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Joint Government of Bangladesh/Donor Task Force

on

Strengthening the Institutions for Food Assisted Development

FINAL REPORT

SUMMARY

Ministry of Planning

July 1989

TABLE OF CONTENTS - SUMMARY

	Para Numbers
1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1-17
- The Central Theme	1-2
- The Analytical Approach	3-6
- The Recommended Institutional Framework	7-13
- Transition and Action Planning	14-17
2. SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONDITIONS FOR FUTURE ACTION	2.1-2.64
- The Social and the Development Problem	2.1-2.2
- The Existing Food-Assisted Programmes	2.3-2.5
- Future Perspectives	2.6-2.10
- The Need to Build National Capacities	2.11-2.13
- Constraints in the Current Institutional Framework	2.14
- Decentralisation Policy	2.15-2.17
- Proposed Institutional Changes and Their Implications	2.18-2.42
- Other Recommended Changes and Areas for Action	2.43-2.64

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Central Theme

1. The central theme of this report is that the majority of food aid to Bangladesh is supplied not just on humanitarian grounds but also to support the social and economic development of the people and of the country as a whole. Over the past 14 years approximately the humanitarian purposes of food aid have been served quite well. Seasonal and year-round employment has been created for very large numbers of people under the Food-for-Work (FFW) programme and the Rural Maintenance Programme (RMP). Income transfers in the form of wheat allowances have been made to very large numbers of women under the Vulnerable Groups Development (VGD) programme. In other words, short-term benefits have been provided by the food itself to the intended target groups.

2. But the longer term development impact of what is done with this targetted food aid has been short of expectations, short of the possibilities. The principal task, therefore, is to enhance the development impact of the food aid. And to do this there must in the future be a new emphasis on the development functions themselves, including the development and maintenance of rural infrastructure, human resource development among the rural poor and a range of possible new development functions in the future.

The Analytical Approach

3. There are several reasons for the shortcomings in achieving the development objectives of targetted food aid. Some are historical, deriving from the original pressing need in 1974/75 to provide relief and to minimise the loss of life following the 1974 floods and famine. At that time, speed was of the essence and the development objectives of food aid were not emphasised. It has only been since the dramatic growth of the food assistance that its development potential has begun to be appreciated (Figure 5.1, Chapter 5). Nevertheless, there are some aspects of the original design of food aid arrangements that are still highly beneficial. Food aid now represents in the order of 20 per cent of international development assistance to Bangladesh. Moreover it is by far the easiest form of assistance to negotiate and it has flowed smoothly and rapidly from the donors to the government and from the government to the people. It has not suffered the delays and pipeline blockages experienced by most other forms of aid.

4. Today, other reasons for shortcomings in the development impact of food aid include budgetary, organisational, technical, programming and institutional factors. Institutionally, we have characterised food aid as being isolated from the mainstream of the national development effort (Figure 6.2, Chapter 6). The programming, sectoral deployment and allocation of food resources is also by and large divorced from other resources. Technically, the FFW, RMP and

VGD programmes have inadequate access to specialised planning, design and supervision services. Organisationally, they are inadequately staffed both at central and local levels. Budgetary shortcomings are principally not that the food resources need incremental financial allocations but that they are inadequately blended with existing financial allocations devoted to similar development functions (e.g. infrastructure and poverty alleviation). In brief, the food-assisted programmes have far outgrown their original design and the institutional strain has been getting more and more severe.

5. In the future, it is impossible to predict how long Bangladesh will need food aid. But from international experience it is highly unlikely that the achievement of national self-reliance or self-sufficiency in foodgrain will remove the need for food aid. Nor, certainly, will it remove poverty. In the future, what may happen is a decline in the need for aid in the form of grain. But other types of food commodities such as edible oil and pulses may still be required. Food targetting is also likely to be justified quite long into the future, though perhaps with the substitution of domestically-procured grain for international grain.

6 Thus, the report contends that, on the one hand, the development functions in rural infrastructure, poverty alleviation and other fields of work will have to be pursued long into the future. On the other hand, food targetting, with or without international food aid, will also probably be required for long to come. Seen in these terms, the task of putting in place the best possible institutional arrangements for handling food resources is itself justified in the national interest - not just because so much food aid is currently being received.

The Recommended Institutional Framework

7. The Task Force recommends major institutional changes and extensive institutional strengthening. We have explored several different possibilities and approaches. The changes recommended are designed to incorporate food resources more closely into the mainstream of national development planning and administration. They are designed also to create a situation in which the planning, design, implementation, supervision and follow-up of activities using food resources can draw on specialised services and personnel in the relevant fields. To minimise the cost and difficulty of achieving these institutional objectives - and because it makes sense in any case - our recommendations hinge on integration of the food resources and on the rational utilisation of available specialised institutions. The great majority of the targetted food is channelled to the Upazilas to support development activities conceived and implemented at the local level. Hence, most of the recommended changes are designed to make it easier for the Upazilas Parishads to choose the best possible schemes, to draw on an appropriate blend of food and financial resources to complete those schemes properly, and to enhance the effectiveness of their teams of specialised transferred civil servants..

8. The proposed changes would not of themselves automatically guarantee immediate solutions to all the various difficulties faced by the food-assisted programmes. They would, however, permit improvements to be made : they would put in place a framework in which it would be worthwhile to pursue the necessary improvements in the national interest.

9. The key elements of the recommended framework are :

- a new role for the Planning Commission for the strategic overview of food resources, their sectoral (not detailed) allocation, and their blending with necessary financial and other resources;

- a revised structure for the annual Upazila block grant, to include a General Grant (in cash); an Infrastructure Development and Maintenance Grant (in cash and food); and a Bittaheen Unnayan Grant (in cash and food);

- a consolidated role for the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives in allocating the revised, blended block grant to the Upazilas;

- at the Upazila level, a rationalisation and clarification of the roles of different elements in the specialised teams of transferred civil servants, including a consolidated role for the Upazila Engineering Offices for food-assisted rural infrastructure and a consolidated role for the Upazila Rural Development Offices for food-assisted poverty alleviation work;

- extension of the role of BRDB in providing technical support and advisory services to the Upazilas in respect of food-assisted poverty alleviation work;

- extension of the role of LGEB in providing technical support and advisory services to the Upazilas in respect of food-assisted rural infrastructure development and maintenance.

10. There are various other aspects of the food-assisted programmes in need of further analysis, rationalisation, and strengthening. One is the whole field of accountability for the proper use of donated food. At present the accountability system has been designed and is largely managed by the donors themselves. In the future we recommend that there should be a strengthened partnership between the donors and GOB for this work. This means that there should be an adjustment in the balance of budgetary allocations and operational capacities between GOB and the donors so that the government can become more involved in monitoring work and in ensuring that users of food aid can be held more closely accountable. The two main agencies that should be strengthened are the Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation Division in the Ministry of Planning and the Directorate General of Monitoring, Evaluation and Inspection in the Local Government Division. It would be expected that both agencies would have been able to increase their operational capacities significantly by the end of the Fourth Five Year Plan. The accountability systems themselves are in need of some refinement and some expansion in

scope, particularly in respect of examining the development benefits of different types of projects undertaken with food assistance.

