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# COUNTRY STRATEGY OUTLINES

## Agenda item 4

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# COUNTRY STRATEGY OUTLINES— BANGLADESH

## ABSTRACT

WFP's strategy for the period 2001-2005 is built on past experience and on the principles of "Enabling Development". It was developed over a six-month consultative process involving a large number of representatives from the Government, NGOs and beneficiaries. The process of developing this Country Strategy Outline (CSO) has been synchronized and harmonized with that of the forthcoming United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) for Bangladesh and with the plans of other development partners. The proposed strategy is aimed at the country's 30 million "ultra-poor" (around 6 million households), especially at their chronic food insecurity and malnutrition. Annually, food-based interventions supported by WFP will target more than half a million of the poorest households, particularly their most vulnerable members who can benefit most from direct food transfers. The strategy also foresees an impact on Bangladesh's overall food assistance system through vulnerability analysis and mapping (VAM)-based policy analysis and advocacy for the Enabling Development focus of food interventions.

The strategy envisages that WFP food resources combined with non-food resources will go to the following programme activities:

- a) **Vulnerable Group Development (VGD):** This nation-wide approach, with emphasis on the most vulnerable areas, will focus exclusively on destitute women and address mainly Enabling Development priorities 1, 2 and 3. In addition to the successful partnership with NGOs on asset-creating and income-generating activities, this sub-programme will form a partnership with the National Nutrition Programme (NNP) in some of the selected areas and will increasingly rely on micronutrient-fortified wheat flour to enhance the nutritional impact of food transfers.
- b) **Integrated Food Security (IFS):** This will target vulnerable communities and individuals in the most food-insecure and disaster-prone areas. Activities will be based on the needs and capacities of very poor and hungry people, especially women. Communities and beneficiary groups will be involved in the planning and implementation of these activities. Household food security and nutritional needs will be the key determinants for the selection of activities supported in a given locality. Nutrition-related activities focus on Enabling Development priority 1, whereas the other activities of this sub-programme focus on priorities 3 and 4.
- c) **Rural Development (RD):** It is envisaged that WFP support to food-for-work activities of the Government's current RD Programme will undergo a reduced food wage and an increased cash wage component. Activities—involving both female and male beneficiaries—will be planned and implemented through stronger cooperation with NGOs, which will also establish the link between the workers and their food-insecure families. Beneficiaries will receive basic nutrition training in addition to technical training, and will be enabled to "graduate" into other development activities. Activities of this sub-programme will focus on Enabling Development priorities 2 and 3. It is expected that some RD activities will be gradually transformed into the IFS sub-programme, and that support to RD will be phased out in 2003.

The implementation of this strategy will be supported by:

- Partnerships with other United Nations agencies and bilateral donors;
- Introduction of a wheat flour fortification and blended food production programme;
- Joint programming with decentralized government and NGO partners; and
- An area-based organization of the country office.

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## NOTE TO THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

**This document is submitted for consideration to the Executive Board.**

The Secretariat invites members of the Board who may have questions of a technical nature with regard to this document, to contact the WFP staff focal point(s) indicated below, preferably well in advance of the Board's meeting.

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Should you have any questions regarding matters of dispatch of documentation for the Executive Board, please contact the Documentation and Meetings Clerk (tel.: 066513-2645).



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## ACRONYMS USED IN THE DOCUMENT

BMI	Body mass index
CSO	Country Strategy Outline
FFW	Food for work
GDP	Gross domestic product
GNP	Gross national product
GOB	Government of Bangladesh
IFS	Integrated Food Security
ILO	International Labour Organization
NFNP	National Food and Nutrition Policy
NNP	National Nutrition Programme
NPAN	National Plan of Action for Nutrition
RD	Rural Development
SIFAD	Strengthening the Institutions for Food-assisted Development
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
VAM	Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping
VGD	Vulnerable Group Development



