

RESEARCH REPORT

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# An Impact Analysis of Vulnerable Group Feeding Programme in Bangladesh

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Mitali Parvin



**Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS)**

# **RESEARCH REPORT**

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**Mitali Parvin**

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## **List of Acronyms**

DC	Deputy Commissioner
DO	Delivery Order
FCS	Food Consumption Score
FFW	Food for Work
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GoB	Government of Bangladesh
GO	Grant Order
GR	Gratuitous Relief
HSC	Higher Secondary Certificate
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
KII	Key Informant Interview
LSD	Local Supply Depot
MoDMR	Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
PESP	Primary Education Stipend Project
PIO	Upazila Project Implementation Officer
PO	Procurement Officer
RMP	Rural Maintenance Program
SSC	Secondary School Certificate
TR	Test Relief
UNO	Upazila Nirbahi Officer
UP	Union Parishad
VGf	Vulnerable Group Feeding
VGd	Vulnerable Group Development
WFP	World Food Programme

## **Abstract**

In Bangladesh, safety nets are formal and informal ways of protecting people from poverty. In contrast, formal safety nets include various transfer programmes designed to play both a redistributive and risk-reduction role. The traditional role of safety nets is to redistribute income and resources to the needy in society so that the impact of poverty can be reduced. This study examines the targeting, selection, and benefit distribution process, including the extent of leakage associated with the VGF programme. The study employed various research methods (questionnaire survey, focus group discussion, key informant interview) to gather data. The findings implied that lobbying with the chairman/member or local influential persons is crucial for getting the VGF card for safety net programmes. The VGF programme expects to bring tangible and direct benefits to vulnerable groups through cash or in-kind transfers. However, effectiveness in reducing poverty and deprivation is adversely affected because of the inefficiency and corruption associated with selecting beneficiaries and disbursing benefits. The issue of leakage is vital in this respect. Inappropriate targeting, such as the inclusion of the wrong person or the exclusion of the right person in the programme, is a major concern with most safety net programmes. Leakage is commonly reported but seems more prevalent in kind-mediated programmes than cash-mediated ones. The programme delivery remains weak due to weak institutions, especially government institutions at the local level. The efficiency of the VGF programme must improve. Many problems associated with targeting and leakage can be minimised if greater emphasis is placed on monitoring and evaluation. Programme monitoring should be supplemented by developing the capacity of line ministries to monitor programmes on a day-to-day basis.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES

---

Eradicating poverty within the shortest possible time and improving the quality of life of people are the priority goals of the Government of Bangladesh (GoB). One of the notable features of the government's approach to poverty alleviation is the wider involvement in targeted programmes, which cover a wide range of activities. These activities included food aid to establish safety nets for the poor, creation and maintenance of rural infrastructure, rural development programmes, microcredit programmes, and poverty reduction and welfare programmes implemented by different government departments and agencies.

Over time, the social safety net programmes have received increasing attention from the government as well as non-government organisations (NGOs). Moreover, a distinct shift in approach is noticed in social safety net programmes of the country. In the initial years, the basis for the social safety nets programmes was largely ingrained within a charity approach which, over time, has transformed more into the right-based development approach. At present, the social safety net activities are based on five criteria. These are (i) income criteria; (ii) occupational criteria; (iii) physical ability criteria; (iv) gender and children criteria; and (v) regional disparity criteria (Ahmed, 2007).

Under the safety nets for the poor, the various targeted programmes are Food for Work (FFW), Gratuitous Relief (GR), Test Relief (TR), Vulnerable Group Development (VGD), Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF), Old Age Pension, Allowances for Distressed Women, Honorarium for Freedom Fighters, Primary Education Stipend Project (PESP), etc.

VGF is a form of gratuitous or emergency humanitarian relief. This programme is usually launched during and after disasters like floods, cyclones, and other natural calamities and continues until the distressed people remain vulnerable to hunger. It started in 1975 as the World Food Programme (WFP) relief activities under project BGD 2226. The WFP carries out a mapping exercise to identify the targeted population that categorises Upazilas concerning food insecurity. The programme primarily aims to feed those who are most at risk of hunger and malnutrition, i.e., the poorest, especially those who belong to female-headed households. During the mid-1980s, the programme was renamed the VGD. In response to the devastating floods of 1998, the Government started the VGF programme, which provides some five million vulnerable households with 16 kg of wheat and rice per household per month. The GoB, however, reintroduced the VGF in 1997 as a separate programme, which played a vital

role after the 1998 flood as an emergency relief programme. The VGF is an emergency humanitarian or seasonal relief programme to address distressed/extremely poor households. However, the flood-affected poor or victims of natural calamity get priority in the beneficiary selection process. It helps the poor cope with disasters. Currently, the VGF programme covers three different types of beneficiaries:

1. **General Beneficiaries:** Those who receive benefits (10 kg rice) mainly during two Eid festivals (Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Adha).
2. **The Disaster-affected Beneficiaries:** Under the programme, a household gets 10-30 kg (the amount varies according to government decision) of food grains per month for three months or such following natural calamities like floods, cyclones (*Sidr, Aila*), etc.
3. **Special Beneficiaries (belonging to the poor fishing community):** Every year, the authorities enforce a ban on catching fish for two or three months from mid-May to mid-August for breeding and boosting fish production in specific areas, i.e., during the period, mother fishes lay eggs while fish fries also release in the lake. Under the programme, each fisherman receives 20/30 kg of rice per month for a period of two or three months. The present survey covered the 'general,' 'special,' and 'disaster affected' categories of VGF beneficiaries.

### 1.1 Objectives of the VGF Programme

The goals and objectives of the VGF programme are as follows:

- To ensure food security of distressed and poor people;
- To help resist deterioration of nutrition among distressed children;
- To contribute to reducing poverty by temporarily helping in the improvement of social and economic conditions of beneficiaries;
- To provide food assistance to the poor people further in the lean period;
- To provide food assistance to the natural calamities (like floods, cyclones, etc.) affected poor people.

### 1.2 VGF Selection Criteria

The selection criteria specify distressed or extremely poor households, landless or those with only homestead land, households dependent on day labour income, disaster-affected poor, and poor fishermen of specific areas. The fishermen refrain from fishing during certain months of the year for national interest.

**Inclusion criteria:**

- Landless households or those owning only homestead land;
- Households depended on day labour income
- Dependents on women's income or begging
- Households having no adult male income earner member
- Households where school-going children have to work in income-generating activities
- Households that do not have income-generating assets
- Households headed by widowed, divorced or separated women
- Households headed by disabled freedom fighters
- Incapacitated and disabled household heads
- Households that did not get any microcredit
- The disaster-affected distressed or extremely poor households
- Households that do not have sufficient food for two meals most of the time during a year

**Exclusion criteria:**

- More than one VGF beneficiary from the same household

**1.3 Implementation Procedure: Allocation and Distribution**

The central administration authority of the VGF programme is the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR). The Ministry circulates Grant Order (GO) to the Department of Relief and Rehabilitation, informing the number of VGF cards and the amount of food grains to be distributed against each Upazila. The Department of Disaster Management issues the GO in favour of the Deputy Commissioner (DC) of each district, mentioning the Upazila-wise number of VGF cards, amount of food grains, and amount of transportation and incidental costs. The DC then reallocates food grains and relevant expenses in favour of the Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) or Chairman of Paurashava. However, in the management of the VGF programme right from the district to the Union, several committees are involved, including the District VGF Committee, Upazila VGF Committee, Paurashava VGF Committee, and Union VGF Committee.

The District VGF Committee is mainly responsible for reallocating food grains and money for transportation and incidental costs following the GO issued in favour of the district. It is also responsible for ensuring proper implementation and monitoring of the progress of VGF activities within the district. The main responsibility of the Upazila VGF committee includes: approving a list of VGF beneficiaries prepared by union parishad (UP) following selection criteria and issuing cards accordingly; monitoring whether the concerned UP receives food grains from the local godown in time and distributing those accordingly. The member secretary of the Upazila Committee is responsible for preserving the store register of food grains, master roll, and other auditing accounts.

The VGF beneficiary selection process starts from the union/ward level, and this initial selection process is administered by the Union VGF Committee headed by the Union Parishad Chairman. The primary responsibilities of the Union VGF Committee are the following:

- to prepare a list of beneficiaries under the VGF programme based on selection criteria mentioned in the VGF guidelines;
- to organise the issuance of VGF cards approved by the Upazila committee;
- to take required actions for receiving food grains from the Upazila godown and distributing them among the beneficiaries in the mentioned time;
- to preserve the list of VGF cards or list properly.

Activity for the preparation of a list of beneficiaries must be started by forming the committee immediately after receiving the guidelines of the VGF programme. A duly signed copy of the beneficiary list must be displayed on the notice board of Union Parishad. It is important to note here that VGF cards are targeted at the poor through a number of committees beginning at the national level and reaching down to the local level. A study evaluating the allocations of VGF cards conducted by Grameen Trust and presented at the conference of Nagarik Durjog Mukabila Udyog on “The Deluge: Developing Coping Capacities” indicated that this targeting procedure was very effective (Hashemi, 1998). It is important to note here that VGF cards are targeted at the poor through a number of committees beginning at the national level and reaching down to the local level.

According to HIES 2010 data, nearly 25 per cent of the households reported having received benefits during the last 12 months from at least one type of programme compared to only 13 per cent in 2005 (BBS, 2010). So, one may conclude that the safety net programmes have widened substantially in terms of coverage and benefits over the 2005-2010 period. However, the hard fact is that while various safety net programmes make a difference in the

lives of the beneficiaries, there are millions of others who require assistance but have not yet been targeted. Thus, the problem is increasing coverage and improving efficiency through better targeting and minimising leakages.

#### **1.4 Operational Process of VGF Programme in Bangladesh**

The following steps are generally followed in the operation process for the allocation and distribution of VGF benefits:

- MoDMR circulates GO containing information regarding the amounts of food grains per beneficiary and the number of VGF beneficiaries per district to the Department of Disaster Management.
- Director General of the Department of Disasters Management hands over the GO mentioning upazila wise number of VGF cards, amount of food grains per beneficiary, and amount of money allocated for transport and incidental costs to the DC of the district.
- DC provides food grains, transport, and incidental costs in favour of the UNO/Chairman of Paurashava.
- UNO sends a letter for circulating the Delivery Order (DO) of food grains in favour of the concerned Chairman of Union VGF committee to Upazila Food Controller.
- Upazila Food Controller issues a DO for food grains to the local LSD storage for distributing allocated food grains in favour of the concerned Paurashava/Union.
- Food grains allocated for a particular month must be distributed to the beneficiaries within that month.
- If any incidence of misappropriation in the distribution of food grains occurs and is proven after proper investigation, appropriate actions are to be taken against the person(s) responsible for such an incidence. The penalty imposed for such an incidence is usually double the (money) value amount of the price of stolen food grains. The DC is authorised to take legal actions following existing rules and regulations if the penalty imposed for stolen food grains is not recovered within one month.

#### **1.5 Limitation of Study**

A major limitation while covering different field areas was that it took an unusually long time to get the relevant information from some locations. There were some unexpected delays in initiating the fieldwork, which was beyond the control of the study team. The study team



strongly believes that important information relating to the critical issues of concern under the present evaluation has been gathered from the field level through beneficiaries/non-beneficiaries surveys, key informant interviews (KIIs), and focus group discussions (FGDs). The information thus obtained is expected to bring out diverse views and useful pointers relating to the issues under evaluation of the three programmes. Logistically, the study was managed excellently with whole hearted cooperation from the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief and other relevant agencies and individual stakeholders. The Secretary, MoDMR, helped us in all possible ways to conduct the study-related activities smoothly.

The VGF programme provides some five million vulnerable households with 10-30 kg of wheat/rice per household for a specific period. Overall safety net coverage ranges between 25-30 per cent of the poor; within the limits of relatively low comprehensive coverage, it is the case that proportional coverage is higher for the poorest groups indicating a progressive incidence of safety net benefits. Indicative data from some research studies suggest that actual coverage would be lower than planned coverage due to leakage and inclusion errors. Coverage of transient food insecurity can vary from year to year, depending on the incidence of disasters in specific years. Disaggregated coverage estimates are hampered by serious gaps in household survey data. Planned coverage estimates are possible based on budgetary statements, but only indirect estimates of realised coverage are possible based on sporadic qualitative or quantitative data.

# CHAPTER 2

## METHODOLOGY

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### 2.1 Methodology

#### 2.1.1 Issues in Impact Assessment

The methodological literature on impact evaluation is a burgeoning one but at its heart lie the search for two core answers: i) does a given intervention make a difference? and ii) what explains the observed impacts? Two approaches dominate the discourse, one focuses on counterfactual assessment using control groups, etc., and the other emphasises heuristic or theory-based evaluation. Each of these has merits and limitations, with differing emphases on evidence and explanation. An evaluation of three transfer programmes- FFW, FFE, and VGD- showed at least two of them, FFW and VGD, reached the poorest of the poor (Chowdhury & Sen, 1997).

##### *Key Issues in Assessing Outcomes*

There are three levels at which the impact of safety net programmes, as given primarily by their objectives, has to be examined:

- i. Firstly, perceptions of the beneficiaries themselves on programme impact;
- ii. Secondly, changes in various indicators of household welfare because of participation in the programme;
- iii. Thirdly, assessing how much of the observed changes in household indicators is due to programme impact by comparing beneficiary households with a control group, i.e., the 'with and without.

An important concern in impact assessment is the issue of non-sampling errors, which can arise from three sources: i) weaknesses in the research design in terms of conceptual errors and inappropriate queries, ii) investigators' failure to communicate with the respondents, and iii) respondent's unwillingness or inability to provide the required information. It is possible to narrow down the margin of non-sampling errors by anticipating likely problems in each of the above areas and then trying to overcome them as best as possible using multiple methodologies.

Questions on leakage and selection bias, for example, rarely elicit robust answers in structured questionnaires. But in the relative anonymity of FGDs, respondents appear much more willing to share the relevant experiential realities. The present study was particularly

careful to engage with these social imperatives to build familiarity with the field sites and the social safety net programmes to be examined, identification of a range of formal and informal key informants to assist in respondent identification, and field documents pertaining to programme implementation, intensive training of field research teams on the conceptual scope of the research and the mixed-method approach of quantitative and qualitative instruments.

There are a number of conceptual and methodological challenges in carrying out a meaningful study on safety net programme outcomes. Several dimensions can be identified.

### ***2.1.2 Relevance of Perceptions***

The distinction between perceptions and quantitative outcomes is important in arriving at a meaningful assessment of the specific and general impact of social safety net programmes. Perception data can point towards intangible outcomes, such as empowerment, that are not easily captured through quantitative indicators. Perceptions data can also help to bring out beneficiary judgment on the significance of programme participation within the larger dynamics of the household. Such judgments may be missed out on quantitative outcome indicators. Perceptions are also helpful in bringing out information on sensitive aspects such as corruption, on which beneficiaries are often reluctant to provide individual answers in questionnaire format.

### ***2.1.3 Problems with Safety Net Programmes***

Three major questions are pertinent here: How accurate is the selection of beneficiaries? Is the benefits package adequate? And are there leakages in the process?

Two leakage issues are significant: informal entry fees for allowance-type programmes and fraudulent muster rolls in workfare programmes. Lesser leakage issues include lower-value asset transfers and undefined deductions from benefits/allowances.

#### *The problem of Attribution*

A second concern is about attribution. Surveys often bring many types of changes in the status of beneficiary households. How far are such changes attributable to a particular programme? This problem of attribution is familiar in assessment exercises and is bound up with the specification of a counterfactual. Using control groups is the accepted methodological device to narrow down this attribution problem. However, establishing meaningful control groups presents particular challenges when safety net-type programmes have become ubiquitous, especially in poverty-prone localities. Moreover, as participation within a safety net programme is a non-random choice, it is extremely difficult to select a genuinely

comparable control group. It remains problematic even when more advanced statistical techniques are employed.

### *Assessing Individual Programme*

In assessing individual programs, the following major aspects are especially crucial:

- i. Adequacy: coverage, benefit level, duration;
- ii. Equity: validity of target group definition, inclusion and exclusion errors;
- a. Assessing the Overall System

No assessment of safety net programmes will be complete without an examination of the overall system. It would call for an exercise focusing on some key aspects of the system as a whole. The key concerns that need to be addressed as part of such an overall assessment are:

- *Appropriateness*: Have the relevant risks been addressed?
- Has the safety net portfolio achieved a proper balance in addressing the different categories of needs and risks?

#### **2.1.4 The Assessment Gap**

##### Knowledge Gaps in Outcomes

Independent and comprehensive assessments of the impact of safety net programmes have been relatively limited. Most of these focus mainly on process issues, i.e., coverage, benefits package, targeting, and beneficiary profiles, rather than on outcomes. Such a situation is not limited to Bangladesh. With this knowledge gap on outcomes in mind, a key objective of the present study has been a comprehensive field assessment of the major social safety net programmes- VGF being implemented by the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief.

