



Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

# **Towards Sustainable Food Systems in Bangladesh**

## National Pathway Document for the UN Food Systems Summit

September 2021



This Pathway Document has been prepared by drawing on a longer and comprehensive background paper that was prepared following a consultative process. It is a living document. Changes may/will be incorporated as required.

# **Towards Sustainable Food Systems in Bangladesh**

## **National Pathway Document for the UN Food Systems Summit**

### **Introduction**

Bangladesh has made immense strides in economic growth, health, and food and nutrition security, since independence in 1971. Article 15 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh that was formulated under the visionary leadership of the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, states that it is a fundamental responsibility of the State to secure for its citizens through planned economic growth, the provision of basic necessities of life including food, clothing, shelter, education and medical care. Article 18 (1) states that raising the level of nutrition and improvement of public health are among the primary duties of the State. These have laid the foundation for the formulation of multisectoral national policies and strategies for sustainable development and economic growth.

Investment in human capital and women's empowerment, accompanied by sound macroeconomic management with a comfortable balance of payment position, and improved business climate, enabled Bangladesh to attain lower middle-income country status in 2015. A Perspective Plan: 2021-2041 (PP2041) has been developed to achieve the SDGs Agenda 2030, and to graduate to an upper middle-income country by 2031 and become a prosperous high-income country by 2041[1]. The Eighth Five Year Plan (8<sup>th</sup> FYP) for the period July 2020 to June 2025, has initiated the implementation of PP2041, targeting achievement of SDGs' targets, including the elimination of extreme poverty by 2031[2]. A long-term comprehensive Bangladesh Delta Plan (BDP) 2100 has also been formulated that focuses on economic growth, environmental conservation, and enhanced climate resilience [3]. Prior to the onset of COVID-19, Bangladesh was on track towards achieving many of the SDG targets; poverty levels declined from 44 per cent in 1991 to 15 per cent in 2016, based on the international poverty line of USD 1.90 a day<sup>1</sup> (SDG 1: End Poverty). The prevalence of undernourishment<sup>2</sup> [4], stunting, wasting, and underweight in children under 5 years reduced significantly<sup>3</sup> [5] (SDG 2: Zero Hunger). Access to safe and nutritious diets for all is a priority commitment of the Government of Bangladesh. However, food intake continues to be cereal-dominated, with the per capita daily intake of pulses, vegetables, fruits, and animal source foods (except fish) remaining between a quarter to one-half of recommended intake values [6]. There is prevalence of micronutrient malnutrition, and increasing incidence of overweight and obesity.

The National Food and Nutrition Security Policy (NFNSP) (2020) [7], and its Plan of Action (2021-2030) recognize the need for transformation of food systems. The 8<sup>th</sup> FYP focuses on the need to recover from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis and lays emphasis on following sustainable development pathways that are both inclusive and resilient to climate change. Extending social protection for the poor and vulnerable based on a lifecycle approach, and strengthened institutional mechanisms are necessary for this. In line with the vision for a Digital Bangladesh and in readiness for the 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution, the Government of Bangladesh is also working to mainstream ICTs, e-commerce, and the Internet of Things (IoT) across all sectors. Achievement of the SDGs requires increased investment in infrastructure, technology, education, capacity building, extension services, and employment generation, with a focus on sustainable food systems. This Pathway Document has been prepared following a participatory and inclusive process, with inputs from diverse stakeholders and consulting the relevant policy documents.

### **Action Areas to Achieve Agenda 2030**

Agriculture is a major driver of economic growth, contributing to 13.35% of GDP in 2019-20 and engaging 40.6% of the labour force [8]. Bangladesh is rich in crop, horticulture, animal and fish diversity. Biofortified

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/bangladesh/overview> accessed on 7 September, 2021

<sup>2</sup> The prevalence of undernourishment came down from 16.4% in 2016 to an estimated level of 9.7% in 2020

<sup>3</sup> Stunting and wasting 36 per cent and 14 per cent respectively in 2014 to 28 per cent and 9.8 per cent in 2019 and underweight from 33 per cent in 2007 to 22.6 per cent in 2019

and stress tolerant crop varieties have been developed by a dynamic agriculture research system. There are however issues to be addressed such as, excessive fertiliser and chemical use in food production, inadequate mechanization, scarcity of quality fodder and feed for livestock, poultry and fish, need to promote Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) among farmers, and need for greater linkage of research and development with extension. As part of the food systems transformation agenda, enhanced research and technology support will focus on improving input use efficiency and productivity.

