CHAPTER SIX

POPULATION AND FOOD POLICY OPTIONS IN BANGLADESH: A SUGGESTIVE FRAMEWORK
To have food and nutrition security in the developing countries like Bangladesh, no one can sensibly question the reduction of population growth rate as the basic necessity. Considering the number of malnourished and undernourished persons in the region, one has to think in terms of demographic sustainability vis-à-vis food security. Although food production can and has been increased significantly with the help of high yielding varieties, fertilizers and modern equipment, food availability alone cannot solve the basic problems of poverty, hunger and malnutrition. One has to consider the role of population.

The problem of food and nutritional security is multidimensional in nature. Its close relationship with population growth, poverty and socio-economic equality cannot be ruled out. Depending on the situation prevailing in Bangladesh with regard to the population and natural resource equation, an approximate population policy will have to be developed and implemented. The policies of populations especially the family welfare programme, health and nutrition policies needs an integrated approach. It must be integrated with policies like agricultural and food policies and family planning policies.

Bangladesh has both short term and long term measures to improve the standard of living, to elevate nutritional status and also to reduce child and infant mortality. They also have the family planning programmes. But this alone has not been much effective
family planning programme has to become an integral part of national food security systems.

6.1 **Population Programmes And Policies In Bangladesh**

Bangladesh Government came out with a national population policy in 1976 to control rapidly growing population. This was the first comprehensive official statement on the population policy. This envisaged an accelerated decline in the rate of population growth. It recognised "the urgent need for the total re-orientation of strategy making population control and family planning programme an integral part of social mobilisation and national development efforts".

The population programme in Bangladesh focused on family planning and the reduction in fertility rates. However, the programme is still not adequate to keep the population at a economically sustainable level. The population projections under different assumptions indicate that the size of the population is destined to double or nearly double in the next forty to fifty years due to the population momentum built-up in earlier years. The population policies adopted in the past could thus be said to have attained only a partial success. The reasons for realising more optimal results from Bangladesh's population programmes have as yet not been satisfactorily addressed. The dependence of

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Bangladesh’s Family Planning Programmes on the donors made the whole programme vulnerable to any prospective decline in donor support. To make the population programmes sustainable as well as to make the overall approach more effective in order to cope with the future challenges, issues of management today need to be more carefully scrutinized and purposeful measures need to be undertaken on a priority basis to iron out these constraints to the efficiency of the programme. To be effective, population policies should address all sources of continuing growth, except declining mortality².

The history of organized efforts for population planning can be traced back to 1953 when the Family Planning Association of Bangladesh (FPAB) initiated clinical family planning with assistance from the government and the external donor agencies. An integrated health and family planning service was introduced during 1960-65 but the extent of its success was very limited. However, some experience was accumulated in the clinical and non-clinical sectors. The intensification of family planning was initiated during 1965-70 with an expansion in the provision of clinical services, development of a communications programme and outreach of services. However, the first Five Year Plan of Bangladesh (1973-78) had a considerable impact on the population programme through giving

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high priority to put in place a broad based population policy with a view to reduce the growth of population in Bangladesh. In 1975 some important policy decisions were taken for generating a more robust demand for family planning services through introducing the position of Family Welfare Assistant (FWAs). These FWAs were expected to provide for service delivery and to motivate users through provisions of door step services. The FWAs contributed to the current level of success of the population policy through reducing the level of fertility from 6.3 in 1975 to 3.3 in 1996.\(^3\)

The Second, Third and Fourth Five Year Plans continued to support these programmes through expanding the reach of the family planning programmes and introducing some new strategies, such as, construction of FWCs at the Union level and employing Family Welfare Visitors (FWVs), initiating the concept of Satellite Clinics and Local Initiative Programme (LIP), etc. During these phases NGOs came to play an increasingly vital role in the family planning sector through providing services at the grass - roots level.

In the Fifth Five Year Plan (FFYP) for the period 1997-2002, there are indications of major shifts in the GOB’s population policy. The shifts are based on several problems and constraints that were identified during 1990-96 period, some of these are identified below.

(i) The existing service delivery system requires reorganization/restructuring to meet the need for providing a cost effective and efficient services.