11. Another area for further work is the pattern of deployment of transferred (and perhaps, retained) civil servants at Upazila level. There are tremendous variations among Upazilas in terms of area, population, resource flows and numbers of Unions within them. The current standard model for staffing structures is inappropriate and could be rationalised. This is an issue which affects - but goes far beyond - the efficient implementation of food-assisted development programmes.

12. In considering the future institutional framework for the VGD programme, the Task Force has identified a major difficulty. At present the strategy and the institutional framework for poverty alleviation work in Bangladesh are both inadequately, incompletely established. We had considered recommending that a new agency should be established at central government level (but with decentralised, transferred officers at Upazila level) specifically to concentrate on poverty alleviation measures. We have not gone so far as actually to recommend the creation of such a Bittaheen Unnayan Board : but we do recommend that the idea should be looked into urgently, especially in view of the preparations for the Fourth Five Year Plan. If Bangladesh could clarify its strategy for tackling poverty and if it could put in place an adequate institutional capacity for this work, we believe it would be possible to mobilise significant additional aid, the potential for which has so far barely been tapped.

13. A fourth issue is the future framework for emergency preparedness and response, and its distinction from routine relief or social welfare measures. There have been several recent developments and new proposals from other sources to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of these types of work. The recommendations of the Task Force outlined above are also relevant because they are based on creating in the future a sharper distinction among food-assisted development programmes, routine social welfare measures and emergency operations. Therefore, we review recent developments and raise a number of issues that should be taken into account in finalising any new arrangements for emergency operations. We do not, however, put forward any specific additional recommendations in this highly specialised field.

Transition and Action Planning

14. The recommendations of the Task Force are far reaching. They would not be easily or rapidly implemented. At this stage, therefore, we have not prepared detailed action plans for the implementation of all the recommendations. Instead, the Task Force is submitting its extensive analysis and its proposals in their current form as a strategy. If this strategy and its integrated "package" of recommendations is accepted, the way will be clear to proceed to the next stage of drawing up action plans.

15. We recommend the development of at least seven and perhaps nine component action plans as follows :

(i) strengthening the Planning Commission, the design of a proposed Food Resources Planning and Programming Unit, and the specification of planning, programming and working procedures;

(ii) principles and procedures for the incorporation of food resources in a revised Upazila block grant structure;

(iii) rationalisation of staff deployment patterns among Upazilas according to size, population, administrative units and resource flows;

(iv) incorporation of the VGD programme with poverty alleviation work under the administration of the RD&C Division;

(v) incorporation of the FFW and RMP programmes with rural infrastructure development and maintenance work at the Upazila level under the administration of the LG Division;

(vi) organisational adaptation and strengthening of BWDB to integrate food aid more closely with its regular work programme;

(vii) strengthening the DGMEI and IMED (and design of arrangements for further refinement of methods, systems and operational procedures for accountability); and perhaps

(viii) a feasibility study of the creation of a new Bittaheen Unnayan Board; and

(ix) adaptation and consolidation of the role of the Ministry and Directorate of Relief.

16. One aspect of work cutting across several of these proposed action plans would be to take into account the valuable experience of those in the MR DR administrative structure who have been responsible for the food-assisted programmes for so long. For the PIOs in particular there would be at least three new career opportunities open to them - to become Upazila Engineers; to join Upazila Rural Development Offices; or to form the core of an operational capacity for the DGMEI. If transferred officers are felt to be needed in the emergency relief function in the future, some PIOs may prefer to serve in this capacity. For some headquarters personnel of the Ministry and Directorate of Relief with experience in food resource allocation, there are prospects for their re-assignment either in MLGRD&C or in the Planning Commission, where their skills would be most beneficial.

17. Pending the GOB response to the thrust of our recommendations and pending also the development of agreed action plans, the Task Force recommends that there should be no significant change in the current institutional framework for the food-assisted development programmes.

2: SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONDITIONS FOR FUTURE ACTION

The SIFAD Task Force has been commissioned to undertake a fundamental review of the institutional framework for food-assisted development programmes in Bangladesh. Having done so, it recommends a number of major changes in the way in which these programmes should be organised, planned and implemented. These changes are strategic in nature. They could not of themselves be expected to yield significant benefits in terms of the development impact of the programmes in the immediate future. But in the medium and longer term the Task Force believes that they would permit improvements to be made. To achieve this result the recommended changes must not only be implemented but must also be accompanied by a sustained effort to strengthen the concerned institutions and to improve planning and programming procedures. This will require action by donors and by GOB in a revised partnership. The donor community has already indicated its acceptance of a share of responsibility in this process. The Task Force therefore submits its conclusions and recomendations to GOB together with a request for its response with respect to (a) the proposed future strategy and (b) its willingness to make a sustained commitment towards institutional strengthening and operational improvements.

The Social and the Development Problem

2.1 Quite apart from the effects of natural disasters and periodic emergencies, extreme poverty is a chronic social problem in Bangladesh. Hunger is one of its most invidious effects. Since the early 1980s there has been some sign of marginal improvement in some aggregate indicators of poverty. Nevertheless the sheer magnitude of the current poverty problem combined with a still steeply rising population mean that special measures will be required long into the future to mitigate the worst effects of this endemic poverty. In designing such measures there are three broad possibilities :

(i) to undertake holding operations, providing food (for example) and other assistance to help the poor meet their basic needs until such time as the economy in general can offer them opportunities for productive employment. This can be characterised as the relief option. It is vitally needed when emergencies occur. But as a routine measure it consumes valuable resources while contributing little or nothing to overcoming the root causes of poverty. It can actually perpetuate the poverty trap.

(ii) actively to mobilise the poor, employing them to contribute to general economic development (e.g. FFW and RMP), or helping them to devise their own means of raising their levels of

living (e.g. VGD). This can be characterised as the development option. But it can only meet its twin objectives of helping the poor both in the short and the long run if the activities undertaken are well conceived, well planned and well implemented. If they are not, this approach is hardly distinguishable from the relief option. Moreover, ill-conceived activities can impose a net cost on rural communities and their production base.

(iii) to provide a safety net for those who may be productively employed but whose real incomes are below a level permitting them to maintain a minimum standard of life acceptable to society. This can be characterised as the income support option. It is a feature of social security policy in many countries irrespective of their levels of economic development. It often takes the form of a financial supplement but can also be designed to provide additional food entitlements. In this latter form it exists already in such diverse conditions as Bangladesh (e.g. the "Pally" and other types of food rationing system) and the USA (e.g. the US Food Stamp system).

