

ONHIGH ROAD TO PROGRESS

CLIMATE, WOMEN AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

SILVER JUBILEE SPECIAL

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Food security

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At times, unsafe food is worse than no food. People can survive starvation for limited period but, may have to die from consumption of adulterated food.

We have heard enough of outdated laws such as pure food act, and heard enough of government enacting stringent, modern laws in place but any visible enforcement is yet to come by. Couple of years gone by since parliament passed safe food laws and it has been almost a year now that safe food authority is formed but public confidence on safety of food items served to their dishes is still very low.

Over the last three/four decades, Bangladesh as well as entire South Asia has overcome the problem of food availability. All countries now have enough food for people to meet their minimum energy requirements. However many people still lack money to buy sufficient quantities of nutritious food. This is manifested in high level of malnutrition, hunger and poverty.

Rising income inequality acts as deterrent in reducing poverty, hunger and malnutrition in a faster pace. This is evident from the fact that in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan more than two out of every five children are stunted (low height for age), one in three are underweight (low weight for age), and over 15% are wasted (low weight for height). Similarly, about half of the women in these three largest countries of South Asia are suffering from anaemia.

Over the last three decades, food production and availability has increased at a good pace in Bangladesh as well as entire of South Asia. Food production grew annually by 1.2% between 1980 and 2010 regionally. This increase was attributed to the impres-

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sive performance of Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, where per capita food production increased by 1.1%, 1.4% and 1.0% respectively. While India and Pakistan are self-sufficient in the production of most food commodities, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have also become self-reliant in production of their staple rice. As a result, South Asia's per capita food availability increased from 2,259 kcal/person/day to 2,434 kcal/person/day between 1991 and 2011.

Malnutrition, poverty and hunger have decreased in Bangladesh over the last three decades. This can be attributed to pro-poor growth policies coupled with specific educational and nutritional interventions. The government's budget allocation for the social sector has increased significantly and non-government organisations played an important role as well. Also, the country has formulated a comprehensive social safety net which has benefited the population, particularly the vulnerable ones.

The nutritional status of women has improved over the last several decades, yet disparities exist by income and social status. In 2011, nearly a quarter of women (aged 15-49 years) suffered from chronic energy deficiency (with a BMI of less than 18.5) compared to half of the women in late 1990s. Micronutrient deficiencies in iron, iodine and vitamin A are also a challenge. Though decreasing, yet anaemia among pregnant women is still high.

Thanks to farm mechanisation, agricultural technology developments, better breeding and farm subsidy and other policy supports, farmers in Bangladesh are still being able to grow more crops from fast depleting farmlands. Resources (land, water, etc.) are scarce; demand for food is on the rise thanks to an increasing population. Choice is limited here. Higher demand for housing, road-building and industrialisation is taking away fertile farmlands while challenge is getting bigger and bigger in meeting greater food demand of increasing population. Though the birth rate is stabilised yet because of an existing large population base, Bangladesh needs to grow nearly half a million tonnes of additional rice year-on-year just to keep pace with the increased number of mouths to be fed.

Almost 30% of the households do

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own only up to half an acre. Such tiny landownership is insufficient to meet the food needs of four to five-member households, whatever advanced technology the farmer use. There has been no move, whatsoever, for any sorts of land reforms. Tenancy farming is order of the day. People who own land largely don't do farming while people who don't own land mostly do the job as lessees. Economic disparities, relative opportunity costs, flourishing non-farm sectors have got something to do about this phenomenon.

Despite such huge challenges it's to the credit of laborious farmers and supporting farm policies that Bangladesh is being able to self-sufficient in rice production. In wheat, we're largely import-dependent but in maize growth has been fantastic over the last two decades. There has been tremendous growth in yields of potato and vegetables and rise in fish productions is quite significant as far as meeting nutritional needs is concerned. But still for the poorer section of the popu-

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lation, rice-centric dietary habit and serious absence of dietary diversities remain a great challenge.

Probably that explains why the number of undernourished people in Bangladesh has remained almost static in recent years despite the country's commendable improvement in food security status since 1990. Number of undernourished people stands at 26.3 million in 2015 compared to 26.5 million in 2010-12, said the State of Food Insecurity (Sofi) report-2015, a UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) flagship published annually on the eve of World Food Day (October 16).

Sofi statistics show that number of Bangladeshi undernourished people dropped from 36 million in 1990 to 27.7 million in 2000 and further down to 24.3 million in the 2005-07 period. But the pace has rather lost momentum in recent years as the number of undernourished people increased to 26.5 million in 2010-12, from which it has dropped by a mere 0.2 million now.

Undernourishment means that a

person is not able to acquire enough food to meet the daily minimum dietary energy requirements over a period of one year.

Bangladesh has done well and we all know that it achieved some of the vital MDGs even ahead of time. In fact, Bangladesh is one of the forerunners in achieving the first of eight Millennium Development Goals – reducing extreme poverty rates by a half (from 58% to 29%) between 1990 and 2015.

Probably we have reached a point now that we need to identify the 'pockets' where things are not moving fast. We have to look into the areas where people lost their traditional occupations; we have to look into the vulnerabilities of elderly people; people lacking skills, differently-able persons and ethnic minorities. In order to further reduce the number of undernourished people, Bangladesh also needs to focus on people living in shoals, river-erosion areas, khas lands and saline-prone

The writer is Assignment Editor The Daily Star.

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"গার্মেন্টস এক্সেসরিজ ও প্যাকেজিং শিল্প দেশের রপ্তানি বাণিজ্যের অন্যতম অংশীদার'"

বর্তমানে এ শিল্পখাতের ১৪০০ শিল্পে কার্টন, পলি, লেবেল, সুইং থ্রেড, জিপার, বার্টন, হ্যাঙ্গার, ইলাস্টিক, ঘাম টেপ, হ্যাং ট্যাগ, প্রাইস ট্যাগ, ফটোকার্ড, ন্যারো ফ্রেবিক্স সহ প্রায় ৩৫-৪০ টি গার্মেন্টস্ এক্সেসরিজ ও প্যাকেজিং পণ্য উৎপাদন করে গার্মেন্টস্সহ অন্যান্য রপ্তানিমুখী শিল্পে সরবরাহ করে দেশের রপ্তানি বাণিজ্যে গুরুত্বপূর্ণ ভূমিকা পালন করছে। দেশের হাজার হাজার লোকের কর্মসংস্থানের পাশাপাশি গত অর্থ বছরে ৫.৬০ বিলিয়ন ডলারের বৈদেশিক মুদ্রা অর্জন করেছে। দেশী ও বিদেশী বিনিয়োগকারীগণ এ খাতে হাজার হাজার কোটি টাকা বিনিয়োগ করেছে।



বাংলাদেশ গার্মেন্টস এক্সেসরিজ এন্ড প্যাকেজিং ম্যানুফ্যাকচারার্স এন্ড এক্সপোর্টার্স এসোসিয়েশন (বিজিএপিএমইএ)

Randladesh Garments Accessories & Packaging Manufacturers & Exporters Association (RGAPMEA)

Bangladesh Garments Accessories & Packaging Manufacturers & Exporters Association (BGAPMEA)
Sonartori Tower (9th floor), 12, Sonargaon Link Road, Banglamotor, Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh.
Tel: 880-2-9632700, 9666763, 9632717, Fax: 9632718, E-mail: bgapmea@gmail.com

Website: www.bgapmea.org

Regional office: Progoti House (4th Floor), 1070, Sk. Mujib Road, Agrabad, Chittagong, Bangladesh.

Tel. & Fax: 880-031-2510709, E-mail: bgapmeactg@gmail.com

