

Background

Bangladesh is in the pathway of attaining Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In order to achieve the goals, it is imperative to ensure inclusive development and end poverty and therefore, a concrete livelihood programme or public works model is essential. Public works programmes have been observed as “win-win” by generating employment, creating assets, and more specifically providing welfare transfer.

Research Objectives

- To identify how the Government of Bangladesh’s livelihood social security programmes are affecting the long-term welfare of the citizenry, and whether they provide a better value for money over direct cash transfers or not.
- To find out whether livelihood graduation programmes have any long-term impact on beneficiaries or not.

Methodological approaches

- Deploys a survey technique on SWAPNO beneficiaries to compare it with baseline and end line, and
- Compares between cash transfer and graduation programme using HIES 2016 data

Research Findings

Strengthening Women’s Ability for Productive New Opportunities SWAPNO Programme:

The beneficiary women were employed from 16 August 2015 to 15 February 2017 for a tenure of 18 months and each beneficiary received a total of BDT 66,450 as cash wage payments. Besides, the programme had a mandatory savings scheme (BDT 50 per working day) and each participating woman received BDT 22,150 as a graduation bonus at the end of the programme. Along with employment, SWAPNO beneficiaries also received seven basic life skill and livelihood trainings. It attempts to achieve dual objectives since inception i) maintenance of public works ii) boosting of women self-confidence and self-esteem.

SWAPNO analysis finds

- Substantial increase in yearly income and asset of the beneficiaries which has been calculated to be approximately BDT 14,797 compared to their control counterpart due to SWAPNO intervention which resulted in an increase in food and non-food expenditures, particularly education and health expenditures.
- Beneficiaries reported that they have other sources of income including livestock, personal grant, income from TR, VGD and VGF, handicraft, small business, selling fruits, government grants etc. The graduation bonus was used in purchasing homestead and cultivable land along with starting different small businesses. Their transition from wage labour to a mix of farmers has enhanced their self-esteem and self-confidence.
- Comparing the value of BMI, beneficiaries are perceived to have good health than before maintaining good food habits which has resulted in improved nutritional status.
- SWAPNO training programme has been successful in creating awareness among the participants about maintaining sanitation status along with coping strategies even during shocks.

- Beneficiaries are highly aware of certain laws and rights related to child marriage and dowry.

Challenges

Although the SWAPNO project is an effective Social Safety Net Programme, there exist some challenges too.

- Sometimes, SWAPNO women were sexually harassed by the supervisors and other UP members and teased by other people of the society while working outside.
- Bribe and lobbying have played important role in selection due to the lack of proper supervision.
- Beneficiaries have shown their dissatisfaction about the programme duration, wage rate and low number of beneficiaries covered in the programme.

From the FGDs, the beneficiaries have not tasted the poverty again just after ending the programme. The main reason is that the participants have not faced any serious shocks within last two years. Henceforth, there is high possibility that some participants may fall back into poverty if they face any shock.

Recommendation from FGD Findings

- Currently Two areas - Kurigram and Sathkhira are target areas. Other remote areas of Bangladesh should be considered so that people can come out of extreme poverty.
- The SWAPNO authority, especially the union workers, should monitor the workplace properly to tackle sexual harassment and teasing.
- Per day savings can be increased from BDT 50 to BDT 70 so that the participants can get more as graduation bonus.
- Duration of the programme can be increased so that they can properly implement their learning into productive activities.
- The participants can improve their living if revision of wage rate can be reconsidered.

Graduation and Cash Transfer Debate

- People under graduation programme are more literate than someone receiving continuous cash transfer programme. The reason is that, within graduation programme, the participants get preliminary training on reading and writing which is absent in continuous cash transfer programme.
- Beneficiaries under CCT programme spend slightly more on education, food and non-food items than people under graduation programme. But people under graduation programme hold more operating land on average than people under CCT. The insight here is that, graduation programme provides more attention to sustainable livelihood and a participant can accumulate assets during and after the programme. The result also shows that, the average daily wage of both types of programmes are almost same but it is obligatory to mention here that, in graduation programme the participants get different incentive i.e. training on income generating activities, knowledge on health hygiene along with basic rights which are absent in the cash transfer programme.
- Under CCT, 64% of children complete their primary education and 22 % pass SSC level whereas its 68 % and 24% under graduation programme Therefore; the insight here is that the highest level of education under graduation programme is slightly better than cash transfer programme. This result implies that - people are literate enough to demand their rights as well as starting their own business utilizing their education and training.

Finally, propensity score matching PSM analysis gives an opportunity to evaluate the impact of long-term benefit of any programme intervention. It has been observed that the comparison between the households who received benefits from Social Safety Net Programmes (SSNP) with the ones who did not, is confounded. Overall, the results portray that there is positive impact of SSNP programme in Bangladesh. More specifically, the treatment group receiving the benefits under SSNP have more income and consumption than the untreated/control group. However, both groups consist of households with similar attributes (rural, agricultural occupation and education). Given the cross-sectional settings, PSM approach gives the opportunity to analyze the impact of SSNP programmes in limited scope.

Are Participants Better-off After Exiting the Programme?

There is growing evidence that social security programmes such as SWAPNO, VGD, EGPP, etc. help to uplift the economic well-being of poor participants. But as per KII discussion, there is a high probability that the participants may fall back into poverty once they exit the programme since many of these programmes do not have solutions which can guarantee sustainable poverty elevation. For example, sometimes, asset creation, creation of sustainable income earning, etc. do not guarantee that the poor will not slip into poverty again. Besides, the participants who are more conservative may not fully utilize the opportunities/supports provided by these IGA programmes and thus, there is risk of falling back into poverty once they exit the programme. Natural shocks like floods, cyclones, etc. often take lives and destroy assets including the means of livelihood. These significantly increase people's vulnerability to poverty, especially in the absence of a robust insurance mechanism. In addition, health shocks make many families off-guard due to the limited access to public healthcare and high out-of-pocket healthcare expenses. Such health shocks significantly erode household savings and reduce household income if the affected person is the sole income earner. Therefore, for ensuring sustainable development and alleviating poverty, there is still a room for improvements.

Graduation programme exhibits significant positive impact and outweighs cash transfer programme by several indicators. Both HIES analysis and particular observation from public works model (SWAPNO) reveal exemplary success on beneficiaries under graduation context. According to literature, though cash transfer intervention brings temporary support, there is probability that the poor people will slip into poverty again in the long run. The evidence supports that graduation or public works model include a package of interventions aiming to upgrade the ability of the beneficiaries so that they can maintain a certain level of income even in the absence of the project. Moreover, this paper highly argues that, if the main aim is to graduate people out of extreme and moderate poverty, a comprehensive social security system should be developed with the adequate engagement of government bodies.