#### **2.2 Selection of Sample Location**

The sample for the present evaluation is multistage, stratified, and based on random clustering. It is intended to represent the eight divisions and sample districts/upazilas within the division.

#### **2.3 Estimation of Sample Size**

The appropriate sample size for a population-based survey is determined by three factors: estimated prevalence of variables of interest, desired level of confidence, and acceptable margin of error.

For a survey design based on multistage, random cluster sampling, the required sample size can be estimated according to the following formula:

$$n = \frac{z^2 p(1-p)d(1-nr)}{e^2}$$

n = required sample size

z=confidence level at 95 per cent (standard value of 1.96)

p=estimated prevalence of variable of interest

e=margin of error at 5 per cent (standard value of 0.05)

d= design effect, and

nr= non-response or recording error (usually 5 per cent of the total sample)

The estimated result is rounded up to the closest number that matches well with the number of clusters/upazilas to be surveyed. While estimating sample size, all measurable key indicators will be taken into consideration.

The total sample size for the three projects is estimated as:

$$n = \frac{1.96^2 \times 0.5 \times 0.5 \times 2 \times 1.05}{0.05^2} = 806.67 \Rightarrow 810$$

Where z=1.96, p=0.5, q=1-p=0.5, d=2, e=0.05, and nr=0.05

Based on the above calculation, the minimum sample size required is around 810.

## **2.4 Selection of District, Upazila, and Union**

A critical aspect of the study is the selection of districts, upazilas, and unions, so they represent the universe and provide a good data base. The Union is the lowest administrative unit in the VGF programme. The WFP carries out a mapping exercise that categorises upazilas with respect to food insecurity and vulnerability. The mapping exercise categorises upazilas into four groups based on relative food insecurities, i.e., 'very high,' 'high,' 'moderate,' and 'low' (Table 2.1). The concentration of beneficiaries under different districts depends on the concentration of poverty as identified through vulnerability analysis and mapping exercises. The overall allocation of the VGF is done at the upazila level using poverty/food insecurity as one of the main criteria.

**Table 2.1: Distribution of Sampling Area for VGF by Division, District, Upazila, and Poverty Index**

Division	District	Upazila	Poverty Index
Barishal	Barishal	Babuganj	33%
		Muladi	37%
	Bhola	Char Fasson	38%
		Bamna	37%
	Barguna	Betagi	28%
Patuakhali	Bauphal	41%	
Khulna	Satkhira	Kaliganj	63%
		Shyamnagar	65%
Chattogram	Chattogram	Hathhazari	2%
	Rangamati	Langdu	31%
		Kaptai	12%
	Noakhali	Suborno Char	23%
		Companiganj	19%
	Bandarban	Lama	36%
		Thanchi	56%
Cox's Bazar	Chakaria	17%	
Mymensingh	Jamalpur	Ramtuang	35%
		Sarisha Bari	39%
Dhaka	Kishoreganj	Madarganj	47%
		Nikli	16%
Sylhet	Habiganj	Habiganj Sadar	24%
		Bahubal	29%
	Sunamganj	Jamalganj	30%
		Tahirpur	29%
	Sylhet	Gowainghat	6%
	Companiganj	6%	
Rajshahi	Rajshahi	Paba	13%
		Godagari	36%
	Bogra	Dhunat	35%
		Sariakandi	36%
Rangpur	Rangpur	Mithapukur	46%
		Pirgacha	45%
	Panchagarh	Tetulia	39%
		Boda	39%
	Dinajpur	Bochaganj	32%
		Birganj	37%
<b>8</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>36</b>	

## 2.5 Study Framework and Methodology

The usual methodology in this kind of evaluative study is “before-after” or “with-without” comparison. If benchmark data on key variables before the initiation project are available, these are compared with the same set of variables after the project starts operating. Since benchmark data are not available for the present evaluation, we have followed the “with-without” comparison to evaluate the impact of the three programs. In order to assess the impact

of the programmes on the beneficiaries, we have also covered respondents from the 'control group.' For this purpose, the 'control' group has been selected so that the non-beneficiaries belong to the socio-economic category of the programme beneficiaries but are not covered by any of the safety net programmes.

Since the objective of the MoDMR/BIDS study was the impact assessment of three safety net programmes, a number of methodological challenges had to be met simultaneously. The study had to be national in scope. It needed to cover all seven divisions. Also, the study methodology needed to accommodate 'with and without' analysis to ensure a meaningful assessment of change. And for the 'with and without' analysis, a control group had to be identified. Accomplishing all these parallel objectives simultaneously constituted a complex methodological challenge.

Key steps in the research strategy were the choice of a programme sample, choice of location sample, choice of beneficiary sample, and finally, choice of a 'control' sample. Out of a total of 64 districts, 20 from 7 divisions across the country were selected. From each division, a number of districts were selected with differing levels of poverty concentration as identified by WFP vulnerability and mapping exercise.

## **2.6 Upazila and Beneficiary Selection for VGF Programme**

For the VGF programme, samples were drawn from three different categories.

The first category included fishermen from two upazilas surrounding Kaptai lake in Rangamati district and one upazila of Chattogram district (i.e., Hat Hazari upazila). From each upazila, 60 beneficiary and 30 non-beneficiary fishermen were selected, and a total of 180 beneficiaries and 90 non-beneficiary respondents were interviewed.

The second category included general beneficiaries of the VGF programme from seven divisions. A total of 12 districts were selected, and from each sample district, two upazilas were selected (i.e., a total of 24 upazilas and 24 unions). From each union, 30 VGF beneficiaries were selected, which gave a total of 1,080 beneficiaries and 540 non-beneficiaries from the 18 sample districts. Thus, a total of 720 VGF beneficiaries and 180 non-beneficiaries were selected by the present survey. The distribution of VGF beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries by two distinct categories is shown in Table 2.2.

The third category included disaster-affected beneficiaries of the VGF programme. A total of 6 districts were selected, and from each sample district, two upazilas were selected (i.e., a total of 12 upazilas and 12 unions). In selecting the districts, special emphasis was given to covering the coastal belt and haor areas that are vulnerable to frequent disasters (including cyclones, *Sidr*, *Aila*) and districts affected by recent floods. From each union, 30 VGF

beneficiaries were selected, which gave a total of 360 beneficiaries and 180 non- beneficiaries from the six sample districts.

Thus, the survey covered a total of 1,260 VGF beneficiaries (180+720+360) and 630 non-beneficiaries. The distribution of VGF beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries by three distinct categories is shown in Table 2.2.

**Table 2.2: Selection of VGF Beneficiaries and Non-beneficiaries: By Category**

Region	Beneficiary category	No. of upazilas covered	VGF beneficiaries covered	Non-beneficiaries covered
Special VGF for Fishing Community: Chattogram division-2 districts: Rangamati & Chattogram	Fishermen living in upazilas surrounding Kaptai lake in Rangamati and Hathazari Upazila of Chattogram district.	3 upazilas: 2 from Rangamati and 1 from Chattogram.	3 x 60 =180	90
General category: including Coastal belt region	General VGF beneficiaries who receive benefits mainly during two Eid festivals (or during any time of the year).	12 districts from seven divisions were selected, and 2 upazilas from each sample district, i.e., a total of 36 upazilas.	24 x 30 =720	360
Disaster-affected category of VGF beneficiary: including Coastal	Beneficiaries who receive benefits mainly during disasters like floods, cyclones, river erosion, <i>sidr</i> , <i>aila</i> , etc. (or during any other crisis).	6 flood-affected were selected, and 2 upazilas from each sample district, i.e., a total of 12 upazilas.	12 x 30 =360	
<b>Total</b>			<b>1,260</b>	<b>630</b>

A total of 1,260 beneficiary households and 630 control households were selected from these localities for collecting detailed information regarding the impact of the programmes on the beneficiaries, implying a total of 1,890 respondents were covered by the present impact study.

Beneficiary perceptions on the overall programme impact on income, employment, food intake, etc., have been obtained. However, perceptions data alone cannot provide a basis for a robust assessment of programme impact. One additional data source is changes in key household indicators and a 'with and without' comparison of beneficiary and control households. To what extent were the observed changes due to programme participation? 'With and without' comparison of beneficiary and control households will shed light on this.



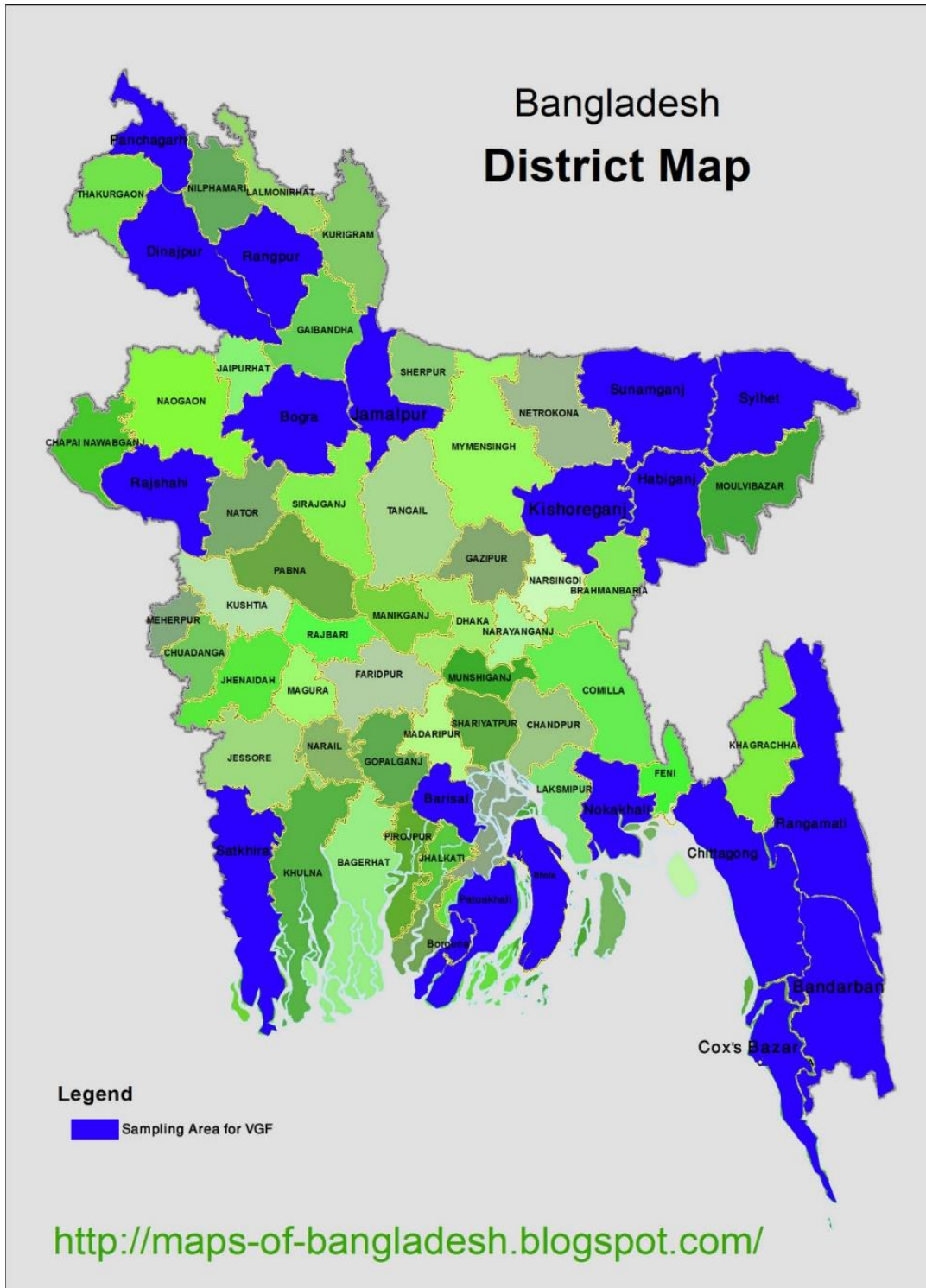
## 2.7 Sampling Area for VGF

Information was obtained covering 20 districts, 36 upazilas, and 54 unions. The districts covered include Rajshahi, Jamalpur, Habiganj, Barishal, Rangpur, Rangamati, Chattogram, Satkhira, Panchagarh, Bogura, Dinajpur, Barguna, Patuakhali, Noakhali, Bandarban, Cox's Bazar, Kishorganj, Sunamganj, Sylhet and Bhola. The distribution of the sampling area for VGF by division, district, upazila, and union is shown in Table 2.3.

**Table 2.3: Distribution of Sample Locations by Division, District, Upazila, and Union**

Division	District	Upazila	Union		
Barishal	Barishal	Babuganj	Chand Pasha	Madhab Pasha	
		Muladi	Gachhua	Char-Kalekhan	
	Bhola	Char Fasson	Aslampur	3 no.Char Madras	
		Barguna	Bamna	2 no. BamnaSadar	
		Betagi	5 no. BetagiSadar	-	
Patuakhali	Bauphal	10 no. Kalliya	5 no. Surjumoni		
Khulna	Satkhira	Kaliganj	Mathurespur	Tarali	
		Shyamnagar	Nurnagar	Munshiganj	
Chattogram	Chattogram	Hathhazari	North Madrasha	Garduara	
	Rangamati	Langdu	Mainemuk	Langdu	
		Kaptai	Kaptai	-	
	Noakhali	Suborno Char	Mohammadpur	-	
		Companiganj	Sirajpur	-	
	Bandarban	Lama	Rupshi	-	
		Thanchi	Bolipara	-	
		Cox's Bazar	Chakaria	Dhemosia	-
			Ramu	Gorjonia	-
	Dhaka	Jamalpur	Sarisha Bari	Bhatara	Mohadan
Madarganj			Gundaritala	Balijuri	
Kishoreganj		Nikli	Dampara	15 no. Zartaila	
Sylhet	Habiganj	HabiganjSadar	HabiganjSadar	Gupaya	
		Bahubal	Snanghat	BahubalSadar	
	Sunamganj	Jamalganj	Jamalganj	Sachnabazar	
		Tahirpur	7 no. Baliguri	-	
	Sylhet	Gowainghat	5 no. Alirgow	-	
		Companiganj	Telikhal	-	
Rajshahi	Rajshahi	Paba	Huzripara	Bara Gachi	
		Godagari	Deopara	Matikata	
	Bogura	Dhunat	Bandarbari	-	
Sariakandi		Sariakandi	-		
Rangpur	Rangpur	Mithapukur	Changmari	Durgapur	
		Pirgacha	Chawla	Tambalpur	
	Panchagarh	Tetulia	4 no. Salbahar	-	
		Boda	Moydan Dighi	-	
	Dinajpur	Bochaganj	Murshid Hat	-	
		Birganj	Nizpara	-	
<b>7</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>54</b>		

Figure 2.1: Sampling Area for VGF



## **2.8 Quantitative and Qualitative Survey Instruments**

In keeping with the complexity of the assessment challenge, the present study adopted a mixed-method approach in its field research strategy. The study used both qualitative and quantitative information. The quantitative investigation was implemented through a household questionnaire survey. The qualitative investigation was implemented through a carefully chosen set of FGDs and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). In this survey, we have used both qualitative (e.g., FGD, KIIs) and quantitative (e.g., questionnaire survey) methods. In situations where the availability of numeric data is not adequate or difficult to organise, we have used qualitative data.

## **2.9 Quantitative and Qualitative Data**

Primary data were collected through a set of structured questionnaires and interviews of:

- individual beneficiaries/food grain recipients of the VGF programme

### **Quantitative Instrument**

The present evaluation has been designed to permit an assessment of the impact of the three programmes on the beneficiaries. The evaluation has collected information on income, food security, and landholding status of the beneficiary and control households.

The questionnaire for the household survey covered the following indicators:

- i. Demographic status
- ii. Economic status
  - Land
  - Income
  - Savings
  - Debts
- iii. Programme participation
- iv. Perceptions of programme impact
- v. Changes in household indicators (i.e., monthly income, yearly food security, food consumption score, etc.)

The questionnaire survey also covered the following common dimensions:

- i. Process realities
- ii. Satisfaction
- iii. Suggestions for programme improvement.

The field survey was administered in May-June 2015.

### **Qualitative Instruments**

To supplement the questionnaire survey, a number of qualitative instruments were used at various stages of the study. Information was collected through in-depth interviews of key informants (KII) with Upazila and Union-level officials - UNO, Upazila Parishad Chairman, PIO, UP Chairman, and PIC-Chairman. In addition, FGDs were conducted with community leaders, including journalists/lawyers, school teachers, and NGO workers.

