

Midterm Evaluation

Integrated Food Security Program - *IFSP*



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Dhaka

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Integrated Food Security Program (IFSP) is a five-year Title II food security project that was initiated in FY 2000 (July 1999) with an anticipated cost of \$130 million derived from the monetization of 570,000 MTs of wheat. The program continues the infrastructure activities of its IFFD predecessor, incorporates the two previous pilot components—flood proofing and UPWARD—and introduces a new pilot project to address food and livelihood insecurity in urban slum areas. IFSP is comprised of the following four components: Flood-proofing (FPP); BUILD; SHAHAR; and Disaster Management (DMP). In its totality, IFSP employs approximately 600 staff and covers the vast majority of districts in the country though one component or another. The overall goal of the IFSP is “to promote and protect the food and livelihood security of vulnerable groups in underdeveloped high-risk rural and urban areas of Bangladesh.” The three strategic objectives that will contribute to this goal are:

- Strategic Objective One (SO1): To promote and protect household income and community resources and assets;
- Strategic Objective Two (SO2): To improve health, hygiene and nutritional practices of vulnerable groups; and
- Strategic Objective Three (SO3): To promote effective and sustainable institutional support systems.

Although the four components that comprise IFSP are quite different, the design of the program is organized around a comprehensive and holistic household livelihoods approach. Each component targets food insecure and vulnerable groups in specific geographical areas, and each component seeks to establish partnerships either with local government and/or national NGOs as a means of assuring the sustainability of project interventions. The project has an intervention strategy based on a large number of activities, including infrastructural development (roads, flood-proofing structures, latrines, etc.), health, hygiene and nutrition education, and institutional capacity building through training and awareness promotion.

This report contains the results of the mid-term evaluation of the IFSP project. An interdisciplinary team comprising Bangladeshi and expatriate consultants carried out the evaluation. This methodology employed in this evaluation was based on a multi-method, iterative approach to assessment. First, the team consulted the abundant IFSP-related reports and documents provided by CARE staff and other organizations in order to frame the relevant issues. Then, extensive fieldwork was conducted using a range of qualitative tools including key informant interviews, focus group discussions, large group discussions, process analysis, and several PRA techniques. At the end of each visit to the field offices, the team maintained a “restitution” meeting with CARE, LEB, and NGO representatives to explain the preliminary findings and to elicit feedback. Over 250 staff, partners, stakeholders and beneficiaries were interviewed during this process.

The evaluation team sought to review the current progress of each IFSP component with respect to its implementation strategies in order to assess whether end-of-project goals were likely to be achieved. At the same time, the team focused

on several cross-component issues of concern to CARE/Bangladesh, especially those directly related to the long run strategic plan of the organization—gender, institutional capacity building, and regionalization of the project.

Key Findings by Strategic Objective

With regard to the first strategic objective, the evaluation team concluded that IFSP, at midterm, has demonstrated substantial and adequate progress toward its goal of protecting and promoting household and community assets and resources. Specifically, the report presents the following:

- FPP has been particularly effective in reducing the flood-prone vulnerability of households and villages in the char and haor areas. The structural protection of homesteads, village mounds, schools, markets, and the construction of flood shelters and other public places are interventions that have enabled a major change in local livelihoods which can be measured in terms of both income savings and increased economic activity.
- The infrastructure interventions associated with road building (BUILD) have also yielded measurable positive economic impacts for households located along the rehabilitated roads.
- Income generating activities in the older SHAHAR sites (Tongi and Jessore) have had a positive impact on household livelihoods.
- Tree plantation interventions in BUILD, as they are currently designed, meet their road and slope protection goals, but as income generating sources for destitute women, are inadequately designed. The number of women beneficiaries is too small, and the potential income derived from tree harvesting is, in a sense, too large. As a SO1 strategy, the tree plantation concentrates income in the hands of a few fortunate beneficiaries.

With regard to the second strategic objective, the evaluation team has noted that IFSP progress with regard to intended results is satisfactory. The HNE interventions in both FPP and in SHAHAR have successfully disseminated their messages. The beneficiary populations have demonstrated that they have assimilated the messages; however, it is not clear to the team how much behavioral and attitudinal change is occurring or at what rate. Certainly, such change is processual and slow, and immediate impacts are not to be expected.

The progress in creating effective and sustainable institutional support systems has varied widely. Specifically,

- The BUILD/Capacity and SHAHAR have demonstrated significant progress in the institutional capacity enhancement of locally-elected bodies—the union parishad and the pourashava. The team discovered clear indication of a greater level of accountability and transparency among the LEBs assisted by the project. Management skills in areas such as accounting and budget preparation are much developed, and local leaders are much more responsive to their constituencies.
- There is no clear vision for the civil society groups that have been formed to assure participatory implementation of the IFSP interventions. In particular the stakeholder groups (BUILD) and the local project societies (FPP) have not achieved their goals of effective representation of the different segments of

society and assuring that the vulnerable voices are heard and respected in public decision making.

