



INTERNATIONAL
FOOD POLICY
RESEARCH
INSTITUTE

IFPRI

HIGHLIGHTS OF RECENT IFPRI Research and Partnerships in **BANGLADESH**



2016

Reducing Poverty and Hunger
through Food Policy Research

Supporting Bangladesh's Pro-Poor Growth Strategy

Since its independence in 1971, Bangladesh has made enormous progress in food and nutrition security, food production, market development, employment growth, and social protection programs targeted to the poor. The nation has transformed itself from a country of chronic food shortages to a country of food self-sufficiency. Remarkable improvements in welfare and human development, such as a notable reduction in poverty headcount and child stunting rates, have also accompanied recent rapid economic growth. Bangladesh has successfully increased secondary school enrollment by using one of the earliest conditional cash transfer programs in existence. Since 1988, IFPRI has had a strong presence in the country, conducting food policy research, providing policy support, and strengthening stakeholders' capacity. This on-the-ground presence has allowed IFPRI to generate evidence-based research results on critical ongoing food and nutrition security issues as well as on major unforeseen events—such as the 1998 floods that ravaged the country's rice supply. Since 2010, IFPRI has scaled up its support to Bangladesh with the Policy Research and Strategy Support Program, which provides policy options and advisory services to the country's policy makers. This brochure highlights some of IFPRI's major projects in Bangladesh during the past few decades and describes major new initiatives with the potential to positively influence food and nutrition security policies that benefit the poorest.



“I express my sincere gratitude to IFPRI for its strong presence in Bangladesh conducting demand-driven food and agricultural policy research and providing evidence-based policy support to the government.”

—Matia Chowdhury, Minister of Agriculture, People's Republic of Bangladesh, at [IFPRI's 40th Anniversary Celebration](#) on November 18, 2015.

Providing Food Policy Support

Policy Research and Strategy Support Program

Project Duration: 2010–Present

MOTIVATION

The Bangladesh Policy Research and Strategy Support Program (PRSSP) for Food Security and Agricultural Development, funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), is the largest project IFPRI has ever had in Bangladesh. Building on previous work in the country alongside government partners in the Ministry of Food and Disaster Management and the Ministry of Agriculture, IFPRI launched the program in October 2010. PRSSP fills the need for demand-driven food and agriculture research in response to Bangladesh's country investment plan for agriculture, food security, and nutrition. It aims to generate information on critical issues, strengthen analytical capacity within the country, and stimulate policy dialogue. Its main objectives are to provide policy options and advisory services, collaborate with national institutions to evaluate and explain evidence, and find effective ways to deliver options and evidence to decision makers and stakeholders.

RESULTS AND OUTCOMES

The Bangladesh PRSSP has been engaging in various research and capacity strengthening activities since its inception.

- ▶ In 2012, IFPRI designed a two-year experimental pilot program called the [Transfer Modality Research Initiative \(TMRI\)](#), which was implemented by the World Food Programme (WFP). IFPRI evaluated the impacts of five types of social safety-net transfers on income, food security, and child nutrition for the 4,000 ultra-poor women and their 21,600 family members who received substantial benefits from 2012 to 2014. PRSSP's assessment, supported by USAID and the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation, showed that the combination of cash or food with nutrition education improves children's nutrition. The TMRI led to an unprecedented decrease in child stunting by 7 percentage points over the project period—an achievement almost three times the national average decline.
- ▶ During consultations for the 2016 National Nutrition Plan of Action (NPAN), UNICEF and World Bank missions in Bangladesh referenced TMRI findings to highlight the importance of nutrition education in improving children's nutrition.
- ▶ Bangladesh's [National Food Policy Plan of Action and Country Investment Plan Monitoring Report 2015](#) recommended that nutritional education be incorporated into the country's National Social Protection Strategy, drawing from the TMRI results. The country's [7th Five Year Plan \(2016–2020\)](#) also referenced the initiative's findings to support the integration of nutrition education into social safety-net programs.
- ▶ PRSSP developed the [Bangladesh Integrated Household Survey \(BIHS\)](#) in 2011, the most comprehensive and nationally representative rural household survey, which collects critical poverty, nutrition, food security, gender (using the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index), and other data from 6,500 participating households. A part of the survey was designed to track the progress of USAID's Feed the Future program.
- ▶ In estimating the impact of the Feed the Future program in Bangladesh, the BIHS dataset was instrumental in showing the nearly 16 percent reduction in poverty from 2011 to 2015 within Feed the Future zones of influence in Bangladesh, according to USAID's 2015 [Feed the Future progress report](#).
- ▶ The BIHS dataset was also used by the World Bank to prepare a US\$500 million [loan agreement](#) with



