

Government activities in poverty alleviation

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Significant success has been achieved in the poverty alleviation of Bangladesh by government and private efforts and the coordinated efforts of various social enterprises. As a result of the implementation of the government's planned policies, the poverty rate in Bangladesh has decreased despite the global recession due to the effects of the Russia-Ukraine war after the Covid-19 outbreak. According to the preliminary report of the 'Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2022', the country currently has a poverty rate of 18.7 percent and an extreme poverty rate of 5.6 percent. Note that according to the 2016 Khana Income and Expenditure Survey, the poverty and extreme poverty rates were 24.3 percent and 12.9 percent respectively. However, the poverty rate has decreased more in urban areas than in rural areas. This rate is 5.9 percent in rural areas and 4.2 percent in urban areas.

Bangladesh's success in implementing poverty alleviation strategies such as expanding social safety nets for people at risk of poverty, financial incentives, encouraging micro-savings, effective disaster risk reduction programs and building resilience to the effects of climate change has attracted global attention. In order to implement various programs taken by the government to reduce poverty, various public and private institutions, autonomous organizations are running various activities including providing micro loans. Besides, the government is taking steps for the welfare of poor people of the country by providing old age allowance, widow and widower allowance, destitute women allowance in social security provisions. On the one hand, the government is implementing multifaceted development projects with the aim of structural transformation of the economy, on the other hand, it is constantly increasing the scope of the social safety net to reduce poverty and inequality for inclusive development. In addition to the large development programs, multi-faceted programs are being conducted simultaneously to meet the basic needs of the backward, poor and helpless people of the society.

Notable among the social security programmes are the old age allowance program; Widow and Spouse Women's Allowance Scheme; Insolvent Disability Allowance Programme; Scholarship programme for students with disabilities; Programmes to improve the quality of life of the transgender community; Development of the Living standards of the Bede community; Development programmes for the quality of life of backward communities; Disability Identification Survey Program; Rehabilitation and alternative employment for people involved with begging; Financial support Programmes for patients with cancer, kidney, liver cirrhosis, stroke, paralysis, congenital heart disease and thalassemia and Life improvement programme for tea workers. In the current financial year, the number of beneficiaries in the social security sector is 1 crore 15 lakh 71 thousand 567 and Tk 1,30,08 crore has been allocated.

In the financial year 2023-24, the number of elderly beneficiaries is 58.01 lakh, the number of widows and dependent women beneficiaries is 25.75 lakh and the number of beneficiaries under the education stipend program for disabled students is 1 lakh. Also, the number of disability allowance beneficiaries has been increased from 23.65 lakh to 29 lakh in the financial year 2022-23 and the monthly allowance has been increased from Tk 750 to Tk 850. At present, under the social security program, the beneficiaries of only these four programs total 106.41 lakh people, which is about 3.47 percent more than the total beneficiaries of the previous financial year. With the aim of building a digital Bangladesh of the government, allowances are currently being given to all individuals under the digital management system for the convenience of the beneficiaries. 115.741 lakh beneficiaries under Social Security Programme are receiving benefits through G2P system through MFS Institutions 'Cash', 'Bikash' and Agent Banking. In addition to various programs like food assistance, food in exchange for work, sale of goods in the open market, the government also provides cash assistance under the social security programme. A brief description of some of the important activities related to cash assistance under the Social Safety Net Program is presented below:

Elderly Allowance Programme: This program was started from the fiscal year 1997-98. Initially 5 men and 5 women per ward were given allowance at the rate of 100 taka per month. The number of beneficiaries and the amount of allowance have been increased gradually. Poor and vulnerable senior citizens of the society whose age is 65 years or above in case of men and 62 years or above in case of women can come under this scheme. In the financial year 2023-24, the number of beneficiaries under this programme is 58.01 lakh, each of whom is getting monthly allowance at the rate of Rs.600.

Widows and Deserted Women's Allowance Programme: With the aim of social protection and empowerment of poor, vulnerable and backward women, the Government of Bangladesh launched the 'Widows and Deserted Women's Allowance' program in the fiscal year 1998-99. Initially, under this program, 4.03 lakh women were getting allowance at the rate of Tk 100 per month. In the financial year 2023-24, the number of beneficiaries is 25.75 lakhs, each of whom is getting allowance at the rate of Rs.550 per month. **Maternity Allowance for Poor Mothers:** Maternity Allowance was introduced for the first time in the financial year 2007-08. Financial assistance is mainly provided to poor mothers in rural areas under this. Under this programme, poor pregnant women are given health and nutrition training along with allowances. Earlier this allowance was paid at the rate of 500 taka per month. At present, the monthly maternity allowance for poor mothers has been increased to Tk 800. Besides, the period of payment of allowance has also been increased from 24 months to 36 months.

Working Lactating Mother Support Fund: This programme started from the financial year 2010-11. This allowance is provided to working poor mothers in urban areas to support maternal health and full development of their unborn child or newborn child. Dhaka, Narayanganj and Gazipur garment industrial areas and all city corporations/municipalities of the country have been included in this programme. Earlier, a mother used to get this support for 24 months by paying Tk 500 per month. Both the amount and duration of allowance have been increased from FY 2018-19. A mother gets this support for 36 months by paying Tk 800 per month.

Freedom Fighter Honorary Allowance: The government is working tirelessly to improve the quality of life of freedom fighters, the best children of the nation. From the financial year 2021-22, the honorarium of freedom fighters has been increased from Tk 12,000 to Tk 20,000 per month. Awarded freedom fighters are being given 2 festival allowances at the rate of 10 thousand taka per year along with honorarium allowance. At present, monthly honorarium is paid at the rate of Rs 35,000 to Bir Shrestha, Rs 25,000 to Bir Uttam and Rs 20,000 to Bir Bikram and Bir Pratikam. At present, all the freedom fighters are being given honorarium in G2P system in all the districts of the country. Bengali New Year allowance of Tk 2,000 is being given to freedom fighters from the financial year 2018-19 along with honorary allowance and festival allowance. Besides, special honorarium of 5000 taka per head is being given to all living freedom fighters on the occasion of Victory Day. A separate program has been launched for the treatment and honorarium of the families of martyrs and war injured freedom fighters.

Allowance for indigent disabled persons: The indigent disabled allowance programme was introduced in the financial year 2005-06. Under this programme, in the beginning, 1 lakh 4 thousand 166 disabled persons were given allowance at the rate of Tk 200 per month. In the financial year 2023-24, 29 lakh beneficiaries are getting allowance at the rate of Tk 850 per month. **Education stipend for disabled students** Through the Ministry of Social Welfare, the program of 'Education stipend for disabled students' was launched in the financial year 2007-08. In the beginning, the number of beneficiaries under this programme was 12 thousand 209 people. Under this program in the financial year 2023-24, 01 lakh beneficiaries are being given stipend at the rate of 900 taka per month at the primary level, 950 taka at the secondary and higher secondary level and 01 thousand 0300 taka at the higher level. **Capitation Grant of Private Orphanage:** Capitation grant of Tk 2,000 per person is provided for taking care of up to 50 percent of orphans in private orphanages registered by Department of Social Services with a minimum of 10 orphans.

Livelihood Development Program of Bede Community: In the fiscal year 2012-13, the implementation of this programme was started as a pilot in 7 districts of the country namely Dhaka, Chittagong, Dinajpur, Patuakhali, Jessore, Naogaon and Habiganj districts. Currently, this program is being implemented in a total of 64 districts by expanding the programme.

The main goal of the current government is to move forward with all those who are backward in the society. And only through this, a developed Bangladesh without discrimination, hunger and poverty will be possible.

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