- While some progress is noted, there is still the need to promote the participation of the vulnerable groups, including women, in project civil society groups. Presence should not be confused with effective participation.

Findings by Cross-Component Themes

Gender: The evaluation team lauds the effort of CARE/Bangladesh to promote gender awareness both within its organizational culture and within its programming. It notes that IFSP has systematically attempted to address gender integration in terms of its own staffing and in terms of its sensitivity to the beneficiary population. At the same time, the gender challenge is still an active one, and there is a necessity to reinforce gender awareness at all levels of staff and in the design of project interventions.

Institutional Sustainability: IFSP has created a number of critical partnerships with GOB and NGO organizations, and the evaluation assesses both the quality and the sustainability of these partnerships. Specifically,

- The IFSP partnership with LGED has been a successful one, primarily in infrastructural interventions.
- There is a concern of the evaluation team regarding the sustainability of the progress achieved in improving the accountability, transparency, and effectiveness of locally-elected bodies. There is no mechanism in place to assure that newly elected UPs and pourashavas will have access to skill-building opportunities in a post-project context.
- Female members in LEBs are still not fully integrated and often appear as tokens rather than effective participants. The team does realize, however, that the national situation for women in public life has improved vastly from recent history.
- Civil society groups in all the components lack a clear vision of their purpose and their role. If the intention is that they become community-based organizations that are sustainable and active, greater effort in capacity building is needed.
- Partner NGOs are a critical component in the success of the project; however the relationship between CARE and its PNGOs has been uneven and needlessly restrictive. The current initiative to create long term partnerships outside the parameters of project specific MOUs is seen as a positive step.

Environmental Compliance: It is noted that IFSP in all its component activities has complied with relevant environmental regulations. Several concerns involving wastewater and biodiversity have been identified and mitigation measures recommended.

Management Issues: The evaluation team concludes that the management of the IFSP project has been both effective and competent overall. There are, however, specific issues to be addressed:

- The regionalization of IFSP as a means of integrating the different components has had a successful start. The reorganization of project staff by strategic objective (instead by component) has been effective in instilling a great sense of integration. At the field level, however, the challenge of integration is moving more slowly. The team believes that there is significant opportunity for greater and greater levels of integration.
- The team acknowledges the programming flexibility and innovativeness that has been demonstrated by the SHAHAR component in re-evaluating and restructuring its interventions and implementation strategies.
- The monitoring and evaluation system is very complex one, and it has generated a large volume of very use data. However, the analysis of the data and the integration of this analysis into project management could be expanded.
- The team has concluded that field level staff do not have an adequate voice in project planning and evaluation. The staff are given tasks and timeframes, but the value of their frontline experience and their creativity are not adequately tapped in the project as a whole.

Recommendations

The evaluation team has compiled and prioritized two sets of recommendations—those that in the opinion of the team can be implemented in the remaining time of the project and those that represent ideas for future programming. Only the short-run recommendations are summarized here and are detailed in the text:

- Great emphasis should be placed on integrating the IFSP activities related to strategic objectives one and two. Economic and nutritional interventions should be seen as highly interrelated. HNE messages for families unable to heed them are ineffective. There are opportunities for expanding IGA activities into the FPP component, as is the case in SHAHAR.
- IFSP should articulate a consistent vision with regard to its civil society groups, i.e., stakeholder groups, LPSs, etc. The current ambiguity as to the role and composition of these groups may compromise future sustainability.
- An effective gender action plan is recommended that will initiate a set of reflective activities designed to insure gender awareness within the organizational culture and programming.
- The current disaster management component should be expanded to include a risk and disaster management structure, making it more comprehensive and providing it a role in disaster prevention and mitigation as well as response.
- The urban component has demonstrated that the timing of interventions is crucial. Specifically, the mobilization of community members should proceed infrastructural works.
- The integration of IFSP components should be further explored by such measures as incorporating the BUILD/Capacity interventions into FPP activities, using stakeholder groups to spread HNE messages, and other forms of cross-fertilization.

- The M&E division should expand the action research methodology now used in BUILD and SHAHAR to all the components. Action research should be incorporated into a wide participatory monitoring system that can better trace behavioral and attitudinal changes envisaged by the project.
- The frontline staff should be utilized more fully as a source for creative ideas for project interventions. A formal meeting or retreat opportunity to brainstorm in a non-intimidating environment is recommended.