

The Pattern of the VGD Program Lopsided Towards Establishment and Conservation in Bangladesh: A Policy Issue

Mohammad Mamun Morshed Bhuyan¹

Runa Saha²

Abstract

This paper explores the achievements and policy failures of the “Vulnerable Group Development” (VGD) program in Bangladesh; an unconventional program to shield women from vulnerability. This study examines the extent to which the requirements of the extremely poor people are addressed through this program and how this program influences their socio-economic conditions by assaying the performance of the VGD program. Empirical substantiation suggests that serious downsides are being observed in the perpetration of the VGD program. It is found that lack of an organized relationship between the Union Parishad (UP) and the recipients result in a decline in collaboration, which has an effect on the VGD program both qualitatively and quantitatively. The extent of widespread corruption in the selecting process is highlighted by a field survey. It has been shown that VGD beneficiaries are vulnerable to variations in the distribution of food items; of these, 34% believe they are receiving much less than what is appropriate. About 28% of respondents are dissatisfied with the inconsistent delivery of food items at the commencement of the distribution. The amazing concern is that around 23% of respondents receive VGD offers by providing financial advantages. When 6% of the rich receive a VGD card while being ineligible according to the VGD standards. Neutrally selected beneficiaries have been given out in an unsettling manner by families of Union Parishad members, the chairman, and other connections. Inappropriate amplification of the distribution for voting purposes in all probability. It was also found that modern, transparent, and accountable delivery systems are lacking in the implementation process, and that improper oversight processes, rampant corruption, favoritism, and unborn power politics also contribute to the pinnacle.

Keywords: VGD, Social protection, Union Parishad, Fairness, Irregularities

1. Introduction

Bangladesh is a developing, densely populated country in South Asia that is particularly vulnerable to natural disasters because of its geographical setting. Natural disasters cause disruptions in people's lives once a year. VGD program, in particular, plays a pivotal role in increasing low-income women's earnings potential through the social safety net. Social

¹Assistant Professor, Dept. of Economics, University of Chittagong, Bangladesh. E-mail: mmbeco@cu.ac.bd

²Assistant Professor, Dept. of Economics, University of Chittagong, Bangladesh. E-mail: saharuna.economics14@gmail.com

protection within the range of basic food security for people experiencing poverty is a crucial factor of political legitimacy at both the local and central levels in Asian nations (Hossain, 2005). Social protection throughout a crisis can contribute to the consummation of five objects giving direct support to the vulnerable, furnishing Keynesian stimulant spending, providing economic expert information defrayal, protecting long-run human capital investments in education and health of the young, contributing to socio-political stability, and (in this extremity specifically) rebalancing growth toward domestic consumption.

Barrett and McPeak (2003) note that without adequate safety nets, people frequently cross over the crucial asset thresholds into chronic poverty. They conclude that the poor's most valuable irreplaceable possession is their health and education. According to the World Bank (WB), the safety net programs in Bangladesh effectively decrease poverty and improve gender reforms. In the recent decade, the government has accomplished remarkable socioeconomic progress, cutting the poverty rate by more than 15 percentage points. Food security programs in the social protection section of the government budget amounted to Tk. 11754.11 core in FY 2018–19 and Tk.14528.75 core in FY 2019–20. (The Bangladesh Economic Review 2020). The VGD is the most extensive safety net program for low-income families headed by women, and it is coordinated and implemented by the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs and the Ministry of Food and Disaster Management with the help of local non-governmental organizations. Every month, the selected women-headed ménage receives a food allotment equal to thirty kilograms of rice for twenty-four months. Though initially implemented as a relief program in the mid-1970s, it has since expanded to incorporate food security into development goals. Currently, the World Food Program (WFP) is providing a monthly food quantitative ration and development assistance package to roughly 750,000 women (about 3.75 million beneficiaries) from ultra-poor households. The event package includes life skills and income-generating skills coaching as well as a private savings program and access to micro-credit/NGO membership. There are two different forms of VGD: Income Generating Vulnerable Group Development (IGVGD) and Food Security Vulnerable Group Development (FSVGD). The VGD is a holistic strategy combining food with development. To achieve the program's goal, this activity provides ultra-poor women with a food ration of thirty-weight units of wheat or twenty-five weight units of fortified flour (atta) per

The Pattern of the VGD Program

month for twenty-four months, as well as a set of development services aimed at enhancing their human capital. Participants are limited to one cycle of VGD activities, which occur every two years. The VGD program currently serves 10,40,00 disadvantaged and vulnerable women. From its inception in the 1996–97 fiscal year through the end of the current fiscal year in 2019–20, 91.80 lakh women will have benefited from the program. Since the program's inception in the 1996–97 fiscal year, 91,80,000 women have benefited.

Through improved food consumption, education, development, diversification of livelihoods, and risk reduction, the program enhances the food and nutrition security of women and children, which makes it significant. In fact, this initiative turns out to be crucial for bolstering the food and nutrition security of women and children.

2. Literature Review

Ahmed (2023) examines the difficulties of using Social Safety Nets (SSNs) to reduce poverty and offer recommendations for other ways to reduce poverty in Bangladesh. Nevertheless, there are still unresolved concerns about insufficient coverage and benefits, inadequate administration and oversight, insufficient monitoring, and the efficiency of these programs in reducing poverty and promoting economic growth. SSNs in Bangladesh are further challenged by corruption, overlap, poor coordination, and lax accountability. Rahman (2021) found that the distribution and selection of SSN programs are influenced by informal systems, such as kinship, political affiliation, clientele politics, and interpersonal disputes. To deepen clientele ties, increase their legitimacy, stabilize their influence, and expand their vote banks, Union Parishad (UP) members circumvent the official channels and distribute the SSN programs to their ineligible customers (supporters, local elites, and political groupings).

Research reveals that the poor and vulnerable individuals who should be allocated the funds to combat poverty and vulnerability are not usually the ones who get SSN transfers. The majority of beneficiaries picked under the SSN program, it turns out, do not meet one or more of the program's priority requirements. When choosing beneficiaries, the mandatory requirements are occasionally disregarded as well (Haider & Mahamud, 2017). Hossain et al. (2018) evaluated how well the Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) program was achieving food security in the Rangpur division and district. In terms of food availability,

access, and stability, VGD's performance toward food security has generally been deemed adequate; nevertheless, utilization has been found to be lacking.

Khan (2008), financial insolvency, administrative difficulties, lack of cooperation, and lack of public awareness are significant legal and practical limits of the UPs. Ali (1992) evaluated VGD and found that its users are selected because most of them are women who are the primary breadwinners in their families but have meagre salaries and are landless in almost all cases. The way they spent money showed how poor they were. They cannot support themselves and have received only a minimal education. Women who are VGD cardholders report that a lack of financial resources is the most significant barrier to earning more money. According to Ali (1992), this relief-cum-human resource development initiative reaches a huge number of destitute/poor women and children. According to Ali, the VGD program provides food assistance to around 0.5 million women and children. Ali claims the VGD program feeds half a million women and children monthly. The number of people who would benefit from the VGD would be close to 2 million if every female-headed home had four members. Nutrition, health and sanitation, housing, personal security, access to the distribution system, and participation are only some aspects of quality of life that Ali considered an effort to alleviate poverty. These problems can be solved if the VGD program is well-planned and executed.

Hashemi (2001) claims that the success rate of VGD targeting is generally high. However, recent studies show that the targeting strategy needing to be more transparent and reliant on the Ward Member/Selection Committee relationship was the most critical factor in the VGD selection process. The UP Chairman or a member must exercise discretion when deciding who gets benefits. Selections are typically made with input from a wide range of stakeholders. They try to hand-pick their members most of the time. Bribery might be a crucial factor in the procedure. The impoverished may have higher odds of winning if they can afford cards.

This work aims to fill the knowledge gap that exists because nearly all earlier research on the benefits of VGD was conducted using secondary data. In certain instances, the analysis used primary data from a single district, which is insufficient to provide a clear picture of the program in question. In addition, earlier attempts to investigate corruption lacked

clarity. This study tries to explore a more comprehensive image of VGD program collecting data from four unions of four districts.

3. Theoretical Framework

In order to comprehend the VGD program's patterns and investigate its strengths and weaknesses as a result of the manipulative administrative systems, a variety of theoretical viewpoints will be explored. "Policy as collective decision-making by self-interested individuals" is one of the model's key principles, according to policy theorist Dye et al. (2017). Author also points out that politics is a marketplace in which voters purchase policies and politicians purchase votes and people and political leaders want to maximize their political gains which has been addressed vividly in our study.

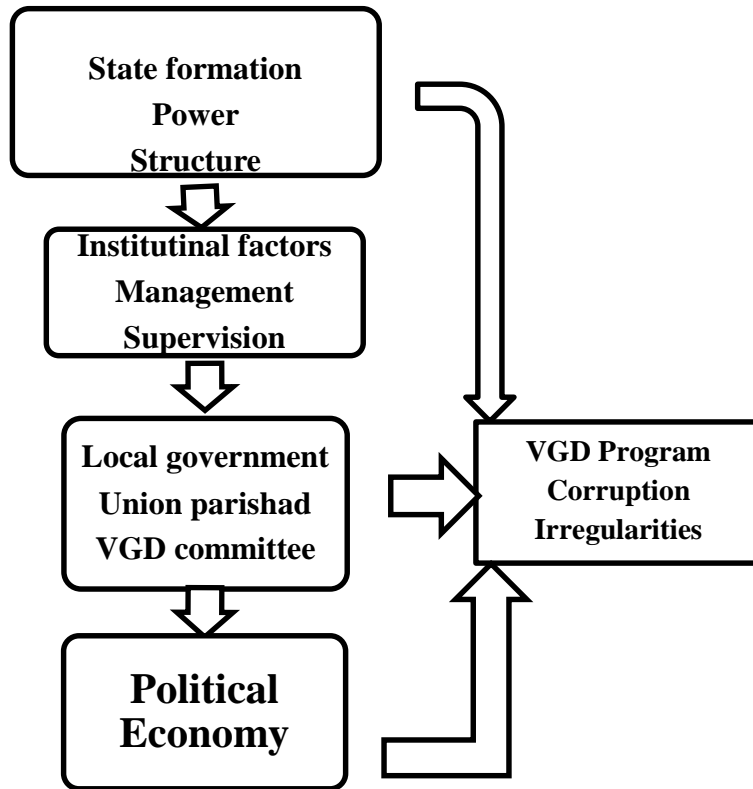
Subbarao (2003) and Smith (2003) pinpointed three key limitations that hinder the effective execution of social transfers: information limitations (insufficient accurate data regarding the actual beneficiaries); administrative limitations (challenges in targeting the beneficiaries); and fiscal limitations (the feasibility of designing the program and delivering benefits, corruption).

The main objective of this study is to find out whether all the activities of the VGD program are being executed correctly. In accordance with the research objective, we have formulated our research question.

In accordance with the regulations of the VGD programs, many ineligible individuals should not have their names added to the list but instead get some benefits, the study claims. In patron-client politics, current allies of the administration believe they are entitled to materials and other advantages from the political market since they supported the leaders. The idea that so-called impartial and common people have no interest in getting the most out of politics is not implied by this. Voters cast ballots to ensure that governments provide the greatest amount of amenities possible. Although elections are only a legal way to seize power, politicians occasionally utilize their financial and physical might to gain public office. But in this instance, the local political elites rely on social security programs to secure their electoral triumphs. From a political economics standpoint, it seeks to provide light on the dynamics and underlying causes of poverty. This study's empirical data have come from four rural locations in Patiya Upazila of Chittagong Division, Bhedarganj Upazila of Dhaka Division, Baniachang Upazila of Sylhet

Division, and Fulbaria Upazila of Mymensingh Division. Focus groups, questionnaires, and interviews various research techniques have used. Our research, aligned with the previously mentioned theory, tried to demonstrate whether information lag, manipulative state formation, power politics, institutional factors i.e. local governance institutions (Unions) are the basic impediments to success of the VGD program (See Chart 1).

Chart 1: the basic impediments to success of the VGD program



4. Objectives and Research Question

The central objective of this paper is to look at the extent of the VGD program's planning and implementation in four unions-the smallest level of local government-in 14 No. Bhatikhain Union of Patiya Upazila of Chittagong district, 3 no. Chhaygaon Union of Bhedarganj Upazila of Shariatpur district, 3 No. Dakshin Purba Union of Baniachang Upazila of Habiganj district, and 3 No. Kushmail Union of Fulbaria Upazila of

Mymensingh district. Its goal is to discern how well the VGD program addresses the needs of severely impoverished women.

The research question is: Does a distorted and corrupt distribution system lead to poor outcomes? Knowing the fundamental components and interplaying mechanisms that determine the satisfaction level of VGD recipients is critical to understanding the extent of satisfaction. These elements go towards deciding the viability of the VGD program's administration conveyance. The study seeks to investigate the flaws in the VGD beneficiary selection process and presents policy proposals to address the issue.

5. Methodology

To collect data for this study, a blended strategic methodological approach that used quantitative and qualitative methodologies was applied. To acquire pertinent data, a questionnaire was designed. Four unions were chosen through purposive or judgment sampling: Patiya Upazila of Chittagong Division, Bhedarganj Upazila of Dhaka Division, Baniachang Upazila of Sylhet Division, and Fulbaria Upazila of Mymensingh Division. The unions were chosen based on two criteria: geographical isolation and economic condition. Each Union has 50 VGD beneficiaries chosen at random. Minimum five VGD card holders from all wards of each union were chosen randomly. Statistical software package SPSS has been used to analyze data. The case studies are chosen from a total of 200 respondents utilizing the severe or deviant case sample approach. Selecting instances that are exceptional or special in some way is alluded to as extreme or deviant case sampling.

6. Management and Administration of VGD Program

The Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs provides a Government Order (GO) to the Department of Relief and Rehabilitation outlining the food quality, number of VGD participants (cards) per Upazila, transportation, and auxiliary charges. The Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief will then fund the Department of Relief and Rehabilitation's transportation and auxiliary expenditures. Following receipt of the GO from the Ministries of Women and Children's Affairs and Disaster Management and Relief, the Department of Relief and Rehabilitation issues Allocation Orders (AO) to the Upazila Nirbahi Officer, which cover the quality of food, the number of VGD cards per Upazila, as well as transportation and ancillary costs. The Upazila Nirbahi Officer then writes to the Upazila food controller, requesting that a food Delivery Order (DO) be issued in the name

of the Union Parishad chairman. The Project Implementation Officer advises that the AO be processed and the DO be issued. The Upazila Food Controller will send a directive to the Local Food Storage Depot (LSD) a copy of the DO will also be sent to the Chairman of the Union VGD Committee. However, in the transfer of food aid under the VGD program from the district to the Union, a number of committees are involved.

7. Procedures for Planning and Implementation of Union VGD Program: An Overview

7.1 Objectives of VGD Program

- a. To create employment for extreme rural unemployed people ;
- b. To increase the purchasing power of the extremely poor people affected by the price hike;
- c. To create wealth for the people and the nation ;
- d. To assist them in escaping the depths of extreme poverty and equipping them with the means of earning a living.
- e. To make them capable of participating in the training program and encourage them to save;
- f. To educate them about disaster management, improvements in diet and health, and other elements of daily life.

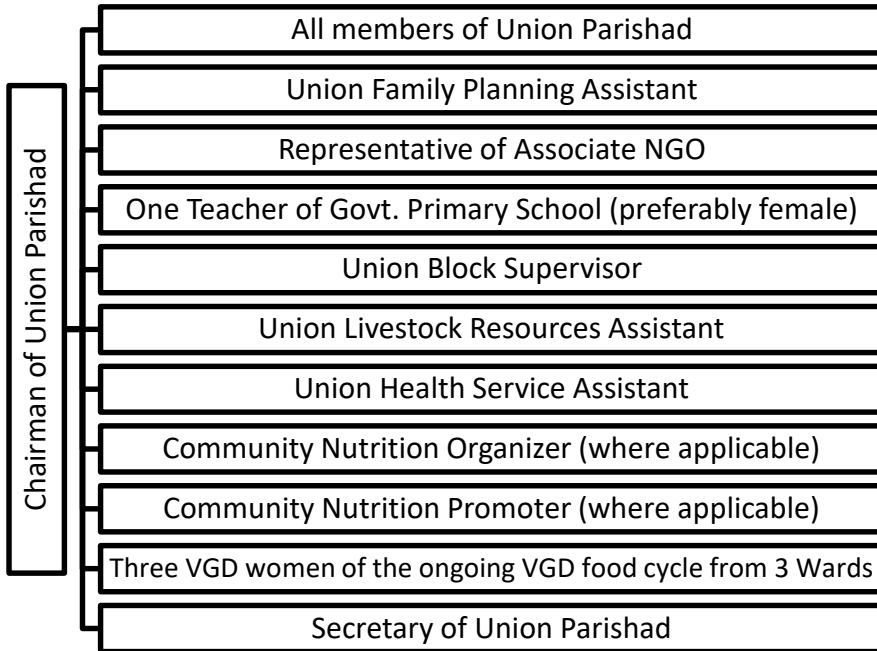
7.2 Selection Criteria of VGD Beneficiaries

- a. Household with not more than 0.15 acres of land;
- b. Day labour or temporary worker;
- c. The beneficiary should be physically capable to work;
- d. Female-headed household with no adult male earners;
- e. VGD members need to be locals who live there permanently;
- f. Must be between 20 and 50 years old and not affiliated with any non-governmental organization;
- g. Did not obtain a VGD card previously and allocate one card per family.

7.3 Composition and Functions of Union VGD Committee

The Union VGD Committee is responsible for implementing the VGD program at the Union level. In fact, it is the committee that is entrusted to distribute wheat/rice directly to distressed women at the grassroots level. At the VGD committee number of chairman is one and the number of members is 11. The composition of the committee is demonstrated in Chart 2.

Chart 2: The composition of the union VGD committee



Source: Department of Women Affairs, 2007-2008:18-19

The responsibilities of the Union VGD Committee are:

- to ensure appropriate selection of VGD women based on established criteria;
- to ensure adequate distribution of wheat/rice, especially ensuring that VGD women receive 30 kg per month;
- to guarantee that nourishment is conveyed by an indicated distributed date and all records (Master roll, stock registrar, savings registrar, inspection book) are appropriately kept up by the member secretary of the committee;
- to give associated NGOs the necessary support and provide them with comprehensive support in the provision of development service packages;
- to ensure proper execution of management of savings in non-government organizations;
- to arrange a special meeting to raise social awareness for VGD women at Union position where there's no NGO development program;

- to confirm safe and proper storage of food grain;
- to put up a signboard on the UP premises which includes necessary information like the name of the center, the total number of VGD women, the amount of the food ration, the distribution date, the amount of the compulsory monthly savings of each woman (at least Tk. 8 per month) and the duration of the VGD food cycle;
- to make certain that UP chairman submits a monthly progress report to UNO by the 5th of the next month (the UP Secretary will take the indispensable action in this regard).

In addition to the other services the VGD program provides, qualifying women will also get 30 kilogrammes of wheat and 25 kilogrammes of fortified atta each month for 24 months. The linked NGO's role as a non-governmental service provider means that it must offer participants in this program access to training, savings management, and microcredit as part of a comprehensive package of development services. This set of services was designed with the hope of helping VGD women escape from poverty.

The main objectives of including them in this service package are:

- to make them competent to receive employment opportunities;
- to reinforce their social empowerment by providing awareness-raising and income-generating training;
- to continue microcredit and other assistance during the food assistance cycle and after the completion of the food cycle;

Life skills training and income generation training have been the primary focus areas for VGD women's education. While the first focuses on issues like food and nutrition, disaster management, HIV/AIDS, health and hygiene, women's empowerment, etc., the second emphasizes chicken farming, backyard gardening, cow/goat farming, and managing a small company. In the latter situation, the linked NGO will provide the relevant WFP sub-office with a market feasibility research report and a list of participants/VGD women for income-generating training. After receiving authorization from the proper authority, the NGO performs the training. Typically, each participant gets instruction in any of the avenues above for financial gain, forming with required education in the fundamentals of small business.

The Pattern of the VGD Program

The affiliated NGO brings savings management activities to VGD women and provides training. Following is the method through which these tasks are completed

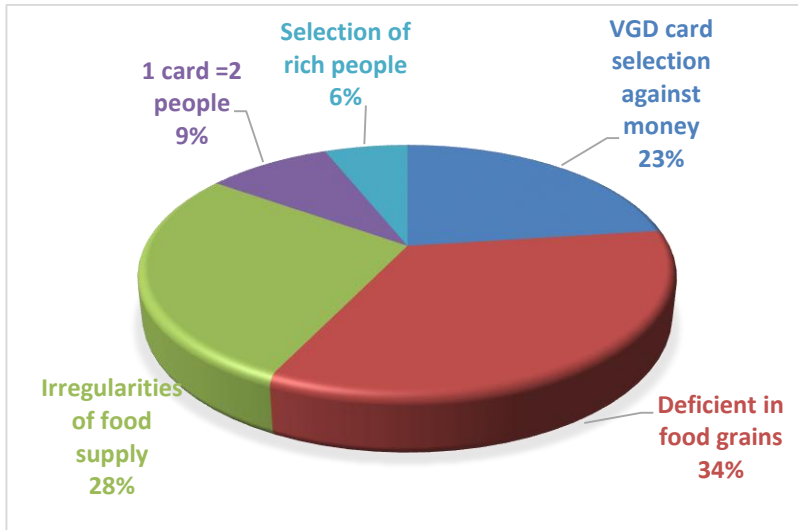
- a. Women in the VGD deposit their savings at local NGOs and bank branches. Each lady has her passbook in which she records her financial transactions and progress towards her savings goals.
- b. Half of a woman's VGD savings are always available to her to withdraw. After a woman's VGD cycle is complete, she should be urged to keep her account open. Withdrawn savings following the end of the feeding cycle are supposed to be invested in something profitable.
- c. Non-conformity is routinely checked by the UP Chairman, members, and secretary of the UPVGD committee.

8. What Makes the Program Vulnerable to Remove Vulnerability?

There have been 70 VGD card-holders in Patiya, 135 in Chhaygaon, 142 in Dakshin Purba, and 269 in Kushmail Union. Examining the cardholders it was found that specific varieties of corruption can be determined inside the management and distribution of VGD programs. A diffusion of irregularities can be observed within the management of VGD program. In step with regulation, it's the assigned duty of the Union VGD Committee to post a monthly progress file to the Upazila committees but it was found that the four sampled Unions did not preserve monthly meetings. Upazila administration, underneath the leadership of the UNO, seemingly contributes appropriately in selecting beneficiaries, but not to the preferred volume. The Union Parishad quite frequently manipulated the choice of VGD beneficiaries. Under the VGD program, it become alleged that the Chairman regularly gave precedence to those UP members who had a near alliance with him. Nearly all VGD beneficiaries in the sample showed that they did not see the list of VGD beneficiaries at the board of the Union Parishad. Under the program, someone is entitled to get hold of 30 Kg of meals grains per month. Our look at, however, has discovered that during all Unions, VGD beneficiaries did now not acquire monthly meals grain; they also received much less than the amount to which they have been entitled. All VGD beneficiaries of 4 Unions knowledgeable that in preference to the use of a weighting device, the Union Parishad Program employee used a bucket to measure the weight of food grains. It was additionally observed that the listing of VGD beneficiaries in most

instances was prepared pretty hurriedly. Good enough time was not given to perceive the disadvantaged or distressed people. The method of choice turned into dishonest. The subsequent member suggests the opinion of the beneficiaries at the fairness of the mechanism of selection. The intention of the VGD program, as found in advance, is to offer meals and training assistance to susceptible women. However, maximum of 95% of the respondents (Field Survey, 2020) were not well aware about the objectives of the program. They were not glad with what they got as meals. The respondents, but, made several pointers to enhance the quality of the VGD program. As we will see from the following figure, greater than two-thirds of the beneficiaries (69%) (Figure: 3) counseled that to enhance its effectiveness, corrupt people must not be allowed to be related to the VGD program. Several reasons account for the distance between guidelines and roles. In the absence of an institutionalized relationship among the Union Parishad (UP) and its residents, there's a loss of cooperation among them which, in turn, impacts the VGD program qualitatively and quantitatively. Maximum of the VGD beneficiaries do no longer have any clean idea about the UP activities and VGD program. Exploitative dominance of the chairman over the UP and inner political conflicts between the chairman and contributors significantly affect VGD functioning. Politics of vote is a major constraint to the powerful functioning of the VGD program. Chairman and members of the UP often use the VGD provider as a method to draw voters as opposed to serve the general public. The selection of VGD beneficiaries as a result typically takes position in line with the political choice of the chairman and participants; the latter is greater inquisitive about getting re-elected by whatever manner viable than to make services available to the poor women and the needy who are entitled to specific advantages. Because of financial insolvency, the UP cannot find the money for to bear the transaction expenses of the VGD program. Inadequate honorarium given to UP functionaries can be visible as an important cause of corruption in the distribution of food resource underneath VGD program.