(ii) Population factors are yet to be adequately integrated into macro and other sectoral plans so as to establish linkages between population factors and development variables.

(iii) The Health and Family Welfare centres (HFWCs) at the union level are largely underutilized.

The population policy has identified the key elements that need to be addressed during the next five year period. However, the plan strategies do not mention the steps necessary to materialize these transactions from an established and complex programme that have been operating for a long time without much change in the organizational structure. Any modification in the programme such as, decentralizing authority to the local level community rested with their ownership over the programme planning and resource mobilization, capacity for human resource development, using the Union Parishad as the nucleus of all the population related activities, etc., should be based on very specific plans for action to be field tested on small scale before their introduction at the national level.
In 1995, USAID and the Government of Bangladesh initiated the planning for National Integrated Population and Health Programme (NIPHP) as a follow-up to the Family Planning and Health Services Project (FPHSP) package concluded in August, 1997.

The rationale behind the implementation strategy of NIPHP spells out the necessity of developing a cost-effective strategy in order to cope with the insufficiency of financial resources to keep pace with future needs of the health and family planning sector in Bangladesh. This project intends to deliver a basic package of high quality, high impact family planning and health services in an integrated manner through a more effective policy framework in order to mobilize GOB and NGO resources at the community level.

NIPHP expects to reach the following targets during 1997-2004.

(i) the TFR will be reduced from 8.3 in 1997 to 2.8 in 2004;
(ii) the infant mortality rate will be reduced from 87 to 70;
(iii) the child mortality rate will decrease from 36 to 30; and
(iv) the proportion of pregnancies attended by trained providers will increase from 26% to 40%.

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The policy, set by USAID, indicates that a clearly defined basic package of services will be provided to clients through a one-stop shopping process that will be made available at a location near to the customer's place or residence. Many questions, however, regarding these measures, remain unanswered, for instance, the definition of the basic package, potential service providers and their training, training curriculum, personnel and institutions required for ensuring an optimum level of training, role of field workers, distance from customers residence, mode of referral for basic package services, participation of husband in their activities, linkage between GOB and NGO workers undertaking such activities, changes needed in the organizational structure of the GOB to make this attempt successful etc.

The population programme in Bangladesh has achieved remarkable success in the past decade despite its limitations, but there are new dimensions to the problem that need serious attention.

Bangladesh is facing the following challenges at the policy front.

(a) cost of family planning will increase rapidly and it will be beyond the means of the government in the absence of increased donor assistance for family planning;

(b) reduction of infant and child mortality is a prerequisite for a further improvement of the family planning programme;
(c) due to absence of an efficient management of side-effects, the discontinuation of contraceptive remains very high;

(d) integration of health and other socio-economic factors with the population programmes in order to develop a sustainable system, and

(e) the gap between the stated policies and the allocations.

Finally, it can be suggested that the population programme needs to introduce the concept of community participation at the smallest units in order to develop a sustainable system with community ownership. This concept needs further investigation on a pilot basis in some areas. However, without introducing necessary modifications in the organisational structure, all other efforts will only produce a marginal output, and the targets of the population policy will remain largely unaccomplished.

6.2 Critical Evaluation of Food and Agricultural Policies in Bangladesh

Throughout the world there is a broad commitment to reducing hunger and malnutrition. Increased food production is essential to achieve this objective. But increased production of food grain alone is not enough. Reducing hunger means not only producing more food but also providing it to one and all with nutrition. Government policies play a major role in ensuring food security at all levels.
Since food is an increasingly urgent political and economic issue for developing countries, food production is the primary economic concern. And to make it accessible to everybody is an essential objective. The supply of food at affordable and stable prices is the concern of the wage earners.

Historically, food policy has actually been agricultural policy and ways to increase farm output centered around one commodity such as rice or wheat. Such approaches have failed to improve the nutritional status of large number of people in less-developed country. They have failed to forge a link between the expansion of agricultural output and reduction of hunger.

For majority of the population in less developed countries food production is primary economic activity, while availability of food at low and stable food prices is a central political demand. Yet, the multifaceted dimension of the food problem have only recently claimed the attention of policy makers. However, those responsible for formulating and implementing an effective policy often lack practical experiences. Before analysing various food agricultural policies followed by Bangladesh let us take a stock of the current status of the economy of Bangladesh.