the Government of Bangladesh to improve the ability of its safety-net system to reach the poorest and most vulnerable population.

- ▶ In 2014, PRSSP, with support from USAID, the [IFPRI-led CGIAR Research Program on Agriculture for Nutrition and Health \(A4NH\)](#), and Helen Keller International (HKI), designed an experimental project on [Agriculture, Nutrition, and Gender Linkages \(ANGeL\)](#) in order to identify actions and investments in agriculture that can leverage agricultural development for improved nutrition, and make recommendations on how to invigorate pathways to women's empowerment. The Ministry of Agriculture in Bangladesh, which is executing the project, plans to use project findings to design, implement, and scale up the most effective countrywide interventions to improve nutrition and women's empowerment.
- ▶ IFPRI researchers worked with the Ministry of Agriculture to launch the Agricultural Policy Support Unit (APSU) in November 2012. This unit supports policy makers by delivering real-time information—for example, the estimated size of the next rice crop—which is extremely useful for up-to-date, accurate decision making.
- ✦ The APSU has delivered valuable research and recommendations for the ministry. In 2016, the

unit developed interventions and policies to help improve agricultural productivity and reduce poverty in the Teesta River Basin region, which covers 14 percent of Bangladesh's total cultivated area.

- ✦ In 2014, the APSU, with technical assistance from the PRSSP, successfully prioritized 147 projects with a total budget of US\$2 billion from fiscal year 2014/2015 to fiscal year 2018/2019. APSU's high-quality report was approved by the Minister of Agriculture and drew the attention of the Prime Minister.

Improving Nutrition in Bangladesh

Nutrition research at IFPRI focuses on programs and policies to improve the diet quality, nutritional status, and health of poor people in developing countries, especially women, infants, and young children who are most vulnerable to the effects of malnutrition. In Bangladesh, IFPRI's research involves scaling up direct nutrition interventions; enabling other sectors like health, agriculture, and social protection to help accelerate progress in nutrition; and creating a stable environment to sustain these gains.

HarvestPlus: Addressing Nutritional Challenges through Zinc Rice

Project Duration: 2013–2016

MOTIVATION

In Bangladesh, 41 percent of children under five are estimated to be zinc deficient according to the Bangladesh Demography Survey, and the country loses over US\$700 million in gross domestic product due to vitamin and mineral deficiencies according to the World Bank. Faced with such deficiencies in nutrition

and productivity, [HarvestPlus](#), in partnership with the European Commission and the IFPRI-led CGIAR Research Program on Agriculture for Nutrition and Health (A4NH), worked closely with the Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI), the International Rice Research Institute, and 30 other partners to develop three rice varieties fortified with zinc.

RESULTS AND OUTCOMES

- ▶ HarvestPlus reached 160,000 households in Bangladesh with zinc rice by 2015, far exceeding the original target of 11,000 households. HarvestPlus strives to expand zinc rice production and distribution to reach 1.4 million households by 2018. To help achieve this goal, HarvestPlus opened a laboratory in Bangladesh in 2015 to support training of scientists and faster crop breeding, ensuring that the zinc rice varieties maintain high quality and improve in nutrient content for the people of Bangladesh.
- ▶ Between 2013 and 2015, HarvestPlus and its large network of partners released new zinc rice varieties that provide up to 60 percent of daily zinc needs, along with iron and vitamin A. Further, farmers benefited economically from zinc rice because it

matures earlier, is high-yielding, and is disease- and pest-resistant.

