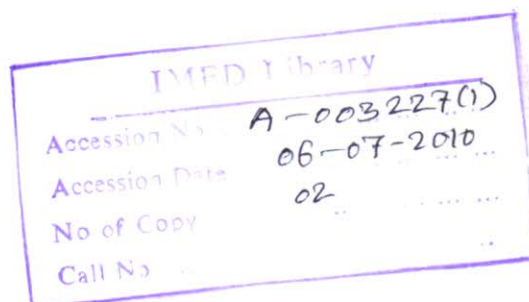


Evaluation of National Food Policy Capacity Strengthening Project (NFPCSP)



**Evaluation Sector
Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division
Ministry of Planning
June , 2010**

Evaluation of National Food Policy Capacity Strengthening Project (NFPCSP)



Study Team:

Md. Khalilur Rahman, Director, IMED
Begum Quamrun Nessa, Deputy Director, IMED
Begum Nargis Jahan, Assistant Director, IMED
Enamul Hoque Chowdhury, Assistant Director, IMED

Dr Md Salimullah, Consultant, IMED

Overall Supervision by:

Syed Md Hyder Ali, Director General, IMED

Conducted by:

Evaluation Sector
Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division
Ministry of Planning
June, 2010

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

"But if, as is sure, there comes to you guidance from Me, whosoever follows My guidance, will not lose his way, nor fall into misery. But whosoever turns away from My Message, verily for him is a life narrowed down". (Al Quran)

The Context

FAO and the Food Planning and Monitoring Unit (FPMU) of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh are jointly implementing the National Food Policy Capacity Strengthening Programme (NFPCSP) to enhance national capacity to implement the National Food Policy adopted in August 2006. The programme aims at strengthening the capacity of the Food Policy Monitoring Unit and other key policy/planning units including also in planning, monitoring and assessing food security related policies and programmes in Bangladesh. Furthermore, it seeks to expand and deepen the knowledge on food security through research and dialogue between government policy officials and civil society researchers.

Objectives of the NFPCSP

- a) To increase the capacity of the FPMU officials to perform their function through arranging and conducting appropriate training courses.
- b) Improve inter-ministerial collaboration and co-ordination to ensure the effective delivery of the National Food Policy and the oversight of its Action Plan
- c) Increased quantity and higher quality food security related research by institutions and researchers in civil society.
- d) More meaningful dialogue within civil society and between civil society and the GoB
- e) Capacity within civil society to manage a food security related research programme.

Evaluation objectives of the NFPCSP

The evaluation objectives of the project are given as follows:

- To review the present status of the project personnel, equipment, and training etc.
- To see how far the training enhanced the research capability and skills of FPMU analysts and Officers of the concerned ministries.
- To observe the collaborative and coordinated efforts amongst inter-ministerial officials and private entrepreneurs, researchers and civil society established with the Food Planning and Monitoring Unit
- To review various research outputs disseminated in the workshops/seminars and how far the outputs/recommendations are incorporated in the national food policy.
- To see to what extent the food policies and plans that are implemented through different activities in relationship to increased food availability, accessibility to food and use of safe and nutritious food through the project.
- To review the strengths and weaknesses of the project.

Methodology

The study team looked into monitoring evaluation report of IMED to examine carefully the status of the project with reference to various features which have been outlined in the project proposals. With a view to have knowledge about various dimensions of the project, the study team had administered a semi-structured questionnaire to all 22 FPMU officials and also had Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with them by following a pre designed structured guide lines. In addition the team had four FGDs: (i) with FPMU participants of the training/study programme held on February 16, 2010 at FPMU office; (ii) inter-ministerial officers on March 23, 2010 at FPMU office, Dhaka; (iii) with the researchers of the project held on April 07, 2010 at Bangladesh Agricultural University, Mymensingh; and (iv) with the researchers, civil society and business community members in Dhaka held on April 13, 2010 at the FPMU office, Dhaka, to discuss activities and involvement of various group who were directly linked to the project either as administrators, or researchers, or business group or members of the civil society. The team also had key informants interview (KII) with Chief Technical Advisor (CTA) and his colleagues of the NFPCSP on April 1, 2010 at FPMU office to record their views about what had been undertaken by the NFPCSP as well as FAO. The NFPCSP has provided all institutional and other necessary supports to help arrange dialogues successfully.