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Bangladesh is one of the world's poorest, most densely populated, and least developed, countries, it per capita income for 1997 is estimated at $ 263. Most of its population of approximately 127 million is tied directly or indirectly to agriculture, which accounts for 35 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and about 70 percent of the labour force. While economic growth in 1998 dropped 0.3 percent to 5.6 percent, primarily due to lower agricultural production, it remained above the historical average annual growth rate of 4.0 to 4.5 percent over the last ten years. The historical growth rate, though positive on a per capita basis, is inadequate to relieve the poverty faced by over half of the population.

GDP growth has been dampened over the years by a number of factors: low productivity growth in the agricultural sector, political and policy instability, poor infrastructure, corruption, and low domestic savings and investment. The state's presence in the economy continues to be large, and money-losing state enterprises have been a chronic drain on the treasury. Nonetheless, during the 1990's Bangladesh has steadily liberalized its economy and increasingly the private sector has assumed a more prominent role as the climate for free markets and trade has improved. The Awami League government, which came to power in June 1996, largely continued the market-based policies of its predecessor, the Bangladesh National Party. It placed a high priority on increasing foreign investment in the economy, and has made some regulatory
and policy changes toward that end. However, implementation of new policy directives by the bureaucracy has been slow and uneven.

Bangladesh suffered its worst flood in history during the summer and fall of 1998. The economic damage is still being assessed, but preliminary estimates suggest a loss of $4.3 billion, or 70 percent of GDP. A large proportion of the winter rice crop could not be planted, which increased the food import bill dramatically despite the assistance of donor nations. The United States has pledged a donation of 7,00,000 metric tons of wheat. As of the end of October 1998, Bangladesh and foreign exchange reservices stood at about $1.7 billion, or less than three months of import cover. These reserves are expected to decrease in the coming months due to imports of food grain and the capital equipment needed to repair flood-damaged infrastructure. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) will provide emergency balance of payment relief of over $300 million, and in turn, Bangladesh has signaled a willingness to negotiate an Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility (ESAF) with the IMF. Such an ESAF in likely to be conditional on government revenue enhancement measures, financial sector reforms and public sector reforms, including privatization.

Inflation surged to 7 percent in 1998 from 2.6 percent in 1997, reflecting food price hikes, public sector wage increases, and
robust money growth towards the end of 1998. Inflation is expected to rise to 8 percent in 1999.

The information and situations given above owe explanation. Here, it become essential to discuss various policies which were adopted. From the very beginning, meeting the growing consumption requirements to cereals, particularly rice, remains an important political issue in Bangladesh and a central objective of public policy. 7

Therefore, achieving self-sufficiency in food has always been a national concern. Food policies are more than a statement of national objective and goals for meeting the food needs of the population. 8 Despite having unfavourable man-land ratio, Bangladesh is trying hard to become self-sufficient in foodgrain production. Overall, policies to secure food for all can be broadly divided into:

(a) Policies focussing on increasing availability and foodgrain self-sufficiency; and
(b) Policies enhancing the accessibility to food.


Since the inception of Bangladesh, agriculture was brought to the centre of planning and attaining self-reliance in basic foodgrains came to be recognised as the key of development. The need for having a food policy was recognised, but it was not until the Second Five Year Plan that a food policy known as the Food Security Plan was developed. The main goal of this plan is to ensure people the minimum desirable level of consumption. Upto the early 1980s, that is, during Bangladesh’s first decade, the government designed its food grain pricing policy to provide low, stable prices to consumers. 9

It is almost established that the problem of food insecurity cannot be solved without addressing the issue of meeting the required food on sustainable basis. Since early 1980s, Bangladesh’s food grain production performance has been improving. Thanks to the Rice Revolution, which took place due to high yielding varieties and fertilizers.

Agriculture continue to remain the most important sector in Bangladesh. It is also true that since its inception, Bangladesh has been facing foreign and domestic resource imbalance. As we have discussed in Chapter 2 most of the arable land has already been brought under cultivation—mainly rice and wheat. Can Bangladesh afford to grow more rewarding perishable cash crops?

