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based agriculture and food
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Agricultural Policy Baseline Report

Bangladesh

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AgriFoSe2030

Agriculture for Food Security 2030

- Translating science into policy and practice



Today more than 800 million people around the world suffer from chronic hunger and about 2 billion from under-nutrition.

This failure by humanity is challenged in UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2: "End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture".

The AgriFoSe2030 program directly targets SDG 2 in low-income countries by translating state-of-the-art science into clear, relevant insights that can be used to inform better practices and policies for smallholders.

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Summary

This report provides an overview of the policy and institutional frameworks governing agriculture and food security in Bangladesh. It enlists and contextualizes the priority areas within agricultural policy in the country as seen through various documents such as the National Agricultural Policy (2013) and the National Agricultural Extension Policy (2015). The report also describes the role of different actors in planning and executing agricultural policy in Bangladesh. It outlines the regional diversity in this context. The report concludes by considering the opportunities and challenges in attaining the AgriFoSe 2030 aims and objectives within the realm of agriculture and food security in Bangladesh.

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1. Introduction

This report seeks to provide an overview of the policy and institutional frameworks currently in place with regard to agriculture and food security in Bangladesh. It will further comment on how these frameworks relate to the key stakeholder groups within AgriFoSe2030, namely smallholders and women. This is carried out through a review of key policy documents and reports from governmental agencies, along with relevant academic literature.

The report is presented in six sections. The first section provides a brief historical and contextual overview of the agricultural sector in Bangladesh, along with current figures on productivity and structural characteristics. The second section delineates the key themes within agricultural policy as prioritized by the Government of Bangladesh and describes the current situation for each. The third section outlines the institutional structure of agricultural policy making and implementation, with brief descriptions of the roles and responsibilities of each agency. The fourth section describes the regional variations in themes and policy priorities within the country. The fifth section comments on the observed position of each AgriFoSe2030 stakeholder group within this given policy and institutional framework. The sixth section concludes with notes for further work within the AgriFoSe2030 agenda.

2. Contextualizing agriculture in Bangladesh

Agriculture is an important sector in Bangladesh. Although it accounts for only 19% of the GDP, it is estimated that up to 85% of the total population is directly or indirectly dependent on agriculture for their livelihoods. The sector has been growing at the rate of 2.2% pa and encompasses 15 million agricultural households of which more than 70% are landless, marginal, and small farmers (MoA, 2015a).

Shortly after the War of Independence against (and liberation from) Pakistan in 1971, Bangladesh was hit by the famine of 1974 following consecutive natural disasters (Dorosh 2012). This experience set the agenda for policy priorities within agriculture in Bangladesh. The core focus of agricultural policy has been on achieving self-sufficiency in rice production and stabilizing the price of rice, thereby attaining food security for all households (Rahman et al 2014). This target was met for the first time in the late 1990s when the total grain production in Bangladesh exceeded the total domestic requirement. In the ensuing decades, the total food grain production in Bangladesh has tripled. However, more than 70% of the total cultivated area in the country remains dedicated to rice and wheat production, resulting in import-dependence for other essential food items like pulses, fruits, vegetables, and spices. The only prominent food item exported by Bangladesh is shrimps.

In the past two decades a number of milestone policy documents have shaped the course of agricultural policy in Bangladesh. The 'National Agricultural Policy' (NAP) was introduced in 1999 and thereafter upgraded in 2013. The 'New Agricultural Extension Policy' was first introduced in 1996 and thereafter updated in 2014-15 in the form of



Location of Bangladesh.

the 'National Agricultural Extension Policy' (NAEP). There are also policy outlines in place for seed and fertilizer distribution, livestock, fisheries, and forestry. The latter revisions and upgradations in the policy documents were made with the aim to align them with other policy frameworks such as those outlined in the National Land Use Policy (1998), National Water Policy (1998), and the National Sustainable Development Strategy (2013). In the present times, the Seventh Five Year Plan (FYP) document (2016-2020) provides an overview of the agenda envisaged for the Ministry of Agriculture.

As most developing countries exemplify, the agricultural sector in Bangladesh too is closely connected with the goals of poverty reduction and securing of livelihoods. Challenges faced by the agricultural sector have expanded from fragmentation of landholdings and increased pressure from a growing population, to climate change induced risks and vulnerabilities. Additionally market and trade conditions following the introduction of structural adjustment policies also constitute an important factor in agricultural policy planning.

Against this backdrop, the following section will now describe some of the key focus areas as identified in the policy documents reviewed.

3. Priority areas in agricultural policy for Bangladesh in recent years

The central aim of agricultural policy in Bangladesh has been to increase both production and productivity while also making agriculture resilient towards climate change (NAP, 2013). This aim is reiterated in multiple policy documents and a few different approaches towards this aim have been identified. The approaches are meant to be pursued in parallel and are applied in whatever combination is found to be most suitable in a particular case.



Administrative Divisions of Bangladesh.
Source: Wikimedia Commons Atlas of the World.

