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ENSURING EFFECTIVE SOCIAL PROTECTIONS IN BANGLADESH: THE NEED FOR MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE

Abstract

There has been increasing consciousness among the government institutions of Bangladesh about social protections as measures to protect people from becoming trapped into poverty. The country has therefore, been conducting series of Social Safety Net Programmes (SSNPs) to implement social protections for addressing the needs of the poor and the vulnerable people. These SSNPs range from relief supports for the victims of natural disasters to health and sanitation services, microfinance for rural women, and legal services for establishing citizens' rights. However, with the absence of multilevel governance in the social, political, and economic sectors of Bangladesh, the extensity of social disparity and inequality remained persistently the same. This is an important issue for a country like Bangladesh where social disparity exists both in agency and structure in which both formal and informal political, economic, social, and cultural institutions are restricting people's participation on the basis of wealth, power, and identity. Therefore, while the social protection policies and programmes have greater resonances in Bangladesh, the poorest and the vulnerable communities have not been benefited that much yet. The paper attempts to explore the emerging need for multilevel governance for the social safety net measures in Bangladesh ranging from policy formulations to implementations in effective ways. The paper addresses governance deficits and delineates the need for multilevel governance in Bangladesh. It is argued that administering SSNPs through traditional governance approaches suffer from inefficiency and specificity, thus generate a good deal of debate regarding the sustainability and impacts of SSNPs in Bangladesh. And for some functions associated with the proper delivery of social safety net programmes in Bangladesh, multilevel governance set up is more well suited.

1. Introduction

Social protection has been an eloquent public policy for addressing poverty and social exclusions in Bangladesh. Social protection is provided through social

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safety net measures, which is a set of public policies and actions that addresses not only income poverty and economic shocks, but also socially excluded people who according to Amartya Sen are deprived as such to appear in the public without shame.¹ It is evident that there has been increasing consciousness among the government institutions about social protection as a measure to protect people from becoming trapped into poverty. Bangladesh has implemented series of Social Safety Net Programmes (SSNPs) to provide social protection to the poor and vulnerable people. The country has various government agencies to conduct social protection programmes all over the country. These SSNPs range from relief supports for the victims of natural disasters to health and sanitation services, microfinance for rural women, and legal services for establishing citizens' rights. However, in the absence of multilevel governance in the social, political, and economic sectors of Bangladesh the extensity of social disparity and inequality remained persistently the same. This is an important issue for a country like Bangladesh where social disparity exists both in agency and structure in which formal and informal political, economic, social, and cultural institutions are restricting people's participation on the basis of wealth, power, and identity. In this setting, people (agency) have less participation in the decision-making process and receive few benefits. In this way, people are excluded from the processes of designing social protection measures and the wide range of livelihood strategies. Therefore, while the social protection policies and programmes have greater resonances in Bangladesh, the poorest and the vulnerable communities have not been benefited that much yet.

In such backdrop, the paper attempts to explore the emerging need for multilevel governance for the social safety net measures in Bangladesh ranging from policy formulations to implementations in effective ways. The paper addresses governance deficits and explores the need for multilevel governance in Bangladesh. The paper focuses on three areas where multilevel governance is essential for effective social safety net measures. These are:

1. Administration of the SSNPs;
2. Targeting inefficiencies of the SSNPs; and
3. Lack of effectiveness and sustainability of the SSNPs.

Accordingly, the paper is divided into six sections including introduction as section one. Section two addresses the notion of multilevel governance and its

¹ Amartya Sen further described socially excluded people as those who may be deprived of a livelihood; secure, permanent employment; earnings; property, credit, or land; housing; minimal or prevailing consumption levels; education, skills, and cultural capital; the welfare state; citizenship and legal equality; democratic participation; public goods; the nation or the dominant race; family and sociability; and humanity, respect, fulfilment and understanding. See Amartya Sen, "Social Exclusion: Concept, Application, and Security", *Social Development Papers No. 1*, Manila: Asian Development Bank, June 2000.

relevance for effective social safety net measures. Section three explores the various social protection measures in Bangladesh particularly focusing on policies and the institutions involved. The fourth section analyses the increasing demands for multilevel governance in three areas of existing social protection measures in Bangladesh. For this purpose, some of the social safety net measures are discussed in more detail. Few recommendations have been provided in section five about how to materialise the essential elements of multilevel governance in implementing social protection measures in Bangladesh. Section six draws conclusion of the paper.

2. Emergence of Multilevel Governance and its Relevance for Social Protection Measures

It is imperative to discuss the current discourses on governance before explaining the contours of multilevel governance. The notion of governance emerged in the early 1980s as a popular vocabulary in development literature which refers to the system of government concentrating on effective and accountable institutions, democratic principles, and electoral processes.² Governance thus is examined as the manner in which power is exercised in the management of country's economic and social resources for development. In a nutshell, first of all, governance is a process by which governments are selected, held accountable, monitored and replaced. Secondly, governance can be understood as management of resources efficiently, adoption of sound policies and their efficient implementations. And finally, governance is also space creation for the participation of the citizens in the affairs of the state.