2.2 In Bangladesh resources are so scarce, so valuable, and the pace of economic development so limited in relation to the magnitude and depth of the poverty problem that the country cannot afford to choose the relief option as a routine measure (except as a matter of social welfare policy focusing on the old, infirm and the disabled). Equally, the pace of spontaneous growth in employment opportunities, at whatever cost to real incomes, is unlikely to be sufficient to rely exclusively on the income support option. There is inevitably some blurring and overlap, particularly between the relief and the development approaches. The food donors accept this : they have at no time suggested that the use of food aid should be subjected to the same rigorous economic analysis that applies to investment decisions using international capital assistance. Nevertheless, since so much of the cause of poverty can be attributed to lack of development and lack of economic diversification, the development option must be given prominence both in social policy as well as in economic planning.

The Existing Food-Assisted Programmes

2.3 There are three main food-assisted programmes in the country - Food-for-Work, Vulnerable Groups Development and the Rural Maintenance Programme. These three programmes are likely to account for nearly 80 per cent of all foodgrain aid to Bangladesh in 1988/89. Food aid itself has accounted for an average of about 20 per cent of all international development assistance to Bangladesh since the late 1970s.

2.4 The FFW and VGD programmes were conceived approximately 15 years ago. They were designed to serve mainly a relief function because in the mid-1970s relief and the prevention of further loss of life under famine conditions were the most pressing issues. Since then, on the supply side, there have been two main trends. First, the original two programmes (followed by RMP in 1984/85) have grown tremendously

in size. They are today about 23 times larger (in terms of wheat volumes) than when they first began. Secondly, the food donors have expected to see steady progress in shifting from a near exclusive emphasis on relief to a greater development role for these programmes yet without losing their focus on the mobilisation of the rural poor. Both trends have placed a severe strain on the national administrative and implementation capacities which have been expanded only modestly.

2.5 There have been a number of adverse effects of these features and trends. First, at the implementation level, it has been difficult to foster a perception of the programmes as having a major potential role in the development of the rural areas, in the development of human resources, hence in tackling the causes of poverty. Because the food aid is still seen as a routine relief measure, its widespread distribution has tended to take precedence over questions of its cost-effective utilisation to achieve development goals. This "distributional imperative" has also been reinforced by local short-term political considerations. Secondly, owing to the severely limited capacity of the existing national institutional framework, GOB has been unable to perform fully the role it should play in these nationwide programmes. Since the programmes were largely conceived on the donor side, since the great majority of their resources are provided by the donors, and since the donors are deeply involved in helping to administer and monitor them, the programmes are widely perceived as somehow "belonging" to the donors rather than to Bangladesh. This perception is not only wrong but is antithetical to the development of the country.

Future Perspectives

2.6 If Bangladesh were to become self-sufficient or self-reliant 1/ in foodgrains in the near future this would not overcome the poverty problem. Nor would it even ensure adequate food entitlements among the poor. There would still be a need somehow to target food (even domestically produced food) to the poor. It would still be important to use these food resources to achieve or to support development (not just relief) objectives. The direct targetting 2/ of food could perhaps in time be progressively dismantled, but only under conditions of vigorous growth in employment opportunities plus universal access to food at all times. Indirect targetting of food would probably be required for a still longer period until these two conditions could be matched by a third : confidence that real incomes among the poorest strata of society had risen and would be sustained at a level sufficient to permit them to meet all their needs, including the purchase of sufficient food.

1/ The distinction between these terms is explained in Chapter 4, para 4.10

2/ The distinction between direct targetting and indirect targetting is explained in Chapter 4, para 4.32 and 4.33.

2.7 The FFW programme is essentially a public works programme similar to those operated by many other countries. Its main distinguishing features are (a) its scale, and (b) the payment of wages entirely in food. In the future it may be possible to reduce progressively the share of food in the wage. But the need to continue with a seasonal works programme will probably endure for longer than the need for food (from whatever source) as a component of the wage.

2.8 The Rural Maintenance Programme is also a public works operation. It differs from FFW in that it is year-round; it employs poor women exclusively; and it offers cash wages (partly because the payment of a food wage would present unmanageable logistical difficulties). In the future the need for road maintenance work will remain, and probably will grow. And for a long time there will be many rural women who will be sufficiently poor, willing and available for such work. RMP or something resembling it will be needed even if food aid is not.

2.9 Similarly, the VGD programme or some derivative of it will be needed even after the country may have become independent of food aid. Indeed , if it is possible progressively to dismantle the direct targetting of food, VGD will probably be one of the last programmes to be affected because its target group is so seriously disadvantaged.

2.10 Meanwhile, according to the pattern of future trends in the extent, depth and location of poverty as well as in the identification of development opportunities and priorities, there may be a need to modify the scope and coverage of the existing programmes. It may also be necessary to design new programmes focusing on different target groups or sub-groups and linking food resources to different types of development activities. If extreme urban poverty increases in the future, for example, new directly or indirectly-targetted food assistance programmes may be required specifically for towns and cities. There may already be a case to consider some form of food assistance to promote higher, more sustained school attendance rates, especially among girls. In this process the monetisation of larger shares of food aid may have to come under new, but careful, scrutiny. In some cases, "closed monetised" food assistance delivery mechanisms could already be considered 1/.

The Need to Build National Capacities

2.11 Because the existing food-assisted programmes are - or are perceived as - "donor creations", and because national capacities are weak, the donor organisations have builtup their own analytical, programming, administrative, coordinating, promotional, advisory, technical, monitoring and other support services. In the future, if Bangladesh chooses to maintain, say, a public works programme, a targetted infrastructure maintenance programme, and some form of food

1/ See Chapter 4, para 4.35 for a definition of the term "closed monetised" and Chapter 6, para 6.10 for a discussion of its relevance to BWDB. See also Chapter 8, para 8.29.

assistance in support of human resource development work among the poor, it may not be able to rely on these support services to the same extent if food aid were to be reduced, eliminated, or were to take a different form.

2.12 Thus, quite apart from consideration of the sovereign role of the government, there could be practical reasons for Bangladesh to build up its capacity in these fields.

2.13 In building up national capacity the Task Force recommends not to pursue the approach adopted hitherto of treating food aid as a discrete, self-contained resource, attempting to form an institutional framework which is principally justified by - and dependent upon - continuity in the supply of large volumes of donated food. Instead, the approach should be to focus on the underlying functions and development objectives of the programmes and build up national capacity to pursue these functions for as long as may be needed with or without food aid.

