

Apart from the core nutrition policies, Bangladesh has quite a few sectoral policies with direct or indirect implications for human nutrition. Of them only a few stand out to be oriented explicitly towards nutrition outcomes. Nutrition being a multisectoral issue, relevant sectoral policies need to be aligned with national development goals in order to effectively contribute towards improvement of nutrition.

An Assessment of Nutrition Policies in Bangladesh

Plethora of Nutrition Policies

In terms of standard nutritional indicators, Bangladesh has progressed well in recent years (1). The country has quite a number of policies with direct and indirect implications for human nutrition which provided the impetus towards the positive change. A recent review, based on a nutrition pathways framework, tries to find out if the present day challenges of ensuring nutrition for all are well-considered in them. **The main finding is that in only a few it may be so.**

The review does not examine policy implementation or their impacts but rather policy statements in terms of their strategic comprehensiveness or structural linkages with the issues of nutrition the details of which naturally differ depending on the context (or sector) The whole exercise was a desk review of the policies and some of the relevant literature. The present policy brief provides a snapshot of the findings based on the review of these policies as well as recommending future actions to remedy the limitations, if any, of the policy statements. It may be noted that 22 policy documents were reviewed and also that policy means policy statement, action plans or strategies.

Four Essential Elements of a Comprehensive Nutrition Policy

Human nutrition depends on consumption of food, its quantity, composition and diversity as well as quality. Environmental factors and diseases also are important. Underlying the food quantity, diversity and quality lie at least four major factors. Over the last few decades, the main policy prescription and practice had been to grow as much food as possible to ensure food and nutrition security. **Availability** of food was the buzz word. As argued by Sen (3), however, there can still

be hunger and consequent undernutrition even when production of food shows no shortfall in aggregate because of limited “entitlement”.

The issues of exchange entitlement or access (through income and employment), thus, became increasingly important as food supply from domestic production became by and large adequate to meet domestic demand. It has also been extremely important to know if people are able to physically utilize the food they consume and get nutrition from such food. The quality of food, its diversity and nutritional content came to be equally important as having enough food to eat. **Availability of food, access to food and utilization are therefore three broad elements behind the immediate causes (as indicated earlier) related to human nutrition.**

However, there are many background factors which impinge on these three basic elements of food security. As agriculture (meaning crop production, fisheries and livestock as well as food from forests or foraging) is perhaps the most important food-sensitive sector, one may illustrate the various issues that impinge upon nutritional status with respect to it.

In the literature, agriculture and nutrition is conceptualized to be linked through several pathways (2,4). One of these is linked to women’s agency. Some of the major indicators of nutrition are also often related to either child or women (maternal) nutrition or both. Furthermore, women and children constitute perhaps the most vulnerable group in terms of food security and nutrition.

Women’s agency is thus a major issue in terms of nutritional outcomes. For this reason, **the policies have been assessed in terms of four inter-related criteria or blocks of issues which relate to availability of, access to and utilization of food as well as women’s agency.**

Varying Degree of Comprehensiveness of Policies

The assessment of the policies based on the 4 criteria stated above indicates that only a few appear to address all of them (see Box 1). In most other policies (13 out of 22) availability and access have been addressed while often one major lacuna had been the limited or little attention to women's agency and women nutrition. In some extreme cases (National Livestock Policy, for example) no mention has been made of importance of livestock in nutrition or to gender issues

Policies addressing all 4 elements comprehensively

National Food Policy 2006
National Women Development Policy-2011
Nutrition Policy-2015 and NPAN-2
National Strategy for Adolescent Health-2016
National Food and Nutrition Security Policy-2019 (draft)

Coordination and Governance of Nutrition Addressed Only Recently

The implementation of quite a few policies (such as National

Food Policy 2006) has to involve several ministries. Similar is the case with National Nutrition Policy and the related NPAN-2. This calls for attention to issues of governance and coordination. It appears that only the NPAN-2 and National Food and Nutrition Security Policy 2019 (draft) have addressed these issues.

Ministerial Mandates vs Policies

Policies of a particular ministry understandably should follow from its mandates as stated in the Allocation of Business of the Government. It has been found that some ministries have extensive mandates reflected in one or other aspect of policies related to nutrition such as the 2013 act related to breast milk substitute overseen by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. This act was preceded by several decades of related regulatory systems. In contrast, consider that one of the mandates of the Ministry of Industries is "Production, supply and distribution of processed food". While production certainly should be its mandate, the rest is issue of access which is not really its job. ***It is apparent that there is a need for better synergy between mandates and policies in some few cases.***

Possible Follow-up Actions

A few follow-up actions are recommended based on the above analysis. These are as follows:

All nutrition-relevant policies need to be revisited to be - along the line of the NNP and the Second NPAN

Policies need to be integrated with appropriate nutrition focus and all may be considered together and cross-referenced for a proper holistic approach

Policies need to be under continuous review based on advances on nutrition science as well as the field based experience regarding what has worked and what has not in translating these policies into action. This will necessitate proper and accessible documentation of the evidence.

For a proper synergy and alignment between formal mandates and the policies, both may need to be considered together and redrafted, if necessary so that institutional and human capacity may be built accordingly and actions minimizing duplications in actions and interventions.

References

1. BBS/ UNICEF- "Progotir Pathay Bangladesh" Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey-2019.
2. Du, Lian, Victor Pinga, Alissa Klein and Heather Danton, Leveraging Agriculture for Nutrition through the Feed the Future Initiative, *Advances in Food and Nutrition Research*, Vol. 74, Chapter One, 2015.
3. Sen, Amartya K. (1976), Famines as failures of exchange entitlements, *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol XI, Nos 31-33, pp. 1273-1280. Also Sen, A. (1981), *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* (Oxford, Clarendon Press).
4. Yosef, Sivan, Andrew D, Jones, Barnali Chakraborty and Stuart Gillespie, Agriculture and Nutrition in Bangladesh: Mapping Evidence to Pathways, *Food and Nutrition Bulletin*, 2015, pp. 1-18.

"The NIPN is funded by the European Union. This publication has been produced with the assistance of the European Union. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of NIPN - HKI/BIDS and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union."