In the early nineties, another approach to governance came into spotlight i.e., multilevel governance. The term indicates a changed way of governing. It refers to "a new process of governing or a changed condition of ordered rule or the new methods by which society is governed".³ The chief protagonists of multilevel governance agree that government is different from the concept of governance which indicates the formal institutions of the state and the use of monopoly legitimate coercive power at the nation-state level to maintain public order and facilitate collective actions. In this regard, according to James Rosenau, the difference between governance and government has to be recognised to get a grip on the emerging demands for governance. However, both the government and governance are exercising rule systems but the process of exercising such rule system is different. In fact, from the government perspective, rules systems

² Patricia McCarney et. al., "Towards an Understanding of Governance: The Emergence of an Idea and its Implications for Urban Research in Developing Countries" in "Perspective on the City", *Urban Research in the Developing World*, Vol. 4, Toronto: Centre for Urban and Community Studies, 1995, p. 4.

³ R A W Rhodes, "The New Governance: Governing without Government", *Political Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 4, 1996, p. 652.

encompass formal structures or institutions as for example sovereignty, constitutional legitimacy and laws. In contrast to that governance comprises of both formal and informal rules including traditional norms and habits, informal agreements, shared premises, successful negotiations, community participations and public-private partnerships that are carried out by public or private actors.⁴ Therefore multilevel governance:

- refers to a set of institutions and actors that are drawn from but also beyond government;
- identifies the blurring of boundaries and responsibilities for tackling social and economic issues and also identifies the power dependencies involved in the relationships between institutions engaged in collective actions;
- also refers to autonomous self-governing networks of actors; and
- recognises the capacity to get things done which does not rest solely on the power of the government to command or use its authority.

In this context, multilevel governance refers to a system of continuous negotiation and decisional relocations among different institutions at the national, regional and local levels. In this system national, regional and local level governments are integrated into overarching public policy networks.⁵ This public policy network in contrast to traditional policy network recognises different clusters of actors each of whom has interests or stakes in a given policy sector. These actors help to determine policy successes and sustainability at the local levels.

Multilevel governance has two dimensions of public policy formulations and implementations – vertical and horizontal. The vertical dimension of multilevel governance refers to the increased interdependence of government's institutions operating at different territorial levels, while the horizontal dimension focuses on the growing interdependence between government and people at various territorial levels. Therefore, authority has been the subject for relocation from state level institutions to institutions at the regional, local and community level, and also among formal as well as informal level. The following table shows the differences between State-centric and multilevel system of governance.

⁴ J N Rosenau, "Strong Demand, Huge Supply: Governance in an Emerging Epoch", in Ian Bache and Mathew Flinders (eds.), *Multilevel Governance*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 31.

⁵ G Marks and L Hooghe, "Contrasting Visions of Multilevel Governance", in *ibid.*, p. 15.

Table 1: State-Centric Governance vs. Multilevel Governance

Governance Aspects	State-Centric Governance	Multilevel Governance
Actor(s) of Governance	State is the most important, rational and self-interested actor which plays dominant roles in the governance process.	State is not the only dominant actor; rather State shares control and decision-making competences with different actors at different levels of governance.
Exercising authority and power	State's role is defined by the concept of state-autonomy or state-sovereignty and only state determines authority and power.	Increasing demand for re-allocation of authority and power.
Decision-making process	The State is the most influencing actor in the decision-making process. On crucial issues decision-making is based on unanimity.	Multilevel governance promotes negotiations among governments and non-state actors at several territorial ties (supranational, national, sub-national and local).

Source: Compiled from different sources by the author.

The concept of multilevel governance thus refers to the changing relationships between actors situated at different territorial levels both in the public and private sectors in terms of public policy formulations and implementations. Therefore, the relevance of multilevel governance for effective social protection measures can be argued as are manifold.

Because there has been mounting demand for social protection in the developing countries to address hunger, to respond to sudden crises or to overcome chronic poverty, social protection policies are adopted and implemented by the governments to enhance the capacity of the poor and vulnerable persons. These interventions are essential to improve the livelihoods of target population by reducing the impacts of various risks and shocks that adversely affect income levels and opportunities to acquire basic needs. Traditionally, social protection is largely about public actions implemented by a range of public institutions and programmes aimed at protecting individuals and their households from poverty and deprivation. However, social protections tend to redistribute resources toward disadvantaged groups, but such measures have not often been translated into an effective and sustainable action due to the

failure of the traditional social protection institutions to effectively reach and engage the poor and vulnerable people.⁶