Constraints in the Current Institutional Framework

2.14 Based on its review of the current framework for the food-assisted programmes, the Task Force has identified a range of difficulties, shortcomings and constraints. Among the most critical of these are that :

(i) current institutional arrangements, particularly the institutional isolation of the programmes, tend to perpetuate the widespread perception of them as serving primarily a relief objective;

(ii) there is no satisfactory focal point within the current framework with which the donors can engage in dialogue and through which analytical work can be carried out with respect to diversification of the existing programmes; establishing and reviewing the appropriate balance between direct and indirect targetting of food assistance; and assessing the possible need for new initiatives or new programmes;

(iii) the organisational and staff structure is inadequate for the efficient implementation of the programmes in their current form (and this problem is made worse because the pattern of staff development among Upazilas is not adequately based on the pattern of resource distribution in the programmes);

(iv) the isolation of the current food-assisted programmes has meant not only that they have been inadequately complemented by cash, equipment and other resources, including specialised staff, but also that it has been difficult to coordinate and blend them with the flow of these other resources for development either through GOB or NGO operations;

(v) though more rigorous, more professional planning is one of the principal keys to enhancing the development impact of the programmes, the capacity to undertake planning at the local level is extremely weak while the planning process at present is in any case too rushed and focuses too closely on the distribution of resources rather than on using them to the best development effect;

(vi) equally, the programming system, including the signalling of likely resource levels, does little to facilitate or to encourage better local-level planning;

(vii) the capacity within GOB to ensure compliance with programme standards, to monitor programme implementation, and to ensure that any user of food resources can be held accountable for their proper use is weak.

Decentralisation Policy

2.15 Any recommendations to overcome the difficulties outlined above and to improve the prospects for achieving better development impact from the food-assisted programmes will inevitably touch on matters of local government, the relationships between local and central government agencies, hence on the decentralisation policy of GOB. In its deliberations the Task Force has focused at different times on such questions as : how the programmes could better serve the aspirations of Upazila Parishads; how they could be arranged to facilitate the management role of Upazila Chairmen with respect to their teams of specialised transferred officers; what the implications of such changes might be upwards through different levels of the civil service structure; how changes in, say, planning and accountability systems required by central government may affect the limits of discretion among Upazila Parishads in deciding how to utilise development resources; and how the introduction of any intermediate levels (i.e. between Upazilas and Dhaka) of technical support services, accountability systems and the like could be made to fit with the role of Zilas and other levels of government in the framework of the decentralisation policy.

2.16 The decentralisation policy introduced in late 1982 has been characterised as having brought about the most radical charges in local government in Bangladesh for more than a century. It began to come fully into effect only in August 1985. It is as yet still too soon for all the effects of the changes to have worked their way through in the form of new working relationships between Upazila Parishads and their civil service teams, or between members of the civil service teams and higher administrative levels within their respective specialised agencies. At the Upazila level the system is still evolving, still settling. More recent still has been the revival of Zila Parishads. Though the role of the Zila-level of local government has been defined in legislation it remains to be seen how this role will be performed and what it will mean in terms of demarcations of responsibility for different development projects, programmes and activities or in terms of the relationships between Zila and Upazila Parishads and their associated civil service teams.

2.17 Within this still new framework of local government the Task Force has attempted to adhere to two principles. First, any change or strengthening in the institutional framework for food-assisted programmes should be consistent with the decentralisation policy. To the extent possible they should also facilitate this decentralisation, clarify institutional responsibilities, hence make the Upazila specialist teams more effective servants of the Upazila Parishads. But secondly, since the Government of Bangladesh has endowed Upazila Parishads with certain discretionary powers rather than full autonomy in the deployment of resources for development, it remains important to hold the Parishads accountable for the proper use of those resources.

Proposed Institutional Changes and Their Implications

2.18 The institutional changes recommended by the Task Force are intended (a) to preserve the most successful aspects of food-assisted programmes so far, (b) to outline an institutional framework and mandate through which food resources can contribute more to the development of Bangladesh and its people, and (c) to show how GOB could assume more of its proper role in running the programmes. The main recommended changes are presented in a sequence beginning at central government level. The essence of the recommendations is :

(i) a new strategic role for the Planning Commission, including broad sectoral allocations of food and matching resources, though without disrupting the smooth flow of food aid;

(ii) a consolidated role for the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives, particularly in the detailed allocation of food and matching resources in a re-structured Upazila block grant;

(iii) rationalisation and clarification of responsibilities at Upazila level, including the development of a single, cohesive team for rural infrastructure and maintenance work and rationalisation of responsibilities for poverty alleviation and associated human resource development work;

A New Role for the Planning Commission

2.19 The strategic planning and programming of all food resources serving development objectives should be brought into the mainstream of development administration. Thus, the Planning Commission should be designated as the highest GOB agency responsible. The Commission should be responsible for undertaking (or commissioning) research on such issues as the continuing need for direct and/or indirect targetting of food as a contribution to poverty alleviation work and the extent to which food targetting can be compatible with the implementation of development activities. It should make decisions on the broad sectoral allocation of food resources (from any origin) for development purposes in the same way that it does for other resources. It should set guidelines and plans for the blending of food with financial and other resources in such a way as to achieve both the social as well as the development objectives of existing and

potential new programmes or programme components. It should not, however, become involved in the detailed design of specific projects or programme components. Nor should it have powers to disrupt the smooth flow and fast-disbursing nature of food aid.

2.20 Strengthening the Planning Commission. To undertake this work the Planning Commission would need to be strengthened. It is recommended that a new Food Resources Planning and Programming Unit (FORPPU) be established. The functions of this unit are outlined in the text. The details of its staffing structure are yet to be worked out in detail. However, such a unit should not be just an adjunct to the large volumes of food aid currently being received but as a necessary part of the framework for planning and for the deployment of resources for social and economic development. Further, international financial and technical assistance may also be sought to help set in place the unit, its working methods and procedures.

2.21 Nationally-conceived and planned uses of food resources : In the future, as at present, it may be decided that a portion of food resources could appropriately be deployed in the implementation of major national programmes or to divisible components of nationally-conceived development activities. The details of such arrangements (including the blending of food and other resources) would involve negotiations among the relevant specialised agencies of GOB as well as the donors of food and other assistance. They would have to be approved, however, by the Planning Commission. Current examples include the channelling of food resources to the work of the Bangladesh Water Development Board and for the national programme of Growth Centre Connecting Roads. At present there are also examples of the use of food resources by NGOs acting alone or in collaboration with specialised agencies of GOB. This type of arrangement should be expanded. The Planning Commission, in full collaboration with food and other donors, would be expected actively to promote such expansion from the position of its strategic overview of development planning.

2.22 The channelling of food for local development initiatives : A significant share of food resources would continue, as now, to be channelled to Upazila Parishads in support of a potentially wide range of social and economic development initiatives conceived locally. In the future, these food resources should be blended with financial assistance in the form of an integrated block grant to Upazila Parishads. At present the Planning Commission sets guidelines based on nationally-set priorities for the sectoral deployment of the financial block grant. This role of the Planning Commission should be further refined and made more explicit following the integration of food and cash in the revised block grant. There should be three components of the Upazila block grant - a General Grant; an Infrastructure Development and Maintenance Grant; and a Bittaheen Unnayan Grant (reserved for local-level poverty alleviation and associated human resource development work).