The findings of the quantitative data were supplemented by qualitative data, KIIs, FGDs, and observations of the study team during field visits. It is expected that the information obtained from the questionnaire survey, KIIs, and FGDs would bring out diverse views and useful pointers relating to the issues under evaluation of the three programmes.

#### **2.10 Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and KII**

In addition to an in-depth survey of beneficiaries, information was obtained through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The FGDs were conducted with community leaders and service providers/local-level administration. Under the FGD, community leaders, local-level leaders/influential people, including journalists/lawyers, school teachers, NGO workers, UP members/Chairman, etc., were assembled to discuss various aspects regarding coverage of the safety net programmes. For Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with service providers, respondents included the UP Chairman and upazila-level officials like the Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO), PIO, upazila chairman, and PIC Chairman. Emphasis was given to the identification of existing gaps and lapses.

The study used both qualitative and quantitative information.

- Questionnaire survey
- FGD
- KII

Primary data were collected through a set of structured questionnaires and interviews: with individual beneficiaries/food grain recipients of the VGF programme. In addition, information was collected through in-depth interviews of key informants (KII) with upazila and union-level officials: UNO, Upazila Parishad Chairman, PIO, UP Chairman, and PIC-Chairman. FGDs were conducted with community leaders, including journalists/lawyers, school teachers, and NGO Workers.

A total of 262 KII and 132 FGDs were conducted under the impact study. The quantitative data findings have been supplemented by qualitative data (KIIs and FGDs) and observations of the study team during field visits. It is expected that the information obtained from the questionnaire survey, FGDs, and KIIs would bring out diverse views and useful pointers relating to the issues under evaluation of the three programmes. Supplementary insights from FGDs/KIIs will bring out some of the dynamics inherent in the safety net programmes.

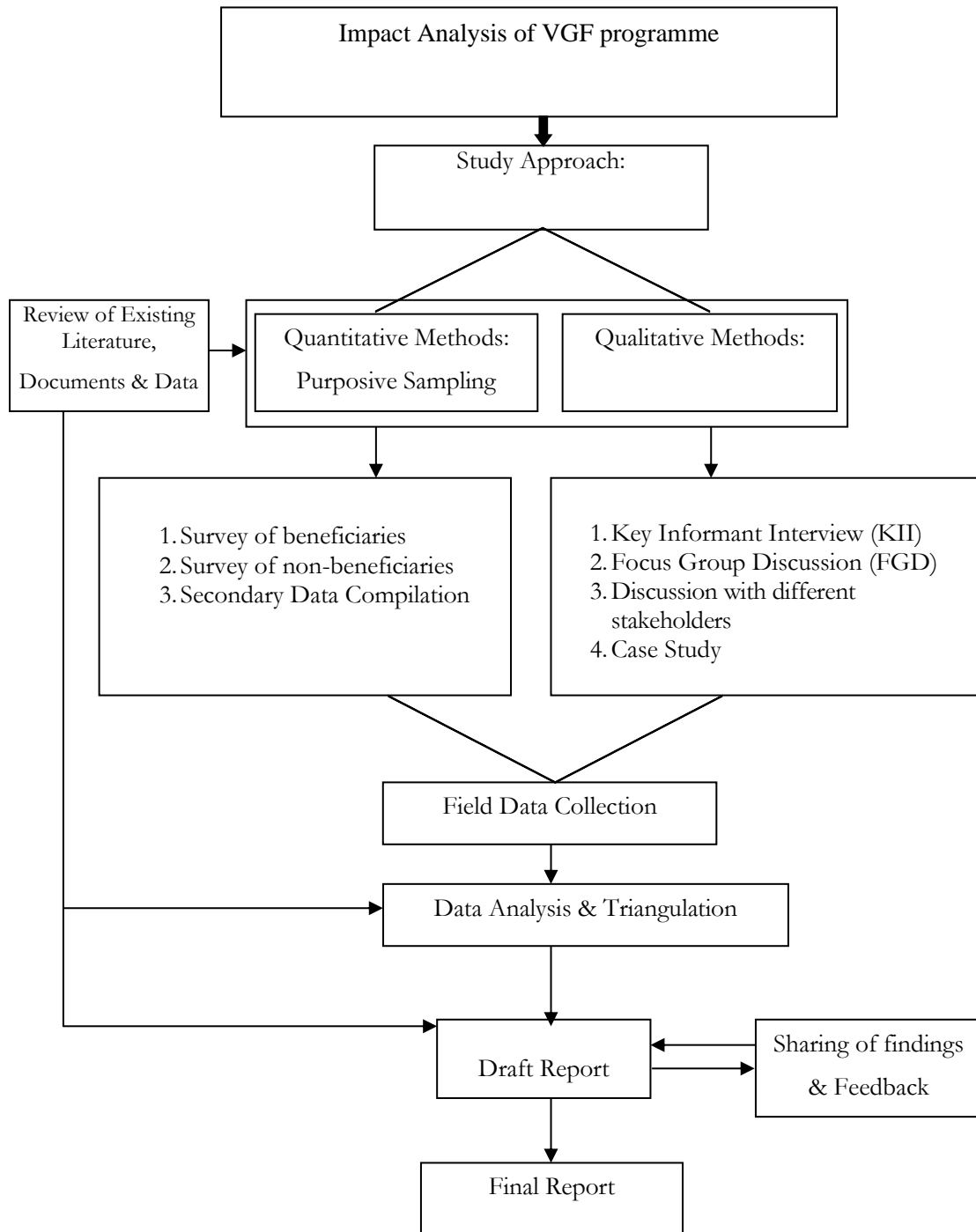
The FGD with community people has provided participants with the scope to feel ‘free’ to talk about different aspects of the safety net programmes. The discussion explored impacts on the beneficiaries, major constraints regarding the selection and disbursement process, and key issues concerning leakage in the programmes. It is expected that the information obtained from the questionnaire survey, KIIs, and FGDs would bring out diverse views and useful pointers relating to the issues under evaluation of the three programmes.

Qualitative data (FGD, KII) has been used to supplement quantitative data. Where gaps, non-clarity, and inadequacy are identified from the quantitative survey, an attempt has been made to address those through a qualitative purposive survey. This qualitative backup of quantitative data is essential for a deeper understanding of the dynamics of safety net programmes in Bangladesh.

Triangulation is a powerful technique that facilitates the validation of data through cross-verification from two or more sources. We have used triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data- the purpose of triangulation is to increase the credibility and validity of the results. It will allow for triangulation for a better cross-match, supplement between qualitative and quantitative data, and ensure that the different perspectives are understood and represented in the analysis.

The overall methodology is given in Figure 2.2.

**Figure 2.2: Overall Methodology Flow Chart**





## CHAPTER 3

# SOCIOECONOMIC PROFILE OF BENEFICIARY AND NON-BENEFICIARY RESPONDENTS

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### 3.1 Selection of Respondents

The present study has been conducted based on a survey of 1,260 VGF beneficiaries and 630 non-beneficiaries. Among the 1,260 beneficiaries interviewed, 720 belong to the ‘general category, i.e., living anywhere in Bangladesh, including people living in the coastal areas, and 180 belong to the special category, i.e., fishermen living around Kaptai Lake and Halda river areas of Chattogram division who are barred from catching fish for a specific time) and the rest 360 disaster-affected, i.e., living anywhere in Bangladesh affected by floods, cyclones, etc. The rationale for selecting “control households” is that it would better indicate the effectiveness of targeting. The control households (non-beneficiaries) were selected in such a way that they belong to a similar socio-economic category as the beneficiary households but are not covered by the VGF programme.

The main objective of the present study is to assess the process of targeting, selection, and benefit distribution of the VGF programme. Another important objective of this study is to observe differences in the socio-economic status of VGF recipients and non-beneficiaries. For this, the utmost care was taken in selecting non-beneficiaries (control group). After randomly selecting recipients from the list of VGF beneficiaries, enumerators selected non-beneficiaries that were close neighbours of the recipient, had very similar housing quality and condition, and neither had ever received VGF during the last 12 months.

Table 3.1 presents the salient characteristics of the VGF beneficiary and non-beneficiary households. The data show that both categories of respondents have similar demographic characteristics in terms of age composition, household size, etc. The mean age of the VGF beneficiary was 45.6 years compared with 42.7 years for the non-beneficiaries. The average household size was 4.7 for the VGF beneficiaries, compared with 4.5 for the non-beneficiary households. The average landholding size of VGF beneficiaries (10 decimals) was higher than that of non-beneficiary households (5.7 decimals).



**Table 3.1: Salient Characteristics of Beneficiary and Non-beneficiary Households**

Averages	Beneficiary				Non-beneficiary (n=630)	Overall (n=1,890)
	General (n=720)	Fishing (n=180)	Disaster Affected (n=360)	Sub-total (n=1,260)		
Age of the household head (years)	45.8	46.6	44.3	45.6	42.7	44.6
Household size (average)	4.3	5.6	5.1	4.7	4.5	4.8
Average land holding (decimals)	7.3	14.2	13.4	10.0	5.7	8.6
Monthly Household Income (In Tk.)	4676.4	7732.4	6780.4	5654.2	4847.8	6158.2
Per capita monthly income (in Tk.)	1064.9	1383.1	1330.2	1224.3	1073.7	1328.9
Outstanding loan (in Taka)	11987.1	21475.6	15118.0	14093.2	11849.8	13357.9
Savings (in Taka)	3342.4	5375.8	2989.5	3499.9	1980.8	3019.3
Per capita daily income (in Tk.)	35.5	46.1	44.3	40.8	35.8	44.3

Similarly, the average monthly income of VGF beneficiary households (Tk. 5654.2) was about 8 per cent higher than that of non-beneficiary households (Tk. 4847.8); the mean per capita monthly income was Tk. 1224.3 and Tk. 1073.7 for the beneficiary and non-beneficiary households, respectively. The findings imply that the VGF recipients and non-beneficiaries belong to the poorest category regarding monthly income and land holding size. However, non-beneficiary households are somewhat more vulnerable than beneficiary households. The beneficiary households are more loan dependent than the non-beneficiary households (Tk. 14093.2 vs Tk. 11849.8), which implies that the beneficiary households have better social capital than the non-beneficiary households. Similarly, beneficiary households have higher savings than their non-beneficiary counterparts (Tk. 3499.9 vs. Tk. 1980.8).

### ***3.1.1 Distribution of Respondents by Gender***

The most significant demographic variables, age and sex, are the primary basis of demographic classification in vital statistics, censuses, and surveys (Akhtaruzzaman et al., 2011). The distribution of the respondents by gender is shown in Table 3.2.

**Table 3.2: Distribution of Respondents by Gender**

Gender	Category of Respondents									
	Beneficiary								Non-beneficiary	
	General		Fishing		Disaster Affected		Total			
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Male	225	31.3	158	87.8	267	74.2	650	51.6	301	47.8
Female	495	68.8	22	12.2	93	25.8	610	48.4	329	52.2
Total	720	100.0	180	100.0	360	100.0	1,260	100.0	630	100.0

Females constitute 49.7 per cent of the total population. It is observed from Table 3.2 that among the beneficiaries interviewed, about 68.8 per cent of female respondents belong to the general category, about 12.2 per cent of the fishing community, and 25.8 per cent belong to the disaster-affected group. Among non-beneficiaries interviewed, about 52.2 per cent of respondents belong to females, while 47.8 per cent belong to males.

### 3.2 Socio-demographic Characteristics

#### 3.2.1 Age and Gender

The gender of the household head is important in the context of employment and income-earning opportunity. Female-headed households are more likely to be in poverty at any point in time than male-headed households. The economic conditions of a female head vary considerably depending on such factors as her marital status, her access to land, income, and other resources, and the composition of the household. Evidence shows that female-headed households are more vulnerable to poverty than male-headed households. The degrees of vulnerability are more induced when the head is widowed, divorced, or separated (Sharif, 2012).

It is observed from Table 3.3 that among the beneficiaries interviewed, about one-fourth of respondents belong to the age group below 35 years, while two-thirds (64.5 per cent) belong to the age group 35-64 years. It is also observed from Table 3.2 that among the non-beneficiaries interviewed, about one-fifth of respondents belong to the age group below 35 years, while two-thirds (68.9 per cent) belong to the age group 35-64 years. However, 8.7 per cent of the beneficiaries and 11.2 per cent of the non-beneficiaries belong to the age group 65 years and above, i.e., the elderly.

It is observed from Table 3.3 that 18.7 per cent of VGF households are headed by females, while 20.5 per cent of households are female-headed in the non-beneficiary category. From this perspective, non-beneficiary households are more vulnerable to poverty. Among the

beneficiary respondents, one quarter (25.7 per cent) of the general VGF beneficiary households are female-headed compared with 5.0 per cent of the special category beneficiaries and 11.7 per cent of the special disaster-affected category beneficiaries. Since female-headed households are more vulnerable to poverty and deprivation, non-beneficiary sample households face considerable hardships because a higher proportion of such households are women headed (widowed, divorced, or separated). The data indicate that non-beneficiary households are more deserving candidates for receiving the benefits under the VGF programme.

**Table 3.3: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents by Category**

Indicators	Beneficiary Type				Non-beneficiary (n=630)
	General (n=720)	Fishing (n=180)	Disaster Affected (n=360)	Subtotal (n=1,260)	
<b>Age group</b>					
<25	2.2	0.0	4.2	4.8	2.2
25-34	16.7	28.0	16.7	22.0	17.6
35-49	40.8	38.0	54.2	41.2	42.2
50-59	20.0	12.0	16.7	17.7	18.9
60-64	8.6	6.0	4.2	5.6	7.8
65+	11.8	16.0	4.2	8.7	11.2
Mean age	45.8	46.6	44.3	45.6	45.5
<b>Gender of household head</b>					
Male	74.3	95.0	88.3	81.3	79.5
Female	25.7	5.0	11.7	18.7	20.5
<b>Household size (%)</b>					
Single-member	6.3	1.1	0.8	4.0	4.9
2 members	11.7	3.9	4.2	8.4	7.0
3 members	13.1	6.7	13.3	12.2	15.4
4 members	23.8	15.6	18.3	21.0	29.5
5 members	23.3	25.6	30.8	25.8	18.9
6 members	11.9	20.6	19.2	15.2	9.2
7+ members	10.0	26.7	13.3	13.3	15.1
Mean Household Size	4.3	5.6	5.1	4.7	4.5

### **3.2.2 Distribution by Size of Household**

There is substantial evidence that household size is an important determining factor in the level of poverty. In developing countries like Bangladesh, household size and consumption (or income) per person are negatively correlated, i.e., larger households are likely to be poorer (Lanjouw & Ravallion, 1995). The average household size was 4.7 for the VGF beneficiary households, compared to 4.5 for the non-beneficiary group. Variation across the category of the beneficiary is, however, considerably more significant.

Looking into details of households by the number of members, one observes that 4.0 per cent of the beneficiary and 4.9 per cent of non-beneficiary households have only one-member family. On the other hand, about 13.3 per cent of the beneficiary and 15.1 per cent of non-beneficiary respondents come from households with a family size of seven or more.

### 3.2.3 Human Capital: Education

Education is an important human development outcome that helps households to accumulate better human capital, which, in turn, contributes to better livelihoods. The education level of the household head significantly impacts the household income (or expenditure): education premiums are higher when the household head has a tenth-grade or higher level of education. The education level of the household head's spouse has a similar impact on poverty (Sharif, 2012). Better-educated household heads have a greater possibility of being employed in the labour market, are economically more productive, and, thus, have higher incomes than household heads with lower levels of education. The impact of education on earnings and, therefore, on poverty works largely through the labour market, even though education can also contribute to productivity in other areas, such as peasant farming (Orazem, Glewwe, & Patrinos, 2007, p.5).

**Table 3.4: Educational Status of Household Head**

	Programme Type			Sub-total (n=1,260)	Non-beneficiary (n=630)	Overall (n=1,890)
	General (n=720)	Fishing (n=180)	Disaster Affected (n=360)			
Illiterate/Can read and write only	68.9	51.1	70.8	66.9	71.7	68.5
Primary	16.9	25.0	25.0	20.4	17.5	19.4
Secondary	9.6	18.3	2.5	8.8	9.0	8.9
SSC and HSC	4.0	4.4	1.7	3.4	1.4	2.8
Degree plus	0.6	1.1	0.0	0.5	0.3	0.4

Table 3.4 provides the indicators of human development by educational level. The table shows there is no major difference in the literacy rate of the beneficiary and non-beneficiary groups. Around 66.9 per cent of the beneficiary household heads are illiterate; the corresponding figure for the non-beneficiary household head is 71.7 per cent. It is also noted that the literacy rate has a wide variation among the beneficiary household heads. Again, about 20.4 per cent of the beneficiaries had education below primary level (1-5 class) compared to 17.5 per cent for the non-beneficiary households. The proportion of household heads completing SSC or above is 3.9 per cent for the VGF beneficiary households, as against 1.7 per cent for the non-beneficiary households (Table 3.4). The beneficiary households are in a better position in terms of education than the non-beneficiaries, which may impact their income-earning potential.

