

Chapter-37

Ministry of Food

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Bangladesh is one of the densely populated countries in the world. With this large population, ensuring food security for all is a formidable challenge. The Ministry of Food has been working on providing sufficient and safe food for all through coordinated policy, strategy and management. This is a challenging task considering the fact that the country has ever increasing population, limited resources, poverty and malnutrition. One of the main objectives of the ministry is to ensure availability of food for the poorer segment of the society, especially for women who constitute half of the total population. The ministry is continuing its effort to maintain price stability of food through women friendly and targeted food distribution programs, providing price incentive to farmers, providing rice fortified with micronutrients and ensuring safe food free from adulteration.

2.0 Major Functions of the Ministry

- ❖ Country's overall food management, planning, operation, and co-ordination;
- ❖ Export, import and internal procurement of food grains (rice and wheat), maintaining sufficient food stock and its distribution and movement around the country;
- ❖ Fixing the procurement price and sell price of public procurement program, ensuring price stability sufficient supply of food grains;
- ❖ Designing and implementing various development projects of food sector;
- ❖ Maintaining sufficient stock of food grains and testing the quality of grains;
- ❖ Food planning, research and monitoring; and
- ❖ Implementing the Safe Food Act 2013.

3.0 Impact of Strategic Objectives of the Ministry on Women's Advancement

3.1 **To ensure food security:** The supply of adequate food during disasters is ensured by government's strategy of keeping adequate stocks of food at district and Upazila levels, through domestic and international procurement. This will bring stability to the supply situation and acts as a food safety net for the poor especially for the destitute women. Generally, at the beginning of the financial year a stock of 10 lakh metric tons of food grains is maintained in government storage/silo, sufficient to meet 5 months' requirement. The stock of food grains usually diminishes just before the harvesting season and reaches the maximum at the end of the procurement season. During a crisis it will be possible to stabilize market prices of food grains

through Open Market Sale (OMS) of stored food grains. As a result, it would be possible for poor women to buy food grains at low prices and the process will have a positive impact on poverty reduction. Maintaining safety stocks of food grains at the government level will thus increase food supply to poor and destitute women during periods of crisis.

- 3.2 **To stabilize market prices of food grains and to ensure fair prices to farmers for their crops during the harvesting season:** In order to stabilize food grain price in the market the Directorate of Food procures food grains from farmers at fair prices during harvesting season which is subsequently sold at OMS during the lean period. This brings price stability to the market and poor-friendly market system is ensured. As a result, poor women will have better access to food and nutrition. Purchasing food grains at government's pre-determined prices will ensure fair prices to marginal and poor farmers. With the procurement of food grains at fair prices and subsequently distributing through OMS, grain prices in the market will remain stable and destitute women will get the opportunity to buy food grains at a relatively low price. This will help poor women gain access to food and nutrition and increase their food security and involvement in income generating activities. They will also benefit from the government procurement of food grains at a pre-determined price which eliminates the costs of brokers and middlemen.
- 3.3 **To ensure access to food for the poor especially poor women and children:** Employment opportunities for the rural poor are created during lean periods through the implementation of Test Relief (TR), Food for Work (FFW), Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) and Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) programmes. Direct supplies of food grains on requisition of implementing authorities under the food-based programme will ease access to food for the beneficiaries. For this, necessary stocks, storage and distribution channels are maintained. As a result of distribution of food grains to different women friendly programs, the employment for the poor and destitute women will be created; their income will increase and that will ease their access to food.
- 3.4 **To ensure safe food and to improve nutrition status:** Providing fortified food enriched with micronutrients through government food aid programmes to the destitute people, especially to the poor women, improves their nutritional level. In addition, food aided programmes also creates employment opportunities to the women.

4.0 Role of the Ministry of Food in establishing women's advancement and rights:

- 4.1 Since women constitute half of the population, they may be considered as significant beneficiaries of food security programs. The incidence of food insecurity falls disproportionately on the deprived section of the population, a larger portion of them being women. Some of them are widows; some others are deserted by husbands. Despite being deserted or widow, many of them have more than one child. As a result, food shortage impacts them most. Considering the above Ministry of Food has formulated 'The National Food Policy Plan of Action'. If this plan of action is fully implemented, this would contribute greatly to ensure the food security for the destitute women.
- 4.2 To develop a food security system the Bangladesh Country Investment Plan 2011 was prepared in the light of the National Food Policy Plan of Action. In this plan an integrated food safety net has been targeted in conformity with the 6th Five Year Plan. To ensure food security, Under Food Safety Act 2013, the safe food rules 2014 regarding administrative procedure for seizing of unsafe/adulterated food has already been formulated. Consequently Bangladesh Safe Food Authority has been established. It is expected that with these planning documents and strengthening of the legal foundation, the Ministry of Food will be able to ensure food security for all. Women being the half of the total population would also be able to enjoy that benefit of this security. Moreover, special emphasis has been accorded to ensure food security to the poor and destitute women in the light of the Food Policy Action Plan, Bangladesh Country Investment Plan 2011 etc.
- 4.3 Ministry of Food procures food grains from the farmer at a fair and reasonable price during the harvesting season and distributes grain directly or indirectly through different target-oriented programs to stabilize its market price. One of such distribution programmes is Open Market Sale (OMS). This is a women-friendly program through which food grains are sold to the poor at a nominal price. A large proportion of this poor population is women. As a result, by implementing the OMS programme, the Ministry of Food is ensuring food availability to the women in low-income group. On the other hand Ministry of Food indirectly supports other government programmes like the implementation of TR, FFW, VGF and VGD programs by supplying food grains. Most of the poor beneficiaries of these programmes are women.
- 4.4 The government is constructing storages, silos and warehouses for the storage of food. In these construction projects a substantial number of workers are women, allowing them opportunities for part time employment. Women constitute about 25