A Consolidated Role for the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives

2.23 Beneath the Planning Commission, the MLGRD&C is currently responsible for the detailed allocation of the Upazila block grant. It should continue with this role with respect to the proposed three components of the new, integrated block grant. It could not do so effectively, however, without some strengthening of staff resources and analytical capacity and without further development of its working procedures, including information feedback from the local level.

2.24 Strengthening the MLGRD&C. For the food-assisted programmes there are three areas in particular in which the MLGRD&C requires considerable strengthening. First, it must in the future be able to ensure that the allocation of resources (and resource balances) in the proposed Infrastructure Development and Maintenance Grant (IDMG) is tailored to the needs of different Upazilas as expressed in the form of medium-term development plans as well as maintenance inventories. Secondly, it must have the capacity to match the allocation of the proposed Bittaheen Unnayan Grant to the distribution and depth of poverty in the country. Thirdly, it must be able to adjust resource allocations in all components of the block grant to the proven capacity of different Upazilas to use them effectively. This third area includes a capacity and mandate to act on the results of audit and accountability systems. This will call for a clear commitment and an agreed programme by GOB for strengthening of MLGRD&C.

2.25 The strategy and framework for poverty alleviation. There still remain, however, some fundamental concerns about the strategy and institutional arrangements for poverty alleviation measures in Bangladesh. The Third Five Year Plan pointed up the need for "a complete reformulation of the strategy for rural development" - but fell short of articulating clear, comprehensive proposals. As a result, BRDB has become the apex organisation for poverty alleviation largely by default. The Task Force feels that to expect BRDB to combine (a) the promotion and development of the agricultural cooperative movement, and (b) broadly-based poverty alleviation work is bound to lead to strain. Since specificity in objectives, target groups and methods of work is a key determinant of institutional effectiveness, a case can be made to set up a new agency - possibly under the title of Bittaheen Unnayan (BU) Board - to oversee the national poverty alleviation effort in the future. BRDB would then be able to revert to its founding objectives with respect to cooperatives, in which much remains to be done. We stop short of making a categorical recommendation to set up a new BU Board but urge that GOB, together with all the concerned donors should consider this suggestion at the earliest possible stage. The Fourth Five Year Plan should also either resolve, or make provision for resolving, this outstanding issue.

Rationalisation and Clarification of Responsibilities at Upazila Level

2.26 Physical infrastructure. At present the management role of the Upazila Chairman in pursuing the development and maintenance of physical infrastructure is made unnecessarily difficult owing to a number of technical shortcomings and organisational anomalies. Better local-level planning over a longer time horizon than at present would be one of the most valuable means by which Upazila Parishads could pursue economic and social development. It would be necessary for GOB to give the Upazilas a reinforced mandate as well as the capacity for better planning.

2.27 For the implementation of infrastructure development and maintenance work the Parishads must be equipped with a cohesive team of transferred officers. At present, such a team appears nominally to be in place in the form of the Upazila Engineering Office. But in practice, there are managerial complications owing to three main anomalies. First, the institutional distinction between the Upazila Engineer and the Project Implementation Officer makes collaboration and coordination between them more difficult than it need be. Secondly, even within the Upazila Engineering Offices, the inclusion of officers on secondment from different specialised agencies such as PWD and DPHE has at best caused uncertainty and at worst tension. And thirdly, the lack of cadre status among all PIOs and among many staff of the UEOs has seriously affected staff morale and career prospects.

2.28 Without the removal of these anomalies and without a rational plan for forming a cohesive specialised team for all aspects of the development and maintenance of Upazila physical infrastructure, the earlier recommendation to integrate food and financial resources in a new IDMG would only partially achieve the desired benefits. The Task Force recommends, therefore, that the role, structure and composition of the Upazila Engineering Office should be more clearly defined. Its officers should be given cadre status. And it should preferably become a single, cohesive engineering team serving the Upazila Parishad in the area of rural infrastructure. This will also involve clarifying the future organisational structure and status of the PWD and DPHE. If either agency is to have an operational capacity at Upazila level or below, the concerned personnel must either be fully integrated with the UEOs or should form separate, functionally specific teams working under the Upazila Parishads.

2.29 Poverty alleviation and associated human resource development. Though poverty and all that it entails is the largest single social problem confronting Bangladesh, the Upazila Parishads are singularly ill-equipped to undertake poverty alleviation and human resource development work. Among most Upazilas there are two principal sets of officers engaged in this work : Upazila Rural Development Officers and PIOs. But each of them is engaged only on a part-time basis - often for only a small part of their time. In the future, poverty alleviation and human resource development will become an even more important area of work than it is - or should be - today. Upazila Parishads should have the capacity within their teams of transferred officers to pursue it. In the short run the Task Force recommends that the URDO and his team should be the main agents in the field of

poverty alleviation and human resource development. In the future it may be desirable or necessary to introduce greater institutional distinction, however, between assistance to people through the formal cooperative approach and assistance to the poorest of the poor through more flexible, less formal means.

2.30 Re-examination of the pattern of deployment of transferred officers. At present, the deployment of transferred officers is based on a single standard model. Yet the range of variation of geographical size among Upazilas is in the order of 380:1. In population, the range is about 54:1. In the VGD programme, there were 7 Upazilas in 1987/88 whose wheat allocations were, on average, 56 times greater than those of the 6 Upazilas with the smallest allocations. And in the 1987/88 FFW programme the largest regular allocation to any Upazila (i.e. excluding subsequent emergency allocations) was 51 times the smallest allocation. The range of numbers of Unions per Upazila is from a minimum of 2 to a maximum of 26. To apply a uniform staffing structure in the face of such tremendous variations in size, population and resource flows is unrealistic. The Task Force therefore recommends that rationalisation in the organisation of transferred officers within Upazilas should be accompanied by rationalisation in the deployment of transferred officers among Upazilas.

Technical Support Services and Career Development

2.31 The decentralisation policy of GOB recognises the need for technical support services to the Upazila Parishads and their teams of specialised officers. It also makes provision for career development routes for some of the more senior of the Upazila transferred officers by maintaining their cadre and personnel policy links upwards through the district level to their respective specialised agency headquarters at central government level. These arrangements are not, however, universally clear or equally well developed among the different specialised officers and their headquarters agencies. Rationalisation and clarification of responsibilities within Upazilas should therefore be accompanied by similar measures at successively higher levels in the civil service structure.