3.1 Research and development

Knowledge generation and dissemination have been central to the policy agenda through the decades. In the NAP (2013) and NAEP (2015) there is an added emphasis on demand based research prioritization. The main focus has been on improving seed varieties to increase productivity and efficiency of cultivation. Diversifying crop varieties has also been in focus. Other fields of research include improving soil quality and developing improved irrigation management systems. In the seventh FYP document, there is an added emphasis on orienting agricultural research towards organic farming.

A public-private partnership approach has been adopted in this regard. A vast network of agricultural research organizations exist in Bangladesh (as the next section will expand on). There has also been a steady focus on building international partnerships and collaborations to strengthen research and development within agriculture. Some of the prominent international bodies that have been involved in agricultural research and technology improvement in Bangladesh include the FAO, the World Bank, the International Rice Research Institute, and CIMMYT (International Maize and Wheat Improvement Centre).

3.2 Decentralization

The NAEP (2015) emphasizes on the importance of farmers' associations at the village level. These organizations are seen as elementary to the aim of building secure supply chains for agricultural inputs and products, improving market linkage, facilitating contract farming, and extending agricultural knowhow. The NAEP (2015) seeks to legally formalize grassroots level farmers' associations through registration starting at the village level. Organizations at the higher levels will be formed on the basis of these village level organizations. These organizations at the district and sub-district levels will be in charge of production and commerce related decision-making. The indicators for judging the economic performance of these organizations have been identified in the NAEP (2015) as - improved bargaining powers of small holders, improved profit sharing mechanisms, greater participation in decision-making, and ability to reduce risks.

The seventh FYP further mentions the creation of Participatory Guarantee Systems to link farmers' associations involved in organic farming and urban retailers in the metropolitan areas, to expand the market for organically produced agricultural goods.

3.3 Export orientation

The National Food Policy (2008) made it evident that the central aim of agricultural policy was to cater to the domestic market and attain self-sufficiency. However in more recent times, the seventh FYP document broadens the aim to include export orientation for certain agricultural products. The main among these are the products of organic farming, which are identified to be in high demand in high income countries. To this end, the plan suggests trade fairs, group certifications for formal entry into the export market, and assistance for institutional capacity building.

The NAP (2013) mentions building stronger export ties with countries where a sizeable Bangladeshi diasporic presence is to be found. It also mentions the search for competitive export markets and diversification of export goods as an area of interest for Bangladesh.

3.4 Climate change and related disasters

As one of the countries with the largest population vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, Bangladesh has taken steps towards orienting its agricultural policy towards climate change adaptation, resilience, and disaster-risk reduction. The NAP (2013) recognized that the risks and vulnerabilities faced by the agricultural sector vary considerably between the different regions (discussed in detail in section 4) and committed to appropriate technological assistance in each case. It plans for collaborative efforts with NGOs, private individuals, and charitable organizations in post-disaster scenarios. It further emphasizes on the importance of crop insurance, crop protection, and compensations to farmers in case of crop loss.

This is echoed in the NAEP (2015) which further suggests a number of technologically oriented and geographically specific interventions including the distribution of resistant seed varieties, better disaster warning systems, and introducing innovative and adaptive technology for irrigation and cultivation.

4. Overview of institutional structure for policy planning and implementation

The website of the Ministry of Agriculture illustrates the vast network of institutions and agencies that are affiliated to the Ministry of Agriculture in Bangladesh and are responsible in various capacities for the planning and implementation of agricultural policy. In this section I summarize the roles and functions of some of these prominent agencies listed by the government. The first part refers to bodies involved in research and development. The second part expands on bodies related to drawing of legislations and implementation of particular schemes and programmes.

4.1. Research and development

Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council: This is the apex organization that is in charge of formulating the vision document for agricultural research at the national level as well as for planning resource allocations for the same. It also draws management procedures for all agricultural research institutes to maintain consistency in their operations.

Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute: This is the largest multi-crop research institute that also conducts research on soil and water related issues. It operates through three wings – research, support services, and training and communication.

Bangladesh Rice Research Institute: This institute has nine regional stations in different agro-ecological zones of the country. Together the activities of these stations cover 80 per cent of the area under rice cultivation and 91 per cent of the total rice production. The institute has so far released sixty different rice varieties.

Bangladesh Jute Research Institute: The mandate of this institute covers both agricultural as well as technological and economic-marketing related research on jute and allied fibres. It is invested in both improving the crop and developing new marketable products.

Bangladesh Institute of Nuclear Agriculture: The main role of this institute is to develop new and improved crop varieties through induced mutations. It also works in soil management and towards providing training in agricultural engineering.

Soil Resource Development Institute: The institute has the mandate to collect, store, interpret, and generate knowledge about soil samples from different parts of the country. It produces maps and GIS services for other research institutes and promotes soil testing facilities amongst individual farmers.

Bangladesh Sugarcane Research Institute: The main aim of this institute is to keep sugarcane farming a viable enterprise amongst farmers, especially in the “mill zones”, through technological inputs and finance and support services.