This state of affairs has led to the introduction of multilevel governance with new decentralised social protection mechanism. This mechanism involves engaging more actively both the formal and informal institutions, engaging the poor and their communities in the policy designing, implementation and monitoring. Multilevel governance thus decentralises the delivery processes of public services to local and community governance structures, introduces demand-driven programme supports and, community involvement in targeting and managing social safety net supports as well as fosters group-based economic activities and resource managements. The rationales behind the introduction of multilevel governance in social protection measures are that locally formulated definition of deprivations are more consistent with local conditions and culture than rigid, technical formulas coordinated by hierarchical national authorities. The traditional institutions that have responsibilities for these programmes like social sector ministries are often weak in the local areas, and the targeted poor people have no voice and participation in these government institutions. A study shows that social programmes that involve communities, local groups, local governments and non-governmental organisations can achieve better outcomes.⁷ Multilevel governance in social programme not only harnesses but also strengthens potential social capital and community organisations. This is very important for the poorest and disadvantaged groups who can be empowered through the creation of a sense of ownership thereby enabling them more to articulate their demands and press for it. In the context of Bangladesh, the introduction of multilevel governance is very important. The country has made impressive gains in poverty reduction and, social and human development, but these achievements are increasingly being overshadowed by rising concerns about efficiency and sustainability of social protection measures. In this regard, the next section delineates the overall social protection measures in Bangladesh.

3. Social Safety Net Measures in Bangladesh

Initiatives for social safety nets are becoming increasingly important for countries like Bangladesh where a large number of people are living in abject poverty and are also excluded from formal job market. Social safety net programmes aim to provide social protection to people who are experiencing various types of economic and social hardships. Bangladesh has a set of actions – public or private – which addresses risk, vulnerability and chronic poverty.

⁶ Jonathan Conning and Michael Kevane, “Community-Based Targeting Mechanisms for Social Safety Nets: A Critical Review”, *World Development*, Vol. 30, No. 3, March 2002, p. 1.

⁷ Jeanine Braithwaite et. al., *Safety Net Programs and Poverty Reduction: Lessons from Cross-Country Experience*, Washington, DC: World Bank, 1997, p. 87.

Social protections aim to prevent adverse events, mitigate their impacts, or enhance the capacity of the poor people to cope with the adverse situation. Moreover, social safety net is also an important component of Bangladesh's poverty reduction strategy. The aims of SSNPs in Bangladesh are:

- Provide food and other emergency assistances to the victims of natural disasters and calamities so that they can improve their poverty condition;
- Develop women's skills through training, motivating savings, providing access to credits so that they can enter into income generating sectors and empower themselves;
- Provide livelihood support and subsistence allowance so that distressed women, elderly and disabled people can minimise their daily hardships;
- Support the comparatively backward region of Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), develop infrastructure for addressing the needs of the inhabitants of CHT, and equip them with necessary skills which allow them entry into the mainstream society; and
- Generate employment during slack seasons so that people in extreme poverty have employment thereby sustaining their purchasing power.

However, the major SSNPs in Bangladesh can be divided into four categories.⁸ These are:

- a. Provision of special allowances for the various underprivileged sections of the population, so that the poor and disadvantaged people can cope with their poverty situation more effectively;
- b. Provisions of employment generation through micro-credit and different fund management programmes;
- c. Food security based activities to better manage the consequences of natural disasters; and
- d. Provision of education, health, and training to make new generation more capable and self-reliant.

SSNPs in Bangladesh cover three different groups who experience different facets of shocks and risks associated with vulnerabilities and poverty. First of all, SSNPs target people who are labelled as chronic poor i.e., those who are poor even during the normal situation as they have limited access to assets and income to manage risks and vulnerabilities. As for example Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) Programme targets ultra-poor rural women who are vulnerable to chronic poverty. It is a food-based transfer with a complementary development package (training, savings, credit etc.). Each participant receives either 30kg of wheat or 25kg of micronutrient-fortified *atta* (wheat flour) each month for 24 months. The government of Bangladesh, different donors and Non-

⁸ Barkat Khuda, "Social Safety Net Programmes in Bangladesh: A Review", *Bangladesh Development Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 2, June 2011, p. 91.

governmental Organisations (NGOs) also run Food for Work programme and Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) Programme. Food for Work offers employment generation for the poor mainly during the dry season through their employment in the infrastructure construction and maintenance projects while VGF provides food aid over several months to poor households. It is used purely as an emergency programme at the time of disasters.

The second group of people are those who live close to the poverty line therefore, can easily fall into a chronic poverty situation during economic, social, and environmental crises and hardships. To address these people, the country runs several SSNPs. Among them, Programme Initiative for *Monga*⁹ Eradication (PRIME) has been launched in 2006. The programme benefits the poorest households through provision of 'seed money' and linking them to 'protection nets' whenever possible. It provides cash-for-work employment opportunities for one *monga* season, emergency credit for households to slightly increase their income, consumption loans, remittance services and specially designed flexible credit support throughout the year. The prevention aspect of the SSNPs aim to break vicious cycles that trap households during shocks and stresses – preventing, for example, sales of productive assets following a drought or flood or to pay for major family events. Besides, in September 2008, 100- Day Employment Generation Programme was initiated in response to soaring food prices. The beneficiaries under this 100-Day programme receive Tk. 100 a day for work. Registered unemployed people have been issued cards after enlisting. If the registered unemployed are not given an appropriate job within 15 days after issuance of cards, they should get unemployment allowance which is Tk. 40 per day for the first 30 days and Tk. 50 thereafter. The programme's intended focus is on eradicating unemployment and poverty, and ensuring food security.