Figure 1: Beneficiaries Opinion on Fairness in VGD Selection



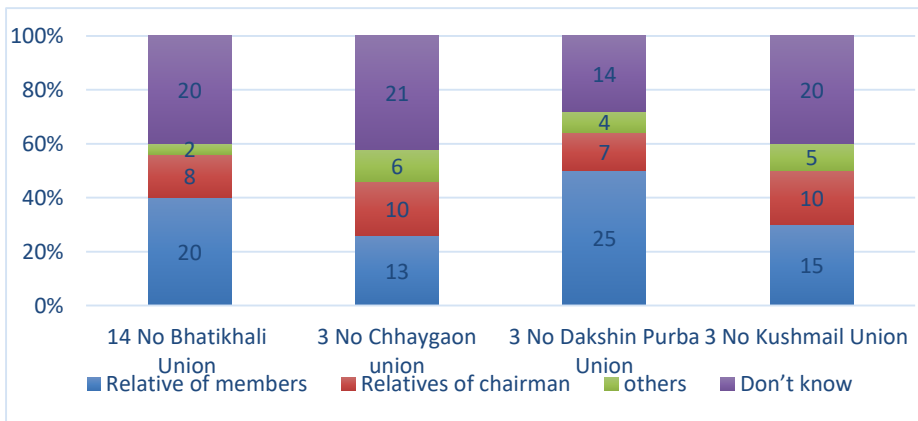
Source: Field Survey, 2020

Field survey delineates the magnitude of rampant corruption within side the selection process. From the above pie chart it's far revealed that VGD recipients are susceptible at factor of distribution of meals stuffs wherein 34% are of opine that they're getting much less than what they're meant to. About 28% are complaining approximately irregularities of meals stuffs deliver on the very outset of the distribution. The awesome apprehension is that approximately 23% are getting VGD offers via giving pecuniary benefits. Ineligible in accordance to VGD criteria, 6% wealthy have obtained VGD card is a clear breach of the goal of the program. Another 9% are sharing their cards with another susceptible exacerbating the distribution in all likelihood for voting purposes.

Field data demonstrate that the bulk of beneficiaries have been linked with UP leaders, as shown in Figure 2: overall, 73 beneficiaries (37%) have been household of Union Parishad Members, and 35 beneficiaries (18%) have been household of UP Chairman together they comprise of 55%. From above, it is clear that relatives of Union Parishad members, the chairman, and other linkages have ominously handed over neutrally chosen recipients. Among the four unions, 3 No. Dakshin Purba Union is

discovered to have 64% of the beneficiaries decided on the basis of own circle of family relation- 50% from union members, and 28% with no nexus. The 14 No. Bhatikhali Union of is ranked second in this regard, with around 56% of the beneficiaries determined in the aforementioned method, with 40% coming from union members. Other unions, bigger or smaller, exhibiting the same circumstances with their own circle of relative's relation appear to be instrumental in a select method.

Figure 2: Beneficiaries opinion on irregularities of VGD selection



Source: Field Survey, 2020

Case Study 1

Selina Akhter, a middle-aged woman from the 3 No. Kushmail union has a family of six people. Her spouse works as a rice dealer and government agent, supplying rice to the authority as needed for food aid programs (VGD, VGF). This winner, according to the interview, has 6 acres of land. Despite the fact that they are wealthy enough to keep their lives active, they receive VGD food grains. Surprisingly, Selina Akhter has also been enrolled in the VGF program without interruption since 2016.

9. Suggestions to Improve the Overall Activities of the Program

The purpose of the VGD program, as observed earlier, is to provide food and training assistance to vulnerable women. However, the majority of respondents were not particularly knowledgeable about the program's goals. They weren't happy with the food assistance they received. However, the respondents provided a number of recommendations to

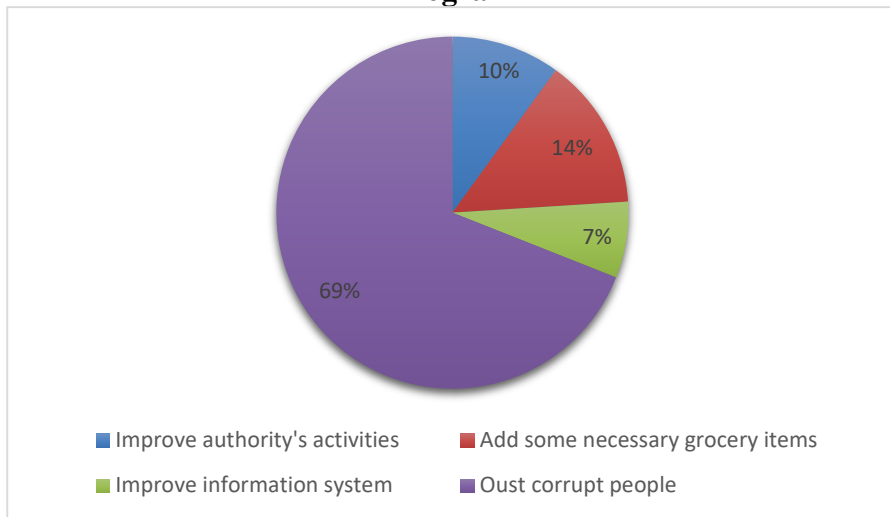
The Pattern of the VGD Program

enhance the VGD program's overall activities. As one can see from the following figure, more than two-thirds of the beneficiaries (69%) suggested that to improve its effectiveness, corrupt people should not be allowed to be associated with the VGD program.

