



SCRUTINIZING INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION ERRORS IN VGD PROGRAM OF BANGLADESH

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In a given society, two principles: *universalism* and *targeting* function as fundamental policies. While the former focuses on whole population, the latter reflects on a group populace with specific means-testing. Following the second, Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) is one of the oldest social programs in Bangladesh, which protects “destitute mothers” from acute food vulnerability. This study scrutinizes the factors that promote the inclusion and exclusion errors in identifying the clients. Using in-depth informal interviews, the study tends to find that errors occur due to equivocal roles of “social network,” the culture of “elite capture,” practice of “equal share,” “weak and partial governance systems,” “fear of stigmatization,” and “categorical differences.”

Keywords: Inclusion error, Exclusion error, VGD, Social policy, Bangladesh.

Introduction

“Universalism” or selectivity through “targeting”, which one is the core principle behind social provisioning, historically it is a contesting challenge for social policies. The entire population is the beneficiary under “universalism” while targeting advances through eligibility criteria for membership into the program based on specific means-testing to determine “truly deserving”. Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) is one of the oldest supplementary feeding programs (SFP) in Bangladesh. It is one of the core social programs undertaken by the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) since its inception in 1975 among several social safety nets (SSN). The program targets the most vulnerable segment of the population in Bangladesh and it is evidently considered as the largest SFP for the poor women. Thus, VGD as a social policy in a developing country like Bangladesh, it is important to uncover the targeting errors, as the poverty dynamic as well as socio-political atmosphere is diverse in nature. In doing so, Amartya Sen’s analysis on *the political economy of targeting* is incorporated here along with ideas evolved from actor’s perspective in development studies. The reason is that, Sen’s analysis explains factors affecting targeting within an eclectic point of view covering some more important social theories. The intention of corroborating these theoretical arguments is to capture both individual and social factors that may influence targeting. Specifically, the present study shows interest to explain how *inclusion and exclusion errors* occur in a local level. In searching this central question, the present study highlights the individual and social characteristics of ‘existing clients’ and ‘potential clients’ of VGD. In order to scrutinize so, the study also focuses on administrative and political processes behind the program. More precisely, it does not concentrate on measuring; rather, the focus is on understanding the process of public service provision in terms of targeting

errors in SFPs. We found that while weak social network restricts potential VGD clients to access the program, the others step in due to better social connections. Current study finds that most political elites in local level control the entire inclusion process. Similarly, the norm of “equal share” among political leaders substantially adds to the disparity in participation of clients. Apart from that a very weak and partial governance system in a society composed of categorical differences also opens loopholes for actors to commit errors in the VGD selection process. Finally, the study unveils that the previous social positions of the clients augments “fear of stigmatization” and restricts their human agencies, which eventually result in exclusion error in VGD program. The study recommends that targeting based on a specific capability deprivation can reduce the errors.

Theory and Method

Drawing on Amartya K. Sen (1995, 2000), De Herdt (2005) asserts the presupposition that the success or failure of a poverty program crucially depends on the behavioral response generated by “poor” and “non-poor”. It is a common dictum that, social policy programs are hardly ever purely universal or purely based on targeting; however, they tend to lie somewhere between the two extremes on a continuum by spelling out individuals’ life chances in a specific social order (Mkandawire, 2005: iii). It should be noted that access to food transfers and the protection of poor is a simultaneous process. If the adequate supply of food is available from providers, but insufficient demand occurred from recipients, then it creates complication within the institutional arrangements to tackle poverty within the society (De Herdt, 2005). For recipients, there might be some structural factors which constrain their participation in the program (Johnson, 2012) and conversely, there might be some more structural elements which create room for maneuver (Cleaver, 2005). Effective social network, for example, of an individual could spur his/her possibility to access certain services, but if any cultural prototype like “elite capture” prevails within society then the individual’s access to such services might be affected.

