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The Equity State of Employment Generation Program for the Poorest: A case in Mohonpur Upozila under Rajshahi District in Bangladesh

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Abstract

Employment Generation Program for the Poorest (EGPP) scheme is one of the important workfare programs as social safety nets in Bangladesh through which the local working poor get the chance to work and survive. This is a cash-based package aiming to help rural extreme poor providing employment during lean season over two cycles for 80 days. EGPP generally involves participants for doing physical work for rural community.

This paper focuses on the EGPP scheme aimed toward stating equity in two Unions—Moughachhi and Bakshimuil—in Mohonpur Upazila under Rajshahi district. It provides an assessment of EGPP focused on equity based on beneficiary selection, allowance distribution, and implementation. Following a mixed method approach where data have been collected through questionnaire survey, FGD, and KII. The findings indicate that the transfers are not always distributed among the poor and vulnerable people who deserve to receive the allocation for fighting against poverty and vulnerability.

Existing discontent proved that the selection procedure of beneficiaries in EGPP scheme is not quite satisfactory and still inequitable as near about half of the beneficiaries said the distribution is not fair. The study findings also specify that people remain in vulnerable situation even after taking this scheme... Initiatives could be taken in increasing allowance, changing beneficiary selection procedure and monitoring intensification which can contribute to promote in facilitating peoples' livelihood against poverty and vulnerability.

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Introduction

Social safety net programs (SSNPs) are such kinds of line-ups activities which support the vulnerable people in a society by providing grants or working opportunities under the parasol of National Social Security Strategy (NSSS). Employment Generation Program for the Poorest (EGPP) is one of the SSNPs of the government of Bangladesh.⁴ SSNPs are actually the sets of measures that a society applies to protect its members from different kind of economic and social hardships. Social safety nets not only do support the realization of the human right to social security, but also ensure economic and social necessity of the vulnerable people. Well-designed social protection systems – providing cash, food, insurance, and other support for the poor– contribute to reduce poverty and inequality, improve opportunity and enhance resilience to the poorest of the poor.

The Government of Bangladesh (GoB) has been implementing various SSN schemes through Union Parishad (UP), aiming at achieving equity, social justice, poverty reduction, women's empowerment, gender equality and inclusive development to reduce the vulnerability of marginalized groups and improving resilience for the poor. In Bangladesh, a significant number of social protection interventions from the government as well as NGOs provide safety nets for the poorest households but they are not well articulated. Employment Generation Program for the Poorest (EGPP) is one of the important SSNPs being implemented by MoDMR. Since its launch in 2008, the EGPP has established its firm roots as one of the flagship safety net programs of Bangladesh government.

SSNPs historically have been the government's main response against poverty and vulnerability. Public Work Programs (PWP), for some cases, focused on the practical need to rebuild community infrastructure while providing a safety net for the poorest of the poor by providing the seasonal job opportunity. As a policy response to crisis and seasonal unemployment, the Government of Bangladesh introduced the 100- day Emergency Employment Program (EGP) in 2008 to mitigate the adverse effect of the rise in global food prices, earning capacity of the poor and so forth. EGPP provides 40 days of employment during each of the two lean seasons—March to April, and September to November—in rural areas.⁵

Like other PWPs—Food for Work, Rural Maintenance Program—, EGPP sets unskilled manual workers households into the program.⁶ Workers are selected on an annual basis based on applications at the local level. In each phase, an enrolled participant is entitled to receiving up to BDT 8000, or about \$104, or a little over \$200 if work is taken up in both seasons for the full number of days. Ministry plays the supervising role, the interventions under EGPP are practically implemented by the local government institutions, particularly the Union Parishad.

To understand the state of equity of this program, two unions of Mohonpur Upozila have been selected to analyze in depth about the state of equity of employment generation program for the poorest. This paper is organized as describing the objectives and methodology, social safety net program and workfare programs, EGPP in brief, social works under EGPP scheme, and selection procedure. Finally, this paper has analyzed the state of equity on the basis of beneficiary selection, allowance distribution, and implementation of employment generation program for the poorest.

⁴ Md. Masud-All-Kamal and Choyon Saha, Targeting Social Policy and Poverty Reduction: The Case of Social Safety Nets in Bangladesh. *Il Poverty & Public Policy*, 2014.

⁵ The nationwide implementation of the program was supported by partially by financing from the World Bank under the Employment Generation Program for the Poorest Project.

⁶ Currently the wage is below the market rate at BDT200 per day. This rate is adjusted for inflation over time.