4.2 Policy planning and implementation

Department of Agricultural Extension: This is the largest public sector extension service provider in Bangladesh, working on both technology transfers and human resource development, apart from its focus on increasing agricultural productivity. It is a crucial actor in the implementation of the NAEP.

Dept. of Agricultural Marketing: This body is responsible for ensuring a fair price for farmers as well as a steady supply for consumers at a reasonable price. It collects data at the farmer level on wholesale and retail prices, market arrivals, and movements of stocks. It calculates prices and disseminates the information among traders and farmers. It also advises the government on procurement programmes, support prices, storage, marketing, distribution, and export.

Agriculture Information Services: This agency has been called the “institutional memory” of the Ministry of Agriculture. It is mandated to provide mass media support to the agriculture sector through radio, television, print media, and other modes of dissemination. It is particularly focused on technology transfers between research institutes and farmers.

Bangladesh Agriculture Development Corporation: This agency plays important functions in the fields of administration, finance, minor irrigation, seed and horticulture, and fertilizer management. Its main roles are to facilitate government to government collaborations in these fields. It also acts as a bridge between government and farmers with regard to providing inputs and services.

Seed Certification Agency: This is a regulatory agency responsible for certification and quality control of all seeds and the recommended varieties.

Cotton Development Board: This body is responsible for organizing farmers' associations for extension of cotton cultivation. It also provides training to cotton farmers and supports the processing and marketing of cotton.

5. Regional considerations

The NAEP (2015) identifies the following regions within the country that experience particular forms of vulnerabilities, especially in the face of climate change:

- the western and north-western regions as the chronic drought-prone areas of the country due to irregular rainfall patterns
- the flood-prone central region
- the flash-floods affected regions of the north and north-east
- the increased soil-salinity affected regions of the south-west and south-central areas
- the hill tracts of Chittagong with erratic rainfall
- the cyclone affected coastal belt

The document further specifies that together these vulnerable regions constitute about 41 per cent of the total land mass of Bangladesh. Thus, while combatting climate change is a priority in general, the specific strategies for the same are different for the different regions. Although these strategies are not clearly spelt out in the NAEP, it does recognize that there are wide disparities in terms of poverty and malnutrition amongst the various regions in the country. It further states that the particular extension services for each region will be carried out bearing in mind the environmental challenges and technological capacity of each region. The NAEP also considers the different classes of farmers that exist in the different regions and aspires to involve them as equal participants in the development process. Thus, the particular demands for agricultural extension services from the local farming class are supposed to form the basis for the strategy in each region.

6. Position of AgriFoSe2030 stakeholders i.e. women and small holders

As mentioned before, there is a strong and emerging emphasis on the participation of smallholders in the implementation as well as decision-making within agricultural policy. This is mainly envisaged through the formalization and strengthening of farmers' associations at the grassroots level and making the extension process participatory. Given that the vast majority of farmers in Bangladesh are small, marginal, or landless cultivators, all agricultural policy is bound to affect this group of stakeholders. This is clearly acknowledged and taken into account in all the reviewed policy documents.

The other stakeholder group i.e. women is not mentioned as frequently or emphatically in the policy documents reviewed. The seventh FYP document devotes a short section to "Main-streaming women in agriculture". In this section, women's role is defined as crucial to the "transformation of agricultural products to food and nutritional security" hinting at their role as care-givers within the household. However it also mentions the gender based inequalities all along the food production chain and calls for the active engagement of women in decision making processes. In this regard, the plan document proposes skill development training and access to credit and other business development services. Given the country's strong history in women's microfinance mobilizations, the plan also mentions the probable role of women's groups. Another important proposal stated in the plan is to employ more women as extension workers and researchers within agriculture.

7. Conclusion: Opportunities and Challenges for AgriFoSe2030 aims and objectives

Capacity building and translating research into policy are the two main objectives of the AgriFoSe2030 project. Within this framework, the current policy baseline of Bangladesh is well suited to the aims of the project. The agricultural sector in Bangladesh is built upon a complex and broad-based network of agencies and institutions. These bodies have their roles well defined and together encompass all the important aspects of agriculture and food security. Thus there exists a strong institutional foundation for the objectives of the project to be executed.

Furthermore, the current agricultural policy is founded on research and maintaining its status as a food secure and self-reliant economy. This is envisaged in the policy documents through village level farmers' associations which is also in keeping with the smallholder focus of the project. The most challenging aspect as observed in this policy overview is the issue of gender. Women's role and participation finds a marginal presence in the existing policy framework and not much is mentioned regarding their land rights, incomes and livelihoods. This can be an important area of intervention for the project that can be further explored.

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List of abbreviations

CIMMYT	International Maize and Wheat Improvement Centre
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FYP	Five Year Plan
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
MoA	Ministry of Agriculture
MoEF	Ministry of Environment and Forests
NAEP	National Agricultural Extension Policy
NAP	National Agricultural Policy
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations