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Food Insecurity

60pc households suffered last year

Finds survey

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Over 60 percent households of the country, including at least 10 million children, suffered from food insecurity last year, says a survey.

"The problem is widespread and a matter of growing concern in the light of rising food prices that affected mostly the poorer section of people," observed the survey report titled State of Food Security and Nutrition in Bangladesh: 2010.

The National Food Security and Nutrition Surveillance Project (FSNSP) unveiled the report at a stakeholders' meeting in Radisson hotel in the capital yesterday.

Food Minister Abdur Razzaque, Statistics Division Secretary Riti Ibrahim, Health Secretary Humayun Kabir, HKI Vice President Nancy Haselow and Brac Vice-Chancellor Ainun Nishat, among others, were present in the meeting.

James P Grant School of Public Health of Brac University, Helen Keller International (HKI) and Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) with the support from the European Union conducted the survey among more than 23,000 households and 26,000 children.

The food minister agreed to the fact of widespread malnutrition in the country saying that cereal consumption has increased significantly over the time but the nutritious food-intake has not.

He identified rising population, declining farmland, disasters and shooting food prices as the major challenges to food security and nutrition.

He said the government in 2010-2011 distributed 2.29 million tonnes of food grains among the low-income people and created employment in rural areas to mitigate the effect of rising food prices.

Food insecurity

The survey found that over 80 percent households in the lowest-income bracket underwent food insecurity last year.

However, around 13 percent of the wealthiest group suffered malnutrition due to not taking balanced diet.

In the late 2010, prices of commodities hiked more in proportion compared to a day labourer's wage exacerbating food security and making the outcome of the government's safety net programmes less effective, said FSNSP official Jillan Waid while presenting the survey report.

The report recommended targeted and timely strategies for different seasons and regions.

Child health and nutrition

Bangladesh is having slow progress in alleviating the high rate of child malnutrition, said the report, adding that chronic child malnutrition is extremely high in the country, about 45 percent, and most of the children suffering from the condition are under the age of five years.

Community-based programmes to improve child feeding practices and treating moderate and acute malnutrition could help prevent the situation, the report recommended.

Maternal health

The number of women who completed antenatal check ups has increased four folds in the last 13 years. The current rate stands at 26 percent, which is still very low, the report maintained.

In Rajshahi and Rangpur, more than 55 percent women received iron and folic acid tablets during pregnancy while only 38 percent received in Sylhet and 41 percent in Barisal. These rates are also unacceptably low, notes the report.

Health and nutrition experts observed that since malnutrition of a mother results in underweight babies and chronic diseases, multi-factorial investments are necessary to achieve maternal and child nutrition security.

In his keynote, Brac Executive Director Mahabub Hossain said surveillance is critical to help the authorities devise new strategies to ensure food security and nutrition.