Objectives of the study

The main objective of this paper is to figure out the state of equity of employment generation program for the poorest. Underlying this essence of evaluating of this program, this paper mainly focuses the critical analysis of beneficiary selection of EGPP scheme, allowance distribution of it, and implementation of EGPP Scheme. Specifically the objectives of the paper are;

- i) To analysis the beneficiaries' selection discrepancy of EGPP scheme.
- ii) To investigate the allowance distribution procedure of this program.
- iii) To know how this scheme is being implemented at Union Parisad level.

Methodology of the present study

Selection of Study Areas and the rationale

In the present study, the researcher selects the study areas with great care so that real results are representative. The present study was confined to Rajshahi district purposively. Then the researcher selects two unions— Moughachhi and Bakshimuil randomly from Mohonpur Upazila of Rajshahi district. Considering the constraints of time and fund, two villages were selected randomly from each union through the random sampling table. The rationale behind this selection is that Rajshahi district is predominantly informal working based and the poverty rate is also high in this district. The government safety net facilities do not work properly here. Considering some of that features the researchers have selected this area purposively.

Sample selection

A total of 50 beneficiaries were randomly selected from two unions— Moughachhi and Bakshimuil— in Mohonpur Upazila under Rajshahi district. The researcher has selected the sample of unions in such a way that can represent the actual scenario of equity of employment generation program for the poorest in the study areas and provide effective ways to provide some recommendations to make this scheme more productive and equitable in future.

Sources of Data

Primary

Considering the objectives of this paper the study has incorporated field based primary data collected from the respondents—beneficiaries, and local government officials, and local representatives. Data (primary) have been collected through—questionnaire survey, four focus group discussions (FGDs) and six key informant interviews (KIIs). A total of 25 samples size has been drawn and 25 from each unions following snowball sampling approach.

Secondary

However, for this research some secondary data have also been collected. Sources of secondary data include government implementation manual of social safety net programs, reports, previous studies, and different websites, available books, published articles, dissertations, newspapers, government publication, national and international study reports, annual reports, Bangladesh Labour Force Survey, Bangladesh Bureau of statistics, Bangladesh economic review, International Labour Organization, Ministry of Labour and Employment, Union Parishad office.

Social Safety Net Programs and Workfare Program

In Bangladesh, social safety net programs (SSNPs) can be categorized under four broad major divisions. These are—(i) employment generation programs; (ii) programs to cope with natural disasters and other shocks; (iii) incentives provided to parents for their children's education; and (iv) incentives provided to families to improve their health status.⁷ The SSNPs can also be grouped into two types depending on whether these involve cash transfers or food transfers.

These programs cover three different groups depending on the degree of shocks and risks. These include: (i) the chronic poor (2) the transient poor and (3) other vulnerable population group.⁸ Thus, given the types of shocks and risks, it is appropriate that SSNPs follow both the —promotion approach which is undertaken to raise the incomes and employment opportunities of the poor and the —protection approach which is undertaken to reduce the vulnerability of the poor. Several types of safety net programs have been described below (Table: 1).

Table 1: Main Types of Social Safety Net Programs in Bangladesh

Type	Program Examples
Cash transfers	Old Age Allowance Widowed and Distressed Women Allowance Disabled Allowance
Conditional cash transfers	Primary Education Stipend Program Stipends for Female Secondary Students
Public works or training based cash or in kind transfer	Rural Maintenance Program Food-for-Work Vulnerable Group Development (VGD)
Emergency or seasonal relief	Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) Gratuitous relief Test Relief

This sorts of programs are actually motivated by mostly three important considerations—equity, efficiency, and resilience. The proponents of such programs consider ensuring benefits of economic growth to be shared widely among the society. As the workfare program EGPP can have an impact on the poorest of the poor in the society that may ultimately create some opportunities to work for survival.

Employment Generation Program for the Poorest (EGPP) in Brief

EGPP is an ongoing social protection program that provides short-term employment for 80 days over two cycles to manual workers during lean season. The first cycle is between October and December while the second cycle is between March and April. These are lean seasons in Bangladesh when the rural poor face limited employment opportunities; this contributes to seasonal poverty. Some of the hardcore poor people even do get benefits from the government sponsored social safety net programs including Cash for Work (CFW), Food for Work (FFW), Test Relief (TR), VGF, and Char livelihood projects.⁹ However, the hardcore poor who are not included in government safety net programs remain out of any income sources

⁷ Barkat-e-Khuda, —Social Safety Net Programs in Bangladesh: A Reviewll, Bangladesh Development Studies, Vol. XXXIV, June 2011, No. 2.