### 3.2.4 Land Ownership

The land is at the center of rural life in Bangladesh. But, in the case of VGF beneficiaries, they tend to have a very limited holding of less than 0.15 acres of total land, and, in many cases, they do not even own any land (Table 3.5). Based on its uses, land can be disaggregated into two categories: one is cultivable land, which is normally used for producing crops, and the other is homestead land, which is mainly used for accommodation purposes. Here we have considered total owned land, including homestead and cultivable land.

**Table 3.5: Size of Landholdings of the Households (% of households)**

Landholding size (in decimals)		Beneficiary Type				Non-beneficiary (n=630)
		General (n=720)	Fishing (n=180)	Disaster Affected (n=360)	Sub-total (n=1,260)	
Total Land	0.0	20.9	20.8	18.0	20.1	27.0
	0.01-0.14	68.4	59.0	51.4	62.4	64.2
	0.15-0.49	8.5	10.7	23.4	12.9	7.2
	0.50-1.50	2.0	7.9	7.2	4.2	1.6
	1.51+	0.1	1.7	0.0	0.3	0.0
	Mean land holdings (decimals)	7.3	14.2	13.4	10.0	5.7
Homestead Land	0.0	21.5	21.3	18.2	20.6	27.6
	0.01-0.14	74.3	65.2	66.4	70.8	67.9
	0.15-0.49	4.1	10.7	15.5	8.1	4.3
	0.50-1.50	0.1	2.8	0.0	0.5	0.2
	1.51+	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Mean land holdings (decimals)	4.5	5.9	6.4	5.2	3.6
Cultivable Land	0.0	89.2	83.3	70.0	82.9	90.1
	0.01-0.14	5.3	4.4	9.2	6.3	4.8
	0.15-0.49	3.8	6.1	17.5	8.0	4.3
	0.50-1.50	1.7	5.6	3.3	2.7	0.8
	1.51+	0.1	0.6	0.0	0.2	0.0
	Mean land holdings (decimals)	2.9	8.3	7.0	4.8	2.1

Table 3.5 shows that 20.1 per cent of the beneficiary households have no land at all, and this figure is 27.0 per cent for the non-beneficiary households. Again, more than four-fifths (82.2 per cent) of beneficiary households have land not exceeding 0.15 acres. The corresponding figure is 91.2 per cent for non-beneficiary households. From this perspective, non-beneficiary households are more vulnerable to poverty. It is evident from the table that some of the beneficiaries have landholdings exceeding 15 decimals (the proportion varies from 4.2 per cent to 12.9 per cent), which is a violation of the selection criteria according to the land-based assessment. Again, 0.3 per cent of VGF beneficiaries are found to have land exceeding 0.50 acres (50 decimals and above), which indicates a major violation of the targeting criteria.

### 3.2.5 Occupational Status

Poor households have wage labour or irregular income as a major source of earning. Table 3.6 shows the distribution of respondents by the household head's primary occupation. The predominant occupation is indeed casual or daily labour (28 per cent). Day labour and

van/rickshaw pulling together constitute the principal occupation for more than 40 per cent of the beneficiary and non-beneficiary households. Among the fishing community, 96.7 per cent of respondents reported fishing as the principal occupation. Petty trading (small business) and domestic help constitute the other two major occupations of the beneficiary and control group households. It is also noted from Table 3.6 that a sizable number of household heads (3.5 per cent) are sick/disabled or dependent on others, and such households are exclusively dependent on others for their survival. Table 3.6 also shows that a sizable number of household heads (3.3 per cent beneficiaries and 3.5 non-beneficiaries) are found to be begging, and such households are fully dependent on others for their survival.

**Table 3.6: Occupational Status of the Household Heads**

Occupational status (Total)	Type of Beneficiary				Non-beneficiary (N=410)
	General (n=720)	Fishing (n=180)	Disaster Affected (n=360)	Sub-total (n=1,260)	
	%	%	%	%	
Agriculture/farming	0.8	0.0	4.2	1.7	1.6
Wage labour (agriculture)	11.9	0.0	23.3	13.5	12.2
Wage labour (non-agriculture)	10.8	0.0	35.0	16.2	15.8
Petty trading	3.9	0.0	4.2	3.4	3.4
Service	1.8	0.0	1.7	1.5	1.1
Fishing	0.0	96.7	0.0	14.3	14.3
Rickshaw/van puller	3.3	0.0	7.5	4.0	4.6
Driver/helper	0.8	0.0	0.8	0.7	0.9
Cottage/handicrafts	2.2	0.0	0.8	1.5	1.5
Sick/disabled	4.4	1.1	3.3	4.3	3.5
Housewife	35.3	0.6	9.2	22.8	24.1
Unemployed	1.3	0.0	0.8	1.0	0.7
Domestic helper/maidservant	16.5	0.6	8.3	11.8	12.0
Begging	5.4	0.0	0.8	3.3	3.5
Tailoring	0.8	0.0	0.0	0.5	0.3
Others (Mason, cook, etc.)	0.6	1.1	0.0	0.3	0.4

According to the selection criteria, ‘general’ category VGF beneficiaries should be selected from day labourers or those with occupations having an irregular income, and special category VGF beneficiaries should be selected belonging to the poor fishing community. About 1.5 per cent of VGF beneficiaries are found to have a salaried job as their main occupation, a violation of the inclusion criteria. On the other hand, 3.3 per cent of the special beneficiaries are selected from those who have a main occupation other than fishing, which is also a clear violation of the VGF inclusion criteria.

### 3.2.6 Household Income

Monthly income is considered to be an important indicator of poverty. It is evident from Table 3.7 that about one-fourth (24.4 per cent) of beneficiary households have monthly income not exceeding Tk. 3,000. The corresponding figure for the non-beneficiary household is 30.2 per cent. Similarly, 14.3 per cent of beneficiary households, compared with 15.9 per cent of non-beneficiary households, have monthly income not exceeding Tk. 4,000. It can be observed from Table 2.7 that 59.1 per cent of beneficiary households, compared with 53.8 per cent of non-beneficiary households, have monthly incomes not exceeding Tk. 5,000. By contrast, only 2.3 per cent of the beneficiary and 0.2 per cent of non-beneficiary households have monthly income exceeding Tk. 8,000.

**Table 3.7: Distribution of Respondents by Monthly Household Income**

Monthly Income Group (Tk.)	Type of Beneficiary				Non-beneficiary (N=630)
	General (n=720)	Fishing (n=180)	Disaster Affected (n=360)	Sub-total (n=1,260)	
Up to 2000	19.7	2.2	5.0	13.0	13.7
2001-3000	14.7	8.3	5.8	11.3	16.5
3001-4000	19.3	9.4	6.7	14.3	15.9
4001-5000	45.1	71.7	80.8	59.1	53.8
5001-8000	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
8001 and above	1.1	8.3	1.7	2.3	0.20
Average monthly income	4676.4	7732.4	6780.4	5654.2	4847.8
Mean monthly household income					
Male headed	5078.2	8498.3	7350.8	6843.1	5764.8
Female-headed	4098.1	10522.7	5228.1	4502.1	3833.3
Per capita income	1064.9	1383.1	1330.2	1224.3	1073.7

The average monthly income of the beneficiary households was 8 per cent higher than the non-beneficiary households (Tk. 5654.2 vs Tk. 4847.8). The findings show that not only monthly income but per capita monthly income is also higher for the beneficiary households (Tk. 1224.3 vs Tk. 1073.7).

It is evident from Table 3.8 and Table 3.9 that about 94.8 per cent of beneficiary households have a monthly 2,334 Tk income (less than a dollar per day), among which 96.4 per cent belong to the general category, 87.8 per cent to the fishing community, and 95.3 per cent disaster affected. It is also evident from Table 3.7a and Table 3.8b that about 97.8 per cent of non-beneficiary households have a monthly 2,334 Tk income (less than a dollar per day).

**Table 3.8: Distribution of Households by Per Capita Income Per Day (% of households)**

Indicators per capita income per day(Tk 77.80 = 1 Dollar)	Type of Beneficiary				Non- beneficiary (N=630)
	General (n=720)	Fishing (n=180)	Disaster affected (n=360)	Sub-total (n=1,260)	
(% of households)					
Per capita income per day higher than one dollar	3.6	12.2	4.7	5.2	2.2
Per capita income per day less than one dollar	96.4	87.8	95.3	94.8	97.8

**Note:** Tk. 77.80 per dollar on Saturday, 27 September 2015, Bangladesh Bank.

**Table 3.9: Proportion of Households Whose Income is Less than a Dollar (or Equivalent Taka) a Day: Income-Based Approach**

(% of households)

Indicators	Type of Beneficiary				Non- beneficiary (N=630)
	General (n=720)	Fishing (n=180)	Disaster Affected (n=360)	Sub-total (n=1,260)	
Monthly Income Group (Tk.)					
Up to 2,334	96.4	87.8	95.3	94.8	97.8

**Note:** Tk. 77.80 per dollar on Saturday, 27 September 2015, Bangladesh Bank.

### 3.2.7 Earning Member

In the case of household income, information on the number of earning members is important. The higher number of members involved in income-generating activities would indicate a higher level of per capita income if we assume that the income level is the same.

**Table 3.10: Distribution of Households by Number of Income Earners in the Household**

(% of households)

No earning members	Type of Beneficiary				Non- beneficiary (N=630)
	General (n=720)	Fishing (n=180)	Disaster Affected (n=360)	Sub-total (n=1,260)	
No earner	1.8	0.6	0.0	1.1	1.0
Single earner	70.1	60.6	61.7	66.3	74.0
Two earners	24.4	26.1	27.5	25.6	21.4
More than two earners	3.6	12.8	10.8	7.0	3.7
Mean earner	1.3	1.5	1.5	1.4	1.3



Table 3.10 provides such information that most of the households (66.3 per cent of VGF beneficiaries and 74.0 of non-beneficiaries) have a single earning member. It is noted that 25.6 per cent of beneficiary households have two earning members whereas the corresponding figure for non-beneficiary households is 21.4 per cent. Similarly, around 7.0 per cent of the beneficiary and 3.7 per cent of non-beneficiary households have three or more earning members.

### 3.2.8 Loan and Savings

Access to credit is an important financial resource that helps household members to engage themselves in various income-earning activities, which, in turn, leads to better livelihoods. In addition, access to credit also assists them in coping with any crisis smoothly. Being able to save is also an important financial resource for households, with the potential to invest in the future and cope with any crisis. The beneficiary households have slightly better social capital than the non-beneficiary households, with 59.4 per cent of the beneficiary group having access to loans, compared to 52.5 per cent of non-beneficiaries (Table 3.11).

**Table 3.11: Social Capital Indicators of the Respondent Households**

*(% of households)*

Information regarding Loan	Type of Beneficiary				Non-beneficiary (N=630)
	General (n=720)	Fishing (n=180)	Disaster Affected (n=360)	Sub-total (n=1,260)	
<b>Whether received any loan last year?</b>					
Yes	56.9	86.1	50.8	59.4	52.5
No	43.1	13.9	49.2	40.6	47.5
Mean outstanding loan (Tk.)	11987.1	21475.6	15118.0	14093.2	11849.8
<b>Whether received any loan last year due to food deficit?</b>					
Yes	30.8	68.9	32.5	36.7	33.2
No	69.2	31.1	67.5	63.3	66.8
<b>Whether additional loans would have been required without the assistance of VGF?</b>					
Yes	52.8	72.2	58.3	57.1	-
No	47.2	27.8	41.7	42.9	-

About three-fifths of the beneficiary (59.4 per cent) and non-beneficiary households (52.5 per cent) had to borrow money from any sources. About 36.7 per cent of the beneficiary and 33.2 per cent of non-beneficiary households had to borrow money, either from banks or NGOs or other sources, to meet pressing household demands (e.g., buying food).

About 60.6 per cent of the beneficiary and 63.5 per cent of non-beneficiary households have no savings. However, data show that in the respondent households with little savings, the majority of their savings are with the NGOs as group savings. The average amount of savings per household is small relative to the vulnerable situation in which they live (Table 3.11). The beneficiary households have slightly better capital than the non-beneficiary households, with 39.4 per cent of the beneficiary group having savings, compared to 36.5 per cent of non-beneficiaries (Table 3.12).

**Table 3.12: Saving Behaviour of the Respondent Households (% of households)**

Indicators	Beneficiary Type				Non-beneficiary (n=630)
	General (n=720)	Fishing (n=180)	Disaster Affected (n=360)	Sub-total (n=1,260)	
Whether any savings currently (% of households)					
Yes	39.7	35.6	40.8	39.4	36.5
No	60.3	64.4	59.2	60.6	63.5
Mean savings (Tk.)	3342.4	5375.8	2989.5	3499.9	1980.8

### 3.2.9 Housing

Housing ownership, especially for poor households and the quality of housing, is an important indicator of their income, asset base, and current standard of living. Because of natural disasters such as cyclones, tornadoes, abnormal flooding, and excessive rains, poor those already living on the edge risk losing their homes, which, in many cases, are only bamboo structures with a roof made of leaves or thatch and with mud walls.

The housing indicator, as presented in Table 3.13, shows that about 72.8 per cent of the VGF beneficiaries own houses compared with 67.5 per cent of the non-beneficiaries. However, if we consider the most vulnerable category, *i.e.*, *Khas land* houses, then about 9.3 per cent of the beneficiary households, as against 8.1 per cent of the non-beneficiary households, live in vulnerable or cluster villages or *khas* lands. Self-ownership houses reduce the vulnerability of the inhabitants, on the one hand, and raise their social status and security on the other hand.

**Table 3.13: Ownership of Housing by Category (% of households)**

Indicator ownership of housing	Beneficiary Type				Non- beneficiary (n=630)
	General (n=720)	Fishing (n=180)	Disaster Affected (n=360)	Sub-total (n=1,260)	
Self-ownership	74.7	57.2	76.7	72.8	67.5
Owens houses on other's land	13.5	4.4	10.0	11.2	14.6
Other's houses on other's land	7.6	11.7	2.5	6.7	9.8
Cluster village or khas land	4.2	26.7	10.8	9.3	8.1

Variation across beneficiary categories is, however, considerably more significant; around 57.2 per cent of fishing category beneficiary households have their own houses, compared to 74.7 per cent for the general beneficiary category and 76.7 per cent for disaster-affected categories.

### 3.2.10 Food Security

Ensuring food security for the people in general and the poor in particular is a major policy objective of the government of Bangladesh. Access to staple food throughout the year is therefore important, particularly for poor households. We have another indicator of poverty in which households were asked to categorise themselves in terms of deficit/self-sufficient vis-à-vis the household's perception of its food consumption needs. Four categories of food deficit status are used:

- ✓ Always in deficit (having food deficit throughout the year);
- ✓ Chronically in deficit (having food deficit for more than 6 months a year);
- ✓ Frequently in deficit (having food deficit for 3 to 6 months a year);
- ✓ Occasionally in deficit (having food deficit for less than 3 months a year); and
- ✓ Self-sufficient in food (break-even).
- ✓ Food surplus (food that remains above what is needed)

Chronic deficit households are households that cannot meet food consumption needs for most of the time in a year, i.e., more than six months. Frequently deficit households can do so during some months of the year, while occasional deficit households can do so for most of the months (up to 9 months in a year). Break-even households are those who consider themselves to be self-sufficient in food, i.e., households having food security throughout the year. Food surplus households are those who have food that remains above what is needed, and these are the households having food security throughout the year.

**Table 3.14: Yearly Food Deficit Status of the Respondent Households**

Food security status	Beneficiary Type			Sub-total (n=1,260)	Non- beneficiary (n=630)
	General (n=720)	Fishing (n=180)	Disaster Affected (n=360)		
<b>Food deficit (last one year)</b> <span style="float: right;"><i>(% of households)</i></span>					
Always deficit (12 months)	16.1	2.2	0.8	9.8	14.1
Chronically in deficit (more than 6 months);	8.1	18.9	2.5	8.0	9.4
Frequently in deficit (4 to 6 Months)	22.6	25.0	12.5	20.1	29.0
Occasionally in deficit (1 to 3 Months)	25.7	34.4	50.0	33.9	29.2
Breakeven (no food deficit)	27.5	19.4	34.2	28.3	18.3
Surplus	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
<b>Frequency of meals with sufficient/adequate food (full meals)</b> <span style="float: right;"><i>(% of households)</i></span>					
Thrice with adequate food	38.8	53.9	45.8	42.9	33.2

Table 3.14 provides a picture of the extent of poverty among the beneficiary and non-beneficiary households separately for each of the indicators described above. Taking the self-assessing indicator, we see that 9.8 per cent of the beneficiary households have a year-round food deficit, and another 8.0 per cent have a food deficit for more than six months in a year. Taken together, these two groups account for about one-fifth (17.8 per cent) of the beneficiary households who are in the worst condition in terms of food security. Among the non-beneficiary group, about a quarter (23.5 per cent) of the households fall in this category, with a food deficit for most of the time in a year. Again, by the self-assessing criteria, more than a quarter (28.3 per cent) of beneficiary households fall into the self-sufficient/break-even category as against only 18.3 per cent of the non-beneficiary households who fall in this category. It implies that the beneficiary households are more secure in terms of food availability than their non-beneficiary counterparts.