Often it is argued that farmers with small land holdings will benefit from those. This will depend on the relationship between countries and involve foreign policy and involve risk. Therefore, its thrust on self-sufficiency is commendable. It realised that a positive grain policy which would ensure remunerative prices to the farmers was essential to ensure sustained growth in domestic production. Increase in food production, especially those based on small holder production, had a marked effect on reduction in child malnutrition.\textsuperscript{10}

Although there was an obvious policy to increase foodgrain production, it had its own limitations. Initially, it lacked infrastructure development and irrigation policies. Constantly hit by natural hazards, it lacked a policy oriented towards constructing roads, bridges, land embankments, irrigation facilities, etc. Unavailability of proper storage facilities reflects the ignorance of the government.

In the mid-1990s the stagnating production was the resultant of stress on the HYRVs. Intensive cropping using there HYVs, fertilisers and chemicals have resulted in heavy soil loss and other associated problems. The existing agricultural policies did not take care of the old practice of crop rotation and importance of organic manure.

Owing to the protracted balance of payments, persistently large fiscal deficits, and a highly unsatisfactory overall

\footnote{Shubh K. Kumar, \textit{f.n}. 4.}
performance, the government initiated major policy reforms in early 1980s, known as structural adjustment. The policy reforms, which spanned the entire decade of 1980s and are still continuing included removal of quantitative restriction on imports, phased reduction tariffs, a flexible exchange rate policy, and withdrawal of subsidies from agricultural inputs such as fertilizers and irrigation equipment.

Here, withdrawal of subsidies from agriculture, especially on fertiliser is worth discussing. In fact, fertiliser subsidies were mainly helping big formers, still, it has not only started to have an impact on the overall production but it is also adversely affecting the small farmers. Similarly, the withdrawal of subsidized irrigation input is most likely to affect the production. Therefore, small farmers should be encouraged to use the new technology with government support. Because benefits received by there small farmers are going to benefit the larger number of society.

As mentioned earlier, food policy should also incorporate the element of protecting soil fertility and educate farmers about crop rotation. By using organic manure and following crop rotation the fluctuations in food production can be checked and it will be sustainable as well. What this country needs at this point of times on the supply front is to check instability in food supply. By adopting effective measures to reduce food grain loss due to floods

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12 Ibid
and drought expanding irrigation facilities and building storage capacity, Bangladesh can reduce instability in food supply.

The Food Security Plan adopted during the 1980s Bangladesh consists of the following main elements:

(i) To increase food production by providing subsidize technical support modern units adequate credit.

(ii) It involves procurement of food at a price that gives incentive to farmers and an open market sale of rice during lean season.

(iii) Withdrawal of rice from statutory rationing helping the government stock for open market sale and make food available through public distribution system.

(iv) To safeguard the interest of the poorer and vulnerable groups through modified rationing food for work etc.

Since policies regarding food production and availability have been discussed earlier, it is now essential to evaluate the policies enhancing the accessibility to food.

Our previous discussions on poverty clearly reflect the poor's inaccessibility to food. Food available to a household clearly depends on its purchasing power. Considering the large number of landless and tenants in the rural and urban areas vis-à-vis limited employment opportunities, the government's policy becomes crucial.
Statutory rationing as part of Public Food Distribution System has failed to yield result and moreover, it has been urban-centric. The impact of food policy on meeting the food needs of the poor people has been minimal. 'Modified Ration' system has been operating at a level that has no substantial impact on household food supplies.

Programmes like food-for-work is purely temporary and it may last for one to two months. We have already discussed the other drawbacks of these programmes in Chapter-4. So, the various strategies used in meeting the needs of the poor have not been satisfactory. There is immediate need to modify these programmes. Focus should be on employment generation through non-farm and cottage activities.