Major Findings and Conclusions.

1. The NFPCSP has sponsored 44 research studies on five broad categories of which 22 completed as on till to date. This indicates 50% is not completed of their planned research.

Programme Funded Research (PR)			
	Number	On going	Total
A. Markets, Prices and Employment	3		
B. Production, Extension and Nutrition	5		
Total	8	11	19
Challenge Fund (CF)			
C. Production and availability	5		
D. Economic, Physical and Social Access	5		
E. Utilization of Food and Nutrition	4		
TOTAL	14	11	25

2. The budget of the PR funded research ranges from US \$10,000 to US \$ 50,000, while that of the CF funded research ranges from US\$ 2,000 to US\$ 10,000.
3. The list of the project allows us to guess about the seriousness of the NFPCSP with regard to achieve its objectives and to strengthen the FPMU through appropriate policy guidelines.
4. With a view to strengthen the in house activities of the FPMU, the FAO under the NFPCSP project has sponsored one PhD, 4 MSc/MS, and 63 short training courses to 22 officials from the FPMU. The long term trainings are conducted abroad and the short term courses are predominantly conducted in Bangladesh. However, funds required to organize the training courses were not calculated.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the NFPCSP

The program is well planned and meticulously organized. The programme is predominantly financed from donor stakeholders' funds. The research themes are approved through different tiers of screening committees formed for undertaking research projects as per the methods provided in the 'guidelines for submission, selection and implementation' of research project.

The researches are divided into two types subject to budget provisions, namely the programme funded research (i.e. up to US\$ 50,000) and the challenge fund research (i.e. below US\$ 10,000).

The researches undertaken from the programme funded research is divided into 2 broad themes: (i.) Markets, Prices and Employment; and (ii) Production, Extension and Nutrition.

The project under Challenge Fund is divided into three broad themes: (i) Production and availability; (ii) Economic, Physical and Social Access; (iii) Utilization of Food and Nutrition.

The major findings, concluding remarks and observations of 11 completed researches under two programs and covering 5 broad themes are presented in Table 4 in matrix form. The findings are laudable and will definitely help strengthen the policy makers and practitioners while making any policy prescriptions for implementation. The researches are another contribution of the NFPCSP.

In any national programme runs by expatriates always draws attention of any sensible person irrespective of his identity. Selection for the executive positions from the pool of the national experts is desired but the decision to this selection is controlled by the donor stakeholders.

It is a human nature to be educated through from better learning institutions. The scope for long term training is very limited which may be treated as another weakness of the project.

Summary Findings

1. An overwhelming majority (i.e.14 out of 22) of trained officials of the FPMU had joined other ministries after obtaining training and only one third joined the FPMU.
2. It appears from the title of the training courses that these are highly useful and demanding. The trainings had not only strengthened the capacity of the FPMU officials but also strengthened the ability of officials in discharging all other daily activities. From this it obviously follows that the NFPCSP is being able to identify and financed courses which have widespread application and the training can be termed as one of the major strength of the NFPCSP project.
3. An enquiry about the scope of application of training in coordinating various research programmes in the present jobs, the officials expressed that they did not have any scope to coordinate research project and also did not exist any opportunity in the office to apply many of the trainings they had obtained.
4. It also appears from the survey that the average intensity of official duty is 2.14 which implied that the trained officials have little time to respond to other activities as such inter-ministerial meeting after performing routine responsibility in their own office.
5. All officials excluding one answered that after obtaining training there is a positive change in their daily jobs/activities.
6. About 50 percent of officials had encountered some type of problems while using training in discharging official responsibility.
7. Eleven types of different problems are identified.