## FOOD INSECURITY AND THE HUNGRY POOR

### Food Insecurity at the National Level

1. Despite significant economic and social progress made over the past 25 years, a substantial proportion of Bangladesh's rapidly growing population suffers from serious food and nutrition shortfalls.
2. The gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate has increased steadily from an estimated 3.4 percent in 1990/91 to almost 6 percent in 1996/97–1997/98 (then declining slightly to an estimated 5.2 percent in 1998/99), but with a per capita gross national product (GNP) of US\$360 (1997), Bangladesh is one of the world's poorest countries.
3. Food grain production has more than doubled since 1972, with an average growth rate of 3.1 percent (although slowing to 2.8 percent in the period 1990-99). However, national production is insufficient to meet actual demand, let alone total food needs. Commercial imports and food aid help to fill these deficits; but even so, some 30 million Bangladeshis consume under 1,800 Kcal a day.
4. Fertility has declined from 6.4 children per woman to 3.9, but the population, estimated at about 126 million, is expected to double over the next 35 years. Already Bangladesh is the most crowded non-city State in the world, with over 850 people per square kilometre. The growing population will demand a more than 60 percent increase in food grain production in the next two decades.
5. Food grains account for over 80 percent of calories consumed, due to the low purchasing power of the majority of the population who are unable to buy more nutritious foods. As a result, the average diet is seriously deficient in proteins, fats and micronutrients, the latter deficiency resulting in a high incidence of nutritional blindness, anaemia and goiter.
6. Although infant mortality rates have dropped from 92 per 1,000 live births in 1991 to 78 in 1996, and those of children under 5 from 146 to 112, they are still among the world's highest. The low nutritional status of the poor is chiefly responsible for the fact that 30 percent of babies weigh less than 2.5 kilograms at birth.
7. Bangladesh remains particularly vulnerable to floods, cyclones and drought, all of which causes extensive damage to crops and hence reduces national food security. This vulnerability to natural disasters also exacerbates the precarious situation of the poor.
8. The incidence of poverty has declined only modestly over the past decade, by less than 1 percent a year. The slow decline in poverty in an environment of relatively high economic growth has been attributed to increasing inequality rather than to the rate of population growth.



## The Target Population

9. In 1996 some 60 million people, out of a total population of 126 million, remained below the official poverty line. It is significant that poverty in Bangladesh is defined by the inability of an average person to consume 2,100 Kcal of food per day. (It should be noted that the recommended average daily intake is around 2,350 Kcal). More than 30 million of the poor are defined as ultra-poor and do not even reach a daily energy intake of around 1,800 Kcal.<sup>1</sup>
10. The bulk of the poor in Bangladesh live in rural areas (80 percent of the total population and 90 percent of the poor). The rural ultra-poor (22.7 percent of rural households) own on average 0.15 acre of land, survive on approximately one dollar a day<sup>2</sup> and suffer chronic food deficit. The majority of these people rely on daily wages for their sustenance, but there is not enough day-labour work available to meet their needs. Seasonal dimensions exacerbate the poverty situation. Between 30 and 40 percent of the labour force is under-employed.
11. The burden of poverty continues to fall disproportionately on women, as shown by their lower nutritional intake, lower life expectancy, less access to paid employment, lower wage rates and poor access to maternal health care. Girls are twice as likely as boys to be malnourished. The body mass index (BMI) of more than half the women of reproductive age is less than 18.5, the cut-off point for the low-weight indicator. Together with malnutrition of girls during adolescence and pregnancy, low BMI results in about 30 percent of babies being born with a weight below 2.5 kilograms. Households headed by women, which constitute about 8 percent of rural households and involve approximately 8 million children and adults, represent the most vulnerable group within rural society, due to the low status of women.
12. While all areas of Bangladesh contain severely poor and malnourished people, the highest rates are found along rivers and coastlines, which are most vulnerable to floods, cyclones and river erosion. Poor rural households are unable to accumulate reserves, so they are highly vulnerable to crises such as natural disasters. In many areas in Bangladesh, these are a yearly recurring event. To prevent the regular degradation of nutritional status and the destruction of human and physical assets during disasters, it is essential that vulnerable families have access to food during these periods and that they are assisted in preparing themselves against the effects of disaster. WFP has been involved in some of these support activities. Disaster mitigation will play an even more prominent role in future food-assisted programmes.

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<sup>1</sup>The term "absolute poor" is used in Bangladesh for those who live below the poverty line. The poverty line (expenditure level) in Bangladesh is calculated on the basis of a per capita minimum diet of 2,122 Kcal (as recommended by the World Health Organization), together with a 30 percent allowance for non-food basic needs (Hossain, 1991). The term "hard-core poor" or more recently the term "ultra-poor" is used in Bangladesh to describe those who do not have an income sufficient to meet even the energy requirement of 1,805 Kcal. These energy indicators have been advocated by the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, and accepted by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, as appropriate proxies for an understanding of poverty in Bangladesh.

<sup>2</sup>Per capita annual income is estimated at Taka 3,757, or just over Taka 10 per day. On the basis of an average household size of 5, this translates into Taka 51 per day, or approximately one US dollar at the October 1999 exchange rate of US\$1=49.4 Taka.



13. The inadequate availability of food and the low nutritional status of the ultra-poor are the major obstacles to their participation in existing development opportunities. Food assistance to the ultra-poor, even over a limited period, has proven to be an important tool in enabling them to break out of their poverty trap and link up with mainstream poverty reduction programmes. WFP's strategy in Bangladesh will be to direct all its food resources to the large number of ultra-poor families who are still excluded from mainstream development activities.

## GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES AND POLICIES ADDRESSING POVERTY AND FOOD INSECURITY

### Overall Policies

14. Overall government policy is outlined in the fifth Five-Year Plan (mid-1997 to mid-2002). As in preceding Plans, the major emphasis of the current Plan is on privatization and poverty eradication. During the past years, increasing attention has been given to "governance" as a crucial precondition for development and to a "pro-poor" approach.
15. A major concern is that poverty alleviation programmes have failed to significantly reduce the number of Bangladesh's ultra-poor and malnourished. The Government has recently introduced a policy of delegating more power and responsibilities to local government levels.<sup>3</sup> The 1998 "Gram Parishad Bill" is designed to give poor and marginal groups, especially women, greater control and involvement in the management and control of community lands and assets. Three elected Union *Parishad* seats are specifically reserved for women.
16. NGOs (estimated to number in excess of 10,000) represent a sizeable and influential force in civil society and are engaged in a host of development and advocacy interventions. The relationship between the Government and NGOs has been evolving to improve complementarity of efforts. An estimated 45 percent of poor rural households are reached directly by NGOs. The provision of micro-credit alone, by the Grameen Bank, other NGOs and government organizations, is estimated to have benefited almost 8.8 million people in 1998.
17. However, NGOs too have had only limited success in targeting the ultra-poor, particularly in the case of micro-credit programmes, which tend to concentrate on those who are more likely to be able to repay loans. Larger NGOs also tend to stay away from the poorest areas, but rather concentrate on areas that are already better off.

### Food Security Policies

18. In line with the convention adopted at the World Food Summit, food security in Bangladesh is addressed in three dimensions: aggregate availability, access and nutrition. Supported by WFP, efforts are under way to fuse these concerns into a

<sup>3</sup>Bangladesh has five administrative levels below the Central Government: six divisions, 64 districts, 460 *Thanas*, 4,400 Unions and about 60,000 villages or *grams*.



National Comprehensive Food Security Policy, which will be governed by a stronger emphasis on access and nutrition.

19. Major Government policy interventions to ensure access include:
  - a) development-oriented food assistance and income-generating programmes for vulnerable and food-insecure populations;
  - b) safety net programmes through enlargement of targeted food distribution;
  - c) price stabilization of food grains;
  - d) maintenance of a security stock of about 1 million tons of food grains;
  - e) modernization of storage capacity and construction of storage facilities at strategic locations; and
  - f) cash-based transfer programmes to complement food-based transfers to the poor.
20. Nutrition has recently been given added prominence in the Government's policies. In line with the National Food and Nutrition Policy (NFNP) and the National Plan of Action for Nutrition (NPAN), a National Nutrition Programme (NNP) was developed to reduce malnutrition rates and to strengthen nutrition-based interventions for poor and food-insecure families. The NNP will be co-sponsored by UNICEF, World Bank and WFP.

### Food Aid Policies

21. Food aid to Bangladesh has undergone significant shifts. Levels of food have fluctuated from year to year, with a distinct declining trend. From a peak of US\$268.6 million in 1990–91, food aid amounted to only US\$93.1 million in 1997–98. As a proportion of all aid, food aid has declined from more than one third in 1973–78 to 7 percent in 1996–98. Despite this, food aid accounted for 66 percent of all United Nations system Official Development Assistance in 1998.
22. Recently, food aid donors have on average provided between 0.6 and 0.8 million tons of food grains annually. In financial year 1998, food assistance programmes funded from the Government's own resources amounted to approximately 1.6 million tons.
23. WFP has contributed to two food-assisted development programmes: Vulnerable Group Development (VGD), which aims to increase the self-reliance of the most disadvantaged women; and Rural Development (RD), which aims to support the development of rural infrastructure and generate employment through food for work (FFW). These programmes involve WFP resources together with those of the Government and several bilateral donors, which have included Australia, Belgium, Canada, the European Union, France, Germany, and Switzerland. WFP designs and monitors these two programmes on behalf of bilateral donors. A substantial proportion of food assistance implemented in Bangladesh is thus reaching beneficiaries within a coherent and targeted programme.
24. The joint Government/Donor Task Force on *Strengthening the Institutions for Food-assisted Development* (SIFAD) was launched in 1988. Its general recommendations are aimed at increasing the development impact of food-assisted activities through a focus on sound technical planning, better programming and institutional support.



