

Good Governance for Food Security in Bangladesh: Exploring the Role of Administration and Stakeholders in Policy Decision-Making

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ABSTRACT

Food security in Bangladesh is a major issue that addresses both social and economic factors. The present study was conducted to identify and overcome the challenges of good governance in ensuring safe food in Bangladesh. In recent years, some positive initiatives have been taken by government and private initiatives to ensure safe food but despite this, there has been no effective and permanent progress in ensuring safe food. The results of this study show that the initiatives taken at the practical level are mostly temporary, and therefore are not sustainable. There are limitations and lack of effective implementation of the existing law in ensuring safe food. In addition, although the relevant departments of several ministries are engaged in administrative and supervisory activities to ensure safe food, there is a lack of coordination and communication between them due to the absence of a unified institutional structure. On the other hand, the lack of internal monitoring and accountability, along with the institutional limitations of the supervisory institutions, is noticeable. Due to these limitations, is creating a huge threat to the health and safety of the common citizen. A set of recommendations have been presented in this study to achieve positive changes in this situation. It also contributes insights to navigate the complexities of stakeholder involvement in food security policy, informing the development of more effective, inclusive policies for enduring and sustainable food security in Bangladesh.

Keywords: Administration, Bangladesh, Food Security, Food Utilization, Good Governance

1. INTRODUCTION

Food security for all is one of the fundamental rights ensured to Bangladeshi citizens under the country's constitution. Ensuring safe, nutritious, and sufficient food for every person is not only a social responsibility, but also a legal right. The condition of food security is present when every person, at all times, possesses the physical, social, and economic means to secure safe and nutritious food in quantities sufficient to meet their dietary needs. Furthermore, this food must reflect their personal preferences, ensuring they can maintain the energy and health required for an active lifestyle (FAO, 2001). Food security exists when all people have constant access to enough safe and nutritious food to live healthy and productive lives. Food insecurity is a critical component in the cohabitation of numerous food-related concerns. The FAO has identified Bangladesh as one of 45 countries requiring external aid for food, citing its insufficient resources to manage critical food insecurity problems. Guaranteeing food safety and security for all citizens is an urgent priority to uphold the right to life, as it is self-evident that human survival is impossible without them. While Bangladesh has seen significant development in its food resources over the past 55 years since independence, the full realization of food security remains hindered by various factors (Sikder & Islam, 2023).

In a 2019 study by the Bangladesh Food Safety Authority and Dhaka University, harmful contaminants like lead and antibiotics were detected in both pasteurized and raw milk. Further research has revealed similar public health risks, including excessive microplastics in seafood, high trans fat levels in soybean oil, and antibiotic residues in poultry (The Daily Star, 2024). Bangladesh faces the significant challenge of securing

food for all its citizens. Since independence, it has made substantial headway in increasing domestic food grain production, thereby bolstering food availability. However, as defined by the 1996 World Food Summit, availability is just one of three necessary conditions for comprehensive food security (Kashem & Faroque, 2013). Within this context, cities have risen as significant participants in food policy on a global scale, effectively reorienting food governance toward the local sphere. In contrast to higher governance levels, municipal authorities have demonstrated a keen awareness that food security challenges are multifaceted and interrelated, necessitating policy responses that cut across traditional sectoral boundaries (FAO, 2019). Research indicates that higher-level food policies consistently fail to address the underlying causes of food insecurity (Sonnino & Spayde, 2014). Candel (2014) attributes these governance failures to the neglect of fundamental principles including effectiveness, responsiveness, equality, and fairness that are crucial for combating hunger at its source. In response, cities worldwide have stepped forward as key food policy actors, rescaling and reshaping governance at the local level.