The third group of people are those who are generally unstable and vulnerable such as the disabled, divorced, and widowed persons. In Bangladesh, the government provides monthly stipends in varying amounts to the disabled and old persons, as well as divorced women.¹⁰ These groups of people have no access to regular employment or any help from other sources. Moreover, SSNPs¹¹ for these groups of people also adopt both promotion and protection approaches. SSNPs in Bangladesh therefore, intend to raise the incomes and employment opportunities of the poor and also include measures to reduce their vulnerabilities.

All the succeeding governments in Bangladesh have been giving high priority to SSNPs to deal with risks, poverty and vulnerability of the people.

⁹ It's a seasonal hunger phenomenon in the north-western part of Bangladesh.

¹⁰ Old persons and widowed women get allowances Tk. 165 per month.

¹¹ Such as Old Age Allowances and Allowances to the Widowed, Deserted, and Destitute Women.

These programmes intend to redistribute the benefits of economic growth. In times of crisis, shock and distress, these programmes act as social, health, and economic stabilizers to reduce potential social and economic fallout of the crisis. Bangladesh through SSNPs therefore, emphasises equity and poverty reduction for promoting equitable growth and development.

However, in some aspects social protection measures lack responsiveness, efficiency, proper targeting approach therefore, lack sustainability. These governance deficits affect social safety net management system to dispense benefits to the poor and vulnerable people. In this context, there has been increasing demands for adopting multilevel governance process in the social safety net programmes in Bangladesh. Multilevel governance can develop a system and process whereby a condition can be created to expand and accommodate the poorer and vulnerable people of the society to engage in policy formulations and implementations. Multilevel governance can ensure focus on the support system that creates employment for the poor and enhances their livelihood through continuous extension of services and supports. Multilevel governance is also required for achieving human rights and basic needs, and removing constraints for the poor people in their participation in the policy formulation process as well as its implementation. The following section therefore, focuses on the key areas in social protection measures where multilevel governance process needs to be incorporated and implemented.

4. Necessity of Multilevel Governance for Efficient Social Protection Measures in Bangladesh

With a poverty figure of nearly 56 million and a food insecure population of almost 65 million, SSNPs draw greater importance in the Bangladesh Government's agenda to address vulnerabilities of the poor people. SSNPs are designed to help and transfer resources to the poor and vulnerable groups of different parts of the society for poverty reduction, social empowerment, and employment generation. Currently, the Government has good numbers of SSNPs which include direct transfers to the poor, whether in cash or in kind and with or without a work requirement. Among the 30 programmes, there are 4 unconditional and 3 conditional food transfers. The unconditional food-based programmes are: the VGD, VGF, Gratuitous Relief (GR) and Community Nutrition Programme. VGF and GR are generally used in times of natural disasters or seasonal downturns, whereas VGD and Community Nutrition Programme are ongoing programmes. The conditional food based programmes are Food-for-Work (FFW), Test Relief (TR) and Food Support for the Chittagong Hill Tracts.¹² Since the food-based programmes are the largest programmes

¹² Shaikh S Ahmed, *Social Safety Nets in Bangladesh*. Dhaka: The World Bank, 2007. Available online at <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BANGLADESHEXTN/>

among all the SSNPs, and are distributed from the Public Food Distribution System (PFDS), an analysis of the food-based programmes' budget allocation, administration and performance will unfold the necessity of multilevel governance for overall SSNPs' management in Bangladesh.

Since the independence of Bangladesh, all the successive governments have tried to ensure effective delivery of the social safety net supports to the poor and vulnerable people. However, for effective social protection measures for the poor people in Bangladesh, any effort must fulfil four things. First, the social safety net needs to be focused on geographically located poverty pocket areas such as the *Monga* prone areas of the north-western part of Bangladesh. Poverty pockets also include the people living in the *Haor*, *Char* (island) and coastal-belt regions of the country. Second, social safety net should address the large number of unemployed and informal workers both in the urban and the rural areas as well as should include measures to integrate them with the formal income generating activities. Third, social safety net should be sustainable i.e., they should also help to elevate the conditions of the poor as well as protect them from not being falling again below the poverty line. And finally, efficient implementations of the SSNPs should include an integrated and comprehensive framework.

In Bangladesh, the overall impacts of social safety net programmes still remains relatively low as the real impacts of the transfer or allocation of funds are difficult to reach the real target people. The extensity of coverage and qualities of these SSNPs are questionable. According to a World Bank study, "even if the interventions were perfectly targeted, that would still mean that less than 10 per cent of the poor receives benefits due to miss-targeting and leakages, only about 6-7 per cent of the poor are actually covered."¹³ Although the government has plethora of social protection promises, they have not reached to the target people properly. Therefore, some overall governance challenges remain there for their effective implementations.