25. Further attention is still needed to increase the direct, sustainable impact of food aid. The WFP/Bangladesh country office is advising its partners in the Government and the NGO and donor communities on ways to add the concept of Enabling Development to the overall development foundation created by SIFAD, whereby particular attention is given to the creation of sustainable human and physical assets at the individual and community level.

## ASSESSMENT OF WFP'S PERFORMANCE TO DATE

26. Since 1974, Bangladesh has been one of the largest recipients of WFP assistance. A WFP Country Programme was formulated in 1996 covering the period 1997–2000, at a cost to WFP of US\$158.3 million (or 640,000 tons of wheat). This was supplemented by a contribution of US\$164.9 million (in wheat) from bilateral donors and US\$185.8 million (in wheat and cash) from the Government of Bangladesh. NGOs provide a further US\$13.6 million in support of WFP-assisted activities. Food-assisted activities were organized in two major sub-programmes: VGD and RD. With those two main food-assisted programmes, WFP has significantly contributed to turning assistance into an effective development tool. In addition to VGD and RD, WFP emergency food assistance was targeted to a nation-wide flood relief operation and a refugee relief operation.

### Effectiveness and Impact of Food Aid

27. Over the past 5 years, approximately 4.5 million very poor and food-insecure people (around 1 million families) have benefited from development food assistance under the VGD and RD programmes each year. As documented by various studies, food assistance to both of these programmes has been successfully targeted to the poorest families in the selected communities.
28. A large number of food assistance beneficiaries have succeeded in improving their families' well-being on a sustainable basis. For many it was access to food assistance that enabled them to participate in development programmes.
29. In addition, WFP has played a major role at times of natural disasters, including the floods of 1998, when it provided some 330,000 tons of relief assistance to approximately 20 million severely affected people. Since 1992, WFP has provided food for refugees from Myanmar—in 1998 this totalled 5,000 tons for 21,000 refugees. Both operations have successfully targeted the most needy people.
30. Since the start of the VGD programme in 1975 there has been a progressive re-orientation from distributing relief food to poor women to providing a package of development services. These services include training in income-generating skills, awareness raising (including nutrition and health issues) and savings and credit, which are mainly provided by national NGOs.
31. RD-supported activities have focused on providing much-needed work opportunities for poor people during the traditional January-April lean season, when other work opportunities are limited. This is also the period when large-scale earth-moving activities can best be undertaken.



32. Through the rehabilitation of embankments and the upgrading of rural roads, the RD programme has contributed to food security by protecting agricultural potential against floods and improve rural transportation systems. Fishpond rehabilitation and road-side plantations have given many poor families secure livelihoods.
33. WFP-supported activities have focused increasingly on women. Destitute women are the exclusive focus of the VGD programme. Also during the flood relief operations, most food went directly to female beneficiaries. The gender balance in the RD programme has risen dramatically during the past two years, to around 46 percent female participation. Training programmes and active advocacy activities have focused on and resulted in involving women in the decision-making process in food-assisted development activities. Children have been usually indirect beneficiaries of the development programmes, but received direct rations in the refugee operation.

### Cost-effectiveness

34. The country office has been conducting several impact evaluations which show that well-targeted food assistance is very cost-effective in the context of Bangladesh. In particular, the approach developed in the VGD programme merits attention since it incorporates almost all dimensions of the Enabling Development concept.
35. The VGD approach enables vulnerable women to “graduate” out of their extreme poverty during an 18-month support cycle with a total cost per direct beneficiary of around US\$165. Approximately US\$50 of this amount is spent on food transfers. The remainder covers non-food costs for the “development package” (training, credit delivery), support personnel and transport.
36. Around 60 percent of the beneficiaries can earn an additional income of US\$4 per month at the time of “graduation” into mainstream (NGO) development programmes. Without attempting a sophisticated cost-benefit analysis, it can be suggested that, in addition to the non-monetary impact on beneficiaries (awareness-raising, knowledge of rights and skills, better start in life for their children), the US\$165 spent on food and non-food transfers to a beneficiary “pays” for itself within a five-year period.
37. WFP’s socio-economic impact assessments have confirmed that food-for-work activities, too, have had a positive impact on beneficiaries and on their communities as a whole. However, it has been difficult to demonstrate a more direct impact on family members of food recipients and on the nutritional status of the beneficiary groups.

### Impact on Markets and Domestic Production

38. Recent studies by two donors (Australia and United States) indicate that the current average annual supply of 600,000 tons of (targeted and other) food aid is still considerably below the threshold of around 800,000 tons where a negative impact on the national cereal markets could be anticipated. Food assistance to the RD and VGD programmes is targeted to the poorest people, who would normally not buy this food due to their lack of purchasing power. Hence, the negative impact of food assistance on markets and domestic production is negligible, especially since a large share of food assistance is made available during the lean season



when local supplies of food are low and purchasing power is depressed. One could further argue that with eventual increased incomes, the former beneficiaries of food aid increase the effective demand for food.