2.32 For locally-initiated infrastructure development and maintenance work, the technical support agency should be the Local Government Engineering Bureau. In this respect LGEB would play a similar role and should have similar status to other specialised agencies such as the existing Directorates in the fields of fisheries, livestock, forestry, agricultural extension, womens' affairs and the like. The title of the Directorate (and of the cadre) may, however, need to be reconsidered in the interests of clarity of responsibility. It could remain as local government engineering or be redesignated as rural development engineering, rural infrastructure or some other specific title. The choice should take into account GOB policy with respect to future responsibilities for support and/or executive services for municipal (as distinct from rural) engineering as well as the future of the Public Works Department, the Department of Public Health Engineering and the Facilities Department of the Ministry of Education. The role of LGEB

(as a Directorate) with respect to local initiatives, divisible components of nationally-planned projects, Zila Parishad work and the like would be no different from that of other specialised agencies.

2.33 These changes should immediately be accompanied by a strong and clear signal to Upazila Parishads from MLGRD&C that in the future the planning of infrastructure development and maintenance will be given priority and will at some stage affect the allocation and release of resources in a more transparent process of rural development. To be effective, however, this signal must be accompanied by measures to provide technical support services to Upazilas to assist them (in the short run) and to develop their capacities (in the longer run) to prepare and to use better plans. Within GOB, tentative proposals have already been made in this respect. One idea is to create a comprehensive (i.e. multi-sectoral) planning team in each Upazila. Another suggestion, specifically for infrastructure planning, is to set up a mobile advisory and support team in each Zila as a resource on which Upazilas could draw for assistance. The Task Force view is that whatever approach may be deemed appropriate and feasible, GOB should seek international project assistance to help in developing the necessary capacities for better planning. Some donors (particularly SIDA/NORAD, US/AID and UNDP/ILO) are already providing - or are planning to provide - help in this field. The onus on GOB (particularly the Planning Commission, MLGRD&C, the Establishment Division and NICAR) is to ensure that multi-donor assistance is well coordinated with a clear long-term strategy for the local-level planning function.

2.34 For poverty alleviation and associated human resource development work, the technical support services should be provided by the Bangladesh Rural Development Board. This would mean transferring responsibility for support services for the existing VGD programme to the Rural Poor Programme Wing of BRDB.

2.35 The above recommendation may have to be regarded as an interim measure. A recent study on cooperatives in Bangladesh has shown that there remains a great deal to do to establish them more securely. A separate organisational analysis of BRDB is also now under way. In the future it may be necessary to establish two separate agencies - one for cooperatives and one for GOB-sponsored poverty alleviation work - so that each may have clarity and specificity of function. The Task Force itself, drawing on the 1986 recommendation of the Like-Minded Group in a meeting in Bonn, has considered recommending the creation of a new Bittaheen Unnayan Board. At present it does not appear to be sufficiently clear how GOB's strategy and policy in the field of poverty alleviation will evolve. The Task Force therefore recommends that in the preparations for the Fourth Five Year Plan, or during implementation of the FFYP, further consideration should be given to the need for a new BU Board or similar agency.

The Future of Relief and the Response to Emergencies

2.36 The Task Force recommends that in the future a clear distinction should be drawn between development programmes (albeit employing or reaching poor people) and relief operations. It recommends that relief, by definition, should be temporary. There should be no regular, routine relief programmes because Bangladesh cannot afford to devote valuable resources to such activities without simultaneously expecting a contribution to be made to the national development effort. The only exception to this should be assistance to the disabled or those unable for other reasons to contribute to development. This, however, is regarded as a social security/social welfare policy issue, not a relief issue. Schoolchildren and their families may in the future qualify for food or other assistance. But even schoolchildren can contribute to the national development effort merely by attending school.

2.37 Beyond recommending the above strategic principles, the Task Force has not undertaken a detailed study of the issues and options for the institutional framework for disaster planning, emergency management or temporary relief activities. Meanwhile, during the course of its work, the Task Force has noted the following major developments:

(i) creation of the National Council for Disaster Prevention (NCDP) following the 1988 floods;

(ii) preparation of a new internationally-funded project proposal for Comprehensive Disaster Preparedness, including the proposed creation of a new Office of Emergency Preparedness serving as a secreteriat to the NCDP;

(iii) publication by the Ministry of Relief of new draft "Standing Orders for Famine" referring to a new National Disaster Coordination Council (NDCC) whose authority is proposed to be exercised "through the Minister for Relief or a Special Advisor to the President as deemed fit" and which would act through a proposed National Disaster Coordination Centre (also NDCC).

2.38 Issues for the future. In pursuing these new developments and putting in place what will apparently be a substantially revised structure for disaster preparedness and response, the Task Force recommends that GOB may take into account the following issues :

(i) the relative cost-effectiveness of (a) retaining a ministry including full-time staff at Upazila level to cope with periodic, temporary emergencies, or (b) creating a modestly-staffed apex agency to coordinate information and action, relying on the mobilisation of a wide range of public sector and NGO staff (including Upazila Officers under the management of the Upazila Chairman and UNO) to assist in responding to emergencies when and where they may strike;

(ii) responsibilities and arrangements (in collaboration with donors) for the design and implementation of new, discrete and specialised mechanisms for food distribution and other assistance during emergencies (since only then will it be possible to achieve greater distinction between food-assisted development and emergency operations).

2.39 Interim arrangements. Meanwhile, the Task Force recommends no change in the role of the Ministry of Relief until and unless the conditions for future action listed in this report have been fully negotiated and agreement reached on the phasing of institutional adjustment and strengthening. Moreover, where individual donors and the Directorate of Relief may already be pursuing modest initiatives aimed at improving various functional aspects of food programming systems, they should continue until such time as final agreement is reached on the overall future institutional framework. Whether in the future these initiatives should fit into the revised framework for disaster preparedness and response or the revised arrangements for food-assisted development programmes should be a matter for negotiation between GOB and the concerned donors. An appropriate time for this would be during the specification of action plans based on the outcome of the SIFAD Task Force work.

Institutional Responsibility for Monitoring and Accountability Systems

2.40 At present there is a severe imbalance between the roles of the donors and GOB in monitoring the food-assisted programmes and operating accountability systems. GOB is hardly involved at all in these aspects except in endorsing the results of work by the donors. In the future, the Task Force recommends that GOB should build up its own capacity in monitoring and accounting for the use of these development resources. There are two agencies with future roles to play. One is the Directorate General of Monitoring, Evaluation and Inspection (DGMEI) within the MLGRD&C. The other is the Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division of the Planning Commission. Both will need strengthening.

2.41 Role of DGMEI. The DGMEI should be made responsible for all aspects of monitoring and accountability systems for locally-initiated development activities, including those undertaken with food assistance. Details of the type and levels of strengthening required by DGMEI, however, must hinge on (a) GOB policy with respect to the future role of this agency, and (b) the specification of donor obligations (as imposed upon them by their respective consituencies and governing bodies). The recent designation of this agency as a Directorate General suggests a GOB intention to provide it with operational field staff. This would be necessary in any government monitoring and accountability system. But the numbers of staff required, their possible location at District or (preferably) some higher intermediate level, and the resources required to put such a capacity in place can best be resolved through negotiation between GOB and the donors during the action planning stage of Task Force work.

