

Women and WFP



Gender Dimensions in Food and Nutrition Insecurity

WFP is fully committed to supporting the Government of Bangladesh in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of promoting gender equality, and reducing poverty and hunger.

Gender equality is not merely socially desirable: it is critical to the reduction of poverty and hunger, the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and the accomplishment of WFP's Strategic Objectives.

Women in Bangladesh remain particularly vulnerable to poverty, food insecurity and undernutrition. Low status within the household and deeply rooted cultural practices associated with childbirth and intra-family food distribution lead to gender discrimination in the allocation of food especially for adolescent girls, and pregnant and lactating women. An estimated 30% of adult Bangladeshi mothers are chronically undernourished, and at least 40% of women suffer from anaemia during pregnancy. Female-headed households are overrepresented among the ultra poor, and they are more vulnerable to the social and economic impacts of disasters.

School Feeding

The WFP-assisted National School Feeding Programme implemented by the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education provides an incentive to families to send their children to school and to nourish them, while significantly boosting enrolment and attendance, and reducing drop-out rates. School Feeding also contributes to gender equality and women's empowerment by addressing shortfalls in women's leadership in primary education: great importance is placed on increasing the number of female members in School Management Committees (SMC), and also on improving the active participation of women in these committees. Monitoring data show that the number of female members has increased over the years (from 16.4% to 37% between 2008 and 2011), resulting in more gender-balanced School Management Committees.

WFP is dedicated to lifting women and their families out of food insecurity, and does so by putting women at the front and centre of efforts to fight hunger and undernutrition. When women are part of the hunger solution, their children have a better chance of growing up well nourished, going to school and becoming productive members of society. As mothers and providers of food for the household, women are in key positions to tackling hunger and achieving food and nutrition security.

In 2011, WFP Bangladesh assisted over 2 million people, mainly ultra poor women and children. Ultra-poor women constitute the majority of the participants in food and cash for work activities, pregnant and lactating women are assisted under nutrition interventions, and female community members are encouraged to participate in decision-making in education. WFP believes its mission can only be achieved if girls and boys are equal in terms of opportunities, and men and women have equal access to resources and services, and participate in decision-making. As a result, gender mainstreaming is a crosscutting theme in all WFP-assisted programmes and strong attention to gender equality objectives is maintained throughout the project cycle.

Improving Maternal and Child Nutrition

WFP's nutrition activities aim to reduce the undernutrition level of children under-2, under-5, pregnant and lactating women, and break the intergenerational cycle of undernutrition. The provision of fortified food is accompanied with trainings and various community education initiatives which endeavor to increase the level of participation of pregnant and lactating women in preventive health programmes, and improve their understanding of nutrition. As household members have key decision-making roles on the food and nutrition security of often very young pregnant and lactating women, WFP's nutrition activities promote the involvement of family members and community gate-keepers in awareness-raising activities. WFP's objective is to counsel husbands and in-laws on adequate maternal nutrition and to remove gender-based discrimination and taboos in food allocation and consumption in this critical period.



Enhancing Resilience to Disasters and the Effects of Climate Change

In collaboration with the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development & Co-operatives, and the Ministry of Food and Disaster Management WFP supports communities in building resilience to natural disasters in disaster-prone areas. In recognition of the fact that women face additional barriers in accessing income-generating opportunities and are more vulnerable than men to the consequences of natural disasters, WFP prioritises women from the most food insecure households in all food and cash-for-work activities. Over the years, WFP has implemented a number of measures to help create an enabling work environment for women, such as gender-sensitive facilities on all schemes. WFP is also working with partners to provide women participants with access to sustainable livelihood and income generating activities after project completion.

Social Safety Nets

WFP works with the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs on the implementation of one of the largest safety net programmes in the country, the Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) Programme, which targets the poorest and most vulnerable women in rural areas. Furthermore, WFP strives to implement innovative and pioneering hunger solution initiatives, such as the Food Security for the Ultra Poor (FSUP) supporting 30,000 ultra poor women and their households. Through FSUP, women receive business identification and management training, an asset grant to set up an income generating activity, as well as a monthly cash allowance for two years and nutrition skills training. These activities enable women to create the foundation for greater food and nutrition security.

Women and Hunger: Facts

1. Following natural disasters, women and girls suffer more from shortages of food. Research has shown that more women die than men as the direct and indirect result of natural disasters.
2. Educated mothers have healthier families. Their children are better nourished, are less likely to die in infancy and more likely to attend school.
3. In Bangladesh, more than 50% of adolescent girls are undernourished and suffer from anaemia, and at least 35% are underweight.
4. Undernourished mothers, especially those who are still adolescent, often give birth to underweight babies who are 20 percent more likely to die before the age of five.
5. Around half of all pregnant women in developing countries are anaemic. Worldwide, iron deficiency causes around 110,000 deaths during childbirth each year.

Renewed Commitment to Gender Mainstreaming

Over the years, WFP Bangladesh has adopted a number of measures to strengthen gender mainstreaming, and to create an enabling environment for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in food security and nutrition programmes. WFP has developed and delivered a Gender Awareness Training for staff, partners and Government counterparts to equip them with necessary skills to report on the progress of gender-related activities. WFP has also committed to undertake further research and analysis of the effects of its activities on gender relations at household and community level. Finally, WFP has allocated resources to develop the capacity of WFP, NGO and Government counterpart staff to apply innovative and participatory M&E approaches and enhance the communication of gender sensitive aspects and outcomes of food security, nutrition and safety net programmes in Bangladesh.

Rafia, the courage and resilience of refugee women

Every day WFP is supporting thousands of refugee women and girls in their struggle to overcome poverty and hunger. Rafia is one of them, in Kutupalong camp. She became a refugee when she fled from Northern Rakhine State of Myanmar with her husband and two sons fifteen years ago. She has faced many challenges since arriving in Bangladesh; a survivor of domestic violence and divorce, she has the sole responsibility for supporting four sons and two daughters. However, with the assistance of WFP and other agencies working in the camp, Rafia has been empowered not only to support her family but to become a leader in her community. She receives a general food ration from WFP to meet her family's basic food needs. In 2010, she also received training in food processing from a local NGO supported by WFP. Rafia, as a vulnerable refugee, also received empty bags from WFP's general food distribution, which she sold to start a small business. Rafia inspires other women after being chosen by the refugee community to be a member of the Food Management Committee. In this role, she works together with WFP to raise and address refugees' concerns about the food distribution. At the beginning, she was anxious about performing her duties as a woman in a conservative society. However, her experiences have helped her to develop confidence and skills as a leader, and as a result she has been selected to represent the refugee community in the overall Camp Management Committee. *"Now I can convey the messages of ordinary refugees to the Government, UNHCR and WFP, with confidence and hope to get support from all for the betterment of our lives".*