On the other hand, multilevel governance in the context of social safety net measures in Bangladesh can also be viewed as a cross-cutting issue to address the processes and impacts of SSNPs. In Bangladesh, there are three key major areas in the management of SSNPs wherein lack of multilevel governance results in the deprivation of the poor, women, and the vulnerable people from the social protection measures of the country. These are discussed in the following subsections.

4.1 Centralised Administration of SSNPs

Resources/ 295759-1240185591585/ BangladeshSocialSafetyNets.pdf, accessed 14 December 2011.

¹³ The World Bank, "Social Safety Nets in Bangladesh: An Assessment", *Policy Note*, No. 33411, Dhaka: The World Bank, 14 September 2005, p. 18.

The administration of social safety net programmes has come under scrutiny to assess their efficient implementations in Bangladesh. From the administrative point of view, these programmes are becoming more and more centralised and hierarchical. The government currently runs a total of 84 programmes under the SSNPs.¹⁴ Thirteen ministries and various international donor agencies are involved in implementing these SSNPs. The numbers of agencies both national and international involved in providing social protection are testimony to the heightened importance of this sector. But sometime this may also cause a hurdle when there is a need to coordinate and navigate through many different agencies to achieve an objective or to accomplish a task. As a result several coordination problems are usually associated with the SSNPs in Bangladesh. These are:

- Problems arising out of existence of multiplicity in planning as well as in executing the programmes. Overlapping of implementing agencies has become a regular phenomenon. This large mechanism has also increased implementation costs.
- Lack of ownership and effective mechanism to ensure accountability and transparency.
- Absence of single policy-making authority for SSNPs.
- Presence of large number of intermediaries in the distribution system of the programmes which reduces efficiency and increases chances of leakages.
- The weaknesses of the local government institutions especially the *Union Parishads* (Union Councils) primarily responsible for implementation of the programmes have also been identified as a major cause for concern.¹⁵

Almost everything related to SSNPs are designed by the central government and there is virtually no coordination with the local governments in relation to decision-making in these processes. Apart from this problem, government has made small allocation for SSNPs in the national budget as for example in FY 2011-12, the total allocation for SSNPs is Tk. 22,556.05 crore which is about 13.79 per cent of the total budget and only 2.51 per cent of GDP. In Bangladesh, the allowances or the benefits the poor receive are inadequate to their needs. Except VGD Programme, food supports are provided for a short period in response to seasonal or emergency needs. Although most programmes are based

¹⁴ “Social safety net shrinks: 40 lakh beneficiaries dropped”, *The Daily Star*, 10 June, 2011.

¹⁵ PPRC-UNDP, *Social Safety Nets in Bangladesh: Review of Issues and Analytical Inventory*, Vol. 1, Dhaka: UNDP Bangladesh, and Power and Participatory Research Centre (PPRC), April 2011, p. 33.

on some well defined criteria, very few programmes have a strategy for graduating the beneficiaries.¹⁶

4.2 ‘Targeting Inefficiencies’ of the SSNPs

In SSNPs targeting method refers to the set of rules, selection criteria, certain benchmarks and other elements of programme design that define beneficiary eligibility. Targeting mechanism also includes very important elements of programme design i.e., intermediary agents and organisational design. This aspect allows for the possibility that different intermediary agents across the different levels of programme using the same targeting methods could obtain better results. Multilevel governance in targeting methods refers to the inclusion of local and community based institutions/agents in the mechanism. These local and community based agents assess eligibility and provide assistance in implementing delivery services. Their roles are valuable and crucial for determining actual beneficiaries and assessing their needs thereby helping the targeting mechanism to achieve the target outcomes.

For long, Bangladesh has been channelling large amount of resources for distributing food and cash aid through various SSNPs. In the early nineties, the country has shifted from a distribution system largely based on a rural ration programmes to a system based on targeted programmes for the poor. An important issue with regard to coverage of SSNPs is whether poor people are effectively targeted by these programmes. Shifting of distribution system alone however reflect little about the programme’s reach to the neediest populations. Moreover, the absence of multilevel governance creates scope for inefficiency in targeting mechanisms as they fail to address regional and seasonal needs, and selection of deserving poor and vulnerable people. These are further discussed below.

4.2.1 Ignoring Regional and Seasonal Vulnerabilities

Lack of multilevel governance process led to the negligence in acknowledging the variations of poverty scenarios across different divisions in Bangladesh. For example, according to a study,¹⁷ improvements in the poverty situation due to SSNP’s were most prominent for Sylhet. Though Sylhet had the highest share of beneficiary households and participation, Khulna deserved the highest allocation due to the poverty incidence. In 2005, Sylhet received the largest share of benefits - 24.31 per cent for rural beneficiaries and 11.25 per cent for urban beneficiaries. In contrast, Khulna received the lowest - 11.03 and 4.23

¹⁶ Shaikh Shamsuddin Ahmed *et.al.*, *Are the Poor Protected? Vulnerability and the Role of Safety Net in the Breaking Down Poverty in Bangladesh*, Dhaka: University Press Limited, 2009, p. 275.

