

Evaluation Brief



Evaluation of the Impact of Food for Assets on Livelihood Resilience in Bangladesh (2008-2011)

Context

Although the incidence of poverty has declined and food security has improved in recent years, in 2012 Bangladesh ranked 68th of 79 countries in the 2012 Global Hunger Index, and 146th of 187 in the 2011 Human Development Index. The country is severely disaster-prone and at high risk of negative impacts of climate change.

Food for Assets in Bangladesh

The evaluation covered the food/cash-for-assets (FCFA) component of WFP's Bangladesh country programme 104100 (2007–2011). During the reference period, 471 FCFA projects were undertaken, involving 55,000 participants, 70 percent of whom were women, in 45 *upazilas* (sub-districts) of 13 districts.

Participants received a combination of food and cash remuneration for two years, based on 90 to 95 days of labour over six months a year, and training for five to six days a month in the remaining six months. Flood/tidal surge protection accounted for 61% of assets, access infrastructure for 34% and water management for 5%. Training topics included disaster risk reduction and preparedness planning, nutrition and hygiene, women's empowerment, income-generating activities and life skills.

Objectives and Scope of the Evaluation

This evaluation assessed the outcomes and impacts of WFP's food-for-assets programming in Bangladesh and was part of a series of five evaluations on the impact of WFP's cash-for-assets and food-for-assets activities on livelihoods resilience. Other countries in the series include Bangladesh, Guatemala, Uganda and Senegal. A synthesis of all five countries will also be conducted. The evaluation emphasized learning by identifying lessons and changes for enhancing the impacts on resilience and aligning food-for-assets programming with WFP's recently adopted 2011 Food for Assets Guidance Manual and Disaster Risk Reduction Policy.

The evaluation addressed three core questions:

1. What positive and negative impacts have FFA activities had on individuals within participating households and communities?

2. What factors were critical in affecting outcomes and impacts?
3. How could FFA activities be improved to address the findings from the first two questions?

The lack of baseline and endline data made impact measurement problematic; thus a mixed method approach was used, including household survey (1500 respondents), focus groups, asset assessments, key informant interviews and participatory rural appraisal.

Key Findings

Asset functionality

330 assets were assessed, only three of which were found to be partially functional. The rest were functional and serving the purpose for which they were designed. However 13% were never completed. Approximately 25% of survey respondents did not know who was responsible for asset maintenance.

Biophysical Effects and Agricultural Productivity

Most assets were reported to deliver multiple biophysical effects including:

- reduced severity of flooding;
- reduced soil and riverbank erosion;
- increased vegetable production and increased agricultural productivity.

Over 80% of respondents reported that embankments enable an additional crop cycle. Roads contributed indirectly to agricultural production by increasing market access and access to inputs.

Livelihoods

Programme participation was negatively correlated with years of education, confirming appropriate targeting towards livelihoods resilience of the ultra-poor and disadvantaged groups.

The evaluation found positive impact on annual incomes of participant households, in the order of 5200 taka (US\$65) more than comparison households. Similarly, programme participation was found to increase the probability of accumulating savings by 26 percentage points, and was associated with size of accumulation.

In intervention villages, poor and extremely poor benefited most from all asset types and participants' ownership of land and livestock was greater than comparable non-participants. However, among participants, women-headed household outcomes were worse than for those headed by men.

Participants undertook more income generating activities than comparison populations, and training provided was found to have contributed to a greater diversification of income-generating activities.

Food security

Food distributions took place during periods of scarcity, and thus filled a short term food need. There was a 16 percentage point increase in the knowledge of participants' knowledge of proper methods for cooking vegetables and an average impact of 17 percentage points in knowledge of sanitation. Participants and all other local stakeholders unequivocally reported in interviews and focus groups that homestead raising as well as training had a positive impact in terms of promoting kitchen gardening and better nutrition. Interestingly, and despite the positive economic impacts noted above, there was no evidence of improvements in food security over the past 12 month period, in dietary diversity scores or food consumption scores.

Vulnerability and coping

64% of participant respondents received training in disaster vulnerability reduction and disaster preparedness and were more aware of disaster preparedness techniques than non-participants. However, coping strategy indices were not significantly different between participants and non-participants.

Women's empowerment

Women were specifically targeted and gender sensitive initiatives such as provision of childcare and sanitation facilities made the work environment more conducive to women's participation. FCFA activities increased household workloads, but women could send replacement workers if needed. From 2009 to 2011, 75% of participant's committee members were women, up from 20% in 2007.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall Assessment

WFP Bangladesh achieved significant positive impacts through its FCFA activities. FCFA and training provided immediate short-term food security benefits to 55,000 participants, 70 percent of whom were women. Assets constructed were well targeted for disaster risk reduction and highly relevant to context.

Despite insufficient clarity on responsibilities and poor maintenance systems, most assets were operational and serving their intended purposes; those directly reducing disaster risk were better maintained than others. Impacts on the biophysical environment, agricultural productivity and economic/market access were confirmed.

There was compelling evidence of social transformation and women's empowerment, and significant impacts on income and savings; however, the evidence suggested that food security impacts were not sustained in the long term. The network approach to support project implementation was a key factor of success.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. The office should continue to provide the Government with support in disaster risk reduction, building on the experience of the ER component in future programmes. (WFP country office).

Recommendation 2. The office should work with its partners to elaborate and institutionalize the network management model for FCFA, refining it to facilitate synergies among different actors, to enhance access to the complementary services that lead to improved household income and food security for the ultra-poor. (WFP country office).

Recommendation 3. Feasible asset-management plans should become an integral feature of the FCFA approach. (WFP country office, its NGO/government partners and WFP worldwide).

Recommendation 4. More robust monitoring systems should be developed to ensure that major intended outcomes can be measured. (WFP country office and NGOs).



Reference:

Full and summary reports of the evaluation and the Management Response are available at www.wfp.org/evaluation

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