Sustainable intensification, diversification, emissions reduction, and increasing resilience of production, through adoption of agroecological practices and agri-food system modernization including use of nanotechnology, and development of ocean and blue economy, will be prioritized, in line with targets under SDGs 6, 13, 14 and 15 (clean water and sanitation, climate action, life below water and life on land). The knowledge and capacity of farmers to use nature-based solutions for agricultural and animal husbandry practices will be enhanced, promoting ecosystem health, biodiversity and making sure the food system operates within planetary boundaries. Measures will be taken to strengthen backward and forward linkages so that local produce has easy access to wider markets. Private investment in inputs, processing, storage, packaging, transportation and marketing of agri-food products and services will be promoted, with special attention given to hard-to-reach areas. To boost on-farm productivity, access to extension services will be enhanced, and aggregation models such as producer groups and cooperatives will be promoted to bring economies of scale to operations<sup>4</sup>. Transformation of agri-food systems will further include environmental monitoring and water saving technologies to protect against water shortages and harmful pollution that threaten to undermine gains in food production and food security. Agricultural greenhouse gas emissions will be reduced in the crop and livestock sub-sectors, in line with latest Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)<sup>5</sup>.

Improving human and social capital, with particular emphasis on women, adolescents, and youth, is essential for effective food systems transformation. Women account for about half of the workforce in agriculture and, nearly three-fourths of rural female workforce is engaged in agriculture [9]; their increased role in decision-making is crucial. Measures will be enhanced to improve women's access to productive resources. Capacity building of women, inclusive and gender-sensitive financing arrangements, and institutional reforms to tackle gender-based inequalities and discrimination have been prioritized in both NFNSP (2020) and the 8<sup>th</sup> FYP, in line with SDG 5 (gender equality). Tailored vocational skill training, including literacy skills will be promoted to facilitate entrepreneurship and enterprise development, motivating youth to be the agents of poverty reduction. Youth will be empowered and incentivised to engage in agriculture and agri-food business.

The transformation of livelihoods for sustainable food systems requires addressing both agricultural and non-agricultural livelihoods. Smallholder farmers and the Cottage, Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (CMSMEs) in rural, peri-urban and urban areas are key actors in the food system and comprise nearly half of the labour force. Increased investment to equip them with relevant skills, and technical and financial support, will contribute to the development of commercially viable agri-food value chains. This is a priority initiative of both the National Agriculture Policy (2018) [10] and the NFNSP (2020). As laid out in the 8<sup>th</sup> FYP, under the 'My Village My Town' (MVMT) initiative, rural growth centres/markets will be identified around the country and the infrastructure improved to enable better market linkages. Specialized markets will be further developed to reduce intermediaries and improve the profitability of smallholder producers. Along with market facilities, storage, transport and communication infrastructure will also be enhanced. In addition, technical support for financial services, including mobile financing, risk coverage, and quality compliance will help enhance the productivity of small producers. Formation of producer groups, as well as contract farming, will be encouraged to enhance economies of scale in processing and marketing, thereby

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<sup>4</sup> For instance, farmers are being enabled to access mechanization and marketing services through federated *Krishok Samobay Samitees* (Farmers' cooperatives).

<sup>5</sup> [https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/ndcstaging/PublishedDocuments/Bangladesh%20First/NDC\\_submission\\_20210826revised.pdf](https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/ndcstaging/PublishedDocuments/Bangladesh%20First/NDC_submission_20210826revised.pdf)

increasing competitiveness and profitability. The use of ICT for agriculture and market linkages will be expanded, to enable critical flow of information and advisory services to farmers in rural and urban areas for fair price with profit margin.

Accelerated urbanization, driven by internal displacement due to multiple factors including climate vulnerabilities, is likely to lead to an urban population of around 46 percent in 2030 [11], which will pose development challenges. Formalization of informal sector workers and providing vocational education and training in line with international labour market trends are some of the initiatives to be taken up in response. In addition, attention will be paid to development of urban market infrastructure with backward and forward linkages. Investment and strengthening capacity of all actors in government institutions at national and sub-national levels is one of the keys to ensuring sustainable infrastructure and development in urban and rural areas. The thrust will be on coordinated governance through an integrated multistakeholder, multi-sectoral and multi-level approach.