Case Study 2

Popi Dey, 30, is a resident of 14 No. Bhatikhain union's ward No. 9. She works as a nurse in a hospital, and her spouse is a Bahrain immigrant. As a result, a family with two working members receives VGD food grains. Her mother-in-law, who also receives an old age allowance, is endorsed as a recipient by the manipulative selection method. Popi Dey stated flatly and categorically that her family relocated to Chittagong town for their children's schooling. She visits the village once a month solely to obtain VGD food grains, which she then sells.

Figure 3: Suggestions to Improve the Overall Activities of VGD Program



Source: Field Survey, 2020

Field study uncovered the profound established issue of the VGD program when respondents were inquired to grant recommendations to make strides the quality of the program. Almost 69% of the respondents are of opine that corrupt committee members must be sacked to make it a success. In expansion to that 10 % of the respondents communicated to induce way better administrations which could be a part of good governance. Almost 14% proposed including a few basic supply commodities within the bushel to create the program beneficial.

Case Study 3

Mst. Jubeda Khatun, 33, is the wife of a private firm employee and lives in ward no. 6 of the 3 No. Dakshin Purba union. Her family is made up of four people. She moreover works as a tailor. She duels in a well-decorated structure with 3.5 shotok of land. Due to an imperfect VGD card dissemination approach, they have ended up partners within the VGD programs. She claimed unquestionably that she is on the list because her brother-in-law is a friend of one of the members of the aforementioned union. She is one of the program's recipients, claiming that the food grain she receives is a significant advantage without having paid any cash.

Case Study 4

Josna Begum is a resident of 4 No. Ward of 3 No. Chhaygaon union. She is 35 years old, and her family consists of five individuals. She is a woman who does not own any land. Her husband drives an auto rickshaw and she has to support her family with only one source of income as result thereof. She was enrolled in the VGD program for the Year 2017-2018. She received VGD food grains on a sporadic premise (after 2 months she got VGD food grains). She has re-enlisted for the Year 2019-2020, but she is not receiving any food grains or benefits from the VGD program this time around. She has no idea who is stealing her food grains. She had gone to Union Parishad several times to ask around this matter, but nothing had been done.

10. Findings of the Study

From information gaps to widespread corruption and nepotism, all kinds of abnormalities were evident in the above-mentioned outcomes. There is apprehension that around 95% of the beneficiaries are not aware of the program's goals due to lack information and low levels of management and supervision, and that the program may be viewed as a complete disaster as a result thereof. Of the cardholders, about 28% say there are systematic irregularities in the food supply, and 34% think they are getting less than what is allocated to them. There are systematic anomalies in the availability of food. The selection procedure is being flagrantly violated by the 23% of people who bribe the selectors to obtain a VGD card and the 9% of people who share one card. Our research shows that approximately 69% of the beneficiaries oppose the involvement of corrupt individuals in the VGD committee. Field data

indicates that a significant portion of beneficiaries are associated with Union Parishad leaders, approximately 37% beneficiaries belong to households of Union Parishad Members, while 18% beneficiaries come from households of UP Chairmen, together representing 55%. Therefore, it is evident that relatives of Union Parishad members, the chairmen, and other connections have unfortunately diverted the selection of recipients who were to be chosen impartially.

11. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Our findings reveal that the program can rarely reap its essential goal of lowering quick-term deprivation and vulnerability of the poor women basically due to corruption, lack of responsibility, inadequate plans, political favoritism, and inappropriate framework. As stated below, several matters need to be done to enhance the efficacy of the VGD and specially to inspire transparency and responsibility in its implementation.

- a. The manner of choice of beneficiaries desires to be simplified. Effective policy and important database want to be evolved for warding off duplication and manipulation.
- b. More intermediate levels of management and supervision are required between an organization's highest and lowest levels. The Union Parishad and the District authorities need to keep an eye on the Upazila office, with the latter having oversight responsibilities over the former.
- c. Political biases inside the formation of the choice committee are to be averted without least delay.
- d. Information about the program was no longer nicely circulated. It supplied the space for manipulation within the selection of beneficiaries. Therefore, it's recommended that a campaign have to be launched at the rural level too.
- e. Through campaigns geared toward growing consciousness many of the rural women would be encouraged. As the listing of beneficiaries is ready in haste, people who have to be the real beneficiaries are often dropped from the list. Efforts are to be made for huge circulation or declaration of the coverage of choice of beneficiaries at the union stage.

The chairman's exploitation and control over the UP and the internal political disputes between the chairman and contributors have a major

impact on how well VGD functions and their overwhelming exercises of power must be addressed without least delay to make it a success. One of the main obstacles to the VGD program's effective operation is vote politics. Rather than serving the public interest, the Chairman and UP members frequently use the VGD provider as a tool to attract voters. As a result, the selection of VGD beneficiaries usually follows the political preferences of the chairman and participants, who are more interested in securing their reelection through any means possible than in providing services to the impoverished and destitute who are eligible for particular benefits. This parochial mentality of the selectors are proved to be a major impediment for the smooth functioning of the aforesaid program. Since it is one of the most vital programs to eradicate poverty, further research can incorporate more unions that will go a long way in exposing all the problems. The study's authors stuck to descriptive summaries and themes derived directly from the respondents' own words, without evaluating the assertion of the recipients. Subsequent investigations may encompass non-beneficiaries and fill the knowledge gap in this particular study. In fine, mass economic emancipation is undoubtedly conceivable if the current trend of widespread corruption is reversed and a sizable number of vulnerable individuals are included in this program.