2.42 Role of IMED. The role of IMED could have two main dimensions. First, it could be made directly responsible for monitoring and evaluating the experience gained in channelling food resources into national programmes and divisible components of nationally-conceived development activities. Secondly, it could receive similar information from the DGMEI with respect to the use of food and financial resources devoted to local initiatives at Upazila level. Collating both sets of information, it could provide analytical feedback to the proposed FORPPU as a basis for adjustments in the future sectoral allocation of food resources.

Other Recommended Changes and Areas for Action

Changes in Programme Titles

2.43 The Food for Work programme should be re-named the Food-Assisted Works (FAW) programme. This would more accurately reflect its proposed nature as receiving an integrated flow of food, financial and other resources. In the future, this new title could remain even if it were possible to shift from an exclusively food wage for earthworks to a combination of food and cash wages.

2.44 The Vulnerable Groups Development programme does not translate well into Bangla. It may assume the new title Bittaheen Mohila Unnayan (BMU) programme. This would associate the programme more clearly with other development projects and programmes targetted on poor women. It would also remain a valid title if in the future there were to be a seperate agency responsible for poverty alleviation and associated human resource development work.

Integration of Food and Financial Resources

2.45 GOB has found it difficult (a) to predict with confidence the level of allocation in the existing block grant, and (b) to match allocations to the absorptive capacity of the Upazilas. Thus, not only have there been significant annual fluctuations in the total block grant but there is also evidence of its under-utilisation. In the future the food donors should be prepared to devote a portion of the domestic currency generated by monetised food aid to different components of the revised block grant. In time, better feedback of information from the Upazilas with respect to their development plans as well as their capacities to use resources effectively would be expected to resolve the under-utilisation problem.

Implementation Overheads

2.46 Another issue, related to the past lack of integration of food and financial resources, has been the very low level of overhead expenditure in the programmes both by GOB and collectively by the donors. There are differences among donors in their levels of overhead expenditure (ranging from less than one per cent up to about 10 per cent applied to different tranches and components of the assistance). But at projected 1988/89 wheat offtake levels for the food-assisted programmes (including emergency allocations) donor overheads as a whole represent less than 2 per cent of the domestic

value of the food. Moreover, a high proportion of this expenditure is devoted to monitoring and accountability systems. While this would be a commendably low overhead for relief operations, it is unrealistically low for development programmes. The Task Force therefore recommends that GOB and the donors should be prepared to spend more on overheads - but only at a pace and to a level that can be used effectively to improve planning and to achieve better quality in the activities undertaken. This is a matter for detailed consideration and negotiation in drawing up action plans.

Local-level Planning

2.47 Since the Task Force regards better planning as one of the most important means of enhancing the development impact of food-assisted programmes, some details are provided in the text on the type of planning required, particularly for physical infrastructure. These include:

(i) introduction not just of medium-term plans but of a continuing, rolling approach to planning at the Upazila level, perhaps over a minimum four-year period;

(ii) introduction of a complementary rolling programming approach under which indicative resource levels would be signalled to the Upazilas up to three years in advance;

(iii) eventual replacement of the system of scrutinising individual schemes (principally by donor organisations) by a system of screening and approving aggregate, phased plans from each Upazila, including priority rankings among schemes;

(iv) substitution of sampling methods linked to a system of penalties, sanctions and rewards in pre- and post-work checks as a substitute for the total advance scrutiny of schemes by donors;

(v) based on sound planning and rational choice of projects, introduction of multi-year commitments of resources by Upazilas to ensure full completion of projects to the required standards;

(vi) introduction of maintenence inventories and maintenence budget planning with a prior call on Upazila resources;

(vii) provision of full sets of modern physical maps at appropriate scales (at least down to 1:25,000) as one of the first essential "foundation blocks" on which an improved planning system could be built.

Value and Leakage Dimensions of Accountability

2.48 The Task Force recommends that in the future equal priority should be given to both these dimensions of accountability. At present it is possible that a significant proportion of food assistance is being channelled into schemes and activities that have no development

benefit or that may impose a net cost on rural communities and the productive base of the country. This is the value dimension of accountability. It could in fact exceed the leakage dimension - the volume of food that is "lost" or that cannot be accounted for.

2.49 The value dimension of accountability. Improving the value dimension of accountability will involve a major research effort to identify simple indicators of relative development impact among different types of activity and different uses of food resources. It will involve an even greater effort in ensuring that all concerned at the Upazila level, particularly those involved in preparing medium-term plans, are trained in applying these indicators

2.50 Controlling misappropriation and leakage. Improving the leakage dimension of accountability is conceptually easier but in practical terms equally difficult. Methods can be, and have been devised (principally by the donors) to check that resource allocations are commensurate with the volumes of work to be done or numbers of beneficiaries to be reached, and to check that wages and entitlements are fully provided. (There is still some scope, however, for greater uniformity and further refinement of methodology used by different donors). There is then a trade-off between the scale on which these checks need to be made and the type and severity of sanctions that may be applied. The practical difficulty arises when the imposition of severe penalties on Upazilas defeats one objective of the programmes in providing employment or other benefits to those who are in need of them. (Nevertheless, when monitoring data reveal clear irregularities the donors have shown themselves to be firm in adhering to the rules, procedures and principles for accountability which have been agreed in advance with GOB.) Another issue in the trade-off is the relative cost of total or extensive coverage in controlling leakage and the cheaper, more restricted sampling approach linked to severe sanctions. Establishing an acceptable position in this trade-off is a matter for further analysis and consultation involving not only the donors but also their proposed new partners (DGMEI and IMED) on the government side.

2.51 Project Implementation Committees. The role of PICs in the FFW programme should also come under new scrutiny. Project committees have been expected to act partly in the interests of the workforce and partly in the interests of the community at large in ensuring that projects and activities are well implemented. They derive from the founding principles of the "Comilla Model" for rural development. In practice there is little evidence that they guard either set of interests effectively. The Task Force has considered the possibility of regarding PICs in the future as implementation agents and of paying them for their work. If there were improprieties in the execution of schemes, penalties could then be imposed on PICs rather than on Unions or Upazilas and, by implication, denying employment opportunities to the workforce. There are risks attached to such a change but the Task Force recommends re-examination of the role of PICs as part of a revised accountability system.

Involvement of NGOs

2.52 An expanded role for NGOs. There is already encouraging evidence from both the FFW and VGD programmes of the positive role that can be played by NGOs. NGOs can help significantly in ensuring that well conceived, well planned and well implemented activities are undertaken, hence that development benefits are enhanced. There is also evidence that the involvement of NGOs may help to reduce misappropriation and leakage of resources. There are, however, no formal mechanisms to promote, to select, to negotiate and to monitor greater involvement for NGOs in programme adaptation and implementation. One important aspect of the role of the proposed FORPPU in the Planning Commission should therefore be to act as an intermediary with NGOs (as well as with specialised GOB agencies) in developing new uses for food resources and new linkages with other development activities.