- ▶ At the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2) in 2014, Minister of Agriculture Matia Chowdhury praised the zinc rice and its impact on improving nutrition. She said, “The country’s first biofortified rice varieties (enriched with zinc), namely BRRI dhan 62 and BRRI dhan 64, have been released...and this is capable of fighting diarrhea- and pneumonia-induced childhood deaths and stunting.”

Alive & Thrive

Project Duration: 2009–2020

MOTIVATION

Malnutrition still affects millions of infants and young children globally but can be prevented by increasing rates of exclusive breastfeeding and by ensuring the nutritious quality of a child’s meals (that is, food other than breast milk or infant formula) between 6 and 24 months of age. [Alive & Thrive](#) is a Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation–funded initiative managed by FHI360, in partnership with IFPRI, BRAC, Save the Children, the



University of California-Davis, World Vision, and GMMB. The program aims to combat global child undernutrition and strengthen the promotion of and support for appropriate infant and young child feeding (IYCF) practices in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, and Viet Nam, recently expanding operations to Burkina Faso, India, and Nigeria. IFPRI's role in Alive & Thrive is to evaluate the impact of IYCF interventions and provide insights into how the interventions achieved impact and scale.

RESULTS AND OUTCOMES

- ▶ In Bangladesh, the Alive & Thrive initiative, implemented primarily by BRAC in partnership with the Institute of Public Health Nutrition, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, and other stakeholders, reached 1.7 million mothers of children under two with information on IYCF. In addition, Alive & Thrive supported the adoption and implementation of a unified, national IYCF communication strategy in Bangladesh.
- ▶ IFPRI's [evaluation](#) of the impacts of Alive & Thrive during the first phase of implementation from 2009–2014 in Bangladesh demonstrated that the initiative achieved rapid improvements in breastfeeding and complementary feeding practices. Exclusive breastfeeding increased from 48 to 88 percent and the proportion of children achieving minimum dietary diversity increased from 32 to 64 percent in intensive program areas.
- ▶ IFPRI's research and development of implementation and capacity-building tools contributed to the program's credibility in Bangladesh and beyond. IFPRI's research results also influenced other nutritional programs and donors' funding decisions in Bangladesh. For example, USAID's Feed the Future sites and the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID)-funded nutrition and poverty reduction programs modeled their IYCF behavior change communication programs on Alive & Thrive. Moreover, additional funding was provided by the

Children's Investment Fund Foundation to continue to scale up counseling interventions for IYCF and by the Government of Canada for maternal nutrition counseling.

Transform Nutrition

Project Duration: 2011–2017

MOTIVATION

Undernutrition causes the deaths of millions of young children every year. For children who survive, it disrupts their schooling and means they are likely to remain poor as adults. The human and economic costs are enormous. [Transform Nutrition](#) is a six-year research program led by IFPRI with support from DFID. The Transform Nutrition consortium, which includes the Institute of Development Studies, the International Centre for Diarrheal Disease Research in Bangladesh (icddr,b), the Public Health Foundation of India, and Save the Children (UK), has three focal countries: Bangladesh, Ethiopia, and India, along with a global workstream. It aims to answer the following questions:

- ▶ How can direct, nutrition-specific interventions targeted to the critical first 1,000 days of a child's life be appropriately prioritized, implemented, scaled up, and sustained in different settings?
- ▶ How can social protection, agriculture, and women's empowerment interventions improve nutrition during the 1,000-day window of opportunity?
- ▶ How can an enabling environment be promoted, and existing and enhanced political and economic resources be used most effectively to improve nutrition?

RESULTS AND OUTCOMES

In Bangladesh, Transform Nutrition assessed the effectiveness of the government's National Nutrition Services Program (NNS) delivery. The evaluation presented



what works in terms of quality and coverage of services provided under the NNS, and the bottlenecks and areas for improvement. Several changes have been made to the NNS as a result of IFPRI's study. This research, done in collaboration with icddr,b, was well received by the World Bank, which published the findings in a report, [Bangladesh National Nutrition Services: Assessment of Implementation Status](#), in 2015.