8. The survey further indicates that only 3 officials were entrusted with the coordination of food security related research. One of them is exclusively engaged in coordination of collecting, collating and compiling data required for food security research.
9. Only 12 officials were entrusted to convene inter-ministerial meetings. The average number of meeting convened is about 9. It directly varies with the official status/position.
10. 18 officials attend meetings and two third of them were assigned to convene meeting (i.e. 12 out of 18). The average number of meetings participated by official is 8.78.
11. Participation of additional directors and directors in the meetings is comparatively higher than the other officers.
12. Different types of training conducted under the project have strengthened the working skill of the officers of the FPMU.
13. It appears from the NFPCSP project budget that 94.48 percent of the total budget allocated for five years (i.e. for 2005 to 2009) period has been used up within four years (i.e. for 2005 to 2008) as per approved PP.
14. It is further observed that the project expenditure had been exceeded by 14.48 percent overspent from the planned budget for four years. It further reveals that each of the items except CD/VAT and Taxes has exceeded the planned budget.
15. It can be seen from the NFPCSP project budget expenditure that the man months for consultants allocated for five year duration were totally exhausted within the first four years. However, 6.08 percent of the allocated budget remained unspent in this head. The planned target fixed for the first four years was 269.6 man months, which indicates that the target had been exceeded by 67.4 man months of which 32.6 man months by expatriate consultants and 34.8 months.
16. A comparison of distributions of the budget allocated and the budget implemented shows that the government contribution to the project was declined to 0.98 percent from 1.70 percent, thus a net decline by 0.72 percent, which primarily either due to shortening of the project period by one year or either by considering partially tax free or reduction of the rate of taxes imposed on the various imported instruments/items for the project by GOB
17. FPMU is entrusted to bring out an exorbitant number outputs which are published on regular basis. Total volume of periodical outputs stands to 27 outputs or 975 issues per year.
18. The FPMU provides secretarial support to the Food Planning and Monitoring Committee (FPMC).
19. FPMU assists FPMC in monitoring the overall food situation and analyzing statistics on production, estimated demand and availability of food stock, so that it can fulfill its terms of reference which are to monitor the overall food situation and advise the Government on the steps to take with respect to overall food management, food security and related actions.
20. FPMU has an authorized strength of 18 professionals to perform its functions.
21. Coordination among the ministries and divisions has improved after launching the project.
22. Eleven ministries/divisions are directly related with the project. Mainly the officers of the planning cell of the concerned ministries and divisions maintained liaison with the FPMU and the project.
23. The concerned officers of the ministries and divisions are busy with their own business and could not attend inter-ministerial meetings regularly.
24. The honorarium for attending the meeting was not enough and rather low as compared to that of other donor funded project.
25. The services of the concerned inter-ministerial officials are transferable. Therefore most of the officers could not continue with the project due to frequent transfer and the new officers could not cope up with the project activities properly.

26. Presence of representatives in the inter-ministerial coordination meetings was not up to the mark.
27. The Director General, FPMU has no financial and administrative power to manage the NFPCSP project activities. The representatives of the ministries did not feel comfortable to discuss any financial and administrative problem with CTA. So there exists a gap between the inter-ministerial representatives.
28. The prioritization of NFPCSP supported research themes on food security was based on a transparent and participatory process conducted in collaboration with civil society and the topics/themes of research are consistent with the priorities of GoB.
29. The selection and approval process of research projects was unbiased, influence free from any quarter and transparent.
30. Selected 44 research projects covered all dimension of food security.
31. Monitoring and technical support at periodic stages of implementation have been done and ensuring quality of the research work carried out has been a priority throughout the process. This fact was reiterated by the participants.
32. It has been reported that 8 universities are actively involved considering the incorporation of food security modules in the on going post graduate courses. An executive post graduate course module of food security may be developed and course may be conducted through institutions having expertise in conducting quality food security researches. A consortium of institutions may be formed with BAU, BIDS, BRAC University and other interested universities.
33. The researchers opined that the present process of approving research projects involving 20% of government representatives is adequate and good.
34. It has been recognized by the researchers and civil society representatives that the continuation of research activities on food security after December 2008
35. The major findings, policy conclusions, concluding remarks and observations of 11 completed researches divided under 5 broad themes presented in Table 4 in the matrix form reveal that the findings are laudable and will definitely help strengthen the FPMU the policy makers and practitioners while making any policy prescriptions for resolving food security problems smoothly. The researches are another contribution of the NFPCSP.
36. Considering the importance of completed and ongoing 44 research projects, the NFPCSP has been able to move on the right track and has been able to achieve its own objectives.