2.53 Specific immediate action in VGD. One specific means of promoting closer linkages between the VGD programme and both NGOs and relevant GOB programmes could be through a proposed major new initiative in the field of poverty alleviation for which World Bank as well as some bilateral assistance is reported to have been already offered. This proposal calls for the establishment of a new Foundation which would be registered under the Societies Act. The Task Force recommends that steps should be taken to examine possible linkages between the VGD programme and the work of the proposed Foundation in case it is decided by GOB to set up the same. If found to be feasible, these linkages should be included in the design stage of this new initiative.

Local Resource Mobilisation

2.54 One indicator of increasing maturity and responsibility in the new structure of local government would be progress in mobilising local resources at Zila, Upazila and Union levels. This is a complex and sensitive area which has been beyond the specific terms of reference before the Task Force. Nevertheless, as a matter of principle, the mobilisation and deployment of resources raised by different bodies in the local government system could be an important part of the thrust towards achieving a more rational planning process and better quality in programme implementation.

2.55 In some countries, the value of grants from central to local government bodies are directly linked to the performance of local government in revenue collection and other local resource mobilisation work. In others, investment assistance is provided from the centre on the understanding that local bodies have the capacity (and the political will) to mobilise local resources to operate and maintain investment projects. In Bangladesh, however, most of the financial assistance from the centre does not depend on this type of reciprocity. It would, however, be an eminently worthwhile target for the future. And an early step in the process might be to expect local bodies to contribute to the maintenance and other recurrent costs of the projects they undertake.

2.56 Two donors (US/AID and a group of Scandinavian donors)are currently engaged in exploring the possibilities of stronger local resource mobilisation in Bangladesh. The Task Force recommends that in developing action plans for institutional strengthening related to food-assisted development programmes, particularly in respect of resource allocation procedures to local government bodies, full account should be taken of the results of these studies on local resource mobilisation.

Linkages Among the Donors

2.57 Existing procedures. There are already good working procedures allowing exchange of information and coordination of action among the food donors. Specifically, the Food Donors Group meets at monthly intervals (or as and when necessary during emergencies), chaired by WFP. In addition, WFP and some other food donors regularly attend meetings of relevant Local Consultative Groups in Dhaka.

2.58 Implications for the future. The changes recommended by the Task Force, however, would have significant implications for the future linkages among donors. The Food Donors Group would still be required, particularly for the exchange of information about regular commitments of food aid for the food-assisted development programmes and for donor coordination during emergencies. But a closer - and possibly more formal - mechanism would be required (a) among all donors contributing to rural infrastructure work, and (b) among all donors engaged in poverty alleviation and associated human resource development. In the same way that the Task Force recommends the integration of food and financial resources by GOB, so too should the donors be prepared to exploit the complementarity of food and financial resources in planning and designing their aid commitments.

2.59 Consortia of donors. In formalising donor linkages consideration should be given to the formation of two consortia of donors : one in the area of rural infrastructure and the other for poverty alleviation work. There is already at least one precedent for such a formalisation of donor relationships in respect of the Rural Access Roads Programme in Kenya. The Kenyan consortium has been justified because the programme concerned is nationwide in scope though each donor member contributed only a portion of the geographical or functional (e.g. training) resources required. In the same way, the food donors in Bangladesh are already contributing to three nationwide programmes. Other donors are making financial and technical assistance contributions in related fields. At the very least, the consortium approach could lead to greater uniformity in, for example, the development of planning capacities at Upazila level. The Task Force therefore recommends that during the preparation of action plans based on the SIFAD exercise the concerned LCGs should develop detailed proposals for strengthening their future linkages, including the possibility of the consortium approach.

2.60 In the future, if more food assistance were to be devoted to alleviating urban poverty, promoting higher school attendance rates, or to other functionally distinct activities, similar linkages may be required among food donors, financial and technical assistance agencies and perhaps international NGOs.

Staffing and Personnel Aspects of Transition

2.61 If the proposed strategy is accepted, it would be desirable not to lose the valuable experience of those MR/DR officers who have long experience in food programming and in the implementation of food-assisted development programmes. For some Upazila-level PIOs, new careers should be considered for them to serve as Upazila Engineers, there being a total of 303 UE posts in the country for which recruitment is under way or surrounding which there are question marks owing to the possibility of re-assignment of the existing incumbents. Some PIOs without engineering qualifications may prefer to join the Upazila Rural Development Offices which the Task Force recommends should be strengthened to handle VGD (BMU) implementation. Other PIOs may choose to retain their current official title of Upazila Relief Officers in a revised institutional framework for disaster preparedness and response. A fourth possibility would be to transfer some PIOs to the DGMEI in LGD, forming the core of a new operational capacity for this agency in line with the recommendations of the Task Force.

2.62 Some headquarters officers of MR/DR - especially those with experience and skills in food programming and allocation work - could be re-assigned beneficially either to the proposed Food Resources Planning and Programming Unit (FORPPU) in the Planning Commission or to the Allocation Units which would be required in MLGRD&C.

Action Planning

2.63 The terms of reference of the SIFAD Task Force call for the preparation of three action plans, one each for FFW, VGD and BWDB. We recommend, however, that at least seven and possibly nine different action plans are required owing to the nature and scope of the proposed overall strategy. The areas for action planning are :

(i) strengthening the Planning Commission, the design of a proposed Food Resources Planning and Programming Unit, and the specification of planning, programming and working procedures;

(ii) principles and procedures for the incorporation of food resources in a revised Upazila block grant structure;

(iii) rationalisation of staff deployment patterns among Upazilas according to size, population, administrative units and resource flows;

(iv) incorporation of the VGD programme with poverty alleviation work under the administration of the RD&C Division;

(v) incorporation of the FFW and RMP programmes with rural infrastructure development and maintenance work at the Upazila level under the administration of the LG Division;

(vi) organisational adaptation and strengthening of BWDB to integrate food aid more closely with its regular work programme;

(vii) strengthening the DGMEI and IMED (and design of arrangements for further refinement of methods, systems and operational procedures for accountability); and perhaps

(viii) a feasibility study of the creation of a new Bittaheen Unnayan Board; and

(ix) adaptation and consolidation of the role of the Ministry and Directorate of Relief.

2.64 Timetables for these action plans have been very tentatively suggested in Chapter 12 of the report. Proposals are also put forward for the financing of action plans through the donor consortia arrangement recommended in para 2.59 above. None of the action planning should begin until the GOB response has been obtained to the strategy put forward by the Task Force. Similarly, the Task Force recommends no significant change to the current institutional arrangements for the food-assisted programmes until the GOB response is known, or until action plans can begin to be implemented.