¹⁷ Shaikh S Ahmed, *op. cit.*, pp. 6-8.

per cents respectively for rural and urban households. The VGF had the highest number of beneficiaries, at around 33.34 per cent of the total. Sylhet had the largest number of VGF beneficiaries. Similar trend is evident in the VGD program which provided assistance to 17.11 per cent households, with Dhaka having the most VGD beneficiaries.¹⁸ Most of these programmes are jointly funded by the Government and the donors. However, while donors have interests in targeting based on food insecurity and vulnerability maps, the Government's resources at times target less food-insecure areas – a reflection of its own political agenda and need to cater to the local political actors.

Due to the absence of multilevel governance, the targeting mechanism also does not take into account the geographical variations in poverty and vulnerability across different regions in Bangladesh. Rural and urban differences in safety net coverage now a day are important debatable issues as most of the SSNPs have high coverage in rural areas. Focus on rural needs is justifiable as most of the poor people in Bangladesh live in rural areas. But recently with the rapid growth of urbanisation, poor people have been forced to migrate in the urban areas and been compelled to live below the poverty line. It is estimated that 43 per cent of urban households live below the poverty line among which 23 per cent are considered extreme poor. Around 35 per cent of the population of six major cities live in slums which cover only 4 per cent of their land area with limited or no access to services.¹⁹ The urban poor are forced to work for nominal wages and have less access to formal job sectors. Limited income does not meet their food needs and basic survival in the face of soaring food prices and increasing living costs in urban areas. The increasing rate of urban poverty requires enhanced SSNPs intervention to assist the urban poor.²⁰

In recent years, SSNPs have given attention to the problems of specific vulnerabilities in a given geographic location in Bangladesh especially in the *Monga* prone areas in the North-west part of the country. However, there is an acute realisation that location and season specific attention may also be needed in other areas as well. The coastal areas of Southern Bangladesh is exposed to ever increasing challenges due to climate change with ensuing sea level rise, salinity intrusions, water logging, erosions, and increased frequency of natural disasters. The same realities exist in *char* areas. The main natural and physical barriers for the *char* lands are that they are remote area because of their distant location to the mainland, and repeatedly hit by floods which limit the work opportunities for the *char* dwellers. People living in distant *char* land also endure very insecure

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Urban Health Update, *Bangladesh, Urban Poverty, Climate Change and Built Environment*, 2008, available online at <http://urbanhealthupdates.wordpress.com>, accessed on 12 January 2012.

²⁰ Fahmida Khatun, et.al., *National Budget Analysis for the Ultra Poor*, Dhaka: CPD-BRAC, 2011, p. 2

livelihoods due to river erosions that cause great vulnerability in terms of loss of cultivable land, homestead and assets, and disrupting roads and communication networks as well as interrupting the marketing of agricultural products. Moreover, the poverty situations in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) areas are quite different from other plain land areas in Bangladesh. The causes of poverty and vulnerability are deep rooted in the history of CHT. Economic inequality accompanied with differences in ethnicity, language and culture aggravated the overall poverty situation of the people in the CHT. All of these issues of vulnerabilities and poverty in different areas should be addressed in the SSNPs' coverage mechanism. Another problem with targeting is that SSNPs do not consider local realities and cropping patterns during delivery of services. The newly adopted Employment Generation Programme (EGP) operates in two lean seasons of the year to assist the rural ultra poor most of whom are agricultural day labourers at times when they have no access to income generating activities. In reality, as crop cycles vary with different agro-ecoregions, lean periods do not prevail uniformly across the country.

In this backdrop, rather than following a hierarchical top-down methods of targeting, the SSNPs design should consider involving the local and community agents to collect information from the cluster-wise areas of poverty, who will also pay due attention to the issues of socio-political forces, geographical barriers, cropping patterns, and natural disasters as well as suggest appropriate time-frame for interventions. In view of this, a bottom up method of decision-making is required for targeting mechanism, and intervention mechanism needs to be designed by the local agents and community people as well.

4.2.2 Selection of Beneficiary

SSNPs in Bangladesh adopt different criteria for selecting beneficiaries. According to the table presented below, though the objectives of some SSNPs i.e. VGD, VGF and Food for Work are same, they use different criteria.

Table: 2: Beneficiary Selection Criteria

Name of the Program	Purpose	Targeting Criteria
VGF	To provide food and other emergency assistance to disaster victims.	Disaster and calamity victims.
VGD	1. Developing life skills for women through training, motivating savings and providing scope for availing credits. 2. Building social awareness on disaster management and nutrition through group-training.	1. Households with not more than 15 acres of land. 2. Households with income less than Tk. 300 and dependent upon seasonal wage employment. 3. Women of reproductive age (18-49).