### Empowerment of Women

39. Seventy percent of the immediate beneficiaries of WFP-assisted development programmes during 1996-2000 were female. Women play a strong management role, especially in the VGD programme, both in government and NGO bodies. Through the improvement of women's socio-economic status and through the strengthening of their role in management and decision-making at all levels, WFP contributed significantly to a slow but steady change in the status of women in Bangladesh society.

### Implementation Issues

40. Surveys conducted by WFP found that RD participants often sold a substantial portion of their food rations, to meet non-food needs. Therefore, in recent years 30 percent of wages were paid in cash, with a corresponding reduction in the food rations. The Government provides this cash input. WFP is negotiating with the Government for further increases in the non-food component of wages to at least 50 percent. Furthermore, it is envisaged that the wheat/rice-based food wage will be adjusted towards a more comprehensive food basket, with the aim that the food ration meet the nutritional requirements of a family.
41. To improve the possibility of RD participants receiving more than a mere wage, and to try to achieve more sustainable livelihoods, NGOs are increasingly providing them with a development package including training in income-generating skills and access to capital.
42. The effectiveness of the RD programme has been hampered by the lack of funds for additional, essential works to be implemented in combination with WFP activities, the institutional weaknesses of Government counterparts, the lack of funds to get full NGO commitment for training and follow-up activities, delays in the payment of the cash wage component to workers and the lack of sustainable mechanisms for people's participation in the design, implementation and maintenance of infrastructure.
43. The country office, in cooperation with implementing partners, has developed a comprehensive approach to monitoring and reporting that is supported by an impact evaluation system yielding valuable information for the management of the programme. The current approach, however, needs to be streamlined and combined with a VAM-based methodology. Further, past experience has lead the country office to design a new, issue-based and results-oriented monitoring strategy, which is expected to provide a better tool for improved targeting and implementation. Evaluations are undertaken increasingly in partnership with renowned local and international research institutions to enhance their quality.

### Portfolio Balance in Light of WFP's Enabling Development mandate

44. A comparison of WFP's current portfolio against the principles of WFP's Enabling Development policy shows that the orientation of the RD programme and



its implementation is less in line with the policy than the activities and results obtained under the VGD programme.

45. WFP looks back at many years of successful contributions to the Government's RD programme. An increasing amount of Bangladesh's own food assistance is being programmed along the experience gained in RD. Within this context and given WFP's Enabling Development policy, it is possible to reduce food resources going into RD during the next Country Programme cycle and develop a portfolio for WFP food assistance that meets more directly the objectives of Enabling Development as mandated by WFP's Executive Board.
46. If Bangladesh wants to gain maximum benefit out of these food transfers, some of the shortcomings of the current RD approach (e.g. sale of food by beneficiaries because of insufficient cash wages; inadequate asset creation at the beneficiary level; unsatisfactory nutritional outcomes) need to be addressed regardless of the size of WFP's contribution. The next Country Programme can assist in this shift.
47. Food assistance, if given in isolation from other development inputs, does not produce the lasting outcomes expected for the ultra-poor and food-insecure. The 1999 mid-term review confirmed the country office's concerns that the future WFP portfolio needs to promote a stronger complementarity between the VGD and RD programmes. These concerns were incorporated into the consultations on a more integrated and area-based approach to food-assisted development that links FFW activities with complementary initiatives.
48. The VGD experience has had a significant impact on the formulation of WFP's worldwide strategy for enabling development. Although some aspects will be further adjusted, it is evident that this programme activity will have to remain a strong component in the portfolio of the next Country Programme.

## FUTURE ORIENTATION OF WFP ASSISTANCE

49. The WFP Country Programme in Bangladesh faces two major challenges:
  - a) further concentrating WFP assistance to help the most vulnerable and malnourished segment of the population; and
  - b) ensuring that food assistance leads to the creation of lasting assets, improvements in the nutritional status of beneficiaries and their most vulnerable family members, and a higher degree of disaster preparedness.
50. The approach proposed for the period 2001-2005 should meet these challenges by building on past experience and on the principles of Enabling Development. The strategy is aimed at the country's 30 million ultra-poor (around 6 million households), especially at their chronic food insecurity and malnutrition. In any given year, food-based interventions supported by WFP will target more than half a million of the poorest households, particularly their most vulnerable members who can benefit most from direct food transfers.
51. The strategy also foresees an impact on Bangladesh's overall food security and on its food assistance system through VAM-based policy analysis and advocacy for the Enabling Development focus of food interventions.