The Pattern of the VGD Program

References

- Ali, L. (1992). *Relationship of Public Sector Social Safety Nets, Social Protection and Quality of life*. Hamdard Institute of Management Sciences, Hamdard University Islamabad, Pakistan.
- Aminuzzaman, S. M. (2010). Local government and development in bangladesh lessons learned and challenges for improving service delivery of union parishad (UP). *Local Governance Support Project-Learning and Innovation Component (LGSP-LIC)*, 1-18.
- Ahmed, A. U., Quisumbing, M. A. R., Hoddinott, J., Nasreen, M., & Bryan, E. (2007). *Relative efficacy of food and cash transfers in improving food security and livelihoods of the ultra-poor in Bangladesh*. Rome: WFP, World Food Programme
- Ahmed, A. (2023). *Assessing indicators for targeting the needy under the Improved Maternity and Lactating Mother Allowance Program in rural and urban Bangladesh*. Intl Food Policy Res Inst.
- Asma, K. M., Misu, F., & Islam, M. A. (2023). The Impact of Social Safety Net Programs on Poverty, Food Security and Standard of Living in Bangladesh. *The International Journal of Community and Social Development*, 5(1), 71-96
- Bekele, Y. W. (2018). The political economy of poverty in Ethiopia: drivers and challenges. *Africa Review*, 10(1), 17-39.
- Barrett, C. B., & McPeak, J. G. (2006). *Poverty traps and safety nets* (pp. 131-154). Springer US.
- Barrientos, S., Gereffi, G., & Rossi, A. (2011). Economic and social upgrading in global production networks: A new paradigm for a changing world. *International Labour Review*, 150(3-4), 319-340.
- Coady, D. P. (2004). Designing and evaluating social safety nets: Theory, evidence and policy conclusions
- Dye, T. J., Jain, S. V., & Simakajornboon, N. (2017). Outcomes of long-term iron supplementation in pediatric restless legs syndrome/periodic limb movement disorder (RLS/PLMD). *Sleep medicine*, 32, 213-219.
- First, J. K. (1998). RUSSIA'S SOCIAL SAFETY NET: STANDING AT THE CROSSROADS. *Economic Developments and Reforms in Cooperation Partner Countries*, 189.
- Haider, M. Z., & Mahamud, A. (2017). Beneficiary selection and allowance utilization of social safety net programme in Bangladesh. *Journal of Human Rights and Social Work*, 2, 45-51.
- Hebbar, M., & Scott, L. (2020). Bangladesh: Social protection
- Hossain, N. (2005). Productivity and virtue: Elite categories of the poor in Bangladesh. *World Development*, 33(6), 965-977.
- Hossain, M. Z., Kaiser, M. A., & Sabina, I. (2018). Targeting errors in beneficiary selection of main public social safety nets programmes in Bangladesh. *Demography India*, 47(1), 23-37.
- Khan, M. M. (2008). Functioning of local government (Union Parishad): Legal and practical constraints. *Democracy watch, RTI international, democratic local governance program-DLGP, USAID*.
- Mannan, M. A., & Ahmed, B. N. (2012). Impact evaluation of vulnerable group development (VGD) program in Bangladesh. *Dhaka: Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS)*.
- Mozumder, M. A. K., Islam, M. M., Alam, M. S., & Rahman, M. M. (2009). Transparency and accountability for ensuring food security in Bangladesh: A study on field institutions. *Final Report CF*, 3(07).

The Chittagong University Journal of Social Sciences

- Podder, P., & Rahman, M. S. (2015). Relationship between organizational justice and turnover intention in the private commercial banks of Bangladesh. *The Chittagong University Journal of Business Administration*, 30, 227-248.
- Pradhan, M., & Sulaiman, J. (2014). A review of the vulnerable group development (VGD) program for protection and promotion of poor households in Bangladesh. *International Journal of Social Work and Human Services Practice*, 2(2), 30-39.
- Pradhan, M. A. H., & Sulaiman, J. (2017). Impact of vulnerable group development (VGD) program on improvement of woman headed household consumption diversity in Bangladesh. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 11(1).
- Rahman Rezvi, M. (2021). Exploring politics of social safety net in Bangladesh through political settlement: The case of Rajakhali Union in Cox's Bazar District. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 56(7), 1441-1456
- Smith, W. J. & Subbarao, K. (2003). What Role for Safety! Net Transfers in Very Low Income Countries?. Social Protection discussion paper series ; no. SP 0301 Washington, D.C. : World Bank Group.
- Subbarao, K. (2003). *Systemic shocks and social protection: role and effectiveness of public works programs*. Washington, DC: Social Protection, World Bank.
- Van de Walle, S., Van Roosbroek, S., & Bouckaert, G. (2008). Trust in the public sector: Is there any evidence for a long-term decline?. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 74(1), 47-64.

Websites:

- Pille ,C. (2019). Revive and VGD: from accountant to advisor.
<https://blogbe.vgd.eu/en/revive-and-vgd-from-accountant-to-advisornewagebd.net/article/24537/2071-sacks-of-vgd-rice-seized>
<https://www.newagebd.net/article/74151/index.php>