Leveraging Agriculture for Nutrition in South Asia (LANSA)

Project Duration: 2012–2018

MOTIVATION

Agriculture is the primary livelihood for nearly half the population of South Asia, and yet its potential to reduce undernutrition remains unrealized. One-third of children in South Asia are stunted. Despite increasing political will to improve nutrition, evidence has been sparse on how agriculture and agrifood systems can be better designed to improve nutrition. In 2012, a research consortium called [Leveraging Agriculture for Nutrition in South Asia \(LANSA\)](#) was formed among

the Collective on Social Science Research in Pakistan, BRAC, the Leverhulme Centre for Integrated Research on Agriculture and Health (LCIRAH), the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), and IFPRI, under the leadership of the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation and with support from DFID. The aim was to generate evidence to strengthen the nutrition sensitivity of agrifood systems in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan.

RESULTS

The body of research in Bangladesh produced through LANSA reveals knowledge gaps, agricultural and other determinants of child nutrition, and regional and seasonal discrepancies in maternal and childhood undernutrition in Bangladesh—evidence that will be valuable for policy makers to better diagnose challenges and develop agricultural policies and interventions to positively impact nutrition. IFPRI recently published two papers through LANSA specifically for Bangladesh: [The Other Asian Enigma: Explaining the Rapid Reduction of Undernutrition in Bangladesh](#) and [Agriculture, Nutrition and the Green Revolution in Bangladesh](#).

Empowering Women through Food Security

Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index

Project Duration: 2011–ongoing

MOTIVATION

The Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) was developed in 2011 by IFPRI, USAID, and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative to directly monitor and support the empowerment and inclusion of women in agriculture as part of USAID's Feed the Future program. WEAI is a first-of-its-kind tool measuring the roles and extent of women's empowerment in agriculture relative to men within their households, particularly women's control over critical parts of their lives. It also helps in identifying the women who are disempowered and what areas they are disempowered in, information that is instrumental in designing solutions to close the empowerment gap.

RESULTS AND OUTCOMES

- ▶ Since its launch, WEAI has been revolutionizing how women's empowerment and its role in agriculture are seen and measured. Bangladesh was one of three countries that piloted WEAI and the first country to implement it in a nationally representative survey—the BIHS. Through WEAI, the Government of Bangladesh identified empowerment gaps, which motivated the Ministry of Agriculture to design interventions targeted to closing these gaps. IFPRI's detailed analysis of the BIHS and WEAI was referenced in the [Nutrition Background Paper](#) prepared to inform the 7th Five Year Plan (2016–2020), substantiating the impact of gender inequalities on nutrition. The plan emphasized the importance of “[ensuring] women's advancement as self-reliant human beings and [reducing] discriminatory barriers by taking both development and institutional measures.”
- ▶ Civil society organizations in Bangladesh have expressed interest in adopting WEAI for project use, which IFPRI is currently working on. Some



nongovernmental organizations, notably BRAC and Helen Keller International, are working with IFPRI to develop the project-level WEAI.

- ▶ The index has received widespread support from developing and donor governments alike. In 2012, then US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton recognized it as an example of a tool created to integrate gender equality, and then USAID Administrator Rajiv Shah explained that it can serve as a means to help women farmers in poor countries produce more crops and gain greater influence over the agricultural economies of their countries. At the 2012 UN Special Commission on the Status of Women, Bangladesh's then State Minister of Women's and Children's Affairs Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury described how the index is useful in defining the obstacles rural women face in their important work as farmers and caretakers.

Female Secondary School Assistance

Project Duration: 2004–2006

MOTIVATION

In 2004, IFPRI researchers assessed the impacts of the Female Secondary School Assistance Project (FSSAP)—a universal conditional cash transfer program supported primarily by the World Bank that was targeted to a wide group of girls living in poverty. It provided a monthly cash stipend and tuition waiver to any girl attending secondary school (grades 6–10) in rural Bangladesh, in an effort to raise extremely low female enrollment.

RESULTS AND OUTCOMES

- ▶ The project was enormously successful. In fact, girls significantly overtook boys in secondary school enrollment—a rare phenomenon in a developing country. Not only was the program effective at giving many girls from poor families the financial support they needed, but it also enhanced awareness of the value of female education among girl students.