In order to get an idea about food consumption annually, the respondents were asked about the frequency of meals per day with sufficient food in their respective households. The data in Table 3.14 show that more than two-fifths (42.9 per cent) of the beneficiary households have access to three meals per day with sufficient food compared with 33.2 per cent of the non-beneficiary households. The condition of general VGF beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries is somewhat precarious. An overwhelming majority of them do not have access to three meals per day, and most of them are forced to consume insufficient food to such an extent that the very maintenance of their physical health is impaired.

### ***3.2.11 Daily Food Intake/Frequency of Meals***

Taking the self-evaluation indicator of food consumption, the respondents were asked whether any household member went to bed without sufficient food during the last year. Table 3.15 shows that about 69.1 per cent of the beneficiary households have no access to sufficient food compared with 80 per cent of the non-beneficiary households.

**Table 3.15: Food Security Status of the Respondent Households**

Food security status	Beneficiary Type			Sub-total (n=1,260)	Non- beneficiary (n=630)
	General (n=720)	Fishing (n=180)	Disaster Affected (n=360)		
Whether any household member went to bed without sufficient/any food (last year)					(% of households)
Yes	70.6	78.3	61.7	69.1	80.0
No	29.4	21.7	38.3	30.9	20.0
Food deficit status by monthly					
Boishakh (14 April-14 May)	25.1	9.4	4.2	16.9	20.6
Joistho (15 May-14 June)	29.0	13.3	7.5	20.6	26.2
Ashar (15 June-15 July)	49.7	65.6	21.7	44.0	55.1
Srabon (16 July-15 August)	47.5	59.4	23.3	42.3	53.8
Bhadro (16 August-15 September)	36.5	45.6	35	37.4	40.8
Ashwin (16 September -15 October)	36.9	11.7	35.8	33.0	40.0
Kartik (16 October -14 November)	44.3	12.2	34.2	36.8	45.2
Ograhayon (15 November -14 December)	12.5	13.3	4.2	10.2	13.3
Poush (15 December -13 January)	11.9	34.4	0.8	12.0	16.2
Magh (14 January -12 February)	12.8	35.0	1.7	12.8	19.4
Falgun (13February -14 March)	20.3	7.8	10.0	15.6	20.6
Chaitra (15 March-13 April)	36.3	8.9	15.0	26.3	28.7
Frequency of Daily Meals with sufficient /adequate food ( last 24 hours)					(% of households)
Three meals a day	41.4	57.2	57.5	48.3	37.8
Two meals a day	42.1	38.3	40.0	41.0	50.5
One meal a day	13.3	4.4	2.5	9.0	8.7
Food deficit in each meal	3.2	0.0	0.0	1.8	3.0

Taking the self-evaluation indicator, Table 3.15 provides a picture of the household member's monthly/seasonal food insecurity. Table 3.15 shows that the months of Ashar (15 June-15 July) to Kartik (16 October-14 November) are the periods of most severe food insecurity for both VGF beneficiary and non-beneficiary households. Table 3.15 confirms that the months from June to August, known as the rainy season, are periods of food insecurity. Moreover, Chaitra, especially the latter, is the month of extended food insecurity. Table 3.15 confirms that the months from June to August, known as the rainy season, are periods of food insecurity. Moreover, Chaitra is the month of extended food insecurity. Table 3.15 also confirms that six months namely Ashar (15 June-15 July), Srabon (16 July-15 August), Bhadra (16 August-15 September), Ashwin (16 September-15 October), Kartik (16 October-14 November), and Chaitra (15 March-13 April) are the months of most severe food insecurity for both VGF beneficiary and non-beneficiary households. Compared to VGF beneficiaries, the condition is too bad for non-beneficiary households. In the above- mentioned months, the member of the household remains unemployed, and insufficient income generates food insecurity.

Again, taking the self-evaluation indicator, Table 3.15 shows that about 48.3 per cent of the beneficiary households had access to three meals per day compared with 37.8 per cent of the non-beneficiary households. The condition of general VGF beneficiaries, fishing communities, disaster-affected communities, and non-beneficiaries is precarious. The vast majority of them do not have access to sufficient food, and most of these households are forced to consume insufficient food to such an extent that the very maintenance of their physical health is impaired.

### 3.2.12 Weekly Food Intake

Table 3.16 shows the food intake patterns of the household members during the last week preceding the survey. The consumption of food items like cereals, pulse, vegetables, fruits, fish, meat, egg, milk, and fats varies according to the beneficiary category. As can be seen from Table 3.16, consumption of meat, egg, milk, and fats is not eaten by a large number of VGF beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries is somewhat precarious. An overwhelming majority of them do not have access to meat, egg, milk, and fats per week, and most of these households are forced to consume protein-deprived food, which is precise to maintain their physical health. Again, the condition of VGF beneficiaries is better compared to non-beneficiaries.

**Table 3.16: Food Intake Pattern of the Household Members During the Last Week Preceding the Survey**

Food Item	Number of days	General (n=720)	Fishing (n=180)	Disaster Affected (n=360)	Sub-total (n=1,260)	Non-beneficiary (n=630)
Cereal	None	0	0	0	0	0
	1 to 3 days	0	0	0	0	0
	4 to 6 days	1.2	1.2	0	0.9	2.4
	<b>Seven days</b>	<b>98.8</b>	<b>98.9</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>99.1</b>	<b>97.6</b>
Pulse	None	17.9	1.7	10	13.3	17.6
	<b>1 to 3 days</b>	<b>57.3</b>	<b>62.2</b>	<b>62.5</b>	<b>59.4</b>	<b>59.7</b>
	4 to 6 days	12.3	27.3	16.6	15.8	14.8
	Seven days	12.5	8.9	10.8	11.5	7.9
Vegetables/ tubers	None	0.7	0.6	0	0.5	1.9
	1 to 3 days	22.6	6.1	0	13.8	17.5
	4 to 6 days	38.8	41.1	28.3	36.1	38.4
	<b>Seven days</b>	<b>38.1</b>	<b>52.2</b>	<b>71.7</b>	<b>49.7</b>	<b>42.2</b>
Fruits	None	29.9	23.3	69.2	40.2	47.6
	<b>1 to 3 days</b>	<b>52.1</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>30.8</b>	<b>48.6</b>	<b>46.6</b>
	4 to 6 days	13.9	6.1	0	8.9	5.2
	Seven days	4.2	0.6	0	2.5	0.6
Fish	None	24.2	30.6	12.5	21.7	23.5
	<b>1 to 3 days</b>	<b>63.5</b>	<b>51.1</b>	<b>78.4</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>67.8</b>
	4 to 6 days	8.1	12.7	9.2	9.1	7.2
	Seven days	4.2	5.6	0	3.2	1.6
Meat	<b>None</b>	<b>89.1</b>	<b>80.0</b>	<b>80.9</b>	<b>85.4</b>	<b>87.7</b>
	1 to 3 days	10.6	20	18.3	14.2	12.5
	4 to 6 days	0.2	0	0.8	0.2	0
	Seven days	0.1	0	0	0.1	0
Egg	<b>None</b>	<b>60.6</b>	<b>68.9</b>	<b>49.2</b>	<b>58.5</b>	<b>67.1</b>
	1 to 3 days	36.5	28.9	50.8	39.5	31.7
	4 to 6 days	2	1.7	0	1.4	1.1
	Seven days	0.8	0.6	0	0.6	0
Milk	<b>None</b>	<b>76.3</b>	<b>81.1</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>80.9</b>	<b>87.6</b>
	1 to 3 days	14	6.7	9.2	11.5	9.3
	4 to 6 days	2.5	0.6	0	1.5	0.7
	Seven days	7.4	11.7	0.8	6.1	2.4
Fats	<b>None</b>	<b>99.9</b>	<b>99.4</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>99.8</b>	<b>99.8</b>
	1 to 3 days	0.1	0.6	0	0.2	0.2
	4 to 6 days	0	0	0	0	0
	Seven days	0	0	0	0	0

### 3.2.13 Food Consumption Score

World Food Programme (WFP) has approved the approach to measuring dietary diversity and food frequency, using an indicator known as the food consumption score (FCS). It is a frequency-weighted diet diversity score calculated using the frequency of consumption of different food groups consumed by a household during the seven days before the survey. The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) did a validation study of WFP's FCS indicator, which was published in June 2009 (IFPRI, 2009).

IFPRI's Bangladesh-specific FCS thresholds

FCS thresholds were revised, and four food consumption groups were created for Bangladesh:

- Poor consumption ( $\leq 28$ )
- Borderline Consumption ( $>28$  and  $\leq 42$ )
- Acceptable Consumption ( $>42$ )
- An additional threshold was introduced to distinguish the acceptable households between acceptable low (43-52) and acceptable high ( $>52$ ).

**Table 3.17: Food Consumption Score of the Respondent Households**

Food consumption score	Type of Beneficiary				Non-beneficiary (N=630)
	General (n=720)	Fishing (n=180)	Disaster Affected (n=360)	Sub-total (n=1,260)	
	%	%	%	%	
Poor (Fcs $\leq 28$ )	14.0	4.4	10.8	11.7	22.7
Borderline (Fcs $>28$ and $\leq 42$ )	44.6	50.6	45.8	45.8	48.4
Acceptable low (Fcs 43-52)	19.6	16.1	25.8	20.9	17.9
Acceptable high (Fcs $>52$ )	21.8	28.9	17.5	21.6	10.9

Taking account of the Food Consumption Score, the data in Table 3.17 show that about 11.7 per cent of the beneficiary households are poor compared with 22.7 per cent of the non-beneficiary households, and these households are forced to consume insufficient food. An overwhelming majority of them remain on the borderline: about 45.8 per cent VGF beneficiaries and 48.4 per cent non-beneficiaries, which is precarious regarding food security.

## CHAPTER 4

### ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF VGF PROGRAMME

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The main characteristics of the rural population are overwhelming poverty and food insecurity of a vast majority, especially the target group of VGF beneficiaries. A vast majority of these households have no access to adequate food for an effective life (because of insufficient income). Hence, they are poor; they have no access or limited access to the market to buy food. Every day they experience poverty in food security, the poverty of shelter, the poverty of health care, the poverty of education, and the poverty of income.

The VGF programme aims to alleviate the deteriorating nutritional situation amongst the distressed groups of women and children and to initiate a process of rehabilitation by combining food assistance with health care, functional literacy, and skill training. Other objectives are to increase the earning capacity and capability of the beneficiaries through training in income-earning skills, community activities to improve the economic and social status of the beneficiaries and to create income-earning opportunities through the use of savings and the provision of credit. In this chapter, we have attempted to see the impact of the VGF programme on the incomes and food security of the beneficiary households.

To see the differences between the socioeconomic aspects of the beneficiary and non-beneficiary households, we have selected the control groups (who are outside the programme) in such a way that they belong to a similar socioeconomic condition to the beneficiary group. The former group (beneficiaries) has been termed as a project group, while the latter group (non-beneficiaries) has been termed the control group. As mentioned earlier in the methodology section, the survey covered 1,260 project households (belonging to the VGF programme) and 630 control households.

#### 4.1 Positive Impact of the VGF Programme: Comparison

Respondents were asked to give their opinion on:

- (i) Food security status
- (ii) Nutrient-rich diet
- (iii) Health care and health awareness
- (iv) Housing condition improvement
- (v) Increase the scope for the education of children
- (vi) Self-reliance
- (vii) Increase capacity to deal with disaster
- (viii) Creating alternative sources of income



### 4.1.1 Food Security Status

Respondents were asked to give their opinion on food security status after having a VGF allowance. Taking the self-assessing indicator, we see from Table 4.1 that 85.6 per cent of the beneficiary households have moderate progress in household food security status and another 9.4 per cent reported no progress at all.

**Table 4.1: Any Change in Food Security of the Beneficiary Households due to the VGF Programme**

Change in Food security	Beneficiary Type			
	General (n=720)	Fishing (n=180)	Disaster Affected (n=360)	Sub-total (n=1,260)
	(% of households)			
Remarkable progress has been made	2.8	10.0	3.3	4.0
Moderate progress	82.2	82.2	94.2	85.6
No progress at all	13.5	6.7	2.5	9.4
No response	1.5	1.1	0.0	1.0

### 4.1.2 Nutrient-rich Diet

Respondents were asked to give their opinion on nutrient-rich diet intake after having a VGF allowance. Taking the self-assessing indicator, we see from Table 4.2 that 52.8 per cent of the beneficiary households reported no progress at all, and 44.2 per cent reported having moderate progress in the ease of household nutrient-rich diet intake.

**Table 4.2: Any Change in Nutrient-rich Food Intake due to the VGF Programme**

Change in Nutrient-rich food intake	Beneficiary Type			
	General (n=720)	Fishing (n=180)	Disaster Affected (n=360)	Sub-total (n=1,260)
	(% of households)			
Remarkable progress has been made	0.3	1.1	3.3	1.3
Moderate progress	39.0	56.7	48.3	44.2
No progress at all	57.9	41.1	48.3	52.8
No response	2.8	1.1	0.0	1.7

### 4.1.3 Health Care and Health Awareness

Respondents were asked to give their opinion on health care and health awareness after having a VGF allowance. Taking the self-assessing indicator, we see from Table 4.3 that 77.8 per cent of the beneficiary households reported no progress at all and 19.8 per cent reported moderate progress on health care and health awareness.

**Table 4.3: Any Change in Health Care and Health Awareness due to the VGF Programme**

Change in Health care and health awareness	Beneficiary Type			
	General (n=720)	Fishing (n=180)	Disaster Affected (n=360)	Sub-total (n=1,260)
	(% of households)			
Remarkable progress has been made	0.3	0.6	1.7	0.7
Moderate progress	12.4	31.1	29.2	19.8
No progress at all	84.9	66.7	69.2	77.8
No response	2.5	1.7	0.0	1.7

**4.1.4 Housing Condition Improvement**

Respondents were asked to give their opinion on housing condition improvement after having a VGF allowance. Taking the self-assessing indicator, we see from Table 4.4 that 88.7 per cent of the beneficiary households reported no progress at all and 9.3 per cent reported moderate progress on housing condition improvement.

**Table 4.4: Any Change in Housing Conditions due to the VGF Programme**

Improvement in Housing condition	Beneficiary Type			
	General (n=720)	Fishing (n=180)	Disaster Affected (n=360)	Sub-total (n=1,260)
	(% of households)			
Remarkable progress has been made	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.2
Moderate progress	8.1	6.1	13.3	9.3
No progress at all	88.8	92.2	86.7	88.7
No response	2.9	1.7	0.0	1.9

**4.1.5 Increase the Scope for the Education of Children**

Respondents were asked to give their opinion on increasing the scope for the education of children after having a VGF allowance. Taking the self-assessing indicator, we see from Table 4.5 that 69 per cent of the beneficiary households reported no progress at all and 24.7 per cent reported moderate progress on increasing the scope for the education of children.

**Table 4.5: Any Change in the Scope for the Education of Children due to the VGF Programme**

Increased scope for the education of children	Beneficiary Type			
	General (n=720)	Fishing (n=180)	Disaster Affected (n=360)	Sub-total (n=1,260)
	(% of households)			
Remarkable progress has been made	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.1
Moderate progress	16.4	38.9	34.2	24.7
No progress at all	72.9	59.4	65.8	69.0
No response	10.6	1.7	0.0	6.3

#### ***4.1.6 Self-reliance***

Respondents were asked to give their opinion on Self-reliance after having a VGF allowance. Taking the self-assessing indicator, we see from Table 4.6 that 64.2 per cent of the beneficiary households reported that there is no progress at all, while 33.3 per cent reported having moderate progress on self-reliance.

**Table 4.6: Degree of Change in Self-Reliance due to the VGF Programme**

Increased change in self-reliance	Beneficiary Type			
	General (n=720)	Fishing (n=180)	Disaster Affected (n=360)	Sub-total (n=1,260)
	(% of households)			
Remarkable progress has been made	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.2
Moderate progress	31.8	28.9	38.3	33.3
No progress at all	63.9	70.6	61.7	64.2
No response	3.9	0.6	0.0	2.3

#### ***4.1.7 Increase Capacity to Deal with Disaster***

Respondents were asked to give their opinion on Increase capacity to deal with disaster after having a VGF allowance. Taking the self-assessing indicator, we see from Table 4.7 that 76.2 per cent of the beneficiary households reported that there is no progress at all, while 18.2 per cent reported having moderate progress on increasing capacity to deal with the disaster.