## Identification of Key Areas for Assistance

52. The strategy envisages that WFP food resources combined with non-food resources will go to three programme activities: VGD, IFS and RD. For new areas of food-aided interventions, pilot projects will test the feasibility and efficiency of approaches. The first phase of this process is already being carried out.
53. **Continuation of the VGD:** This nation-wide programme activity (addressing Enabling Development priorities 1, 2 and 3) has been a pioneering effort in enabling development for many of Bangladesh's poorest women. It will continue its highly successful cooperation with NGOs in using food assistance in combination with other development inputs for asset-creating and income-earning activities of destitute women.
54. In addition, this programme activity will form a partnership with the forthcoming NNP to ensure that NNP services will also reach eligible VGD beneficiaries. Expectant and nursing mothers who are enrolled in VGD and their malnourished children under 2 will receive supplementary food to be provided under NNP. They will also participate in NNP's growth monitoring and health counselling activities.
55. The VGD programme will increasingly rely on micronutrient-fortified wheat flour to enhance the nutritional impact of food transfers.
56. **A new and expanding programme activity for IFS:** It will concentrate on Enabling Development priorities 1, 3 and 4. IFS will not be a nation-wide programme, but follow a VAM-supported and area-based approach to target vulnerable communities in most food-insecure areas in the north, along major rivers and in the cyclone-prone south. Food-assisted activities will be based on the needs and capacities of very poor and hungry people in a given locality. Special consideration will be given to women, and food baskets will be more nutritionally appropriate. Locally produced blended food will be supplied in special nutrition interventions. Communities will be involved in the planning and implementation of these activities. Household food security and nutritional needs will be the key determinants for the selection of activities.
57. Assistance will be programmed for:
- a) Feeding of 2 to 5 year olds enrolled in NGO-managed pre-school programmes. This activity will complement the NNP-supported activities that cover children under 2, and expectant and nursing mothers. It will contribute to meeting the nutritional needs for physical and mental development of persons during critical times of their life—from the foetus to the school-age child.
  - b) Nutrition support to adolescent girls enrolled in Women's Training Centres and similar institutions. Considering the gender disparities and the problem of early marriage of girls in Bangladesh, this activity will not only enhance adolescents' nutritional status, but will also contribute to women's social liberalization. An improvement in young women's nutritional status before entering pregnancy is expected to contribute to increased birth weights and to a reduction of child and mother mortality.
  - c) FFW activities and training for male and female community members to prepare themselves better against the effects of disaster. Communities will select the most needed infrastructure to meet this aim. FFW activities will be



scheduled mainly during the lean seasons. The contribution and participation of communities during the implementation of activities will ensure sustainability and effective implementation. Maintenance of assets created will form part of FFW activities, with a high participation of women.

- d) Community-based income-generating activities such as fishponds and tree planting. This activity will involve mainly women, and female heads of household in particular. Asset creation will be complemented by training in managerial and technical skills, thereby achieving long-lasting food security for the poorest of the poor segment of a community.
58. Food Security Assistance Committees will forge implementation alliances and attract support from partners (NGOs, Government, donors) with non-food resources into these integrated activities. The Sector Ministries thus far involved in traditional FFW activities will continue to provide technical support. However, in correspondence with the Government's decentralization policy, organizational tasks at the area, local and beneficiary level will be handled by more decentralized bodies. As more *ata* (fortified wheat flour with a high extraction rate) becomes available, beneficiaries of IFS will also get access to a different food basket.
59. **A re-oriented programme activity for RD:** It will address Enabling Development priorities 2 and 3. WFP support to FFW activities of the Government's current RD Programme—involving both female and male beneficiaries—will become more people-centred. The lasting impact on beneficiaries and their human capital will be given higher importance. The focus on public infrastructure and the budgetary implications of food aid will be reduced. Beneficiaries will receive a different mix of food and non-food wages to further decrease their need to sell food in exchange for other items required by the household. Activities will be planned and implemented through a stronger cooperation with NGOs, which will also establish the link between the workers and their food-insecure families. Beneficiaries will receive basic nutrition training in addition to technical training and will be enabled to "graduate" into other development activities.
60. It is expected that WFP food resource flows now going to the RD sub-programme will be gradually channelled into the IFS sub-programme, and that support to RD will be phased out during 2003. Hence, FFW activities will be continued where they can be organized within the framework of IFS interventions, i.e. where FFW is complemented by a development package (similar to the one developed for VGD) to ensure that sustainable assets are created not only in the public domain, but also at the household or individual level.

### Scope for Joint Programming with Other Agencies

61. This CSO has been elaborated over a six-month consultative process involving a large number of representatives from government organizations, NGOs, beneficiary groups and donors. The process has been synchronized and harmonized with that of the forthcoming UNDAF for Bangladesh and with the plans of other development partners.