Thus, the coexistence of factors liable for enablement and constraint of human agency is a tension addressed by several theorists exploring the ways in which individual agents are formed and explaining the intermittence and unpredictability of change affected through agency (Henriques, *et.al*, 1984 and Mac Nay, 2000 in Cleaver, 2007). In this connection, Sen (1995) suggests that in case of social policies, the objects of targeting should be viewed as agents rather than patient as the affected could be very active agent indeed by not being languid recipients waiting for next handouts. Furthermore, in response to Sen’s ‘instrumental argument’ of ‘appearing in public without shame’, De Herdt (2005) challenges this instrumental argument and proposes a more complex use of capability-oriented reasoning emphasizing the *plurality of concerns*, which is, in fact, also a part and parcel of Sen’s approach. He explains that the effectiveness of targeting sometimes depends, wholly or partly, on decisions made by the potential and would-be clients of targeted programs (De Herdt, 2005:29). It can be argued that the *plurality of concerns* might nurture some prospects, which may create ‘opportunity hoarding’ (Tilly, 2006) for elite category.

In order to scrutinize the inclusion and exclusion errors in the VGD program of Bangladesh, the study follows in-depth interviews from relevant actors and stakeholders. A local service center, ‘Union Parishad Council’ was selected purposively to examine the processes related to VGD aiming to scrutinize the factors responsible behind the inclusion and exclusion errors in targeting. Considering the principal research question, the study developed an interview guide to keep the locus of information provided by interviewees. Almost every interview were recorded

using a voice tracer except a few of them. For categorizing issues separately, both transcriptions and field notes were employed to enrich the analysis. For the analysis, this study divided each issue interviewed into two parts; descriptions and interpretations. The research describes those issues and processes that are so central to the proposed research questions, hypothesis and conceptual framework.

Inclusion and Exclusion Errors

Sen articulates that ‘since the potential beneficiaries are the agents of action, the art of “targeting” is far less simple than some advocates of means-testing tend to assume’ (Sen; 2000:135). Indeed, in social policies, targeting lies at the heart of attempts to reach at the poorest of the poor, especially in the case of supplementary feeding programs. But it is not nearly as straightforward as is often suggested and designed. An *error of inclusion* is one in which an intervention reaches individuals who are not intended to be beneficiaries and an *error of exclusion* occurs when intended beneficiaries are not able or permitted to participate into the program (Sen; 2000:135, Hoddinott;1999:5). In order to comprehend the notion of inclusion and exclusion errors more elaborately, we can use following table. The table explains errors of inclusion and exclusion in targeting. It is assumed that, food-insecure households participate in the intervention and rest of the household does not participate. When the food-secure households, who participate in the program, are counted as an error of inclusion and the food-insecure who do not participate into the program are counted as exclusion error. Under perfect targeting, it is expected both inclusion and exclusion errors are zero. Now, suppose all households are permitted to participate, then under-coverage will remain at zero, but leakage would rise. Conversely, if no household participates, then leakage would be zero, but under-coverage would rise to cent percent.

Table-1: Understanding inclusion and exclusion error.

Types	Food insecure	Food Secure
Participate in intervention	Success	<i>Inclusion error</i>
Do not participate	<i>Exclusion error</i>	Success

Source: Author’s compilation drawing on Hoddinott (1999).

However, the case of targeting in social policies is complicated by several factors which require further scrutiny. Firstly, according to Hoddinot (1999), targeting is not costless rather it imposes administrative cost that reduces the money available for the actual interventions which vary with the degree or fineness of targeting. For example, a targeting which moves below a certain geographical level (say the district) to villages to households, increasingly it becomes costly (Hoddinott; 1999:5). Secondly, in the same paper Hoddinott explains that when interventions are targeted, there are some possibilities that some food-insecure households might be missed from the program and some well of households might be benefited.