**Table 4.7: Degree of Change in Capacity to deal with Disaster due to the VGF Programme**

Increase capacity to deal with disaster	Beneficiary Type			
	General (n=720)	Fishing (n=180)	Disaster Affected (n=360)	Sub-total (n=1,260)
	(% of households)			
Remarkable progress has been made	0.3	0.0	10.0	3.0
Moderate progress	17.1	15.6	21.7	18.2
No progress at all	78.3	83.3	68.3	76.2
No response	4.3	1.1	0.0	2.6

#### 4.1.8 Creating an Alternative Source of Income

Respondents were asked to give their opinion on creating an alternative source of income after having a VGF allowance. Taking the self-assessing indicator, we see from Table 4.8 that 61.4 per cent of the beneficiary households reported that there is no progress at all, while 33.5 per cent reported having moderate progress on creating an alternative source of income.

**Table 4.8: Positive Impact of the VGF Programme on Creating Alternative Sources of Income**

Alternative sources of income	Beneficiary Type			
	General (n=720)	Fishing (n=180)	Disaster Affected (n=360)	Sub-total (n=1,260)
	(% of households)			
Remarkable progress has been made	0.4	0.6	5.0	1.7
Moderate progress	26.7	44.4	41.7	33.5
No progress at all	67.1	55.0	53.3	61.4
No response	5.8	0.0	0.0	3.3

#### 4.2 Impact of VGF Programme: Food Habit-Quantitative and Qualitative

Respondents were asked to give their opinion on their food intake after involvement in the VGF programme (i) Whether any quantitative changes in food habits than before due to involvement in the programme (ii) Whether any qualitative changes in food habits than before due to involvement in the programme. Taking the self-assessing indicator, we see from Table 4.9 that 82.2 per cent of the beneficiary households have somewhat better than the past in quantitative food intake in their household while another 16.0 per cent report no changes. Again, taking the self-assessing indicator, we see from Table 4.9 that 52.5 per cent of the beneficiary households have somewhat better than in the past in their household qualitative food intake, while another 39.8 per cent reported changes. From Table 4.9, we can say there is somewhat improvement in quantitative and qualitative food intake due to the VGF programme.

**Table 4.9: Changes in Food Habits due to Involvement in the VGF Programme-Quantitative and Qualitative**

Indicator changes in food habit	Beneficiary Type			
	General (n=720)	Fishing (n=180)	Disaster Affected (n=360)	Sub-total (n=1260)
Quantitative Changes				(% of households)
Much more than before	1.3	3.3	0.0	1.2
Somewhat more than before	78.3	90.6	85.8	82.2
No changes	20.0	5.6	13.3	16.0
Worse than before	0.0	0.6	0.8	0.3
Do not know/cannot say	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.2
Qualitative Changes				(% of households)
Much better than before	0.7	1.1	14.2	4.6
Somewhat better than before	53.3	54.4	50.0	52.5
No changes	41.4	42.8	35.0	39.8
Worse than before	0.1	0.6	0.8	0.4
Do not know/cannot say	4.4	1.1	0.0	2.7

### 4.3 Impact of VGF Programme: Food Habit-Quantitative and Qualitative

As poverty is a multidimensional concept, it refers to being denied adequate income and the opportunity to improve one's standard of living. But for the hardcore poor, insufficient income is the most important factor contributing to their food insecurity and nutritional deficiency; an increase in household income is the key element in their poverty reduction and food insecurity.

**Table 4.10: Progress in Economic Condition due to Involvement in the VGF Programme**

Indicator improvement in economic condition	Beneficiary Type			
	General (n=720)	Fishing (n=180)	Disaster Affected (n=360)	Sub-total (n=1260)
				(% of households)
Remarkable progress has been made	1.8	6.7	0.0	2.0
Moderate progress	66.5	73.3	81.7	71.8
No progress at all	30.1	18.3	18.3	25.1
Don't know	1.5	1.7	0.0	1.1

Respondents were asked to give their opinion whether any progress/changes in economic conditions after involvement in the VGF programme. Taking the self-assessing indicator, we see from Table 4.10 that 71.8 per cent of the beneficiary households believed that they have moderate progress in their household economic condition. In contrast, another 25.1 per cent reported no progress at all. From Table 4.10, we can say there is an improvement in economic condition due to the VGF programme.

#### 4.4 Opinion Regarding the Amount of VGF Allowance

From the above discussion and evidence, we can say VGF allowance plays a great role in rural poverty and create an opportunity to improve one's standard of living. Respondents were asked to give their opinion on the amount of VGF allowance and whether they think it is essential to increase it.

**Table 4.11: Opinion of the Respondent Regarding the Amount of VGF Allowance**

Whether the amount of VGF allowance needs to be increased?	Beneficiary Type			Sub-total (n=1260)
	General (n=720)	Fishing (n=180)	Disaster Affected (n=360)	
	(% of households)			
Yes	98.8	96.7	100.0	98.8
No	1.3	3.3	0.0	1.2

Taking the self-assessing indicator, we see from Table 4.11 that 98.8 per cent of the beneficiary households reported that the amount of VFG allowance is needed to increase. VGF allowance for the hardcore poor and insufficient income is the most important factor contributing to their food insecurity and nutritional deficiency. The amount of VGF allowance is essential to increase as it plays a vital role in poverty reduction and food insecurity.

Respondents were asked to give their opinion on the amount of VGF allowance that needed to increase. Taking the self-assessing indicator, we see from Table 4.12 that 38.7 per cent of the beneficiary households reported that the amount of VFG allowance needed to increase from the existing amount up to 20 kg of rice, while another 34 per cent expect that to be 30 kg and 15.3 per cent expect that to be 40 kg. There are considerable percentages of beneficiaries who want 50/60 kg of rice. However, the amount varies among the category of beneficiaries.

**Table 4.12: Opinion of the Respondents Regarding the Extent of Increase in Allowance/Benefits**

The extent of to increase in the existing amount	Beneficiary Type			Sub-total (n=1,260)
	General (n=720)	Fishing (n=180)	Disaster Affected (n=360)	
The extent of increase (in Kg)	(% of households)			
Up to 10	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.1
Up to 20	39.3	10.6	45.8	38.7
Up to 30	40.7	18.3	30.0	34.0
Up to 40	13.7	25.0	13.3	15.3
Up to 50	4.8	15.6	5.8	7.1
Up to 60	1.2	30.6	5.0	3.7
The extent of mean increase (in Kg)	28.2	36.2	101.8	29.5

(Contd. Table 4.12)

The extent of to increase in the existing amount	Beneficiary Type			Sub-total (n=1,260)
	General (n=720)	Fishing (n=180)	Disaster Affected (n=360)	
The extent of increase in benefit (in Tk)	<i>(% of households)</i>			
Up to 500	29.2	-	26.7	29.0
Up to 1,000	34.6	-	73.3	42.4
Up to 1,500	17.0	-	-	13.4
Up to 2,000	15.8	-	-	12.4
Up to 2,500	1.8	-	-	1.4
Up to 3,000	1.6	-	-	1.4
The extent of mean increase in benefit (in Tk)	1031.6	-	663.3	952.8

**Table 4.13: Perceptions of the Beneficiary Respondents Regarding the VGF Allowance**

Perceptions of the beneficiary respondents regarding the VGF allowance	Beneficiary Type			Sub-total (n=1,260)
	General (n=720)	Fishing (n=180)	Disaster Affected (n=360)	
	<i>(% of households)</i>			
The amount of allowance is too low/inadequate	90.8	85.0	77.5	86.2
Poor quality of grain	38.3	54.4	75.8	51.3
Accurate measuring of food grain was not found	53.8	49.4	36.7	48.3
Some portion of the benefit is misappropriated by the authority	11.8	10.0	21.7	14.4
Less benefit is given than the allocated amount	21.8	18.9	13.3	19.0

## CHAPTER 5

# ASSESSING THE VGF SELECTION PROCESS AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

### 5.1 Beneficiary Selection Process: Effectiveness of Targeting

The present study was primarily designed to assess the beneficiary selection process of each VGF beneficiary category based on targeting criteria adopted for the purpose. The targeting criteria of the general and special (fishing community) categories are practically similar, with minor differences; for example, to be eligible for the special beneficiary, a household should be dependent on fishing for livelihood along with other eligibility criteria under the VGF programme. We assessed the effectiveness of targeting beneficiary selection by looking at three different inclusion criteria. At the same time, there are some non-eligibility criteria for the beneficiary selection, i.e., more than one VGF beneficiary from the same household and any other household member receiving benefits under VGD or any other government or non-government food assistance programme.

**Table 5.1: Beneficiaries Fulfilling the Selection Criteria under the VGF Programme**

Targeting criteria	General Category (N=1,080)		Special (Fishing) Category (N=270)		Disaster Affected (n=540)	
	Beneficiary (n=720)	Non-beneficiary (n=360)	Beneficiary (N=180)	Non-beneficiary (N=90)	Beneficiary (N=360)	Non-beneficiary (N=180)
<b>Inclusion criteria</b>						
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Landless	20.8	28.6	20.6	33.3	16.7	18.3
Only have homestead land	89.8	96.1	83.3	95.6	70.0	73.3
Day labour being the main occupation	43.9	41.4	0.0	1.1	64.2	59.4
Dependent on women's income	20.3	25.6	0.6	0.0	9.2	6.7
Begging	5.0	4.7	0.0	0.0	0.8	1.1
Women as household head	25.7	30.3	5.0	8.9	11.7	6.7
Incapacitated/disabled household head	5.6	4.4	1.1	0.0	3.3	3.9
Frequency of daily meals less than two times (annual)	18.1	22.2	4.4	2.2	5.0	1.7
Fishing is the main occupation	0.01	0.8	96.7	84.4	1.7	2.2
<b>Exclusion criteria</b>						
More than one VGF beneficiary from the same household	0.42	-	-	-	-	-
Receiving benefits from VGD or other food assistance programme	12.5	-	0.6	-	2.5	-



The findings show that 89.8 per cent of the general beneficiaries, 83.3 special beneficiaries, and 70 per cent of the disaster-affected beneficiaries met at least one of the inclusion criteria compared with 96.7 per cent for special VGF beneficiaries (Table 5.1). Again, more than (43.9 per cent) of the general beneficiaries met at least two criteria, and only 25.7 per cent satisfied at least three criteria. On the contrary, about 57 per cent of the special beneficiaries satisfy at least two criteria compared with 96.7 per cent of non-beneficiary households (Table 5.2).

It is evident from Table 5.2 that 15.2 per cent of special beneficiary households did not satisfy the necessary condition of the inclusion criteria as their primary occupation was not fishing which is a clear example of inclusion error.

**Table 5.2: Respondents Satisfying Eligibility Criteria for Inclusion Under the VGF Programme**

Eligibility criteria	General Category (N=1,080)		Special (Fishing) Category (N=270)		Disaster Affected (N=540)	
	Beneficiary (n=720)	Non- beneficiary (n=360)	Beneficiary (N=180)	Non- beneficiary (N=90)	Beneficiary (N=360)	Non- beneficiary (N=180)
Satisfied at least one	89.8	96.1	96.7	84.4	70.0	73.3
Satisfied at least two	43.9	41.4	0.0	1.1	64.2	59.4
Satisfied at least three	25.7	30.3	5.0	8.9	11.7	6.7
Satisfied at least four	18.1	22.2	4.4	2.2	5.0	1.7
	<b>10.2</b>	-	<b>3.3</b>	-	<b>30</b>	

However, among the inclusion selection criteria, it is difficult, though not impossible, for the selection committee to accurately assess whether a VGF beneficiary has a low income or irregular income. Verifying income is difficult, particularly in rural Bangladesh, because of the difficulty of documenting the level and sources of income of household members. It is mainly because most households are self-employed and very few keep records, as well as due to fluctuations in the level and sources of income. Beneficiaries' self-reported income is likely to be either understated or inaccurate. Measurement of household income or expenditure requires expensive and time-consuming surveys.

## 5.2 Selection Criteria

### 5.2.1 Land-based Criterion

About 20.9 per cent of general beneficiary households have no land at all, and another 68.4 per cent have land up to 14 decimals. On the other hand, 20.8 per cent of special beneficiaries have no land at all, and 59 per cent have land not exceeding 14 decimals. Alternatively, 18.0 per cent of disaster-affected beneficiaries have no land at all, and 51.4 per cent have land not exceeding 14 decimals. The findings indicate that 10.7 per cent of general beneficiaries and 20.2 per cent of special beneficiaries, and 30.6 per cent of disaster-affected beneficiaries did not meet the land-holding criterion and, as such, were not eligible as VGF beneficiaries (Table 5.3).

**Table 5.3: Land-based Assessment Criteria of the Respondent**

Land ownership	Beneficiary Type				Non-beneficiary (n=630)
	General (n=720)	Special (n=180)	Disaster Affected (n=360)	Sub-total (n=1,260)	
No land at all	20.9	20.8	18.0	20.1	27.0
0.01-0.14 decimals	68.4	59.0	51.4	62.4	64.2
0.15+ decimals	10.7	20.2	30.6	17.5	8.8

### **5.2.2 Occupation-based Criteria**

Occupation-based criteria show that more than two-fifths (43.9 per cent) of general beneficiaries are eligible in terms of households depending on day labour or households with irregular income. While 96.7 per cent of special beneficiaries meet the necessary condition for the special category as these households are dependent on fishing, at the same time, 3.3 per cent of the households did not satisfy the necessary condition (Table 5.1). The findings show that, in terms of different inclusion criteria considered, such as landholding and occupation/source of income, the VGF recipients appear to be somewhat better off than non-beneficiary households. It implies that some of the more deserving non-beneficiary households have been excluded by the selection committee.

### **5.2.3 Exclusion Criteria**

In the general category, there were three households (0.42 per cent) with more than one VGF beneficiary, which is a clear violation of VGF guidelines. The weakness in this respect arises due to the lack of adequate monitoring by Upazila-level officials, which allows error or abuse to creep into the system. Before preparing the VGF list, members must visit all listed households. Unfortunately, there was still limited/no follow-up by Upazila-level officials to verify the recipients' eligibility (Table 5.1).

Overall, in the context of eligibility criteria, the pattern emerges that some of the non-beneficiary households are more vulnerable than their beneficiary counterparts. The findings imply that some non-beneficiary households were excluded from the beneficiary list, although they are among the neediest households.

### **5.2.4 Effectiveness of Targeting: The Evidence**

World Bank (2006) found that the VGD, VGF, and the FFE accounted for 40 per cent of leakage in all food transfer programmes in 1999. Similarly, Del Ninno, Smith, and Roy (in Dorosh, del Ninno & Shahabuddin, 2004) show that leakages from the VGF declined during and in the aftermath of the 1998 floods.

Mannan (2010) shows that overall leakage in the VGF programme was 13 per cent in the intervention area, compared to 18 per cent in the non-intervention area. The latest evidence from NFPCSP (2012) shows that 36.9 per cent of VGF beneficiary households do not satisfy the land-based inclusion criteria (based on HIES 2010 data). The same study found that 0.82 per cent of households have multiple VGF beneficiaries from the same household and 7.92 per cent of beneficiary households received benefits from other food assistance programmes run by government/NGOs, which are the exclusion criteria of VGF beneficiaries' selection.

Recent studies have identified four potential sources of targeting errors. First, the geographical allocation of resources does not match poverty rates (Narayan & Zaman, 2009). For instance, Sylhet Region has the highest percentage of social safety net beneficiaries while its poverty headcount rate is second only to Dhaka region. Second, indicators used in the targeting process may not reflect the true welfare of households (Sen & Begum, 2002, 2010; Iffath, 2009). For example, while literacy and land tenure are relevant to analyse poverty in rural Bangladesh, they are not very useful in identifying the relevance to analyse poverty in rural Bangladesh. Third, even if the design of the targeting mechanism is sound, political economy and implementation issues at the local level may override it (Iffath, 2009; Hulme & Moore, 2010). The reliance of targeting on local authorities for beneficiary selection makes the process prone to elite capture, nepotism, and political interference. Fourthly, institutional issues at the central level foster overlap and gaps in coverage. For example, fifteen ministries of the country run some safety net programmes, with no clear information sharing on the number and profile of beneficiaries, multiple recipients, and impact assessment.

### **5.3 Fairness of Selection Process**

In selecting VGF beneficiaries, biases can arise in two different forms. First, this may be in the form of selection bias towards the non-poor and non-eligible—a non-eligible household may be included in the programme. Second, an eligible household may not be included in the VGF programme because of nepotism or corruption of the selection committee.

