous relief</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>4.69</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>1.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>6.15</td>
<td>5.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>food for education</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>5.74</td>
<td>11.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total nonmonetized</td>
<td>27.29</td>
<td>43.80</td>
<td>48.51</td>
<td>36.63</td>
<td>39.45</td>
<td>57.54</td>
<td>61.41</td>
<td>67.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

So, even in the post-independence period, the SR has not been revamped and it is still misused by the beneficiaries as well as by the distributors. Since a large chunk of these people do not completely use their quota, it creates the ideal conditions for black-marketing by the distributors. As ration shop prices are lower than market prices they are tempted to sell in the open market. These kinds of leakage are quite common. They make huge profit - about 70 percent more than what the government allows them to make on the issue price. This kind of corruption occurs because the allotment quota per household is very high. This explains the accessibility to some and inaccessibility to many in the cities.

**Modified Rationing**

Considering the restricted coverage of the SR it was appropriately thought to reduce the widespread hunger in rural areas. Therefore, 'modified rationing' was introduced in 1949 as part of the public food distribution system. Its objective was to look after low income households in the rural areas and urban municipalities. Here, ration prices and quotas per card are the same as in the statutory rationing. But the government allocates more foodgrains to the modified rationing when market prices are high. MR had excellent ideas to reach to the poorest of the poor in the rural areas. But the prevalent unemployment in the rural areas and weaknesses in this programme did not yield desired results. Some of the drawbacks of this programmes are: -

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5 ibid.

(a) the non-inclusion of new eligible households deprived them of the benefit for long duration;

(b) the administrative in—efficiency and unfair selection of households;

(c) in the actual distribution of foodgrains, the rural poor are discriminated against the municipalities.

It is clear from the above discussion that even the ‘modified rationing’ is not doing well. And both these programmes are not securing entitlements. Table-4.1 only shows food grains distributed through various channels and percent share of those channels. The government is yet to reach to the majority of the poverty stricken people through these two channels. The persisting unemployment and restricted purchasing capacity makes it difficult to purchase food from the open market. Being purely an agrarian economy exposes the landless workers during the slack reasons. There are certain programmes/schemes which are continuing in Bangladesh and which provide opportunities to earn foodgrains even during slack seasons. An analysis of these programmes especially, ‘Food For Work’ and Rural Maintenance Programme’, would throw light on this aspect of the ‘system’ and its effectiveness.

4.3 Ensuring Security through Developmental Programmes: Examining Food for Work Programmes.

As we have discussed in the preceding chapters and the previous section, there exists an intricate relationship among poverty, landlessness, and unemployment. The dependency of half of the rural households on agriculture who happen to be landless is a matter which needs to be focussed. One of the characteristics of agriculture is that it
creates seasonal demand for labourers. Therefore, during slack season, unemployment is glaring and obvious. During slack season, the landless and marginal farmers look for some other avenues. This leads them to self-employment or migration towards cities. But neither of these yields desired result. So, trapped in absolute poverty, they look towards the public development strategies undertaken by the government. These development strategies in Bangladesh have been the integral part of the programmes to generate employment in the rural areas. Directed towards reaching poverty, these programmes are the only hope in the rural areas.\(^7\)

Considering the magnitude of poverty, which reflect the availability of food at the household level, the rationale for public intervention is imminent and moral. In a less developed food deficit economy like Bangladesh, employment opportunities determine the welfare of the poor. Feeding the poorest and poverty reduction depends on increasing the economy's capacity for absorbing the existing labour force.\(^8\) So, the economic growth which would have its impact on poverty reduction is desired. Since public food distribution system is not an adequate solution, development oriented public intervention was thought about in the 1970s. The food-for-work programme (FFWP) and the rural maintenance programme (RMP) are two programmes that have been playing important role in the rural areas.

The food-for-work programme was started in 1975, after the 1974 famine. This started as an emergency relief programme for those the poor


\(^8\) *ibid*, p.32.
facing severe hunger. Its major aims and objectives in course of time has shifted from relief to development. And these are:

(a) to create food-wage employment during the slack season through construction and maintenance of rural roads, river embankment, and

(b) to reduce physical damage and loss of human life due to floods and other natural disasters by building protective structures.