Targeted social safety nets (SSN) for the poor and vulnerable are an important measure for attaining several SDGs, e.g., 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and are guided by the National Social Security Strategy - NSSS (2015) [12]. Over the next five years, the aim is to nurture a progressive and inclusive system through more efficient and effective delivery of SSN following a lifecycle approach and prioritizing the poorest and most vulnerable sections. The Government to Person (G2P) payment system has been rolled out and its outreach will be expanded to improve delivery. The long-term vision for social security as outlined in the 8th FYP is to have an inclusive strategy that enables all deserving Bangladeshis to overcome poverty and inequality and contribute to broader human development, employment and economic growth. The Action Plan of the NSSS for the period 2021 to 2026 has accordingly been drafted with emphasis on inclusion, and improving service and delivery.

There is substantial food and nutritional loss along the agri-food value chain arising from harvest and postharvest losses due to inadequate infrastructure and lack of updated technologies. Investment in reliable storage is beyond the capacity of individual smallholder farmers and calls for public-private sector collaboration [13]. Food spoilage, expiry, improper cooking and eating habits, and inadequate waste segregation and disposal at critical points, are among the reasons for food waste. Reducing Food Loss and Waste (FLW), a target under SDG 12.3, is a priority agenda for the country, and is articulated in the NFNSP (2020). A National Strategy on FLW will be put in place, as recommended by both the 8<sup>th</sup> FYP and NFNSP (2020). This will include investment for resource recovery and reuse. Bangladesh aims to finalize a 10-year sustainable consumption and production national action plan in consonance with SDG 12, target 12.1. Other initiatives to be taken up include the promotion of mechanization, affordable climate-smart loss reduction technologies, and on-site food processing and waste recycling technologies. Awareness building, shortening the value chain, and encouraging consumption of locally produced food including indigenous food, will be undertaken to reduce FLW. Developing reliable and sustainable access to energy, the adoption of best food safety practices by the private sector, and enforcement of regulatory and oversight systems for food safety, are other priorities to enhance off-farm value addition and commercialization of food and food products.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> National Plan of Action for Nutrition - NPAN2 (2016-2025) [14] and NFNSP (2020) highlight the importance of safe and nutritious food. A Plan of Action for the National Food Safety Strategy based on the Food Safety Act (2013) is being finalized, with emphasis on strengthening food standardization, regulation, monitoring, and quality assurance and quality control under the purview of the Bangladesh Food Safety Authority. The capacity of Bangladesh Accreditation Board, an agency of the Ministry of Industries, will be strengthened by obtaining certification (ISO 17020 and ISO 1702) to enable its membership in the International Accreditation Forum. Food quality control, food testing, and other related laboratories will be upgraded, and their capacity enhanced to obtain ISO certification.

Initiatives to address malnutrition in all its forms are being steered by the Bangladesh National Nutrition Council (BNNC) in coordination with ministries and relevant departments, under the guidance of the highest level of leadership, the Hon'ble Prime Minister of Bangladesh. The National Nutrition Policy - NNP (2015) has prioritized undernutrition, overnutrition and micronutrient deficiency, notably anaemia, among the challenges to be addressed [15]. The COVID-19 pandemic has reversed the pace of reduction of wasting in children under 5 years. Priority will be given to early detection and treatment of wasting as part of routine primary healthcare services, and ensuring referral systems as well as food supplementation for pregnant mothers are part of antenatal care services. Institutional delivery will be strengthened to ensure an increase in the number of infants born safely in institutional health facilities having received appropriate antenatal care support. A National School Meal Policy that includes providing a nutritious meal for primary school students has been approved in 2019. Considering the prevalence of micronutrient deficiencies<sup>6</sup> [16], the Government of Bangladesh has been emphasizing food fortification (both crop biofortification and industrial fortification) through different policies. The NNP (2015), NPAN2 and NFNSP (2020) recognize biofortification as a long-term agricultural investment opportunity for improving nutrition on a sustainable basis. Bangladesh has enacted the Edible Oil Fortification Act (2013) and Salt Iodisation Act (2021) for mandatory fortification of oil and salt with micronutrients; and has made provisions for industrial fortification of rice and other staples.

Global food markets have increased the accessibility of ultra-processed food that is less costly but energy-dense and nutrient poor, high in fat, sugar and salt. Access for all to healthy diets is critical for achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. To achieve nutrition outcomes, Social Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) has been integrated across nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions, including greater focus on promotion of breastfeeding, and increased consumption of affordable diversified diets. Awareness will also be generated on overweight, obesity, and increasing incidence of noncommunicable diseases. Investment in programmes and approaches to promote optimal dietary patterns and nutrient intake and enhance demand for healthy and sustainable diets are central to achieving SDGs 2, 3, 12 and 13.