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Dr. M A Mannan et.al., —Implication of Employment Generation Programme for the Poorest (EGPP) to Reduce Disaster and Gender Vulnerabilityll, Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), June 2018.

during those months. For this group of people government has been offering a specially designed daily wage payment basis employment opportunities.

Under the program the hardcore people are being employed during the lean seasons. Altogether, the EGPP attempts to improve the socio-economic conditions of the poor by providing employment opportunities during lean period to the destitute groups in the society. Among the beneficiaries, 30% is secured for the women. The beneficiaries work for 7 hours per day at a daily rate of BDT 200 (two hundred). They must save BDT 25 in their respective accounts and cannot withdraw the amount till 1st July of each year.¹⁰ One Sarder (team leader) is engaged to oversee each project; the person receives an extra BDT 50 per day.

Social Works under EGPP Scheme

Various types of projects are being done concentrating on mainly the earth works as short-term employment generation program activities. These activities help the agricultural production, better rural communication, protection during natural disaster etc.¹¹ the types of sub projects are—

- canal excavating/excavating,
- earthen dam construction/reconstruction,
- rural road construction/reconstruction,
- drain construction/ reconstruction to address the water logging,
- earth raising of community institutions like school, graveyard, playground, fish
- earthen shelter for animals to protect against cyclone,
- excavation of public ponds/fish farms,
- organic fertilizer production for agricultural application,
- development of market/helipad
- Water reservoirs construction for rain water conservations/drinking water.

Selection Procedure of Beneficiary in EGPP

There are some basic requirements for the beneficiary selection procedures in EGPP. These are as follows:¹²

- A person irrespective of sex at the age between 18 years to 60 years old who does not have 0.10 acre of own land excluding homestead and low income person who's monthly income is below Tk. 4000/= or annual income is on and average below Tk. 48,000/= having no pond for fish-culture and he/she is a an unskilled worker can be the beneficiary of EGPP.
- The person cannot be beneficiary of any other social safety-net program of the Government.
- Among the beneficiaries 33% will be female but if the female member is died or unable to perform his work any other family member can work instead of the female worker.
- The union committee will inform about the deadline for selection of beneficiaries of the program through Ward Member, Local Bank, Post Office, school/College and Local Elites.

¹⁰ Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 2018.

¹¹ Khandokar Zakir Hossain and Md. Isahaque Ali, —Social Safety Net Programs In Bangladesh: An Empirical Study on the Employment Generation Program for the Poorest (EGPP) ProjectII, European Journal of Social Sciences Studies, Volume 2, Issue 3, 2017.

¹² Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief.

- If a person is able to fulfill the requirements fixed by the concerned ministry can apply for beneficiary in the prescribed way to the concerned Ward Member.
- The beneficiary will be selected primarily by the Union Committee at the same time the Union Committee prepares a waiting list of beneficiary as per the rule.

EGPP’s Quest for Equity at Local level in Bangladesh

Social safety net programs are actually those kinds of formal & informal ways by which the underprivileged people would be protected from destitution through increasing income & productive capacity. EGPP is one of the important safety-net programs which is being implemented by the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR) and is supported by the World Bank.¹³ The EGPP attempts to improve the socio-economic conditions of the poor through providing employment opportunities during lean period to the vulnerable groups. In terms of the objectives of this research, it has been assessed the issues of equity—beneficiaries selection, allowance distribution, Implementation.

The Analysis of Equity of Employment Generation Program for the Poorest (EGPP)

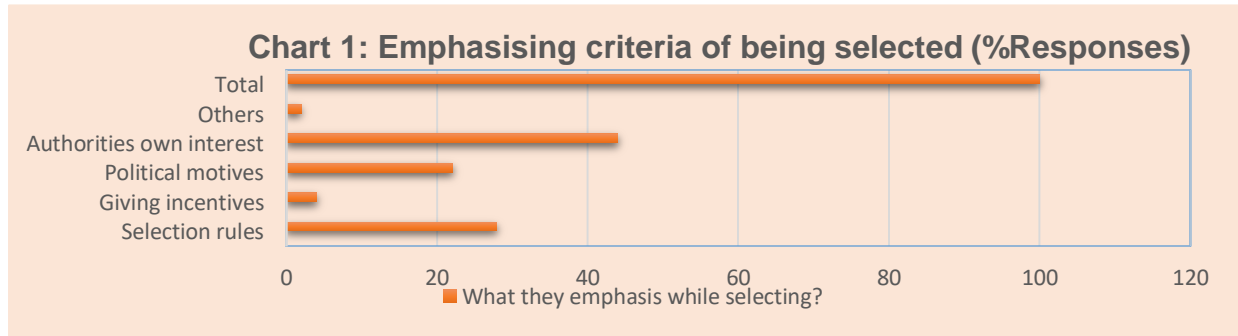
Upazila officials and local level elected representatives actually perform various roles in implementing social safety net programs. Among 114 social protection programs EGPP is one of them having a total number of beneficiaries of 8.17 million in 2018-19.¹⁴ Equity here concentrated on giving every beneficiary his due according to rules of EGPP program.