Therefore, its direction is employment oriented and also to provide income to the rural poor. Wage payments are made in kind. This also helps in the stabilization of foodgrain price in the market and to improve food consumption. The food-for-work projects are administered by the World Food Programme and CARE. The WFP acts as both a conduit and an administrator for multilateral and bilateral food aid for this programme. Projects administered by WFP are implemented mainly by three agencies: - the Water Development Board, the Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation, and the Local Government and Engineering Bureau. These different government bodies are engaged in creating coastal and flood-protection embankments along major rivers, construction and repair of interior roads and digging of small irrigation canals, and construction and completion of roads connecting major cities and towns.

Since 1975, the impact of FFWP has been mixed. Absolute poverty declined substantially from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s. The marginal increase in poverty levels during 1988-89 is probably due to devastating floods in 1988. Due to improve performance of the agriculture sector since 1990 the situation has further improved. It can

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9 ibid.
10 ibid.
be said that the food-for-work programme has been able to contain rural poverty only to certain extent. Its impact on the development of Bangladesh is difficult to assess. Before dealing with the impact of FFWP it is essential to assess the problems faced by this programme during its operation.

One of the major problems was the influence of influential local people.\(^\text{11}\) Delays in the project-approval process also posed great problems. Many projects involved reconstruction or rehabilitation of an existing structure and compensation was not authorized for land from which earth was collected.\(^\text{12}\) The local government officials could not afford the time to monitor and supervise projects because they were too preoccupied with other administrative functions. Even the project implementation officers, whose main responsibility is to measure the quantity and quality of work, were not able to visit all the projects under their jurisdiction.\(^\text{13}\) In spite of the self-targeting characteristics of the food-for-work programme, leakage of resources from the programme has been noticed. Overestimation of the work performed leads to large amount of leakage. Underpayment of workers is another dimension of corruption. The rate of underpayment in this programme ranged from 17-27 percent.\(^\text{14}\) These kinds of leakage and corruption practices cannot take away the positive impact on the rural areas.

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12 Ibid.


14 M. Hossain and M. Akash, f.n.11.
Impact of Food-For-Work: Its Implication on Food Security

Food-for-work resources have been invested in economic and social infrastructure. Some resources have also been invested in natural distribution of food grains, both rice and wheat have been increasing since 1983-84 through FFW programme (table4.2). This table also indicates the continuation of this programme. Wheat is distributed more than rice. Agricultural production and to be precise foodgrain production, has increased significantly in the early 1990s (as described in Chapter-2). The infrastructure development due to sustained FFW programmes has played an important role because physical infrastructure development is associated with changes in participation in output, land and credit markets that contribute to observed crop production and overall income response.\(^\text{15}\)

Therefore, although, self-sufficiency in rice production has been narrowly achieved, but the poorest of the poor are totally unequipped to take advantage of this. Due to their inadequate purchasing power, they lack access to sufficient food. Any development programme which is not there to create alternatives to think beyond earth programmes including construction of roads (kutccha) is unlikely to have its long-term effect. This brings the question of sustainability of programmes because all these programmes heavily depend on food aid (fig.) and food aid depends on the various interests of the donors, which would be discussed late