62. In addition to some of the existing government partners, WFP will explore new partnerships with government organizations that have a good implementation record at the local level.
63. Firm collaborative agreements exist with the World Bank and UNICEF for the planned NNP. Several other joint programming opportunities are still at the design stage. Internal planning and budgeting by partners interested in area-based development are not yet finalized. It will therefore be necessary to develop a flexible approach to programming WFP's assistance in order to be ready to capitalize on emerging opportunities.
64. WFP will work with UNDP and other agencies and donors on technical assistance to enhance implementation at the *Thana* and Union levels. Additional cooperative initiatives are underway and at the planning stage with other partners, such as UNICEF, the World Bank, IFAD, ILO, UNESCO, the Asian Development Bank and bilateral donors.
65. NGOs will continue to be fundamental to the implementation of WFP-supported activities. However, new working arrangements, including contracting NGOs and private enterprises to provide such services as technical support or management training, will also be explored.

### Operational Implications

66. The following implementation strategies are envisaged to secure a sustainable change in the WFP Country Programme:

#### Targeting

- Sharper targeting to the most vulnerable through a VAM-supported concentration of interventions on the most food-insecure areas in the north, along major rivers and in the cyclone-prone areas in the south.
- Within targeted geographic areas, the main beneficiaries of future WFP assistance will be malnourished people from among the ultra-poor, who suffer the greatest food insecurity and gravest setbacks in times of crisis. The focus on malnourished women and children, especially households headed by women, will be further strengthened.
- Programming of WFP food aid will be based on an improved and dynamic resource allocation map. A recently established VAM Unit in WFP/Bangladesh will provide support services to improved targeting. The new approach will seek to define areas of the country according to prevailing risks and coping strategies, linked with hunger gap time lines. The country office is in the process of developing a typology approach to the different household food economies within poor communities, in order to better understand the relative importance of the different underlying factors of food insecurity. WFP interventions will aim to complement and supplement traditional methods of coping with food stresses.

#### Nutrition Focus

- Inclusion and expansion of interventions that transfer energy-rich and micronutrient-fortified food to nutritionally vulnerable groups.



- Nutrition support will be linked to education and, for adolescent girls, skills training, provision of employment, and awareness-raising activities. Partnerships with NGOs, government and donor programmes will be established to ensure the efficient implementation of food and non-food assisted activities and their sustainability.
- The nutritional outcome of the planned interventions will be improved by complementing the traditional wheat/rice-only food basket with an increasing share of fortified wheat flour (*ata*) and other food commodities such as pulses and oil. Production and distribution modalities are currently being worked out, and it is planned that VGD beneficiaries will start to get *ata* with the beginning of the new Country Programme. It is envisaged that by 2004 all VGD beneficiaries and an increasing number of other WFP beneficiaries will have access to this commodity.
- There will be cooperation with the forthcoming NNP to ensure provision of NNP supplementary food to malnourished VGD women and their children under 2, and to provide effective nutrition education to VGD beneficiaries, which enables them to make better use of existing foods.
- The wheat/rice-based food wage in FFW activities will be changed into a more comprehensive and balanced food basket to help meet the nutritional needs of a family.

### **Human Capacity-building**

- To ensure that food transfers create lasting assets, there will be considerable emphasis placed on transferring food within a “development package” including training, awareness-raising and, especially in FFW activities, non-food transfers.

### **Community Participation**

- WFP activities will be increasingly transformed towards a multi-sector, community-based approach, incorporating different combinations of food-aided interventions. These will include—as appropriate and feasible—nutrition and health interventions for children, adolescent girls and expectant and nursing mothers, support to education and skills training, FFW (particularly to meet the main food gap during the September–November lean season and to enhance community and household disaster preparedness), increased food production and income-generating activities. This will ensure that all programme activities can better respond to the needs of the poorest beneficiaries as identified by them through participatory approaches.
- Food Security Assistance Committees and other community-based organizations will be involved in targeting and resource allocation within the selected areas, sub-areas and communities.

### **Disaster Mitigation**

- Disaster mitigation activities will remain of significant concern and be crucial to community-based FFW interventions. Disaster preparedness at the household level will be strengthened through human capacity-building and asset creation.