Analysis of Beneficiary Selection of EGPP Scheme

In selecting EGPP beneficiaries, from two different ways biases can arise. Firstly, it is on the form of selection bias towards the non-poor and non-eligible—a non-eligible household may be included in the program targeted exclusively for the vulnerable and destitute households. Secondly, an eligible household may not be included in the EGPP program because of nepotism or corruption of selection committee.¹⁵

Beneficiaries were surveyed on awareness about selection procedure i.e. whether they know how the UP authority selects beneficiaries and what they emphasize during selection. 46% said they were aware about selection procedures while 54% answered in the negative.

On the second part, 44% of beneficiaries said they were selected as per authorities’ own interest. 28% were selected as per selection procedures, 22% were selected for political motives and about 6% were selected based on incentives and other purposes.



¹³ Khandokar Zakir Hossain and Md. Isahaque Ali, —Social Safety Net Programs In Bangladesh: An Empirical Study on The Employment Generation Program For The Poorest (EGPP) Project.¶ European Journal of Social Sciences Studies, Volume 2, Issue 3, 2017.

¹⁴ Social Security Policy Support (SSPS) Programme, Cabinet Division and the General Economics Division (GED), Planning Commission, Government of Bangladesh.

¹⁵ Implication of Employment Generation Programme for the Poorest (EGPP) to Reduce Disaster and Gender Vulnerability, Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), June 2018.

Furthermore, 60% of beneficiaries highlighted that they did not face problems such as giving incentives, asking for political help and so on. 40% of beneficiaries faced such problems.

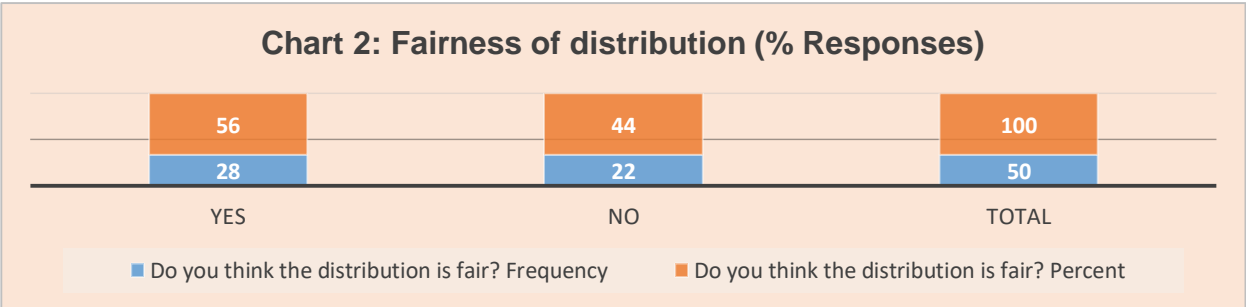
Beneficiaries were asked if they had paid to be selected into the program. 62% of the surveyed beneficiaries across both unions said they did not pay to get selected; 38% said that they did. This number of beneficiaries had to request the UP authority to be selected into EGPP despite the existing selection criteria as the authority often has political considerations.

In sum, the local level representatives at Union Parishads perform various tasks—beneficiary selection is one of them—but existing discontent proved that the selection procedure of beneficiaries in EGPP scheme is not quite satisfactory and still inequitable though KILs tried to make the statement is not quite accurate as the beneficiaries said.

Allowance Distribution of EGPP Scheme

At the local level, the distribution of SSNPs may help the vulnerable population to lead comparatively better life but the fair—not biased— distribution of EGPP scheme is imperative. The capacity of UPs and their representatives is important in executing the allowance distribution. Since the government is going to bring another 12 lakh people under social safety net programs in the next financial year—2020-2021 with the introduction of an electronic fund transfer system to ensure that the money goes directly to the accounts of the beneficiaries.¹⁶ But if there has unequal distribution of EGPP allowance,¹⁷ then the application of it may not be fruitful. There is a general allegation that the benefits of the safety net schemes do not reach the poor and the fund is misused.