### Table 4.2

**DISTRIBUTION OF FOODGRAIN THROUGH NON-MONETIZED CHANNELS, 83/84-95/96**

(Figures in ‘000 tons)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>83/84</th>
<th>85/86</th>
<th>88/89</th>
<th>89/90</th>
<th>90/91</th>
<th>91/92</th>
<th>92/93</th>
<th>93/94</th>
<th>94/95</th>
<th>95/96</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wheat</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food for work</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>369</td>
<td>589</td>
<td>432</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>512</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>493</td>
<td>468</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vulnerable Group Development</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>501</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test Relief</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gratuitous Relief</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food for Education</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>237</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Wheat</td>
<td>528</td>
<td>552</td>
<td>1258</td>
<td>688</td>
<td>604</td>
<td>832</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>774</td>
<td>999</td>
<td>1078</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rice</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food for Work</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vulnerable Group Development</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Rice</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: ‘Others’ include test relief, gratuitous relief etc. **SOURCE:** World Food Programme, 1996.
There is a need to modify this programme simply changing the design with unchanged objective within a specific time frame. To address the continuing problem of food insecurity some alternative earthwork activities must come out. There is some scope for this kind of programme to switch from construction to maintenance activities during the slack season. These activities may include maintenance of trees besides roads, canal embankment and plantations, and primary schools etc. Other activities in the rural areas like social forestry, construction of primary schools can be explored. To improve the nutritional status of rural poor, the beneficiaries should be given both in cash and kinds so that vulnerable groups in the society like women and children can also get the benefit. It is, therefore, essential to analyze the women in the food security.

4.4 **Gender Dimension of Food Security System: Looking At Vulnerable Group**

Poor rural population constitutes to be the most affected by food insecurity. Among the socio-economic groups most at risk are the landless, women and small-scale pastoralists. Out of these groups women’s food insecurity is not easily recorded, though it can be simply understood while taking their social status in the countries of South Asia in general, and Bangladesh in particular. Generally, women are the majority of the world’s agricultural producers, playing important roles in
fisheries, farming and forestry.\textsuperscript{16} Women are responsible for providing the food for their families by earning the income, mostly in the women headed households. Above all, women are responsible for food preparation for their families. Despite all these contributions they are always at the receiving end, being discriminated against. Their poor status in can South Asia be gauged from the following Table (Table-4.3)

\textbf{Table 4.3}

\textbf{Selected Indicators of Human Development and Women's Participation in Agriculture and Economic Activities in South Asia.}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>Human Development Index (Rank)</th>
<th>Gender Development Index (Rank)</th>
<th>% distribution of labour force of Women in Agriculture</th>
<th>Unpaid Family Workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1996\textsuperscript{1}</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


This table clearly suggest the greater participation of women and still very low ranks so far gender development index is concerned. Percentage distribution of labour force of women in agriculture is

significantly high. But despite this there is gender bias in the intra-family
distribution in the entire South Asia and in other developing countries of
Africa and Middle East. Food intake of women in Bangladesh is lower
than male. At the time of scarcity, gender bias against girls exists in
Bangladesh.\textsuperscript{17} Food intake of women in central Bangladesh is only 15
percent less than that of men.\textsuperscript{18} There are several economic and social
explanations for low intake. For instance, adult males work harder and
need more physical strength. Since continuity of the family depends on
the males, it gives them greater social and economic advantages.
Situation of destitute women and children in the food security system
needed urgent attention.

With assisted programmes like 'vulnerable group development'
project, some attention is being paid towards women. With the
fundamental objective of poverty reduction the 'World Food Programme'
initiated Women's Training Centres' in Bangladesh. This project was
launched in 1975 under the name of 'vulnerable groups feeding', with an
initial focus on providing relief to destitute women and children. There
was a progressive reorientation of the project in the 1980s, from
providing relief to supporting sustainable household food security


\textsuperscript{18} Harris, B, "Intra-family distribution of hunger in South Asia", J. Dreze
through poverty reduction. 19 The Women Training Centre is designed to provide beneficiaries with income-generating opportunities. In the WTC cycle which began in July 1995 and ended in June 1996, a total of 18,375 tons of wheat was distributed to 44,150 women participating in the activities of 614 WTCs.20 Its beneficiaries constitute widowed, divorced and deserted women, whose income is below TK 300 per month.

There is a general trend of increasing incomes of beneficiaries.

With these aided programmes being target specific, the result is close to be desired. But it covers only a smaller section of women in Bangladesh. To reach out to the majority of rural women and improve their food security and social status is a gigantic task.