Recommendations and Conclusions

1. It is very difficult to achieve the targeted objectives of a program, when a trainee finds him after returning from attending a long term training program, in a desk, where there is hardly ever use of the training that he had received.
2. With a view to envisage the use of training in the FPMU, there must have some obligation to the officials to serve FPMU for a certain period after obtaining the training.
3. The provision of in service training for officials should be considered in the subsequent phase of any TA project with a view to strengthen the skills.
4. The officials confirmed that after obtaining training they can now discharge their routine duty easily, comfortably and more confidently than before. This can be treated as a major contribution or strength of the NFPCSP in strengthening capability and efficiency of the officials in general and the FPMU officials in particular.

5. After the training the working skills of the officials have strengthened and the increased workload is the indication of that.
6. To resolve the encountered problems a further study should be undertaken to arrive at policy conclusions.
7. The selection of research themes, research topics and coordination were done transparently through the different high powered screening committees, where the officials who were trained had hardly any scope to intervene in the process.
8. Entrusting convening of the inter-ministerial coordination meeting directly varies with the official status/position.
9. The scope for playing pivotal role in the meeting for additional directors and directors in the meetings is comparatively higher than the other officers.
10. The officers are now capable to prepare report and also better equipped how to conduct research study by using available information and statistics.
11. Major changes in food grains management, management of public stock of food grains, preparation of records and statistics, fixation of quantity and time of food grains import, monitoring of markets, and monitoring of open market sale of rice at government fixed price etc. had been visible after the completion of the project.
12. The policy decision must be taken to have a provision of audit the budget of all Technical Assistance project on yearly basis in order to control the expenditures according to allocated budget.
13. The spending of project budget, planned for five years, within a period four years may be considered as not inadvertently done.
14. To avoid such consequences in future a policy decision must be taken to make obligatory to follow the financial as well as man month budgets plans as per project proposal. However, in case of for the interest of the project any overspending beyond the target has been observed, there must have an explanation justifying the use of budget with reference to achievement of objectives of the project.
15. For the interest of the Government, the import of any item either tax free or reduction of tax rate should be discouraged for any TA project.
16. While recruiting any expatriate consultant for a particular service in a TA project, the stake holders/donors would be requested to give preference to indigenous consultant for that selected particular position. With a view to get maximum service from any TA project, it is suggested to make a provision to divide the total budget allocated for consultants (i.e. expatriate and national) in to two equal parts one for expatriate consultants and the other for indigenous consultants. However, in case of non-availability of indigenous consultant, the budget may be adjusted accordingly to appoint an expatriate consultant instead.
17. Considering the volume of activities the FPMU performing at present, the number of existing strength of officer and support staff needs to be raised at least to 1.5 times of the current strength.
18. The rate of honorarium for attending inter-ministerial coordination meeting and other meeting interrelated with the activities of FPMU needs to be raised to the comparable amounts offered for attending similar meeting.
19. With a view to synchronization of inter-ministerial coordination meeting the frequent transfer of the inter-ministerial representatives should be discouraged.
20. The steps should be taken to make the participation in inter-ministerial coordination meetings obligatory for all representatives.

21. The gap existing between the inter-ministerial representatives and CTA needs to be bridged. Therefore, a project director for the NFPCSP project should be recruited with proper financial and administrative power.
22. National consultants may be appointed instead of expatriate consultants, this could help appoint more expert manpower and maximize the services.
23. The representatives of FAO prepare financial and technical work plans of the project. It would have been better if this was done jointly by the Government of Bangladesh and the FAO.
24. Long term training programmes are exclusively destined for the FPMU officials. This facility should be extended to include inter-ministerial representatives.
25. The selection and approval process of research projects needs to be seen further through conducting a study whether there are steps which need to be dropped to make selection process easier.
26. An executive post graduate course module of food security may be developed and course may be conducted through institutions having expertise in conducting quality food security researches. A consortium of institutions may be formed with BAU, BIDS, BRAC University and other interested universities.
27. More involvement of Government representatives in the approval committee may not be conducive for selection of quality research project and apprehended that selection processes may be influenced by the political allies..
28. The continuation of research activities on food security after December 2008 was appreciated by researchers and civil society representatives that the continuation of flow of fund should be assured till successful completion of their projects within the stipulated deadlines and for time needed to present policy recommendations to food security policy makers.
29. Considering duration of research, each of the 44 researches conducted could be a degree awarding research fields of the participating universities, which was overlooked. Therefore, public and private universities and the other educational institutions may be requested to run a degree awarding course on the food security and some of the fields of research could be included in the course as a prerequisite for partial fulfillment of the degree.