Opining on a general question of whether the distribution is fair—not biased— or not, 56% was in positive response i.e. the beneficiaries said the distribution is positive and the remaining’s part of the beneficiaries responded that the distribution is not fare and proposed to make the distribution more equitable that the eligible beneficiaries get the chance to work in EGPP scheme.

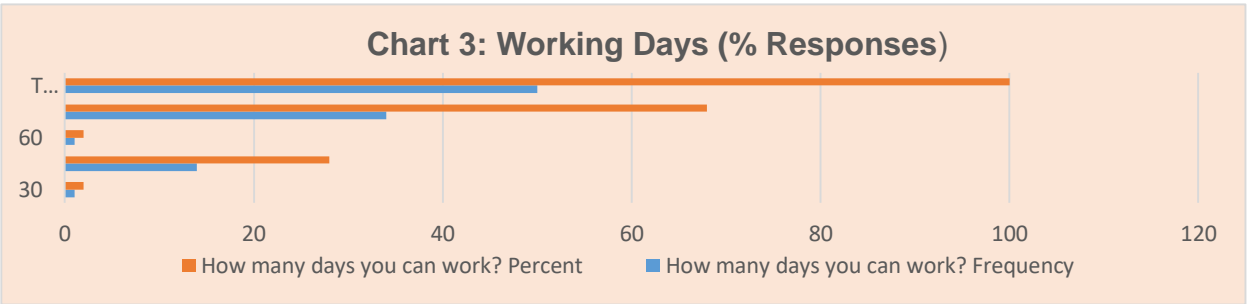


Its show that the equity in allowance distribution is not quite pleasing as 44% of the respondents said that the distribution is not fair.

The KILs with UP Chairmen and Secretaries highlighted, —we are not only performing our regular responsibilities but also assisting beneficiaries, especially women, in opening bank accounts and to collect the money from Bank. Our beneficiaries represent the extreme poor and vulnerable groups of our society, and they are not quite capable to communicate with bank officials. We trust this is also our responsibility to help them in all regards.¶

¹⁶<https://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/safety-net-widens-people-get-fund-directly-thru-eft-1588252>, accessed on 26th July, 2019.
¹⁷ Hasanuzzaman Zaman, —Assessing the Impact of Employment Generation Programs in Challenging Rural Poverty: A Comparative Study on Bangladesh and India.¶ Journal of Poverty, 15:3, 259-276. June 2011.

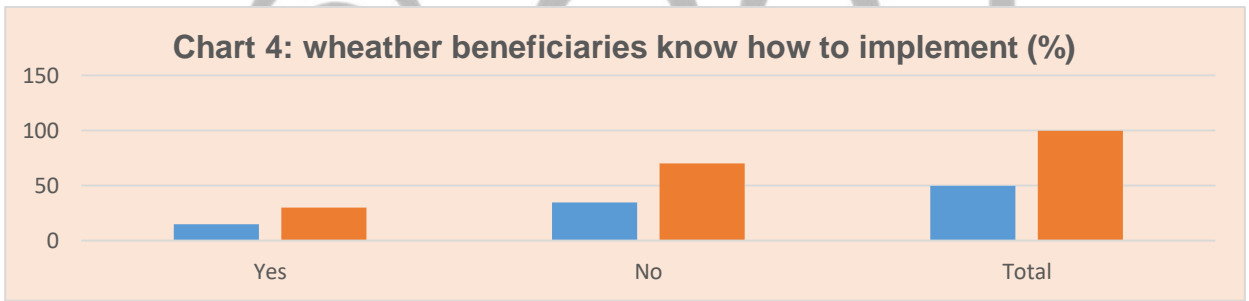
As regard to ensuring the number of total working days, 68% of respondents worked for total days, 28% worked 50 days while only 2% worked for 30 and 60 days respectively. Reasons for disinterest in working for 100 days related to receiving BDT 200 per day and age-related problems.



During FGDs, beneficiaries highlighted on rising on allowance of employment generation program for the poorest to make them relatively sustainable in their livelihood.