### ***Non-food Resources and New Partnerships***

- In order to ensure that food does not have to be sold to acquire other food or non-food items—particularly in activities where food aid is given as part-payment of wages—a sufficiently high proportion of cash-wage will be ensured. Hence, the cash component of wages (currently accounting for 30 percent) will have to be increased to at least 50 percent or to the level of food assistance that is needed and consumable by the household.
- Similarly, there will be a need to secure support for other non-food expenditures such as training and credit so that beneficiaries can receive the longer-term development benefits along with food assistance.
- These non-food inputs will be procured through partnerships with NGOs, government programmes and donors who control these resources. Since it will be difficult to always synchronize the timing of all partners involved, it will be necessary to have sufficient flexibility in the WFP budgeting process to cover some of these expenditures.

### ***Organizational Change***

- It will be ensured that transfers reach the intended beneficiaries through new checks and balances introduced at the implementation level in partnership with local-level development organizations (NGOs, government bodies, public media), and through a new approach to area- and issue-based monitoring and reporting supported by the country office.
- The efficient implementation of community-based interventions will be supported by an area-based organization of the country office, with regional sub-offices supporting this process.

### ***New Logistics Arrangements***

- The introduction of new types of WFP-supported activities will have significant implications for the food basket WFP provides. The introduction of additional types of commodities will also demand different food storage and management routines. New logistics arrangements, including a stronger reliance on market channels, will be developed.

### ***Increased Advocacy***

- The introduction of community-based food aid interventions will depend on WFP strengthening its knowledge base on Bangladesh food systems at both the national and local levels. Using this broadened knowledge base, WFP will be in a better position to undertake a stronger advocacy role, to help ensure that food aid resources from all sources are used most efficiently.

### ***Phasing in***

- The transition of the WFP development programme in Bangladesh to bring it fully into line with WFP's Enabling Development policy will require careful management. Current activities will have to continue until new initiatives have been carefully designed and tested. Similarly, it will be necessary to develop new partnerships in order to enable the food-insecure to have access to the most



efficient mix of food and non-food resources. Thus, it is likely that, at least initially, the transition period will be gradual. Preliminary discussions with development partners indicate that WFP food resources to the three sub-programmes will be allocated in approximately the following proportions:

Year	Sub-programme	WFP food allocation (percent)
2001	VGD	50
	IFS	20
	RD	30
2002	VGD	50
	IFS	30
	RD	20
2003	VGD	50
	IFS	40
	RD	10
2004	VGD	50
	IFS	50
	RD	–
2005	VGD	50
	IFS	50
	RD	–

## KEY ISSUES AND RISKS

67. A major challenge for WFP will be to get full and lasting Government commitment for shifting the focus of food assistance to the ultra-poor and to improvements in nutritional status of this population group. Many Bangladeshis continue to see the creation of public assets as the major objective for the use of food assistance. Considerable advocacy will be required to get the population at large to see the merits of using food assistance also as an instrument for helping the poorest not just in having employment today, but also building their own assets for tomorrow.
68. A significant new feature of the shift to community development will be the increasing responsibility of local government units (*Thanas* and Unions) to implement food-aided activities and to coordinate the development packages needed for sustained success. While this approach is fully in line with the policy of the Government of Bangladesh, it is not clear how fast the political process will allow such a transformation. Currently, the resources and technical expertise available at the local government level are greatly limited. Full Government commitment to the new approach is vital to success. Financial and technical support from the Government and technical assistance packages from other United



Nations agencies (in particular UNDP), bilateral donors and NGOs will be necessary to help overcome this constraint.

69. The introduction of community-based development activities will require significant WFP staff resources in the initial identification, design and development stages. As this will be concurrent with ongoing development activities, as well as increased WFP involvement in logistics and transport, staffing constraints could become a major limiting factor. These constraints would have to be met by re-deploying and training national staff or by hiring short-term consultants.
70. In Bangladesh, increasing amounts of development assistance from different donor sources are being channelled to NGO-supported activities. In general, NGOs have been able to cope with this increased flow, and have achieved a remarkable impact in terms of the sustained improved livelihoods of poor people. Nevertheless, careful attention will have to be paid to the ability of each individual NGO to effectively manage the resources they receive.
71. The Enabling Development approach necessitates an optimal mix of food and non-food resources. Initially, non-food resources will be available only from development partners. The envisaged approach can therefore only come to fruition if partners inside and outside the United Nations system support the concept of Enabling Development, participate in jointly planned activities and help to convince the Government to organize an increasing part of its own food assistance activities along these lines. Eventually it will be necessary for the Government to match external food aid resources with its own budget in order to ensure that the malnourished and ultra-poor of Bangladesh can be effectively and efficiently supported on their way out of perpetual poverty.
72. The shift to fortified wheat flour requires the Government's approval for the introduction of the proposed micronutrients. The Bangladesh authorities responsible for food safety have been reluctant to embrace some of these innovations and it is currently not clear how soon fortification programmes can start and how fast they can expand.