- ▶ Based on the program's evaluation, IFPRI recommended that FSSAP target the poor directly, using specific methods, and include boys from poor families as program beneficiaries in addition to girls. IFPRI also recommended that transfer amounts be increased to cover education expenses and opportunity costs of attending school. By 2010, the Government of Bangladesh and the World Bank had redesigned the US\$130 million program (renamed the Secondary Education Quality and Access Enhancement Project) to incorporate all of IFPRI's recommendations.

Closing the Food Gap

Accelerating Cereal Productivity through the Cereal Systems Initiative in South Asia (CSISA)

Project Duration: 2009–present

MOTIVATION

In 2009, a collaboration of CGIAR centers—IFPRI, the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT), and the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI)—with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and USAID, launched the [Cereal Systems Initiative for South Asia \(CSISA\)](#). CSISA works

with national and international partners to sustainably increase the productivity of cereal-based cropping systems for improved food and income security. IFPRI conducts policy research for CSISA to promote evidence-based policy reforms conducive to the adoption of sustainable intensification technologies and practices at scale in the most risk-prone areas in Bangladesh, India, and Nepal. Additional support for IFPRI's CSISA research was later provided by the IFPRI-led [CGIAR Research Program on Policies, Institutions, and Markets \(PIM\)](#).

RESULTS AND OUTCOMES

- ▶ Between 2010 and 2015, more than one million farmers in Bangladesh benefited from higher yields because of stress-tolerant rice varieties distributed by CSISA. Although gains have been significant, IFPRI's assessment in 2016, [Adoption of Stress-Tolerant Rice Varieties in Bangladesh](#), showed that even higher uptake of these rice varieties is possible through improved education outreach.
- ▶ IFPRI's [Review of the Input and Output Policies for Cereal Production in Bangladesh](#) in 2012 helped policy makers identify key priorities to increase cereal production, such as using resource-conservation technologies for rice and other cereals, and developing high-yielding, stress-tolerant cereal varieties. This study also showed that private sector involvement contributed to improved access and affordability of inputs, helping the government decide to reduce the role of state-owned enterprise.

Improving Public Food Distribution

Project Duration: 2003

MOTIVATION

In response to natural disasters and crop failures that caused food shortages in the 1990s and 2000s, the World Food Programme (WFP) and other donors supplied food for the Government of Bangladesh to distribute.

However, with growing concerns that food aid was not reaching the most vulnerable, WFP called on IFPRI in 2003 to examine the source of food aid "leakages."

RESULTS AND OUTCOMES

- ▶ IFPRI's evaluation revealed large inefficiencies in transport, weighing processes, and grain distribution, which accounted for the loss of 8 percent of grain in the distribution system. Substantial delays—food aid was taking as long as nine months to reach those in need—further exacerbated the problem. IFPRI recommended targeted monetary allocations to improve distribution, to provide accurate, tamper-proof weighing equipment, and to establish regular monitoring by the government and WFP.
- ▶ In 2006, the government implemented IFPRI's recommendations and established a technical committee to monitor progress. The evidence generated by the IFPRI-WFP partnership allowed the government to reduce leakage and improve food security for the most vulnerable.

Building Human Capital through Access to Food

Advancing Educational Performance through Food Rations

Project Duration: 1992–2004

MOTIVATION

In 1991, IFPRI conducted a comprehensive study of a targeted food subsidy program in Bangladesh known as *palli* (rural) rationing. IFPRI found that subsidies equivalent to US\$60 million were being provided each year to run the program, but about 70 percent of the subsidized food (mostly rice) was not making its way to the poor people who needed it. Primarily due to these

findings, the government abolished the Palli Rationing Program in May 1992.

But without the food rationing program, 20 percent of the country's public food grain was no longer reaching the 6.1 million poor households that needed it. To more effectively target food subsidies to the poor, the Ministry of Finance asked IFPRI to conduct a systematic review of alternatives.