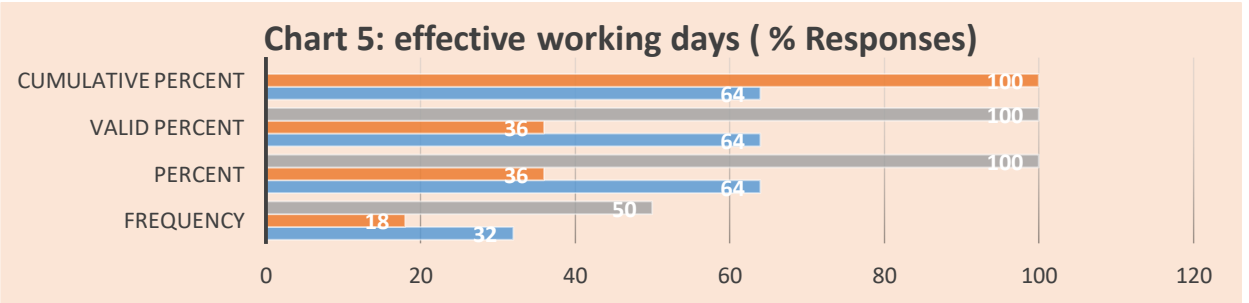
Analysis of Implementation of EGPP Scheme

This program can be successful if the implementation is done properly. But there some implementation problems have been identified in the study that include corruption, lack of continuity of the required number of days, also inadequate human and material resources. In the FGDs and from survey data, the beneficiaries identified their opinion on equity of implementation of EGPP viewing different issues like their knowledge of implementation, whether they can work the required number of days, project implementation for representatives’ personal motives.



From the survey it is that 30% respondents from both the areas know how the project is implemented and but 70% of the respondents do not know the ways of implementation. And this is because that the officials do not want to let the beneficiaries know. A good number of beneficiaries—i.e. 36% cannot work the required number of days because of several problems i.e. employing those people who are not selected as beneficiaries.

Based on KIIs with the UP chairmen and secretaries, programs are not properly implemented as per rules and regulations. According to UP members in Mougachhi, —we always want to follow the rules and regulation of the implementation set by governments, but sometimes we cannot do it due to varied interests not only of the Chairman but also amongst us—UP members.



Through the FGD, a substantial number (72 percent) of beneficiaries opined that the UP authorities employ them for their personal home based works. Addressing the same argument in Kils of UP secretary in both Bakshimuil Union he said, —I am the only person to maintain a huge pressure of administrative and financial management works. It is quite difficult to manage time to monitor the social safety net programs and hardly time to visit the working sites. Therefore, evidently the implementation of EGPP is not equitable always.

In sum, viewing implementation of social safety net instruments particularly EGPP keeps the vulnerable population lifts off from extreme poverty. But considering the equity of beneficiary selection, allowance distribution, and implementation the responses are not quite satisfactory in some specific inquiry—beneficiary's selection criterions, problem of being selected for EGPP scheme, the capacity of UPs and their representatives in execution of allowance distribution, and also information about implementations.

Conclusion

Workfare Program is an important policy instrument for social protection for the poor in developing countries. Many of these programs are to some extent financed by donors, and the assessment is critical to find the development effectiveness of aid. Despite its popularity and importance, there is surprisingly limited evidence regarding how well and efficiently workfare programs work. Employment Generation Program for the Poorest is a fruitful attempt that Bangladesh government has taken with a view to ensuring livelihood of hard core people and vulnerable community. It has also been taken for those who are economically insolvent of the country basically in the lean season. In this period, the working opportunities of daily basis workers and unskilled workers are vulnerable. EGPP tries to make those workers to be active providing employment on short basis. In EGPP projects mainly the village infrastructure development works are done in a year allowing the workers taka 200 for each working day.

Targeting objectives of EGPP—evolving rural extreme poor beneficiaries, adequate representation of women engaged in EGPP, ensuring proportionately greater program coverage of poorer localities within the country—it's important to figure out how equitable this is on beneficiary selection, allowance distribution, and implementation. Thought this paper it has been critically focused on those points of views.

Though Bangladesh has achieved the status of a lower-middle income country, the coverage of the social SSNPs is still limited in scale. Considering the percentage of poor and vulnerable people of the country these programs are not adequate for addressing poverty or for mitigating vulnerability. By implementing workfare program—EGPP— the percentage and intensity of poverty have been reduced so far. Initially economically most vulnerable and socially most disadvantaged households have been selected form rural level but a small portion is well off. Meaning, in all cases the required number of eligible beneficiaries do not get EGPP scheme important factors of equity. Equity—based on beneficiary selection, allowance distribution, and resilience—here concerns on giving every beneficiaries his due in accordance with EGPP criterion.

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