Cities, unlike higher levels of government, have recognized the interconnectedness of food security concerns and the need for integrated strategies (FAO, 2019). Consequently, urban food governance instruments are increasingly viewed as a promising mechanism for advancing sustainable development and realizing the 2030 Agenda, particularly in relation to SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) (Ilieva, 2017; Schiff, 2008). This study contributes to the critical discourse on effective food security governance and urban food policy. To do so, it employs an adapted version of the FAO's good governance analytical framework. The case study offers valuable insights by examining whether urban food governance instruments are genuinely fostering egalitarian and democratic structures. This study adds to current discussions by looking at the following values: accountability, responsiveness, equality and fairness, rule of law, effectiveness and efficiency, and participatory democratic conventions. It points out flaws in the current governance frameworks that prevent fair food security results. More significantly, it presents a novel framework that can analyse the essential underlying characteristics required to promote good governance for food security, especially in urban settings.

Bangladesh has one of the lowest incomes and densest populations in the world. Despite being one of the world's leading rice producers, Bangladesh faces significant challenges in meeting the expanding food demands of its population. Furthermore, price increases in essential goods frequently cause problems for persons with low and intermediate incomes in controlling their required dietary intakes. Due to slow agricultural output growth and persistently low per capita earnings, Bangladesh has experienced a decline in food intake, leading to significant malnutrition challenges. This is starkly reflected in health outcomes: more than 60% of children in rural areas are malnourished, and the infant mortality rate stands at roughly 35 per 1,000 live births (World Bank, 2012). People in Bangladesh rely heavily on main cereal crops such as rice, wheat, and maize for food and with our country's growing population, such reliance on cereals increases susceptibility to food security in the next decades. In such cases, potatoes can help to broaden the food supply base, reducing the likelihood of severe food shortages (Uddin et al., 1970). Potato and vegetable farming in Bangladesh faces two major obstacles. First, price instability causes dramatic year-to-year variations in production levels. Second, the lack of adequate cold storage and agro-processing industries prevents the maintenance of a stable, year-round supply of potatoes and vegetables (M. M. Islam et al., 2008). Nationally, monthly household spending has climbed over the past fifteen years, rising in both urban and rural areas. The increased cost of food is the primary reason for the increase in family expenses. Since malnutrition results in over one-third of Bangladeshi children being underweight or underdeveloped and is a major cause of child mortality there, malnutrition poses a serious threat to the country.

Two key contributions emerge from this research. First, it critically evaluates Bangladesh's food safety policies through a pro-poor lens, centering its analysis on informal food retail environments. This encompasses a comprehensive examination of the various food outlets, stakeholders, supporting infrastructure, and regulatory mechanisms operating within these spaces (Downs et al., 2020; Herforth & Ahmed, 2015). The assumptions of this study would be a useful working guide for policymakers in the Bangladesh Government's relevant Department. Beyond its immediate contributions, this study will benefit researchers in food and nutrition departments at various public and private institutions. The findings will also offer a helpful reference point for subsequent investigations in this area. Central to this work is the recognition that enhancing food safety governance is critical and requires deeper insight into the dynamics of urban food systems.

The main objective of this study is to identify the problems of good governance in ensuring safe food and to provide recommendations for overcoming them. In addition, the specific objectives are to review the existing basic laws in the field of food adulteration control and supervision and to identify the challenges in implementation. It also evaluates the effectiveness of participatory mechanisms focusing on stakeholder engagement, decision-making processes, and transparency in addressing food-related issues.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Food security constitutes a vital element of national socioeconomic advancement and stability, initially dependent on a country's capacity to obtain and produce food. Kashem and Faroque (2013) emphasized both food availability and government's role in achieving food sufficiency as key components of food security. Their research concluded that despite improvements in food production and availability, food insecurity remains prevalent which driven mainly by limited purchasing power and restricted access among the ultra-poor.

Faridi & Wadood (2010) utilize a logistic regression model to study the factors influencing household food security in Bangladesh. The regression findings indicate that food security status is highly sensitive to rice price variations. Analysis across occupational groups showed that wage earners both daily and salaried are more vulnerable to food insecurity than self-employed workers in agricultural and non-agricultural sectors. Understanding these dynamics is critical for policymakers, as addressing food insecurity among disadvantaged groups becomes increasingly urgent when food grain prices are high.

Smith (2000) investigated the root causes of food insecurity in developing countries, focusing on national food supply versus poverty-related access barriers. Using child malnutrition as a proxy, the study found little connection between national food availability and food insecurity. Countries with the worst food insecurity actually had high poverty rates and food surpluses, confirming that poverty is the primary culprit. Smith concluded that well-targeted policies, informed by geographic analysis, could most quickly achieve food security for the greatest number of people.

Ver Ploeg et al. (2009) evaluated the size of regions with restricted access to reasonably priced and nutritious food. The study's conclusions indicate that a tiny proportion of consumers face barriers to obtaining reasonably priced, wholesome food because they don't have simple access to transportation or live far from a supermarket or large grocery shop. Racial segregation and income disparity are more prevalent in urban core areas when food access is restricted. Okwudilio and Wheelock (2006) examined low-income households' levels of food insecurity in a few US Southern States. To examine the sample homes' level of food security, they employed a logit model. The households in the sample were divided into two groups: those having children and those without. They discovered that a household's level of food insecurity and security is significantly influenced by their income.

Hossain et al. (2005) investigated food and nutrition security in Bangladesh, finding notable success in rice production growth through technology and private irrigation investment. Yet they warned that population pressure on scarce land threatens these gains. The study also revealed limited progress beyond rice: access to diverse foods has not increased, and nutritional improvements remain slow. Moreover, Hanson & Connor (2014) explored links between food insecurity and nutritional status in the US. They found that food-insecure adults consume fewer vegetables, fruits, and dairy products, and have lower intakes of vitamins A and B-6, magnesium, calcium, and zinc. Food-insecure children also eat less fruit than food-secure children.

Omonona & Agoi (2007) examined food security in urban Nigerian families using survey data and statistical analysis. They found a 0.49 percent food insecurity incidence in their study area. Regression results showed that food insecurity increases with the household head's age, is higher in female-headed households, and decreases with greater educational attainment. Lastly, Sarmin et al. (2024) compared urban and rural household food security using availability, access, and utilization indicators. They found that food availability and consumption depend on production, imports, public distribution, costs, finances, and preferences. Rural areas consume more rice, while urban areas prefer wheat. Except for rice, urban households consume all food items in greater quantities than rural households.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative technique to gain a complete understanding of food security in Bangladesh. Documentation studies and literature reviews were used to collect secondary data, which came from a variety of sources including official documents, international organization reports, relevant scientific articles and academic publications, as well as books and articles from reliable mass media. Recurring trends were identified during content analysis. Source triangulation ensured data quality by verifying information across documents and perspectives, hence improving reliability.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Research Results

4.1.1. Legal Framework of Food Security in Bangladesh

Bangladesh's food safety regulations and policies aim to control a safe and secure food supply. In Bangladesh, the Consumer Protection Act known as the 2009 provides for the protection of consumers against adulterated or defective goods and services and the resolution of related disputes. The issue of unsafe food or adulterated food has been included in the Consumer Rights Protection Act, 2009 as an 'act against consumer rights, this law makes adulteration of food products a crime and provides for imprisonment and fines. A special law was enacted in 2013 to ensure safe food for the public.

Table 1. The Role of Legal Framework in Ensuring Food Security

Consumer Rights Protection Act, 2009	Safe Food Act 2013
Overview	Overview
The consumer protection act is the act which deals with the rights of the consumers, give protection against anti consumers rights practice & any other matter which is related to it. The act was legislated in 2009. Section 20 of the act provided the provision related to anti consumers rights practice. The main purpose of the act is to safe the right of consumers which prescribed under section 3 of the act, right to safe good and service, right to be informed, right to get remedy if violates the right & most importantly right to complaint.	Bangladesh Food Safety Act 2013 is the main Act which deals with food related issues. It is the predecessor of Pure Food Security Ordinance 1959 & Food Security Rules 1957. The main purpose of the Food Security Act 2013 is to ensure the safety & quality of food for public health & to update rules & laws in the perspective of food laws. The Act, 2013 has provided provision related to food security; it established institutions, authorities (Bangladesh Food Safety Authority – BFSA) & also provides the source of fund & budget to run the mechanism. For ends of justice, the Act established a tribunal known as a food court consisting of 1st class magistrate or Metropolitan magistrate in the Metropolitan area. The Food Security Act established an autonomous body for testing the quality of food for consumers. The main purpose of the act is to ensure safe, hygienic & quality food by preventing food adulteration & contamination. It defines the offences & also provides punishment for breaking the laws. It strengthens our laws, helps the consumers & brings transparency in the field of food safety & security.
Loopholes	Loopholes
1) Absence of ADR process: ADR is one of the most familiar processes in recent time which directly reduces the backlogs of cases & resolves the cases outside the court in a short time without any unnecessary cost. So adopting ADR the Act could upgrade its accountability.	1) Inadequacy of activities & meetings: An agency is run by their active participation but the law provides only 2 meetings per year for the Council meeting under section 4 and 3 meetings per year for coordination meeting under section 16 of the act, which is not proper

- 2) **Absence of provision related to digital market or E-commerce:** Our country is developing day by day so with the development of the ages the market policy is being changed through digital or e-commerce. Therefore absence of provision related to e-commerce is a gap of the Act, 2009.
 - 3) **Complaint:** Section 60 provided the provision related to complaints. The complaint process is old version where it doesn't mention any types of digital complaint process like Facebook or any other social media. This is an age of digital technology so for making the Act easy, this type of provision needs to be adopted.
 - 4) **Limited power of Director:** The controlling authorities have a limited power so they can't control the whole process & there is a gap within the agencies.
 - 5) **Absence of special court:** There is no such type of court which deals with consumers offences. Ultimately the judicial process is being slow. So the authorities or government need to establish special court or tribunal to improve the efficiency of this act.
- 2) **Slow judicial process:** The whole judicial system of our country is overburdened so automatically the process runs slowly. The investigation process is determined at 90 days which can be expanded by 30 more days, so the mechanism results in a slow judicial process.
 - 3) **Backdated complaint process:** There is no digital complaint process like email, message, or any other digital ways. The law provides that a complainant can file a complaint by written document only. So to properly implement & to deal with modern society, the complaint process needs to be upgraded.
 - 4) **Inadequate punishment:** Adulterated food is one of the most dangerous threats which could end a life; it is a serious crime from the perspective of jurisprudence so the punishment needs to be harsher. The act provides only 5 years of imprisonment as the highest punishment, which is not adequate. So to fulfil the purpose of the act, the amount of punishment & fine need to be increased.
 - 5) **Corruption:** Corruption is one of the biggest problems in our country. Food security agency is not beyond the reach of corruption, but the law does not provide any rules, regulations, or exceptional punishment for the authorities related to it.

4.1.2. Role of Administration and Stakeholders in Ensuring Food Security

Understanding stakeholder involvement is essential to comprehending food security policy decisions. Government entities, farmers, consumers, and the food industry each play distinct yet interconnected roles in shaping and executing policies that impact food availability, access, and utilization. This research illuminates how effective collaboration and coordination among these groups can significantly influence policy outcomes. Table 2 presents a detailed overview of stakeholder roles in food security policy decision-making.