RESULTS AND OUTCOMES

- ▶ The Working Group on Targeted Food Interventions, which was chaired by IFPRI, introduced the concept of the Food for Education program in August 1992, through which families were given food in exchange for their children's continued attendance in school. This innovative idea was endorsed by the World Bank as a promising approach. In 1993, the Bangladeshi government introduced a pilot Food for Education program based on the recommendations from IFPRI and its partners. It used the savings accumulated from terminating the Palli Rationing Program for a more effectively targeted, food-based intervention.
- ▶ In a 1994 assessment of the program, IFPRI documented an increase in primary school enrollment (higher for girls than boys) and attendance and a decrease in dropout rates. The program had also been cost-effective in transferring income benefits to low-income households through food grain entitlements. Because of its success, the government expanded the program in the mid-1990s.
- ▶ According to a [2004 impact assessment study](#), the Food for Education program increased school participation in Bangladesh by up to 30 percent and girls' earning potential by up to 35 percent. IFPRI's documentation of the program's effectiveness contributed to the design of the Global Food for Education program established by the US Department of Agriculture and USAID.

COMPACT2025 IN BANGLADESH

IFPRI's [Compact2025](#) initiative, which brings stakeholders together to set priorities, innovate, fine-tune actions, build on successes, and synthesize lessons to accelerate progress in ending hunger and undernutrition by 2025, conducted a [roundtable discussion](#) in Bangladesh on May 5, 2016. More than 100 stakeholders from different sectors gathered and probed how to leverage multiple sectors—agriculture, gender, nutrition, social protection, water, and sanitation—to fill gaps and maximize potential synergies for action. From the roundtable discussion in Bangladesh, five major recommendations were formed: (1) make strategies, policies, and programs across sectors more nutrition-driven; (2) empower women, smallholders, and consumers; (3) fine-tune, consolidate, and operationalize policies; (4) improve coordination and engage with non-traditional partners; and (5) fill data and knowledge gaps. In addition, participants pointed out that more must be done to address social constraints that trap girls and women in cycles of hunger, undernutrition, and disempowerment was emphasized in the discussion, calling for more targeted interventions to girls and adolescents.

Supporting Food Security after Natural Disasters

Responding to Floods

Project Duration: 2000

MOTIVATION

In 1998, Bangladesh was hit by "the flood of the century," a natural disaster that led to a shortfall in rice production and, subsequently, a dire food shortage. Policy makers sought ways to make food more readily available in the short term and to better manage public food grain stocks in the future. IFPRI conducted a study of the impacts of the flooding by evaluating both household coping mechanisms and recovery rates in addition to examining how effectively national food distribution programs targeted food aid to those in greatest need.

RESULTS AND OUTCOMES

- ▶ Results showed that the poorest people in the country coped with the floods by acquiring loans from the private sector in addition to accepting food transfers from government programs and non-governmental organizations.
- ▶ Responding to the government's need for timely, practical policy analysis in the midst of the floods, IFPRI staff members and collaborators from the Food Planning and Monitoring Unit of the Ministry of Food and Disaster Management produced 53 policy advisory memos from 1998 to 2001. These memos offered ready input into current policy decisions needed to respond to the impacts of the flooding.
- ▶ The project's recommendations contributed to the Bangladeshi government developing a policy that maintained affordable rice prices by enabling the import of approximately 2 million metric tons of private sector rice. In addition to stabilizing food markets, this policy contributed to the prevention of famine.

Looking Forward

For more than two decades, IFPRI's research and policy analysis have been a resource for Bangladesh in making impressive strides in ensuring food security and reducing poverty. Working closely with the Bangladesh Ministry of Food and Disaster Management and its Food Planning and Monitoring Unit, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, BRAC, CARE International, and civil society organizations, IFPRI has supported Bangladesh in its goals of improving nutrition, women's empowerment, social protection, and coping with natural disasters. IFPRI looks forward to deepening its collaboration with these and other partners through its Policy Research and Strategy Support Program and complementary initiatives, and to enhancing long-term capacity in policy analysis and evidence-based research. Such strong collaborative efforts have translated and will continue to translate research into policy action that will help accelerate Bangladesh's progress in ending hunger and undernutrition.

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A world free of hunger and malnutrition

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