Other Assisted Programmes for the Vulnerable Groups

Rehabilitation of growth centre connecting Roads (GCCR) and water sector are the major components of the rural development (RD) project assisted by the WFP in Bangladesh. The man objective is to make the vulnerable group of rural poor food secure and subsequently, self-reliant. This project creates opportunities for employment in earthwork, making roads, planting trees, providing assistance for cycle rickshaw/van, household work etc. Payment is made both in cash and

20  ibid.
kinds. The large majority of labourers are landless and small farmers as they rely heavily on day labour for their sustenance.\textsuperscript{21}

Road development directly creates long-term employment opportunities, mostly in the transport and trade sector. There are noticeable increase in agricultural productivity. Due to the construction of roads, growth centres during the project have undergone accelerated development process. Various changes are taking place in the lives of different groups of rural people.\textsuperscript{22} There are, however, certain reservations against the beneficiaries and development process:

(a) Whether the beneficiaries belong to the absolute poor;

(b) Whether the benefit from this programme is creating environment for sustained self-employment; and

(c) How many rural poor are benefiting from this - a miniscule rural population.

Water sector of the Rural Development of project contribute to the development rural infrastructure and resource based generating assets for the benefit of the most destitute segment of the rural society. One of


\textsuperscript{22} \textit{ibid.}
the components of the RD project is the rehabilitation of embankments, canals and other earthen water-control infrastructure. Wheat is paid as wage to labourers involved in the rehabilitation of structures during the dry season. This sub-project implemented by the Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB), specifically aims to protect people, their assets and their agricultural production through better management of water resources. In this project, all female earthwork labourers, through a self-selection mechanism, come from extremely poor rural households, where as the males come from better background.

Here, the distribution of benefits is the prime concern. Some of the poorer segments of rural society receive little, while the major benefits are reaped by traditional farmers and fishermen. Here, it is indeed necessary to check whether NGO's are reaching to the grassroots level.

4.5 Role of NGO's In the Food Security System

Bangladesh has one of the largest and most diversified NGO sector in the worlds. At the beginning of the 1990s at least 12,000 groups were receiving financial and technical support. More then 550 local NGOs were registered with the Association of Development Agencies and more than 300 national and foreign NGOs were getting funds from abroad.

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Around $100 million is channeled to NGO's from external sources, which is about 5% of the total aid flows. The help of NGOs is desperately needed considering the urgent need for alleviating hunger and poverty. The help is needed in several areas for further expansion of health, nutrition and educational facilities.

For the alleviation of poverty and hunger, Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) is the largest indigenous NGO. This indigenous NGO is largely funded by international NGOs, depending on foreign donors for around 85 percent of their budget. Organizations who support financially, are-the Netherlands Organization of International Development Corporation, the Swiss International Development Agency known as SIDA, Oxfam, UNICEF, the Ford Foundation, etc.

BRAC mainly focuses on rural poor. Among them destitute women are given serious attention. It stresses the need for the upliftment of rural women. Operating at the village level, they train fresh graduate so that he/she is aware of the rural problems. The income generating programmes include poultry, rural credit and other credits. 'Credit Approach' is one of the two approach adapted by the NGO. The another approach is 'conscientisation', which seeks to strengthen the weak by arousing the feeling of necessity of their increasing unity. It is aimed at

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enhancing the groups’ understanding of the causes of poverty and backwardness. Confidence building is another part of general awareness programmes, which is mostly carried out by Programme Organizers (POs) assisted by ‘gram sewaks’.

‘Credit Approach’ has worked out well at the household level, where women are targeted. For household poultry programme, women are given small loans to feed chicks and for the cage. Another quasi-governmental organization is ‘Grameen Bank’. This is also based on the credit approach. It is accessible to the landless poor. With unique banking method, it provides credit without any collateral as well as encourages traditional sector of activities. It is now working in more than 36,000 villages through nearly 45,000 centres. The share of NGO’s credit in total credit advanced to Bangladesh was 0.6 percent.25 Most of the NGOs taking both these approaches have initiated people’s organizations at the grassroots levels and facilitated the release of potential social energy of the poor. Health and family planning programmes carried out by VHSS (Voluntary Health and Social Service) and ‘Gowo Swasthya Kendra’ target poor landless. Health workers educate these people and motivate them for immunization, family planning etc.