The Strategic Framework for a *One Health* approach to infectious diseases in Bangladesh, outlines measures to ensure food safety and prevention of environment related human and animal health threats [17]. These measures rely on integration of control systems across animal, food, and human sectors, for the timely detection, prevention and control of animals and human diseases including cross-transmission, and tackling Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR). The framework is in line with priorities set out in the National Livestock Development Policy, and with several of the health-related SDGs to which the government is committed. The *One Health* approach calls for greater coordination and collaboration between different ministries, divisions and agencies, responsible for safeguarding human and animal health and the environment. Drawing on learnings from successful immunization drives, *One Health* Bangladesh will continue to build on its experience and advocate for human and planetary health.

Resilience is an underlying requirement for achievement of the SDGs. Bangladesh is exceptionally vulnerable to natural calamities, which are being exacerbated by the effects of climate change. The socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 has aggravated existing vulnerabilities, threatening hard earned progress in the economy, and gains made in food and nutrition security. Over the recent years, a humanitarian crisis where million Rohingya refugees have fled violence in Myanmar in successive waves of displacement and sought shelter in Bangladesh has placed immense pressure on the Bangladeshi host community and existing facilities and services. These natural and manmade shocks have the potential to disrupt the food system, increasing poverty and inequality, and jeopardizing people's access to food. In order to increase resilience to these shocks, the following priority actions will be taken to reduce climate risk and make our food systems more resilient: i) Research and development on integrated food systems,

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<sup>6</sup> Preliminary findings of the National Micronutrient Survey in Bangladesh 2019-2020 (unpublished)

strengthening institutional collaborations, linkages across cross-sectoral and cross-administrations, including informal sectors, and strengthening harmonization of policies and regulations to anticipate, prevent and adapt to shocks and evolving risk scenarios; ii) Strengthening multi-risk Early Warning Systems (EWS) and coordinated approaches linked to contingency planning, anticipatory action, and rapid emergency response including shock responsive social protection; and iii) Strengthening innovation in climate change adaptation with a focus on coastal areas, to implement innovative solutions that enable empowering vulnerable groups to make them more resilient.

The nation's food systems are being guided in the medium to long-term by the plans and strategies discussed. In addition, there are different sectoral policies and policy instruments that have been developed in the last two decades. The gaps that need to be addressed includes, establishing linkage between Food System and Health System, periodic surveillance systems on Food Systems to track progress of food and nutrition security outcomes at national and sub national levels; strengthening organizational infrastructure to support and harmonize database on Food and Nutrition Information Systems including social protection; data availability and validation as an area for further work; and age and gender disaggregated data relating to governance, implementation and coverage, that are prioritized in the national agenda. In addition, monitoring private sector investment in Food Systems is required.

### **Financial Commitments towards realizing the SDGs**

The 8<sup>th</sup> FYP has made projections for agriculture growth to rise from 3.11% in financial year (FY) 2020 to 3.90% in FY2025; the total Annual Development Programme (ADP) allocation for the 8<sup>th</sup> FYP period (FY21-FY25) in FY 2021 prices, is estimated at approximately USD14.78 billion for health, USD 5.03 billion for Social Security and Welfare, USD 15.40 billion for agriculture, USD0.72 billion for Environment and Climate Change, USD1.80 billion for Industrial and Economic Services, and USD140.02 billion as Total Development Expenditure, amounting to 74.3 per cent of total public investment<sup>7</sup> [2]. Measures will be taken for better monitoring and tracking of resource utilisation, with separate reporting of Food Systems monitoring.

The SDGs Financing Strategy prepared in 2017, provides an estimate of the annual resource gap in achieving SDG targets [18]. The estimates showed that an additional amount of USD928.48 billion (at 2015-16 prices) would be required for SDGs' implementation during the period 2017 to 2030, over the current provisions for investment related to SDGs from domestic and external sources. The annual average cost of achieving SDGs for this period is estimated at USD66.32 billion (at constant prices). Specific to SDG2, the estimates showed that an additional amount of USD16.21 billion (at 2015-16 prices) would be needed to achieve the target by 2030. The cumulative budget of the second country investment plan on nutrition sensitive food systems (2016-20) had a gap of USD3.5 billion in the cumulative budget of USD19.2 billion for the period. There is thus deficit in the budget for nutrition interventions. The resource gap is expected to further increase given the need for increased investments in response to COVID-19. The Government of Bangladesh along with UN Country teams, development partners, civil society, academia and the private sector, is actively engaged in addressing this issue, in order to meet the SDG targets.