		4. Day labour or temporary worker. 5. Households with little or no productive assets.
FFW and Cash for Works	1. Employment generation for the poor in slack season. 2. To develop and maintain rural infrastructure.	1. People who are functionally landless. 2. People who lack productive resources.
TR (Rural Maintenance Program)	1. Employment generation for the poverty stricken people in the rainy season. 2. To develop and maintain rural infrastructure.	Generally a location is targeted where poverty is relatively severe.
Old Age Allowance	To provide livelihood support to the elderly poor people.	1. At least 65 years of age. 2. Income equal to Tk. 2000. 3. Must not have worked in formal sector. 4. Number of beneficiaries is determined on the basis of the category of the Union. 5. 50 per cent of the beneficiaries are women.

Source: Shaikh S Ahmed, *Social Safety Nets in Bangladesh*. Dhaka: The World Bank, 2007. Available online at <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BANGLADESHEXTN/Resources/295759-1240185591585/BangladeshSocialSafetyNets.pdf>, accessed 14 December 2011. p. 9.

In most cases, guidelines for targeting are prepared by the responsible administrative ministry assigned to implement the programme. They set selection criteria at the household level, the total number of beneficiaries, and the number of beneficiaries per Union. Some programmes such as VGD, VGF and Old Age allowance according to the table target similar low income groups but use different criteria to identify beneficiaries. Sometimes all the indicators designed to select beneficiaries are difficult to follow and verify. For instances, first, it is difficult to verify income and, identify the household which consumes less than two full meals a day. Second, there is considerable vagueness about the targeting criteria which uses land possession as a way of differentiating between the poor and non-poor. These criteria could lead to significant misallocation of resources. Currently people who own at most 5 decimals of land are classified as very poor. However given the fact that 59 per cent of the poor have less than 5 decimals of land, as do 36 per cent of the non-poor, a random selection of households based on land possession could lead to selecting over one-third of the non-poor. Thus there remains the possibility of government's scarce resources being diverted to the non-poor, a sign of the inadequacy of the coverage of SSNPs. A recent study shows that in many programmes, poor people do not have access to programme benefits whereas non-poor become beneficiaries through errors of inclusion

which are as high as 20 per cent.²¹ And third, the age of the beneficiaries remain to be a controversial issue. Although government recognises the need for older women to receive assistance, the guidelines of the VGD and FFW programmes do not encourage their selection as in most cases they are not able to participate in the training programme.

The above discussion shows that absence of multilevel governance causes ineffective targeting mechanism. It also creates space for intermediaries viz., patron clientele, local leaders etc., in the SSNPs. The lack of local and community level selection and monitoring mechanism increases leakages in the programmes by degrading quantity as well as quality of supports, which are discussed in the following section.

4.3 Lack of Effectiveness and Sustainability of SSNPs

Studies point to leakages of the magnitude of 10-50 per cent for food-based programmes and 5-25 per cent for cash-based programmes. These studies show a strong correlation between the number of intermediaries in the transfer process of a programme and the degree of leakage in the programme.²² A recent FAO report estimated that 11-12 per cent of the funds of the social protection programmes are drained out through several channels. One per cent of the benefit is leaked out as bribe, 7 per cent lost through mal-targeting and 3-4 per cent for receiving less than the prescribed amount. Having close relationships with local representatives, giving bribes and belonging to the vote bank of an influential member or chairmen appeared to be very important qualifications for receiving benefits of the social protection programmes. Around 14.5 per cent of the beneficiaries used the channel of giving bribes of which two-thirds managed access to the programmes, while one-fifth received benefits through social connections. Only one-third of the beneficiaries were selected purely on the basis of poverty. Overall, however, the study found that local governments were managing the programmes quite well with limited overlapping, low degree of leakage and misuse of funds.²³ Nevertheless, since there is no unanimous agreement on the acceptable level of leakage, it is difficult to accurately judge the situation.

Moreover at present the major discussion on social safety net focuses on sustainability. One of the main objectives of these programmes is to concentrate on the efficient management of resources mainly for the poor and vulnerable so that they are able to sustain certain living standards and do not fall into the trap of poverty in future. Sustainable social safety net requires comprehensive programmes in order to:

²¹ Iffat A Sharif, *Building a Targeting System for Bangladesh based on Proxy Means Testing*, Dhaka: World Bank, 2009.

²² S S Ahmed, *op. cit.*

²³ "12 pc Social Safety Net Lost on bribe, flaws", *The Daily Star*, 09 February 2009.

- Ensure employment generating activities for reducing the vulnerability of low-income households with regard to basic consumption and access to basic services;
- Enhance long term income generating activities through training; and
- Ensuring equity and empowerment of the poor people with regard to access to resources and decision-making process.

In Bangladesh, these sustainability issues of social safety net remains a major challenge. The SSNPs have low impacts on the income generating activities as they cover only a fraction of the poor. Most safety net programmes in Bangladesh pay little attention to demographic vulnerability in terms of the poor's limited access to income generating activities. As for example these programmes pay little attention to demographically vulnerable people including children, the elderly and those who are severely disabled or chronically ill therefore, are often not able to perform the intense physical labour involved in cash or food-based public works programmes.

