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The national food policy and plan of action

Bangladesh

Since the global food crisis of 2007-08, donor commitments to invest in food security and agricultural development have increased drastically. For instance, at the July 2009 G8 summit in L'Aquila, donors committed to invest USD 20 billion in food security and agriculture over three years, both multilaterally and bilaterally. New funding arrangements have been created including the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program, the European Union Food Facility and the US Feed the Future initiative.

The increased availability of funding for food security offers an enormous opportunity for Bangladesh. However, it might also present unprecedented challenges to channel resources efficiently and coherently. Food security is multi-sectoral by nature, and as such requires interdependent interventions across diverse sectors such as agriculture, health, nutrition, education and disaster management. Without strategic planning and coordination, it will thus be difficult to ensure resources are channeled to where they are needed most.

To provide food security actors in Bangladesh with a strategic orientation in

food security planning, the government of Bangladesh designed and approved the **National Food Policy** (2006) and **Plan of Action** (2008-2015). The latter translates three core objectives of the policy into strategic areas of intervention and priority actions: Adequate and stable supply of safe and nutritious food; Increased purchasing power and access to food of the people; and Adequate nutrition for all individuals, especially women and children.

Special care was taken to align the National Food Policy with Bangladesh's overall development strategy. The document is consistent with all relevant sectoral policies and broader policy frameworks, thus making it a suitable instrument to align donors' interventions with government priorities.

The Plan of Action also identifies relevant actors and suggests a set of policy targets and indicators to monitor progress in the implementation of the National Food Policy. While progress has been achieved in increasing rice production, in reducing the prevalence of malnourishment and in lowering the number of underweight children, monitor-

ing of the Plan of Action identified several areas that require increased attention by the Government of Bangladesh and international donors.

Filling the gaps

Evidence shows that, while production has substantially grown, Bangladesh still needs to further increase and diversify agricultural output. To improve the availability of food, investments are needed to intensify and diversify food production and increase its sustainability; support adaptation to climate change; and develop agricultural marketing and infrastructure.

Specific entry points for action include increasing research and extension capacities, with special attention to the development of new rice and non-rice varieties; developing programmes on crop diversification and increasing funding to livestock and fisheries sectors; facilitating access to agricultural inputs and credit and ensuring that fertilizers and pesticides are used sustainably; and protecting producers' incentives by strengthening procurement programmes.

Another important food security challenge is to increase the number of people who can access sufficient and nutritious food. Investments to eradicate income poverty, with a particular emphasis on the most vulnerable groups, and improved risk management, will help increase and stabilize access to food. Among other things, this involves promoting income generation in rural areas by increasing access to markets, strengthening women's access to productive assets, increasing value-addition, paying special attention to the development of micro- enterprises and reforming technical and vocational training to be more gender sensitive. In addition, safety net programs need to be expanded to the landless, marginal farmers and food insecure people in urban and disaster-prone areas.

Diets in Bangladesh are highly unbalanced and diseases impair people's ability to absorb nutrients from the food they eat. To improve nutrition, investments are needed to promote diversified food consumption, tackle nutrient deficiencies among women and children and improve food safety. This requires strengthening health and nutrition programmes by adopting life-cycle approaches in programme design and implementation, and improving their targeting. It also calls for further improving food supplementation and fortification interventions for vulnerable groups, as well as breast feeding and complementary feeding practices. Most critically, a nutrition focus needs to be mainstreamed within agriculture, health, safety nets and education policies and programmes.

Lastly, food security governance needs to be enhanced. This involves increasing human and institutional capacities to implement and coordinate food security interventions and to monitor the National Food Policy and its Plan of Action by ensuring that the relevant data are available and easily accessible.

The National Food Policy and Plan of Action provide the reference policy frameworks for defining a comprehensive investment plan that is able to mobilize additional resources in the context of renewed international commitment to support food security, agriculture and nutrition.

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