Though in the early 1990s 'safety net' policies which targeted vulnerable groups have been successful to a certain extent. But quantitatively they are not significant. There are economically poorer areas which still do not get the preferential access to these programmes. Vast majorities of development resources end up benefiting the better-off segments of the population, even to those who should not have benefited. It would be difficult to carry out these programmes considering the implications and long term consequences of structural adjustment. The government cannot afford to continue to procure foodgrain on higher prices and then distribute them on lower prices. This is the crux of the food policy conflicts (Fig 6.1).
Fig 6.1 FOOD POLICY CONFLICTS

STRUCTURAL POVERTY

HUNGER & MALNUTRITION

LOOKING FOR MORE FOOD

NEEDS SUBSIDISED FOOD

HIGH POPULATION GROWTH

INCREASING DEMAND FOR FOOD

REQUIREMENTS HIGHER FOOD PRODUCTION & IMPORT

NEED FOR HIGHER FOOD PRICES

CAN BANGLADESH AFFORD BOTH?
Now, the question arises - whether the policies discussed above will be effective in eliminating malnutrition and hunger? The answer would be in negative "if any of them is implemented on their own." It requires an entire complex of measures to be in place. In Bangladesh proper 'utilisation of aid' is the most important aspect. It would be useful to see how aid can be most effectively utilised within the context of the broader development and food policy needs.


In a country like Bangladesh, where problems are several and complex, any policy should not be formulated in isolation. Rapidly expanding population and food insecurity problems are interlinked, having wider implications. Therefore, we must go beyond demography to search for a truly effective population stabilizing strategy, which would lead to sustainable population growth. We only witnessed policies relating to family planning and sterilization and of late, child and maternal health care. While dealing with agricultural policies the main focus was on how to increase cereal production to meet the problems of food insecurity.

The crucial role played by various non-food factors is also important. Thus, in addition to improved seeds and fertilisers, factors such as education, population educational programmes, and

13 Shubh K. Kumar, fn. 4
infrastructural development that would generate employment, can be considered as essential components for enhancing and sustaining national and household food insecurity.

The multi-sectoral approach adopted by UNCED Agenda 21 for achieving sustainable agricultural and rural development provides an appropriate framework for integrating all these to achieve food insecurity in a sustainable manner. Within the broad agriculture and rural sector, even the villages can be focussed as a unit. At the district or area level, “concern within agricultural sector is focussed on the sustainability of particular agro-ecosystems, including forestry or fisheries system”.14

The national policies for agriculture and rural development should include full and effective participation of rural people in decision making, implementation and evaluation of the processes of agrarian reform and rural development. Promoting people’s organization and strengthening local government can do this. Full integration of women in rural development on equal basis should be encouraged. Nutritional considerations should be incorporated into decision-making, planning and implementation.

Although the country is experiencing a decline in fertility still, it is far from satisfactory. To lower the reproduction rate below the

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replacement level fertility, the population education programmes should become a part of the development and strategies. For this to happen, policies should be targeted towards the rural areas.

Formulation of policies is always done keeping the available the resources in mind. Because any planning and policy implementation needs resources. Bangladesh does not enjoy much diverse and rich natural resources with its limitations. Apart from its land resources it has to look towards ocean for the generation of future resources. The government has realised its potential in natural gas. A move has already been set afloat to exploit its natural gas in the partnership with the United States of America.

As we have observed earlier, the dependency on foreign aid is due to small foreign reserve. To enhance its credibility; to reduce dependency on external aid; and to improve its economy Bangladesh has to look towards other sources of generating foreign reserve. Apart form gas, it can also look towards 'technical education'. This technically educated class may work outside and send money to their country. Bangladesh had strong educational background historically. Our previous discussions, and the figure 6.1 reveals the handicap situation on the resources font and food policy conflicts.

To sustain its ongoing population and employment programmes, generation it needs perennial source of heavy amount.
Bangladesh, like other densely populated developing country is caught in kind of situation, where it cannot ignore the basic needs of the poor, at the same in centimes to increase food production is inevitable. Enhanced foreign exchange can change the scenario. The integrated Population education, and expansion of the non-agricultural sector mainly small scale and cottage industries can attack the problem of population growth and food insecurity effectively. These two combined will improve standard of living and quality of life. Which would result into two things: reduction in population growth, and reductions in the chronic and transitory food insecurity. It would also improve the nutritional status of the households. This has been explained through a model (figure- 6.2).

This model advocates to focus on the integration of population programmes, agricultural education, agriculture research and extension, and infrastructural development
Figure 6.2 Suggestive Framework for Future Food Security in Bangladesh