The country faces resource constraints hence its ability to undertake safety net on a large scale is limited. Moreover, resources are not allocated on the basis of local realities and necessities. Clearly, most of the resources are allocated to the rural people as relief or aid, not for providing training or assets for livelihood supports. For instance, the country focuses more on VGF for resource allocation rather than VGD. In fiscal year 2011, the VGF received Tk. 1,536 crore and VGD received only Tk. 638 crore for programme implementation. VGF is a relief supports for emergency purposes. Therefore continuing pouring of VGF resources in the hands of poor can make them too dependent on free meals. They should be provided with long term, locally oriented income generating trainings so that they can be self-dependent rather than relying on others' help. The existing VGD programme is providing food and training for the selected poor households. It provides training for life-skills and capacity-building needed to undertake income generating activities. Generally, this programme is designed to provide food grains and training to the vulnerable people, mostly women, for a certain period, after which those women will utilise their training to start their own venture. But in reality very few entrepreneurial activities are taking place for lack of capital and access of the women to income generating activities. Therefore, few initiatives need to be undertaken to incorporate multilevel governance practices in the overall management of SSNPs in Bangladesh to ensure their effectiveness.

5. Few Recommendations

If social safety net is to be made effective and sustainable, it is necessary that the vulnerable and poor's voice and participation are properly heard and considered. People should be considered as agent of change rather than passive recipients. Multilevel governance approach can ensure people's participation as

agent of change in the SSNPs. Following are some of the recommendations that can be adopted at various levels to create a condition of multilevel governance for pro-poor SSNPs.

5.1 Decentralising the Authority

First and foremost multilevel governance approach to address poverty must opt for comprehensive decentralisation of the authority. Local government and locally elected bodies should be given the core responsibilities to design proper development initiatives and appropriate strategies to address poverty challenges. Decentralised authority plays the interfacing role between the democracy and development. Decentralisation of authority can create the institutional mechanism for ensuring participation of the various socially and economically excluded groups of the rural community. Local level governance can place emphasis on the pro-poor focus and stresses on participatory social delivery services involving wider rural communities i.e., farmers, landless households, different occupational and ethnic groups, and women. It can also play an important interfacing role in rural economic development through mobilization of the rural human capital especially in areas like fisheries, social forestry, small-scale water development and micro-credit. It can also directly assist in designing and managing SSNPs and also scaling them up through introducing new entrepreneurs and monitoring tomorrow's poor. Multilevel governance at the local level can also address immediate income/consumption poverty issues. Regular and top-down service delivery system mainly focuses on supply side and thus cannot directly tackle demand-side issues. Multilevel governance can reduce the administrative and management costs associated with the implementation of safety net programmes. Delivering safety net services through local and community organisations eludes the need to establish new institutional or organisational structures, thereby enables social protection to be built upon existing processes and procedures.

5.2 Local Level Planning and Resource Allocation Process

In general, social safety net planning and resource allocation in Bangladesh is top down and lacks transparency in which decisions are skewed in favour of those who directly or indirectly exercise power. Therefore it requires full participations of the programme beneficiaries at the local level for proper planning and efficient implementation. This approach fosters openness, sharing of ideas and generates debate among competing alternatives and opportunities. This will prevent arbitrary decisions which are biased against the poor. To this end, existing people's organisations at the community level should be strengthened and a sense of ownership needs to be imparted so that they can participate in the programme planning and implementation process. Systematic education and information about rights and duties will also enhance their ability

to make appropriate claims as well as will enable them to perform a supervisory function over the programme to prevent selection errors and leakages. Multilevel governance thus rests on the condition where a mechanism needs to be developed for assured participations of the poor and the disadvantaged groups in the local level planning.

5.3 Ensure People-oriented Public Delivery System

People oriented public delivery system requires local level needs assessment initiatives to target actual beneficiaries. People's participation in the delivery system ensures coverage and improvements in the quality of resource distributions. Local information and knowledge on people's livelihoods, resources, and rights are critical for designing and strengthening the delivery system. This system also ensures investment in human capital thereby enabling greater participation of the people by empowering them through mobilizing their talents in community development projects.

6. Conclusion

This paper argues that there are good grounds to explore the relationships between SSNPs and the use of multilevel governance system in Bangladesh. Traditional governance approaches suffer from inefficiency and specificity and thus generate a good deal of debate regarding the sustainability and impacts of SSNPs in Bangladesh. The discussion put forward in this paper argues that there are some functions associated with the proper delivery of social safety net programmes for which a multilevel governance approach is best suited. The needs and aspirations of the poor can be addressed through an understanding of the multilevel governance approach in Bangladesh as well as redesigning the whole management system of the SSNPs under the multilevel governance framework. From this perspective, well-designed and well-targeted SSNPs through the application of the principles of multilevel governance can be fiscally cost-effective while it will also protect and, at the same time, help the poor to get out of the poverty.