Under the 2030 Agenda and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (2015) on financing for development, developed countries are to provide official development assistance (ODA) equivalent to 0.7 per cent of their gross national income, including 0.2 per cent allocated to the support of LDCs [19]. The COP21 (2015) had reiterated the commitment of developed countries to mobilize an additional USD100 billion per year by 2020 to address the needs of developing countries through the Green Climate Fund (GCF). As of June 2021, however, the initial resource mobilization and first replenishment amounts together amounted to only USD 20.3 billion [20]. Food systems transformation can happen only with active commitment and investment from developed countries.

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<sup>7</sup> The figures have been converted as per conversion rate of BDT 85.2 = 1USD given by Bangladesh Bank on 8 September, 2021

## Coalitions of Action to realize Agenda 2030

Bangladesh is a member of several regional (e.g., BBIN, BIMSTEC, SAARC)<sup>8</sup> and international organizations and conventions (e.g., WTO, UNFCCC)<sup>9</sup>. It is a member of the global Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement to end malnutrition, and a signatory of the Paris Agreement (COP21) on climate change. Taking the lead as a climate vulnerable country, Bangladesh is currently Chair of the 48-nation Climate Vulnerable Forum.

Building on the commitments of the government of Bangladesh for transforming Food Systems, there is considerable potential for strengthening regional and global cooperation to accelerate learning and support in meeting Bangladesh's development financing needs. Bangladesh envisions the emergence of Coalitions for Action under the United Nations Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) as an important step in line with SDG17 (Global Partnership for Sustainable Development). Bangladesh endeavours to be part of the Coalitions for Action announced for Nutrition and Zero Hunger; Healthy Diets, School Meals and Nutrition; Reducing Food Loss and Waste; Aquatic and Blue Foods; Agroecology and Sustainable Livestock and Agriculture Systems; Resilient Food Supply Chains: Local production for Local Consumption; and Climate Resilient Development Pathways. In addition, Bangladesh would like to see coalitions emerging for *One Health*; Urban Food Systems; Nutrition-sensitive Agri-food Value Chains; and Food Safety. Bangladesh is willing to lead the Coalition on Climate Resilient Development Pathways, as committed to at the UNFSS Pre-Summit. The Government of Bangladesh has already initiated work in this direction, with the Hon'ble Prime Minister of Bangladesh announcing the 'Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan – Decade 2030' to build resilience for achieving prosperity, at the first Climate Finance Summit of the Climate Vulnerable Forum in July 2021.

The Coalitions of Action will need active participation of multiple stakeholders both at the global and national levels, and greater inter-ministerial cooperation and concerted action. UN Country teams will proactively engage with the Government of Bangladesh in this process. The Food Planning and Monitoring Unit (FPMU) in the Ministry of Food will serve as the nodal agency, and coordinate with multisectoral institutions and bodies for participation in the different Coalitions of Action.

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<sup>8</sup> BBIN: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal Initiative; BIMSTEC: Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation; SAARC: South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation

<sup>9</sup> WTO: World Trade Organisation; UNFCCC: United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change



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### List of Acronyms

8 <sup>th</sup> FYP	Eighth Five Year Plan
AAAA	Addis Ababa Action Agenda
AMR	Antimicrobial Resistance
BBIN	Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal Initiative
BDP	Bangladesh Delta Plan
BIMSTEC	Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation
BNNC	Bangladesh National Nutrition Council
CMSMEs	Cottage, Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises
COP	Conference of the Parties
EWS	Early Warning Systems
FLW	Food Loss and Waste
FY	Financial Year
GAP	Good Agricultural Practices
GoB	Government of Bangladesh
G2P	Government to Person
GCF	Green Climate Fund
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IoT	Internet of Things
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
LDCs	Least Developed Countries
MVMT	My Village My Town
NDC	Nationally Determined Contribution
NFNSP	National Food and Nutrition Security Policy
NNP	National Nutrition Policy
NPAN2	Second National Plan of Action for Nutrition
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PP2041	Perspective Plan 2021-2041
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SBCC	Social Behaviour Change Communication
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SSN	Social Safety Nets
SUN	Scaling Up Nutrition
UN	United Nations
UNFCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNFSS	United Nations Food Systems Summit
WTO	World Trade Organization

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