



SAVING  
LIVES  
CHANGING  
LIVES

## Capacity strengthening for social safety nets

Bangladesh has a long history in delivering assistance to its poor through social safety nets. These programmes make up almost 14 percent of the national budget and cover 27 percent of households in the country.

Despite laudable achievements in closing the poverty gap, the social safety net system in Bangladesh is complex, fragmented and unable to effectively address increasing urban poverty and climate change, two increasingly critical challenges, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the deepening global food crisis.

Recognizing this, the Government has requested WFP to provide capacity strengthening for selected safety nets to help make them more nutrition-sensitive by 2030. WFP provides technical assistance in support of two flagship safety net programmes: the Vulnerable Women Benefit (VWB) programme targeting more than 1 million women for two years and Mother and Child Benefit programme targeting 1.2 beneficiaries for FY 2022-23. These are both implemented by the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA), which assists more than 2 million women and children across the country, through the Department of Women Affairs.

National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) outlines a new Vulnerable Women Benefit initiative offering social security to working-age vulnerable women; it aims to guarantee beneficiaries a minimal income by increasing their labour market participation.

**In the VWB programme**, formerly known as Vulnerable Group Develop (VGD) programme, women receive a monthly 30.3 kg fortified rice ration in addition to intensive skill development trainings, designed to help them graduate out of extreme poverty by engaging them in income-generating activities. The VWB programme will enable 3.2 million women in rural and urban areas to establish micro-enterprise through graduation approach by 2030.

With WFP support, the **Mother and Child Benefit Programme (MCBP)** was launched in 2019 to ensure newborns and young children receive adequate nutrition during the most critical stage of their lives—the first 1,000 days. The programme provides a monthly cash transfer of BDT 800 to pregnant women and mothers, and emphasizes nutrition-sensitivity and early stimulation through behaviour change communications.

Photo: WFP/Sayed Asif Mahmud

## ACHIEVEMENTS

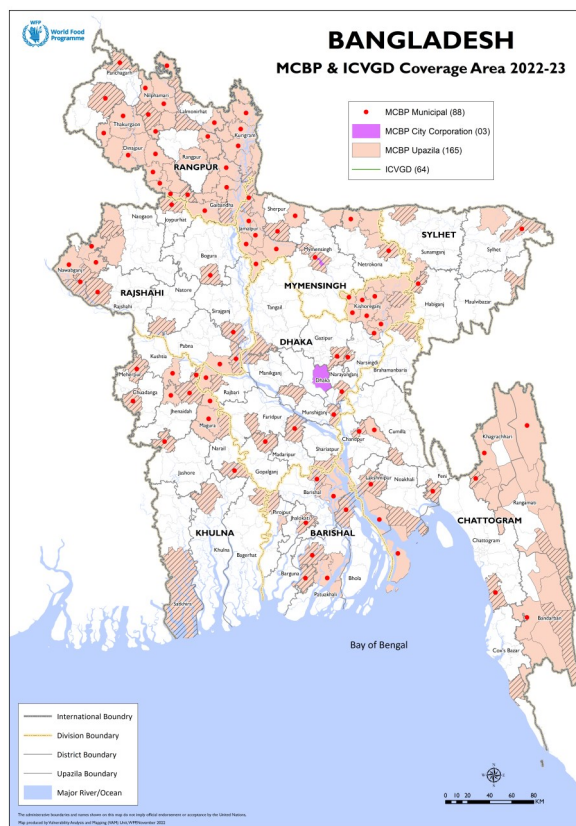
- WFP supported MoWCA to pilot ICVGD project integrating a cash grant for investment into the VGD programme, which now targets 100,000 women in 64 districts with government funding and WFP technical assistance.
- In 2020, WFP established a management information system (MIS) unit at the Department of Women Affairs to facilitate digital services, such as online self-enrolment, monthly cash transfers through the Government-to-Person (G2P) system, phone calls on nutrition-focussed behaviour change communications and MIS-integrated distance monitoring tools.
- To improve beneficiary targeting, WFP supported MoWCA to establish an online self-registration system for the MCBP and VWB programmes. This has helped reduce inclusion errors from 46 percent (average of all government safety nets) to 12 percent for the VWB programme, enabling savings of US\$ 106 million which are redirected to the most needy beneficiaries.
- WFP supported MoWCA in designing and launching a nationwide mobile application for beneficiary self-registration to improve transparency and inclusivity, and contribute to better targeting. The system is linked to the Bangladesh Election Commission for national identity verification and other ministries to ensure maximum coverage, while avoiding selection errors.
- As a result of WFP advocacy, the Department of Women Affairs expanded the MCBP in 2021 to include 61 impoverished areas all over country, including the Dhaka slums where WFP has implemented its first urban food security programme (Kalyanpur and Sattola). A combined total of 990 pregnant women have enrolled in the programme through online self-registration in Kalyanpur Slum (Dhaka) and Mymensingh city, the two locations where the MCBP was launched in 2021.
- WFP contributed to the development of the MCBP social behaviour change communication (SBCC) strategy in 2021. WFP also organized more than 40 virtual training sessions on information management, the G2P payment system and online self-enrolment, which have helped to build the capacity of more than 1,300 government officials at national and sub-national levels.
- Currently two comprehensive age-specific MCBP modules on nutrition and early childhood development are being developed and operationalized. Under the Investment Component of the VGD pilot, new skills development training modules on financial literacy, entrepreneurship, value chain and market linkages have been developed.
- WFP contributed to the design of a more financially-inclusive countrywide VWB programme through robust

analysis of digital financial inclusion and women's economic empowerment.

WFP's technical support consists of policy reform; programme and system reform, institutional accountability; strategic planning and financing; and partnership for sustainability.

## WFP PLANS

- To help MoWCA expand MCBP and VWB as envisaged in NSSS, targeting 7.5 million women and children by 2026.
- To develop proof of concept for shock-responsive social safety nets for urban and hard-to-reach areas; and support MoWCA in programme expansion in urban areas.
- To introduce digital innovation and solutions (i.e. MIS, single registry, targeting, monitoring, community feedback mechanisms) to improve programme efficiency
- To generate evidence on nutrition and early stimulation outcomes in the MCBP and conduct an impact study of the ICVGD programme.
- To support MOWCA to develop an action plan to operationalize the MCBP SBCC strategy through regular programme events, such as court-yard meetings, video screenings, and youth group and mothers conferences.



Annual requirement : US\$ 3 million



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