Table 2. The Role of Stakeholders in Food Security

Name of the Organisations	Role of the Stakeholders
Local government organisation (city corporation)	The primary urban government organizations in charge of food systems are city corporations. Markets, garbage, lighting, planning, and food safety are all governed by separate sections. Bangladesh's major city corporations (DNCC, DSCC, GCC, and NCC) have ward council members and zonal executive officers. Committees for coordinating nutrition and the City Working Group, which is supported by the FAO (M. S. Islam, 2024)
Department of health	Bangladesh's population health and nutrition have significantly improved since gaining independence in 1971. The nation is currently mostly self-sufficient in staple foods, while it was once characterized by extreme food insecurity and maternal and child malnutrition. No communicable illnesses now account for 66.9% of fatalities, notwithstanding a drop in hunger and nutritional shortages (WHO, 2016). Excessive food consumption and sedentary lifestyles are associated with obesity, diabetes, hypertension,

	heart disease, and related disorders. The risk of certain nutrition-related illnesses can be decreased by consuming more plant-based diets (Fahim et al., 2021).
BSTI	The Ministry of Industries oversees the Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution (BSTI), which was founded in accordance with the BSTI Ordinance, 1985. The Central Testing Laboratory (CTL) and the Bangladesh Standards Institute (BDSI) merged to form it. In addition to implementing the metric system of weights and measures, BSTI creates national standards and guarantees product quality control. Additionally, it develops national standards, encourages quality assurance, and offers testing services. BSTI operates as a self-sufficient entity (Mojumdar & Amin, 2023)
Directorate of National Consumer's Right Protection	The Directorate of National Consumer Rights Protection (DNCRP) enforces the Consumer Rights Protection Act, 2009 to prevent anti-consumer practices and raise consumer awareness through government and non-government participation. The Food Grain Supply (Prevention of Prejudicial Activity) Ordinance, 1956 regulates the storage, movement, and distribution of food grains and prevents false information. The Essential Commodities Act, 1990 aims to stabilize and ensure the supply of essential commodities, including food, through monitoring of storage, transportation, distribution, and use (Mojumdar & Amin, 2023)
Mobile court	Human life is at risk due to unsafe food. Mobile courts function under the Mobile Courts Act, 2009 in accordance with Section 75 of the Safe Food Act, 2013 to promptly resolve food safety infractions in unique circumstances. According to the Consumer Rights Protection Act of 2009, hotels and bakeries in Meghna Upazila, Comilla, were penalized by mobile courts for selling expired goods, operating without a license, and preparing meals in an unsanitary manner. According to authorities, these activities will continue in the public interest and are intended to safeguard public health (Sarkar, 2024).
Customs house	At airports, seaports, and land ports, the Ministry of Finance's Customs House oversees the quality of imported food items. Benapole Land Port and Chittagong Seaport are the main entry points for imported foods. Under the direction of Assistant Commissioners, Customs Superintendents inspect imports, gather samples, send them to labs for analysis, and authorize the release of products. Imported packaged, processed, and raw food commodities are subject to quality inspection at customs houses (Rahman et al., 2015).

Source: Data processed by author

As summarized in Table 2, each stakeholder carries distinct yet essential roles and responsibilities in food security policy. The government bears primary responsibility for formulating and implementing policies that ensure food availability, affordability, and safety, while also allocating resources toward research and development. Collectively, these diverse stakeholders form a collaborative network united by the common goal of achieving food security for all. Through continued cooperation among these actors, it is hoped that a more sustainable, safe, and equitable food system can be realized.

4.1.3. Challenges of good Governance for ensuring Food Security in Bangladesh

Food adulteration in Bangladesh represents a grave threat to both food security and public health. According to Rahman et al. (2015), this practice is pervasive across all levels of the food system, manifesting through contaminated products, improper packaging, expired goods, and permit irregularities. While mobile courts have been deployed to address these violations, their effectiveness is hampered by a procedural limitation: they do not consider individual complaints unless written authorization is obtained from the Director General of the Consumer Rights Protection Department (Azad, 2013).

The issues include limited consumer awareness, insufficient regulatory enforcement, poor food processing cleanliness, and chemical contamination. However, a lack of skilled personnel, insufficient finance,

and poor laboratory infrastructure limit its efficacy. Inadequate laboratory personnel, outdated testing equipment, port laboratory capacity restrictions, irregular technical staff training, and hiring without subject-specific qualifications are some of the major issues. Internal quality control procedures are inadequate, and food testing is frequently postponed. Further undermining the enforcement of food safety regulations are anomalies and corruption in sample testing by field inspectors and laboratory staff. As a result, consumers continue to receive contaminated food, which poses major health.

