

## **SEMINAR-II**

### **FOOD SECURITY SITUATION IN BANGLADESH: RECENT TRENDS, CHALLENGES AND WAY FORWARD**

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#### **Summary**

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The paper was reviewed to focus on the trends of food security situation in Bangladesh as well as to identify the major challenges and threats for food security. Based on the analysis and review a strategy was suggested for attaining and sustaining food security at the national and household level in the coming years.

Bangladesh has made remarkable progress in achieving its food security. Since independence in 1971, production and consumption of food grains grew over time. Until 2007, Bangladesh released more than 50 modern varieties of rice and more than 20 varieties of wheat. In addition to the high yielding varieties (HYVs) Bangladesh has also approved 52 hybrids for cultivation during the Boro season. Due to introduction of these modern varieties, the total production level of food grain has increased from 12.14 million metric tons comprising of rice 12.03 million tons and wheat 0.11 million tons in 1973-74 to 28.05 million metric tons comprising of rice 27.31 million tons and wheat 0.74 million tons in 2006-07. In other words, food production was about 2.3 times in 2006-07 than that of 1973-74. Despite inter-year fluctuations, production of food grains had a sustained growth in the 1980s, 1990s and in the 2000s. During the 1991/92-2006/07 period, annual growth in production of food grains was 3.17 percent.

Though there were ups and downs but production of food grains generally experienced an upward trend. However, recent price hike for agricultural commodities particularly rice and wheat has posed a major challenge to food security in Bangladesh. Inflation was very low in the early 2000s. Until December 2003, inflation was about 6 percent and after that the inflation was started to increase, and the high growth in consumer prices continued in the initial months of 2008. Loss of rice production in FY 2007/08 amounting 1.5 to 2.0 million tons by two consecutive floods, devastating cyclone Sidr was a major challenge. Imports from international market could easily offset the reduction in availability caused by natural disaster but restrictions on exports by major rice exporting countries created a serious problem. It also revealed that the domestic price of rice has increased sharply with the announcement of minimum export price by India from US\$ 425 per metric ton on October 2007 to US\$ 1000 per metric ton on

March 2008 for non-Basmati rice. Currently rice export is banned by India, Vietnam, Cambodia and Egypt.

Considering the hurdles of rice import in FY 2007/08 as well as export bans by the major rice exporting countries Bangladesh must depend on its own production to meet up its food grain requirement. A national target of producing at least 32 million tons of rice, comprising of Aus 1.5 million tons, Aman 12.5 million tons and Boro 18.00 million tons, needs to be set for FY 2008/09 and all efforts of all stakeholders must be geared to attain this comfort zone of food security. To this end, a strategy is suggested for the upcoming Aman and Boro season.

To achieve this goal, the Government of Bangladesh must have to promote seeds of improved varieties of food crops, supply adequate amount of fertilizers, ensure availability as well as affordability of diesel for irrigation and ensure supply of electricity for irrigation. Encouragement for cultivation of hybrid rice should also be continued. With proper support for tillage and irrigation, additional 10 lakh ha of coastal areas might be brought under cultivation during the Boro season. It is also possible to increase area under Aman rice particularly in the coastal belt. Aman season has the advantage of low or almost no cost for irrigation. Therefore, adequate importance for increase in production in the Aman season would be required. A mechanism for regular market monitoring has to be put in place towards this. In this context, public and private enterprises and interested NGOs need to be provided with appropriate incentives through fiscal measures and related supports.

In addition, collaboration with other South Asian countries for setting up of SAARC Food Bank and for increased agricultural production would be beneficial to reduce the food security risks at the time of disasters. As a net food importing least developed country, Bangladesh might also put forward its concerns and demand for food aid to the WTO. Hopefully, Bangladesh would be able to meet the current challenges.