25 ibid, p.94.
CARITAS is another NGOs funded by European Catholic and non-catholic organizations. Initially, its main goal was to increase food production. Later on, its objective shifted to the fulfillment of the basic needs of the people and uplifting their social and nutritional status. The focus has been on fish culture as a means of increasing food supply. This NGO has also been involved in direct feeding and food distribution. It runs a 'Rural Work Program', having the main objective to create income generation opportunities. Poor landless households are the main targets here. It also helps in rehabilitation of those affected by cyclones and floods.

We can say that NGOs are doing their work with the help from foreign aid. Outside the government ambit they have been working as private no-profit agencies in the field of development. They also face some problems. Many obstacles obstruct their smooth functioning. At the same time NGOs in Bangladesh do have influence on the government's development policy and some leading NGOs figure in the advisory positions. This could be seen as an endorsement of the value of NGOs or as a way of co-opting potential opposition.\textsuperscript{26}

But we have to look beyond the temporary solutions of hunger given by the NGOs. Simply providing enough food for the current

\textsuperscript{26} \textit{ibid.}
population won’t do much good. Most of these works done by NGOs get aid from donor organization and countries. Therefore, looking at food imports and food aid becomes imminent.

4.6 Food Aid and Food Security System of Bangladesh

In the less developed food deficit countries (CDFDCs) of the world food aid plays an important role in improving food security. In many developing countries food supplies fluctuate widely, depending on the production variability and the extent to which this vulnerability is compensated by changes in imports and stocks.\(^{27}\) Basically, when we talk about the dimension of food aid vis-a-vis food security, we always mean food security for the poor. The poor suffer in two ways. First, as food price rises, the poor suffer a reduction in their real purchasing power. Secondly, the consumption of labour intensive goods and services are reduced and this reduces the employment opportunities.

Generally, food aid is defined as the transfer of agricultural commodities and technical assistance to increase agricultural production, purchase and shipment of agricultural commodities. It contributes to the economic development and self-sufficiency of developing countries, provided it is integrated with the development programmes of the recipient country.

Conditions necessary for the constructive use of food aid must ensure that it satisfies the needs. The conditions would depend on the nature and uses of food aid. Broadly, food aid can be classified into four types:

(a) Program food aid—intended for sale to meet unsatisfied demand for staple foods;

(b) Project food aid—intended to support specific feeding or development project;

(c) Emergency food aid—intended to meet urgent food requirements under abnormal or disturbed conditions of demand and supply; and

(d) Adjustment food aid—intended to mitigate the short-term sectoral adverse effects of different types of adjustment programmes.

The most obvious reasons for these types of food aid is the shortage of cereal production from domestic resources and their inability to purchase it from the international market. A country like Bangladesh has been a regular food aid recipient country due to its frequent natural calamities. Like Bangladesh, in most of the Asian and African countries population growth exceeds food production growth and hence, they have to look for food aid regularly.

The food security system of Bangladesh is not balanced. More than 75 percent of Bangladesh population, which is rural, is not nutritionally secured. Moreover, the chronic unavailability of food has been a regular feature because the domestic supply of food falls short of requirements. Between 10 to 12 percent of its food requirements came from outside in the form of food imports and aid throughout the 1970s. Bangladesh has large share of 'cereal import' and 'food aid' among the countries of South Asia (Table-4.4).

**Table 4.4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cereal Imports and Food Aid in South Asia</th>
<th>Cereal Imports ('000 tonnes)</th>
<th>Food Aid in Cereal ('000 tonnes)</th>
<th>% share of merchandise imports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>2194 1339</td>
<td>1480 1429</td>
<td>23 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhutan</td>
<td>5 37</td>
<td>1 4</td>
<td>— —</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>424 3044</td>
<td>344 299</td>
<td>21 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>56 15</td>
<td>21 8</td>
<td>5 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>613 2044</td>
<td>146 322</td>
<td>21 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>884 1055</td>
<td>170 442</td>
<td>47 16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


At the national level there has been clear cut food gap consistently. The dependency on food import is inevitable(Figure-4.1).Bangladesh
Figure 4.1 Food Gap and Food Import in Bangladesh