4.2. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that there are several gaps that should be bridged to improve the food security. The main purpose of the study is to identify the problems of good governance in ensuring safe food and to provide recommendations for overcoming them. Kashem & Faroque (2013) in spite of being increased in food production and availability, food insecurity remains a serious matter due to a lack of purchasing power and hence access to food. Faridi & Wadood (2010) show the reasons influencing household food security in Bangladesh very sensitive to variations in rice prices. In Bangladesh, the Consumer Protection Act 2009 provides for the protection of consumers in this arena. Consumer's protection act 2009 & safe food Act 2013 are one of the most crucial Acts in this field. Though there are some loopholes such as absence of ADR, E-commerce & Backward complaint process. But the Local government organizations like city Corporation, BSTI, Mobile Court, Department of Health played a crucial role in policy making & implementation.

City Corporations serve as vital administrative organs, managing and regulating food markets within their jurisdictions. Their responsibilities are divided: the urban planning section oversees local planning for market structures and green spaces, while the health section ensures compliance with public health standards. Under Section 75 of the Safe Food Act 2013, mobile courts operating under the Mobile Courts Act 2009 are authorized to try offenses committed under this legislation. However, the study identifies several governance challenges impeding food security in Bangladesh, including manpower shortages, lack of necessary testing equipment, and insufficient laboratory capacity. The paper also provided some extraordinary recommendations & those are amendments should be made to the Safe Food Act, amendments should be made to the Safe Food Act, participation of all stakeholders, Strict enforcement of the law, code of ethics should be prepared and implement and many others. In all over laboratories are not able to perform the expected role in controlling food quality at the field level. The three laws mentioned in the study have positive vibes, but some limitations and practical challenges are noticeable. Due to all the limitations mentioned above, stakeholders and food adulterators have the opportunity to resort to various irregularities and corruption.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study underscores the critical importance of government-led cross-sector collaboration in shaping food safety policy in Bangladesh. While both the Safe Food Act, 2013 and the Consumer Rights Protection Act, 2009 contain meaningful provisions for protecting consumers, several significant limitations continue to undermine their effectiveness. Key shortcomings include the narrow 30-day window for filing complaints, the requirement that consumers bear the cost of defective sample testing, the absence of food courts at district and metropolitan levels, insufficient penalties for violations, and prolonged case settlement processes. These gaps allow a considerable portion of food products to escape proper inspection and create conditions where irregularities and corruption can take hold at the field level. Furthermore, despite multiple government agencies being engaged in administrative oversight, the absence of a unified institutional structure has led to poor coordination and communication, while institutional limitations and lack of internal monitoring have weakened supervisory effectiveness.

To address these challenges, several reforms are recommended. The Safe Food Act, 2013 should be amended to establish food courts in every district and metropolitan area, extend the complaint filing period from 30 to 90 days, and shift the financial burden of sample testing from consumers to relevant government authorities. The Consumer Rights Protection Act, 2009 should be revised to allow consumers the right to file cases directly and to strengthen cooperation between magistrates, prosecuting agencies, and law enforcement during market inspections. Beyond legislative reform, effective implementation requires broader stakeholder participation including civil society, health authorities, local government bodies, and business representatives in both formulation and enforcement. Mobile court operations must be better resourced with adequate police

deployment and stronger local coordination. Food supervisory agencies should appoint dedicated legal counsel for case management, implement a clear code of ethics for field inspectors, and ensure continuous monitoring of food processing facilities with mandatory product testing upon market entry. Achieving meaningful food safety in Bangladesh ultimately requires not only stronger laws but also the political will and institutional capacity to enforce them consistently and transparently.

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