percent of the construction workers. As such a portion of the money allotted for development projects is being utilized for overall welfare of the women.

- 4.5 The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs is implementing the Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) programme under which poor and destitute women are provided various trainings and given food support. Ministry of Food has been engaged in fortifying a portion of rice that is distributed under VGD programme. In this fortification process, fortified kernels enriched with vitamins and minerals are blended with regular rice. This rice helps to reduce the nutritional deficiencies among the poverty stricken women and children.

5.0 Priority Spending Areas/programmes and their impact on women's advancement

Serial No.	Priority Spending Area/ Programs	Impacts on Women's Advancement (Direct and Indirect)
1	2	3
1.	Domestic procurement of Rice and Wheat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ It would keep the food market stable and would also ensure a fair price of food grains to the farmer in harvesting season. Thus the peasant's family members will benefit. Moreover a stable food market during the crisis period would enable the destitute women to buy food from the market.
2.	Import of food grain through own resources and aid supported imports.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ It will bring stability to the supply situation and acts as a food safety net for the poor especially during any disaster or crisis situation ❖ Maintaining safe stocks of food grains through import helps to continue the OMS and Fair Price programme where poor and destitute women are direct beneficiaries
3.	In order to increase storage capacity of food grains, construction of new and standard food storages, silos and other infrastructure and repair and modernization of existing food storages and other infrastructure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ It creates job for women as around 20 per cent of the construction workers are women. Through this a portion of the development expenditure is going to women as income. This helps the empowerment of poor women
4.	Distribution of food grains at fair prices for poor people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ OMS program helps to ensure food to the poor in reduced price while there is a price escalation ❖ This helps to fulfill the minimum nutritional requirements of the poor women and children

Serial No.	Priority Spending Area/ Programs	Impacts on Women's Advancement (Direct and Indirect)
1	2	3
5.	Ensure quality of food	❖ Citizen's health and quality of life will improve with the availability of safe and micronutrient enriched food. This will help the women, who are half of the total population. As women and children are more prone to malnutrition, government initiative like this will be critical to improve their health situation.

6.0 Women's Share in Ministry's Total Expenditure

(Taka in Crore)

Description	Budget 2017-18			Revised 2016-17			Budget 2016-17		
	Budget	Women Share Women percent	Women percent	Revised	Women Share Women percent	Women percent	Budget	Women Share Women percent	Women percent
Total Budget	400266	112019	27.99	317174	86586	27.3	340605	92781	27.24
Ministry Budget	14402	6455	44.82	11979	5293	44.18	12097	5193	42.93
Development	423	87	20.67	239	53	22.01	440	92	20.91
Non-Development	13979	6368	45.55	11740	5240	44.63	11658	5101	43.76

Source: RCGP database

7.0 Success in Promoting Women's Advancement

Ministry of Food procures food grains from the farmer at a fair and reasonable price during the harvesting season and distributes grain directly or indirectly through different target-oriented programs to stabilize its market price. One of such distribution programmes is Open Market Sale (OMS). In addition to this programme, a new program titled *Khaddo-Bandhob* has recently been introduced under which 50 lakh rural poor and ultra poor families are entitled to purchase 30 kg rice each month for five months in a year during lean season (September to November and March to April) at 10 Taka per Kg. Through this programme, a total of 7.5 lakh Metric Tons of rice is being distributed each year.

8.0 Recommendations for Future Activities:

- ❖ Strengthening the Public Food Distribution system keeping in view the demand and requirements of the destitute women;
- ❖ Ensuring participation of women in the planning, supervision and distribution in the activities of food security;
- ❖ Evaluate and recognize the work, role, and contribution of women in maintaining food security;

- ❖ Make social safety net programs more woman-friendly and formulate strategy for the protection of women;
- ❖ Identify poor and destitute women and engage women elected representatives in government food distribution;
- ❖ Open Market Sale (OMS) and Fair Price Card program have to be expanded and be more women-focused.