Respondents were asked to give their opinion on whether all the VGF beneficiaries are eligible for getting cards; if not, what are the reasons for selecting non-eligible persons as VGF beneficiaries; whether all the eligible persons are getting VGF allowance. The picture that emerges from Table 5.4 is that about two-thirds (55.8 per cent) of VGF beneficiaries reported that all the beneficiaries were eligible to get the card. On the other hand, only one-third (34.6 per cent) of non-beneficiaries reported that all the beneficiaries were eligible, 27.6 per cent said that only some of them were eligible, and 23.5 per cent thought that none of them was eligible to receive the card. The findings suggest that non-beneficiary respondents are more likely to be unhappy about the selection process than the beneficiary households.

**Table 5.4: Eligibility of VGF Beneficiaries for Inclusion under the VGF Programme***(% of respondents)*

Whether all are eligible	Beneficiary Type				Non-beneficiary (n=630)
	General (n=720)	Special (n=180)	Disaster Affected (n=360)	Sub-total (n=1,260)	
Yes, all	61.8	71.7	35.8	55.8	34.6
Some of them	24.9	13.3	16.7	20.9	27.6
None	8.5	3.3	33.3	14.8	23.5
Don't know	4.9	11.7	14.2	8.5	14.3

It needs to be mentioned here that targeting the neediest households becomes subjective when there are more eligible households than can be included. Households with similar characteristics may not always be ranked close to each other. In most areas, the UP chairman and selection committee members apply their judgment in selecting beneficiaries; in that process, they are likely to be guided by their self-interest keeping in view local political considerations, village groupings, and factional politics.

Respondents were asked to give their opinion about the reasons for giving VGF cards to non-eligible persons. The responses are summarised in Table 3.5. The most frequently cited reasons reported by the majority of the respondents were nepotism (VGF recipients: 62.9 per cent, non-beneficiaries: 62.1 per cent), voting purpose (55.6 per cent and 44.8 per cent, respectively), the pressure of local elite/influential persons (34.1 per cent and 35.9 per cent, respectively) and bias of selection committee (31.3 per cent and 36.5 per cent, respectively) which became as one of the important causes.

**Table 5.5: Opinion of Respondents Regarding Reasons for Receiving VGF Benefits by the Non-Eligible Persons***(% of multiple responses)*

Reasons	General (n=720)	Special (Fishing) (n=180)	Disaster Affected (n=360)	Sub-total VGF beneficiary (n=1,260)	Non- beneficiary (n=630)
Nepotism/political influence	65.0	53.3	61.8	62.9	62.1
The pressure on local elite/leaders	34.6	20.0	35.5	34.1	35.9
The bias of the selection committee	34.2	46.7	26.3	31.3	36.5
Voting purpose	63.3	16.7	52.6	55.6	44.8
Don't know	1.7	13.3	15.8	8.8	6.0

The above analysis suggests that the non-beneficiaries are considerably more likely to be unhappy about the selection process. It has also been observed that in terms of housing conditions, monthly income/expenditure, and year-round food security, the non-beneficiary

households are relatively worse off compared with the VGF beneficiary households. Thus, there are valid reasons on the part of the non-beneficiary respondents to be unhappy about the section process. Though a sizeable proportion of VGF beneficiaries have low incomes, live in poor housing conditions, and suffer from food inadequacy for most of the months in a year compared with the non-beneficiary households, they are somewhat better off economically. Also, their overall vulnerability is less severe than the non-beneficiary households.

**Table 5.6: Opinion of Respondents Whether All the Persons who are Eligible for Getting VGF Benefits are Included under the VGF Programme**

Whether all persons are getting allowance	Beneficiary Type				Non-beneficiary (n=630)
	General (n=720)	Special (n=180)	Disaster Affected (n=360)	Sub-total (n=1,260)	
Yes	25.8	13.3	20.0	22.4	5.8
No	74.2	86.7	80.0	77.6	94.2

The picture that appears in Table 5.6 is that about four-fifths (77.6 per cent) of non-beneficiaries were eligible to get the VGF card reported by VGF beneficiaries. By non-beneficiaries mentioned that 94.2 per cent of non-beneficiaries were eligible to receive the card. The findings suggest that massive non-beneficiary respondents are more likely to be eligible to get the card.

#### **5.4 Helping Hands to Get VGF Card**

Information on beneficiaries' prior knowledge of the VGF programme is presented in Table 5.6. Almost all the respondents came to know about the VGF programme run by the government through the local government. However, there are some differences between the general and special category beneficiaries regarding the sources of information. Table 5.6 shows that for the general VGF beneficiaries, an overwhelming majority (82.5 per cent) came to know about the programme from the UP Chairman or members. This pattern was somewhat different for beneficiaries of the special category (fishing community), where 80.6 per cent of beneficiaries heard about the programme from the UP Chairman or members and around one-third learned about the programme from the selection committee members. It appears that around 13 per cent of the special and 1.7 per cent of the general category beneficiaries heard from their relatives/friends; the role of NGOs and local influential people was negligible for both categories of beneficiaries.

**Table 5.7: Helping Hands to Get a VGF Card in the VGF Programme***(% of respondents multiple responses)*

Sources of information	Programme Type			Sub-total (n=1,260)
	General (n=720)	Special (n=180)	Disaster Affected (n=360)	
Neighbour	4.6	8.9	3.3	4.8
Relatives/friends	1.7	2.8	5.8	3.0
UP Chairman/member	91.4	18.9	96.7	82.5
Selection committee member	6.5	80.6	0.0	15.2
Local influential person	4.4	2.2	8.3	5.2
Other VGF recipients	2.8	0.6	1.7	2.1
NGO worker	0.0	3.9	0.0	0.6
Parliamentarian	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.2
Upazila chairman	0.0	0.0	4.2	4.8
Nobodies help	0.1	5.0	0.0	3.0

**5.5 Leakage due to Unauthorised Expenses Made by the Beneficiary**

This type of leakage includes any expenses the beneficiaries make to get selected for a particular programme. The beneficiaries were asked whether they had to make any unauthorised expenses to get selected under the VGF programme (i.e., for getting a card). In the study area, as a whole, hardly any incidence of unauthorised expenses was reported; only seven recipients had to make an extra payment to be included in the list (Table 5.8).

**Table 5.8: Whether any Unauthorised Expenses were Made by the Beneficiary to Get Selected under the VGF Programme***(% of respondents)*

Whether paid any money	Beneficiary Type			Sub-total (n=1260)
	General (n=720)	Special (n=180)	Disaster Affected (n=360)	
Yes	0.0	2.8	0.0	0.4
No	100.0	97.2	100.0	99.6

The VGF programme is a kind of relief programme; under this programme, a small amount of food grain is distributed among the poorest households twice a year or among disaster-affected households after a natural calamity.

## 5.6 Respondents' Suggestions about the VGF Selection Process

Table 5.9 summarises responses to the question about what needs to be done to make the selection process fair or minimise targeting errors. An overwhelming majority of respondents (both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries) emphasised the selection of the neediest households reported by 60.7 per cent of the beneficiary and about 75.2 per cent of non-beneficiary respondents. One-third of respondents from both beneficiary and non-beneficiary groups put the suggestion from the village-level committee for beneficiary selection. On the other hand, 40 per cent of the beneficiary and 41 per cent of non-beneficiary respondents suggested verifying the preliminary list of VGF beneficiaries in an open meeting before finalising the list. For minimising the targeting error or prevent nepotism, 31.3 per cent of the beneficiary and 40.2 per cent of the non-beneficiary households recommended imposing some kind of penalty on the selection committee if any non-eligible person is selected as a beneficiary.

**Table 5.9: Suggestions Made by Respondents for Improving Targeting Efficiency of the Selection Process**

*(% of respondents)*

Suggestions for improvement	General (n=720)	Special (n=180)	Disaster Affected (n=360)	Sub-total (n=1260)	Non- beneficiary (n=630)
Formation of the village committee	44.4	64.2	61.7	52.1	67.7
Include the neediest person in the list	56.7	48.0	75.0	60.7	75.2
Measures to ensure the correct weight	67.0	51.4	69.2	65.4	40.6
Verify the VGF beneficiary list in an open meeting before finalising	26.7	40.8	35.8	31.3	40.2
Give priority to the distresses/extreme poor while preparing the list	36.9	51.4	40.8	40.1	43.3
Display in a board no. of cards and per household entitlement	18.4	31.8	14.2	19.1	23.4
Others (As a packet or in cash)	20.9	19.6	3.3	15.7	8.5

## 5.7 Villagers' Opinion about the VGF Selection Process: Findings from FGD

Several FGDs were conducted with the villagers (including local leaders, school teachers, UP members, etc.). The picture that emerged is that the general record of VGF targeting is quite good. However, the most important factor concerning VGF targeting that can be questioned is not mistargeting. But the selection process was not transparent and, to some extent, depended on the relationship with members of the selection committee. The FGD participants opined that what is being called into question is not the effectiveness of the targeting indicators but their fairness, i.e., how the selection was made. In general, the extreme poor got the benefits or received a card; but the poor who were connected to the selection committee were more likely to receive the benefits.

The following points have emerged from the FGDs:

- The formation of a selection committee is sometimes politically biased, which results in the mistargeting of beneficiaries.
- The time given for beneficiary selection is too short, especially in some of the study areas, to prepare a comprehensive list of eligible candidates. Moreover, due to manpower, time, and budget constraints of the Upazila level VGF officials, they cannot verify all the candidates mentioned in the list. Thus, they have to rely on the opinion of local leaders and representatives to finalise the list.
- The process involved in preparing the preliminary list of beneficiaries is not transparent enough, and sometimes the selection committee members use their discretion, ignoring the selection criteria. Thus, the most deserving and eligible poor and destitute people run the risk of being deprived and excluded from the list.
- The chances of being included in the preliminary list primarily depend on the impression of the local-level elected representatives like the UP Chairman and members. In the process, the poorest of the poor and the neediest may be excluded.
- FGD findings and field observation also show that some economically better-off households having diversified sources of income have been given benefits under the VGF programme, while some of the deserving and eligible poor households have been left out (and this also happens in case special category recipients).

### **5.8 Leakage in Distribution: Entitlement and Reported Receipts**

A question was asked to the respondents regarding how many times received benefits under the VGF programme over the last year. The data show that about 33.1 per cent of general beneficiaries received VGF benefits only once, while another 59.9 per cent received them twice. However, only 7.1 per cent received them at least three times during the last year (Table 5.10). The pattern was different in the case of beneficiaries of special VGF: about 65 per cent received them once, 35 per cent received them twice, no one received them three times, while 8.3 per cent received them three times during the last year (Table 5.10).



**Table 5.10: Distribution of Benefits by Frequency Received During Last Year Under the VGF programme**

Frequency of benefits	General (n=720)	Special (n=180)	Disaster Affected (n=360)
Once only	33.1	65.0	35.8
Twice	59.9	35.0	55.8
Three times	7.1	0.0	8.3
Four times	0.0	0.0	0.0
Mean	15.2	21.7	16.8

In general, beneficiaries receive benefits (10 Kg. rice) mainly during two Eid festivals (Eid ul-Fitr and Eid ul-Azha). This study survey covered the period of two Eid ul-Fitr (28 July 2014 and 18 July 2015) and one Eid ul-Adha (04 October 2014). Almost all of the VGF beneficiaries reported being knowledgeable of the benefits/entitlement under the VGF programme. However, this awareness does not ensure the receipt of the full entitlement of benefits under the VGF programme. We asked all the beneficiaries if they received less amount of benefits (rice) than their entitlements. If they reported having received less benefit (rice) than their entitlement, then we tried to verify that information and ascertain the extent of leakage. The present study found a gap in the amount received by the VGF beneficiaries compared with their actual entitlements (Table 5.12 and Table 5.13).

**Table 5.11: Amount of Benefits Received During Last Year Under the VGF Programme**

Mean amount received	General (n=720)	Special (n=180)	Disaster Affected (n=360)
Mean allowance received during the last instalment	8.77	21.67	9.95
Mean allowance received during last year	15.22	21.67	16.78

**Table 5.12: Distribution of Beneficiary by Mean Amount of Benefits Received and Mean Shortfall**

Mean amount received	Beneficiary									
	General (n=720)				Fishing (n=180)				Disaster Affected (n=360)	
	n	Mean	Mean Shortfall	% shortfall	n	Mean	Mean Shortfall	% shortfall	n	Mean
Once	238	8.79	1.21	12.1	117	19.03	1.13	4.85	129	11.03
Two times	431	17.6 (8.86)	2.4	12.0	63	52.67 (26.33)	6.23 (3.12)	10.4	201	18.49 (9.01)
Three times	51	24.98 (8.23)	5.02	16.7	0	-	-	-	30	30.32 (10.32)

**Table 5.13: Mean Amount Received by the Fishing Beneficiary per Installment**

Location	Special Beneficiaries (Fishing Community)			
	Mean amount received	Entitlement per beneficiary	Mean Shortfall once	Mean Shortfall twice
Longodhu	19.68	20(kg)	0.32	
Hathazari	26.88	30(kg)	3.12	6.23
Kaptai	18.38	20(kg)	1.62	

**Table 5.14: Amount of Shortfall in Rice Received During Last Two Years by VGF Beneficiaries**

Amount of shortfall in rice received during last year by VGF beneficiaries by category							
General Beneficiaries							
Division and programme type	The number of beneficiaries received a shortfall	% of beneficiaries received a shortfall	Entitlement per beneficiary (Kg)	Mean amount received per beneficiary (Kg)	Mean shortfall per beneficiary (Kg)	Range Min-Max	Shortfall as % of entitlement
Rajshahi	79	65.8	10	8.6	1.4	0.5-3.0	14.4
Dhaka	17	14.2	10	8.9	1.1	0.5-5.0	11.2
Sylhet	76	63.3	10	7.12	2.8	1.0-6.0	28.1
Barisal	111	92.5	10	7.9	2.1	0.5-4.0	20.5
Rangpur	118	0.0	10	8.4	1.6	0.5-3.0	15.8
Khulna	102	98.3	10	8.6	1.4	0.5-5.0	14.2
Overall	503	69.9	10	8.2	1.8	0.5-6.0	18.0
Special Beneficiaries (Fishing Community)							
Longodhu	11	18.3	20	18.3	1.7	1.0-3.0	8.5
Hathazari	60	100.0	30	26.8	3.2	2.0-13.0	10.7
Kaptai	44	73.3	20	17.8	2.2	1.0-4.0	11.0
Disaster Affected							
Dhaka	12	40.0	*10	9.4	0.6	0.5-1.0	6.2
Sylhet	18	30.0	*10	8.5	1.5	0.5-5.0	15.0
Barisal	84	93.3	*10	8.0	2.0	1.0-8.0	20.0
Chattogram	33	36.7	*10	9.1	0.9	0.5-1.0	9.1
Overall	147	40.8	*10	8.4	1.6	0.5-8.0	15.8

**Note:** \*A disaster-affected beneficiary is supposed to receive 10-30 kg of rice in each instalment. For shortfall calculation, we have considered the minimum entitlement, 10 kg.

When the VGF beneficiaries were asked whether they received less amount of food grain than the stipulated amount during the last disbursement, an overwhelming proportion of the beneficiaries reported receiving less than their entitlements. Table 5.14 illustrates that around three-fifths (69.9 per cent) of the general category beneficiaries, against 86.11 per cent of special beneficiaries, reported receiving less amount of rice than their actual entitlement. The respondents who reported receiving less than entitlement were further asked on what basis they knew they received lower than their entitlement.

The average VGF general beneficiary is supposed to receive 10 kg of rice per instalment, and the special beneficiary category is supposed to receive 20-30 kg of rice per instalment. It is evident from Table 5.14 that general VGF beneficiaries received an average amount of rice, which was less than 1.8 kg of the full entitlement. It implies an average shortfall of 18 per cent. Similarly, the special VGF beneficiaries received an average of 17.86 kg of rice per instalment against their entitlement of 30.0 kg of rice, i.e., they received 2.11 kg less amount of rice.

## 5.9 Summary Findings: Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

Several focus group discussions (FGDs) have been conducted with the local leaders, including school teachers, religious leaders, shopkeepers, UP members, etc. Along with FGDs, we also carried out a substantial number of KIIs with the Upazila level key personnel, including Upazila Parishad Chairman, Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO), Upazila Project Implementation Officer (PIO), and the member of the Upazila VGF committee and Union level key personnel, including the Union Parishad Chairman, Member and Union Parishad Secretary, etc. A summary of these discussions is presented below.

### 5.9.1 The Selection Process

Findings from FGDs suggest that in most cases, the Union Parishad Chairman and members were involved in the selection process and did not go through the scrutiny list of poor or distressed people. They also reported that sometimes local-level political leaders (*i.e.*, supporters of the ruling party who are involved in the upazila VGF committee) try to influence the selection process. The beneficiary of the fishing communities sometimes got selected by the UNO, taking help from the fishermen Samity bypassing the UP Chairmen. In this way, some members who were not eligible (*i.e.*, Leaders of the Samity) were included in the list. Further finding from KII suggests that because of very limited time/short notice, the selection process in needs to be completed within a very short time, which results in miss-targeting.