[Bar chart showing the food gap and food import in Bangladesh from 1984/85 to 1994/95, with the y-axis labeled 'Million Tonnes' ranging from 0 to 3.5.]
drains away a big share of country's hard currency, including export earnings which is a severe blow to the development of the non-agricultural sector. Several other countries in Asia and Europe depend heavily on food imports even more than Bangladesh but these countries have other financial resources, which can exceed the payments in food imports. As the table suggests, food import is on a declining trend. With the attainment of self-sufficiency in rice production, the domestic demand of rice is being effectively met. However, poverty still affects large groups of the population, implying a continuous effort to alleviate it.29 Most of the food imports have been paid by foreign aid, and the magnitude of foreign aid depends on the government's negotiations. Despite declining food imports, the country has suffered from a chronic balance of payment problem similar to the natural calamities. Certainly, it would have been very difficult for Bangladesh to pay for food imports without the huge amount of foreign aid. But the continuity of this large aid will be questioned once it becomes a rice surplus economy. Then the surplus rice can be diverted towards developmental programmes, which is now based on food aid. So, it cannot continue to earn foreign exchange and continue to run its developmental programmes like FFWP on food aid.

Wheat constitutes the major part of food import. Bangladesh still imports 1.5 million metric tonnes of cereal annually. To meet the

increasing demand of its urban population rapid increase of urban population is creating a demand for wheat. At this juncture, growth of agricultural production depends heavily on the expansion of high yielding varieties and modern technology, suggesting a continuous public commitment to agricultural research and extension. The foodgrain sector is still vulnerable to major production shocks, such as heavy floods and droughts. Bangladesh has to learn a lesson or two from India.

It's been more than two decades when India was an importer of foodgrains on a large scale. The country has managed heavy buffer stocks due to ‘green revolution’ in the late 1970s. Today, India has a well established food security system. The build-up of the Indian reserve was made possible by the improved production. It was based upon a determination to acquire reserves and manage them. This Indian commitment to establish its own national reserve requirements represents an important contribution to increased national and world food security.\(^30\)

But Bangladesh has its own compulsions. Demand for food will continue to grow due to growth of population and incomes. Therefore, the need for food imports is likely to continue. Even after stabilization of its population, food imports and aid will be unavoidable, considering the frequency of damaging natural hazards. The concept of large reserve may not be as appropriate here as it is in India because of damp climate and maintenance costs.

It seems that Bangladesh has little choice. It has to depend on food aid since it has no effective resources to pay back for food imports. During the last two decades, for food aid, Bangladesh depended on the USA, Canada and Australia. These came in the form of wheat. Australian food aid is a grant. The volume of food aid to Bangladesh depends on the demand-supply gap in a given year. Food aid from Australia is for humanitarian relief as well as for public food distribution system also. Share of food-for-work programme is 30% and the rest is spent on the components of PFDS. The food aid given by the USAID and Canada is large, but it has more political strings attached to it.

Despite the increase in food production, food aid is not declining and this is not surprising since large part of food aid is deviated towards developmental project. This is intended to ensure food accessibility to the rural poor. And this aid has become the integral part of food security system. Even in the near future, it would be very difficult to say how long it would run on charity and grant. It will continue to need food aid to keep the FFWP going. Considering its geographical location and its vulnerability to natural calamities, food aid is inevitable. All kinds of food aid and grants are not purely on the humanitarian ground. There are some kinds of strategic and other interests of the donors involved. Therefore, it would be interesting to analyze the geopolitics of food aid and its implication for South Asia. The need for a solid food security system is still eluding Bangladesh (Figure- 4.1).
FIGURE-4.2 FOOD SECURITY SYSTEM IN BANGLADESH

Food Production

Food Import

Accessibility to Food

Through PFDS

Employment Generation/Temporary Construction Scheme

Food Availability Within Household

Exchange Entitlement Gained Outside Agriculture

Agriculture Seen As Creating Exchange Entitlement

Cash

Accessibility

Depend on Purchasing Power

Depend on Employment Status Non Vulnerability

Forcing Government for Development/Aided Scheme

How Long Donors Will Support?