

Nutrition Initiative in Bangladesh: Is It a Blessing or Human Right?

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Objective: Review the National Food and Nutrition Policy (FNP) and the National Plan of Action for Nutrition (NPAN) to see if they would be able to meet the need of the country by the year 2010 through project like Bangladesh Integrated Nutrition Project (BINP).

Methodology: Secondary data were analyzed to review the nutrition initiatives taken in Bangladesh.

Results: Against all odds, the country has achieved some progress in various nutrition indicators. Stunting among children aged less than five years has reduced to 51.4% in 1995-1996 compared to 64.2% in 1992; coverage of vitamin A supplementation among children rose from 30% in 1980 to 84% in 1996; and consumption of iodized salt in the households increased to 67% in 1996 from 44% in 1995. All these marked major progresses in the selected indicators. Between 1993 and 1996, the average household consumption had increased at a rate of 8.2% annually. Despite these positive changes, malnutrition is still at an unacceptably high level. About 9 of the 10 children are malnourished in one way or the other; 70% of the pregnant women and children are anaemic; and death of about 650 children per day are attributed to malnutrition. Early childhood malnutrition, including anaemia and iodine deficiency disorder reduce learning ability and retard national efforts on education and development. The country, however, has made progress on several areas, viz. Cabinet's approval of the National Food and Nutrition Policy, finalization and approval of NPAN and launching the Bangladesh Integrated Nutrition Project (BINP). The FNP, NPAN, and BINP strive for achieving nutrition goals for Bangladesh. The FNP gives an overall policy, the NPAN provides a broad-based guideline of inter-sectoral nutrition plans, including activities under various ministries/sectors, and the BINP is the most active programme of the FNP and the NPAN.

Conclusion: Good nutritional status is the basic right of women and children. It is important that the issue of nutrition should be moved from blessing and welfare programme to the agenda of rights. Given the magnitude of the problems, immediate actions should be taken under the NPAN and FNP. The BINP activities should be expanded and enriched where necessary.

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