**Table 5.15: FGD: Reasons for Receiving VGF Benefits by the Non-eligible Persons**

	N	Per cent
Nepotism/political influence	14	107.69
The pressure of local elite/leaders	9	69.23
The bias of the selection committee	9	69.23
Voting purpose	4	30.77
Don't know	2	15.38
Total	29	223.08

**Table 5.16: FGD: Villagers’ Opinions about the VGF Selection Process and Selection Procedure of VGF Beneficiaries**

<b>Villagers’ opinions about the VGF selection process and the selection procedure of VGF beneficiaries</b>		
	<b>N</b>	<b>Per cent</b>
No cards are allocated among the chairman, member, and female members, and they prepare a list of cards	17	58.62
Political workers are given the responsibility of preparing the list against the fixed number of cards and preparing the list according to the cards	12	41.38
Cards are distributed among the committee members, and they prepare the list accordingly	14	48.28
Chairman alone made the entire list	1	3.45
The chairman, in consultation with some selected members, prepare the list	5	17.24
Eligible persons in the ward are assembled, and the list is prepared in an open meeting.	9	31.03
- Others:		
- Fisheries Office made the list (4)		
- In consultation with MP, the Upazila chairman and political parties made the list of beneficiaries, and they have certain quota allocations (4)	13	44.83
- Nowjown club prepared the list of fishermen beneficiaries in Hathazari (4)		
- Others (They send the slip to beneficiaries’ homes according to the list)		
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>244.83</b>

Some relevant findings came out during the Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with the Upazila and Union level key personnel who are involved in the selection and distribution process of VGF. Some of the selection criteria mentioned in the guidelines appear to be ambiguous. They are not clearly defined- ‘no productive assets!’, ‘low or irregular income,’ ‘insolvent households dependent on child labour,’ etc., are difficult to assess because these are not well defined and too ambiguous. Such imprecise selection criteria may lead to the biased selection and provide the scope for existing discretion in the beneficiary selection process. Thus, about 50 percent of Upazila level personnel suggested clarifying the selection criteria to the Union VGF committee<sup>1</sup> and giving some training on how to select the beneficiary on the basis of eligibility criteria. Around two-thirds (73.1 per cent) of Upazila-level personnel expressed concern about the beneficiary being selected as poor under the VGF programme and emphasised the need to select the most deserving person according to the selection criteria (Table 5.17). To ensure more transparency in the VGF selection processes, more than three-

fourths (76.5 per cent) of UNOs suggested the involvement of the local people in the selection process. Another important finding observed during KIIs is that whenever the issue arises, a new list is prepared in each case of the VGF benefits distribution, which is not desirable, at least for the general beneficiary selection. More than half of the key personnel suggested preparing a ‘poor’ or ‘distressed household’ list, which may be used for all safety net programmes. About 42 per cent suggested introducing some kind of punishment for wrong selection. The number of beneficiary cards or the amount of rice allocated was insufficient in view of the number of poor or distressed people, so around 83 per cent of UNO and 55 per cent of Upazila level personnel suggested increasing the number of beneficiaries.

**Table 5.17: Suggestions Made by Upazila-level Officials for Improving Targeting Efficiency of the Selection Process**

Suggestions for efficient targeting	Upazila Parishad Chairmen	UNO	PIO	General Member	Overall
Select actual poor from the proposed list	100.0	68.8	58.8	64.7	73.1
Clarify the selection criteria to the selection committee	70.6	37.5	35.3	41.2	46.3
Involve local people in the selection process	76.5	31.3	23.5	35.3	41.8
Prepare union and ward level poor list	58.8	50.0	52.9	41.2	50.7
Punishment for wrong selection	47.1	43.8	41.2	35.3	41.8
Increase the number of beneficiaries	82.4	50.0	41.2	47.1	55.2
<b>Total sample</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>67</b>

Similar suggestions came from union-level KIIs, and it is interesting that the union-level personnel also suggested clarifying the selection criteria regarding the ‘poor’ or ‘distressed households.’ About 45 per cent of the union-level key personnel of the VGF programme maintain that sometimes the local political influential persons or members of the upazila selection committee try to include some persons who were not in the initial list (Table 5.16).

**Table 5.18: Suggestions Made by Union-level Personnel for Improving Targeting Efficiency of the Selection Process**

(*% of respondents*)

Suggestions for efficient targeting	UP Chairmen	UP Member	UP Secretary	Overall
Select actual poor from the proposed list	23.5	61.8	50.0	45.1
Clarify the selection criteria to the selection committee	11.8	32.4	32.4	25.5
Involve local people in the selection process	5.9	35.3	20.6	20.6
Prepare union and ward level poor list	14.7	44.1	38.2	32.4
Punishment for wrong selection	2.9	2.9	23.5	9.8
Increase the number of beneficiaries	17.6	26.5	47.1	30.4
<b>Total sample</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>102</b>

### **5.9.2 Leakage in Distribution**

The various FGDs we conducted with the villagers (local leaders, school teachers, UP members, etc.) revealed that the general records of VGF targeting were not quite good, and they have serious reservations about the amount of benefits. Most of the FGD participants strongly suggested increasing the amount of rice and, at the same time, ensuring transparent distribution. The FGD participants suggest Tk. 2-5 per KG of rice and distribute at least 20 kg of rice per month.

During the FGDs with the influential local people, community leaders, and civil society people, it emerged that most of the beneficiaries did not receive the exact amount of rice as specified. About 57.0 per cent of the FGD respondents claim that general beneficiaries get around 8 to 9 kg out of 10 kg rice (Table 5.17). Similarly, the majority of the FGD participants mentioned that the special VGF beneficiary gets, on average, 17 to 18 kg against their entitlement of 20 kg of rice. When asked about the short fall, most of the programme personnel involved in connection with the VGF (the UP Chairman, Members, and UP secretary) informed us that since the coverage of the programme is inadequate, a large number of poor or distressed people remain outside of the programme. So, at the time of distributing rice to the selected beneficiaries, a portion is kept outside, which is eventually distributed to the poor who are not covered by the programme. It also emerged from the respondents and during FGDs that some of the non-beneficiary households were even poorer than the beneficiaries. However, from the FGDs and KIIs, we have also found that some of the people in charge of distribution (Chairmen/Members) keep a portion of the rice for chowkidar of the union parishad; as a result, the share of the beneficiary is reduced.

**Table 5.19: Extent of Shortfall and Suggestions from the Beneficiaries***(% of respondents)*

Suggestion to reduce shortfall	Programme Type		
	General (N=610)	Special (N=210)	VGF beneficiary (N=820)
- % of households reported short fall	57.0	78.1	62.4
- Give correct weight	45.1	50.0	46.1
- Scope for weighting the benefits	7.4	10.0	8.0
<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>610</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>820</b>

Around 62.4 per cent of the beneficiaries reported that they received less amount of rice than they were actively entitled to, and for those who received less amount, more than 80 per cent of them verified the actual weight. During KII with union Chairmen, they pointed out that some wastage may occur during transportation and weighting. To avoid this uncomfortable situation, 81.3 per cent Upazila level personnel and 76.5 per cent union level personnel suggested distributing the packet rice to the beneficiaries, which will eventually eliminate the distribution leakages. In contrast, 11.9 per cent of Upazila-level personnel and 11.9 per cent of union-level personnel suggested providing money/cash instead of rice (Table 5.20). The current amount of benefits (10 kg for general, only two times a year, around 20, and sometimes 30 kg for the special beneficiary with a limited time period) are not sufficient. More than half of the personnel suggested increasing the amount of rice, and one-third of the upazila-level personnel suggested giving money/cash in lieu of rice. Sometimes the transportation cost disbursement takes a long time which is not desirable. More than one-third of the Union level personnel suggested releasing the demand for transportation costs as quickly as possible.

**Table 5.20: Suggestions Made by Upazila level Officials for Distributing Efficiently***(% of respondents)*

Suggestions for efficient distribution	Upazila Chairmen	UNO	PIO	General Member	Overall
Distribute packet rice	100.0	81.3	70.6	76.5	82.1
Charge a token amount of money on rice	41.2	25.0	29.4	35.3	32.8
Distribute money/cash instead of rice	29.4	0.0	5.9	11.8	11.9
Make available the weight machine during the distribution	11.8	31.3	29.4	29.4	25.4
Increase the quantity	82.4	50.0	41.2	47.1	55.2
Provide transportation costs to UP quickly	0.0	37.5	5.9	0.0	10.4
<b>Total sample</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>67</b>

**Table 5.21: Suggestions Made by Union-Level Personnel for Distributing Efficiently***(% of respondents)*

Suggestions for efficient distribution	UP Chairmen	UP Member	UP Secretary	Overall
Distribute packet rice	38.2	76.5	82.4	65.7
Charge a token amount of money on rice	14.7	8.8	20.6	14.7
Distribute money/cash instead of rice	8.8	8.8	14.7	10.8
Make available the weight machine during the distribution	2.9	2.9	2.9	2.9
Increase the quantity	14.7	38.2	50.0	34.3
Provide transportation costs to UP quickly	20.6	50.0	35.3	35.3
<b>Total sample</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>102</b>

About 66 per cent of respondents of the FGD participants claim that the VGF programme helps reduce food security and vulnerability of the beneficiaries, whereas 26 per cent of them think this kind of reduction is temporary. Due to many reasons, a vulnerable situation emerges, which makes people unemployed; this type of programme gives food security and reduces the velocity of poverty. It also helps to maintain the nutrition of children and vulnerable groups on a temporary basis. Though the programme is administrated mainly on a seasonal basis and allocation is strictly limited, it may not help reduce poverty significantly. While about 60 percent of respondents claim that VGF programme cannot reduce poverty, only 11 percent say it can. A similar result also comes from the beneficiaries' opinion; the current benefits are not sufficient for them. So, about 14 per cent are willing to pay a minimum charge for getting rice regularly under the VGF programme.

**Table 5.22: Respondent's Opinion on the New Dimension of the VGF Programme***(% of respondents)*

Indicator	General (N=610)	Special (N=210)	VGF beneficiary (N=820)	Non-beneficiary (N=410)
Supports for minimum charge instead of relief				
- Yes	18.7	6.4	3.4	14.8
- No	81.3	93.6	96.6	85.2

To ensure efficient distribution, FGD participants have suggested that introducing cash transfers instead of food transfers will ensure the diversity of consumer preferences. This cash transfer should be implemented through the banking channel. Providing packet rice instead of non-packet rice may be introduced to ensure the right quantity of rice. All kinds of influential inference should be removed, and per head allocation should be 20 kg instead of 10 kg.





# CHAPTER 6

## CONCLUSIONS

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### 6.1 Concluding Remarks

Government target to transfer to maximise limited resources across the most improvised populations. However, identifying and selecting beneficiaries is a significant challenge because:

- In Bangladesh, one-third (31.5 per cent) population lives below the poverty line, so selecting the poorest households in the context of widespread poverty is difficult.
- Like developed countries, Bangladesh does not have the infrastructure to measure and track demographic and financial information on individual households since it lacks an income tax and registration system.

According to Population Census 2011, 77 per cent of the population lives in rural areas, with consumption dependent on subsistence farming. However, most households have small holdings, so their production is often insufficient to meet household consumption needs, in particular, during natural shocks like a disaster, floods, cyclones, droughts, etc. when they face severe food storage problems. It is difficult to fine-tune targeting in countries like Bangladesh, with a large population (150 million), almost 5 million who live below the poverty line, and where the rich control food distribution.

The study found no major anomalies in the selection process for the VGF. Around 86 per cent of general VGF beneficiaries and 85 per cent of special beneficiaries met at least one official selection criteria for the programme; only 2 per cent of the beneficiary households have multiple beneficiary members. On the other hand, leakage in distribution was not so disappointing, but there are scopes for improvement. The distribution leakage was 15 per cent for the general beneficiary compared with 11 per cent for special beneficiaries. Some of the selection criteria appear ambiguous and not clearly defined – those with low and irregular income are difficult to assess because these are not well defined.

Like other safety net programmes, the general VGF programme targets the rural poor of the poorest, landless, and disaster-affected households. Landlessness and insufficient income due to no or irregular earning sources are the main characteristics of the general beneficiaries. Some of the selection criteria appear ambiguous and not clearly defined – those with low and irregular income are difficult to assess because these are not well defined. Along with

landownership and occupational status, other socio-economic characteristics, i.e., income, housing condition, food availability, gender of the household head, etc., are also important to identify the poorest households.

Inadequacy of the number of recipients and insufficient amount of benefits/food grain provided under this programme is the main weakness. Sometimes the disbursement procedure does not follow the proper schedule. For example, in the case of special beneficiaries, out of three instalments, beneficiaries received the last two instalments simultaneously in the previous month preceding the survey, which is not desirable. Another weakness of the VGF programme is the weighing system at distribution sites; the traditional weighing technique is used instead of using standards in weighing equipment. Even though the VGF programme has a provision to pay the Union Parishad for the expenses incurred for transport and handling costs, there is always a long delay in getting the money from the UP.

Although it has been observed that in terms of all the indicators considered, landholding, food security, housing condition, and monthly income, the VGF beneficiaries appear to be relatively better off than the non-beneficiary households. The general record of VGF targeting is quite good. It can be said that VGF beneficiaries, on the whole, belong to households with no land and low levels of income and consumption. Most of whom live in unsuitable housing conditions.

One implication is that greater clarity about the eligibility criteria is likely to help improve the chances of the poor being selected and wider access to the unbiased public information about eligibility and entitlement. Transparency in the selection process is expected to improve the targeting of the eligible poor and vulnerable and may also minimise the shortfall/leakage in the distribution.

The study explored that most recipients are below the poverty line, without land or a regular source of income, but some of the excluded non-beneficiaries are more deserving. In conclusion, it can be said that the need exists for a methodical review of the VGF programme, which suffers from relatively low coverage, targeting problems, and distribution shortfalls.

## **6.2 Recommendations**

A set of recommendations emerged based on the findings from the field investigation, focus group discussions (FGDs), and key personnel interviews (KIIs) involved in the VGF selection and distribution process.

### **6.2.1 Selection Process**

1. Select economically most vulnerable and socially most disadvantaged households as VGF beneficiaries; involve strong participation from local people and the VGF committee members.
2. The open selection method could be used in each village/ward to identify the most deserving person or household. In this selection process, a list of beneficiaries is prepared and discussed in the community meeting before finalising the list. Members of VGF committees should be assisted in identifying individuals. There should be more deliberate efforts to include widows and female-headed households in the VGF programme.
3. Inadequate numbers of beneficiaries compared to the eligible poor enhance the tendency of benefit sharing. It is necessary to increase the number of beneficiaries to prevent the practice of benefit sharing.
4. Data and information of the VGF beneficiary collected each time is an inefficient system. UP secretary should be well-trained in computers to enable him to keep and manage the information appropriately, which will help in selecting the most deserving candidate as beneficiaries.
5. The monitoring of the VGF programme should be strengthened. For this purpose, Upazila VGF Committee has a vital role; they should scrutinise the proposed VGF list received from the union level for transparency.
6. Union Parishad should prepare a comprehensive list of the poor households at the union/ward level involving all stakeholders living in those areas and make it public for verification. Each year they will update the list and preserve it in digital form. The Union Parishad will update the list each year; it will use this list to select the beneficiary of all government programmes, which may reduce the work burden of the Union Parishad during the VGF programme.
7. A fundamental concern expressed during FGDs is that the VGF allowances breed dependence among recipients. It is argued that it would be far better if the government used the money to set up income-generating projects for the ultra-poor. It seems to be the direction the present government is pursuing (i.e., EGPP).

### **6.2.2 Distribution Process**

1. As the amounts of benefits are inadequate, especially for the general beneficiaries, this should be increased. This recommendation also came from the key personnel of the selection and distribution process along with beneficiaries.
2. The information flow on the number of beneficiaries and per-head entitlement should be made public, which, in the future, will enhance monitoring and improve transparency in the distribution system.
3. The transportation and handling costs from the LSD to distribution centers should be assessed for each union. Based on this information, transportation and handling costs/allowance should be allocated in advance or as quickly as possible. The cost of delivering cash is cheaper than the cost of delivering food to the beneficiary. A recent study by Ahmed et al. (2007) finds that the cost of delivering Tk. 1.00 worth of food is, on average, Tk. 0.20. The cost of delivering Tk. 1.00 in cash benefit, however, is virtually zero.
4. Each beneficiary's share needs to be weighed and delivered individually (this could be difficult to implement in practice) to prevent distribution leakage.
5. Steps should be taken to distribute food grain in a sealed packet to reduce the problems of weight tampering, scale tampering, transit loss, and handling loss.
6. Strict punishment should be introduced for selecting non-eligible persons under the VGF programme.

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