While analyzing targeting and means-testing, Sen (1995, 2000) identifies five factors which complicates the fineness of the program. *Information distortion* specifically incites both inclusion and exclusion (Sen prefers to use type II and type I) errors. He asserts that any policing system, which tries to grab the “cheats” who understate their financial circumstances, would make mistakes from time to time and disqualify some bona fide cases. In the case of *incentive*

distortions, Sen explains that ‘the prospect of losing the support if one were to earn too much can be a deterrent for economic activities’ (Sen; 2000:135-136). Hence, it would be natural to expect that some distorting shifts might occur depending on the incentives provided by social programs. Citing John Rawl’s theory of justice, Sen also finds the importance of the notion of *disutility and stigma* where the issue of self-respect might follow to perpetuate exclusion error, and consequently it will reduce the marginal interest of the program. By *administrative costs and corruption*, Sen argues that resource expenditure and bureaucratic delays inhibits losses of individual privacy and autonomy involved in the need for extensive disclosures and the associated program of investigation and policing. He also preaches out that there is greater possibility of corruption since the potentates acquire the power to bestow benefits for which the beneficiaries might be willing to make facilitating payments in the form of corruption. Finally, the factor *political sustainability and quality* signifies the notion that the beneficiaries of targeted social support are often quite weak politically and might lack the clout to sustain the programs in political jostling or to maintain the quality of the services offered (Sen; 2000:136).

The VGD Program

Since its inception in 1975, the VGD program in Bangladesh, is a large-scale program of food transfers and considered as a development interventions targeted at the poorest women (Hossain, 2007). In its initial form, the chief input of the program was wheat grain (now rice) that was provided by the World Food Program (WFP), distributed locally to the selected participants by local government representatives. This program specifically targets the poor women who seemingly take after the characteristics of chronic poor explained by Hulme and Shepherd (2005). Both inclusion and exclusion errors occur when non-poor replaces the chronic poor into the program. In the case of VGD program, the selection criteria might deter some avenues for those who have the authority to incorporate clients. The indicators for VGD client selection follow several criteria as -

1. The household consumes less than two full meals per day.
 2. It owns no land or less than 0.15 acres of land.
 3. It has very poor housing conditions (construction material and sanitation facilities).
 4. It has an extremely low and irregular family income from daily orcasual labor.
 5. It is headed by a woman with no adult male income earner and no other source of income
- (Adapted from Ahmed et.al.; 2009).

According to the inclusion criteria for being selected, a household should meet at least four of the above criteria. The VGD began as a relief program for families affected by natural calamities. Currently, it seeks to integrate food security and nutrition with development and income generation. It is a collaborative food security intervention jointly managed and implemented by GoB and WFP. The VGD program is implemented through two components: IGVGD (Income Generation for Vulnerable Group Development) and FSVGD (Food Security for Vulnerable Group Development). In 2005-06, Among 750,100 women were served by VGD, 85.4 percent and their family members received IGVGD support and 14.6 percent and their dependents received support under the FSVGD component. Of the total 460 *Upazilas*(sub-districts) of Bangladesh under 61 districts, FSVGD operated in 57 *upazilas* in 7 districts in northern Bangladesh and IGVGD operated in 364 *upazilas* in 54 districts (Ahmed et.al, 2009:21).

After the experience of the famine in 1974 (Hossain, 1999), from 1975 onwards, the GoB and WFP jointly install some social safety nets for the poorer segment of the population. In order to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, for Bangladesh, Millennium Development Goals set out the target to reduce the incidence of extreme poverty by 2.12% until 2015. Bangladesh claims that, it has achieved the target and has reduced incidence of poverty by 2.46%. In 1991-1992, the headcount poverty was 56.6% in Bangladesh and in 2010 the number reduced in 31.5% (GoB, 2012), which reflects the above-mentioned reduction rates. We find that a consistent reduction in headcounts poverty take place since 1990 to 2010. The GoB claims that, the prevalence of huge SFPs is the driving force for such achievements.

Result and Discussion

The process of inclusion and errors in VGD participation

The means-testing tool of VGD program is explicitly articulated, but nurture few difficulties to identify clients. The most significant criteria to target clients are ‘who cannot afford to eat two meals per day’ and have ‘no regular income of the family’ (VGD Manual, 2011). It can be assumed that, to some extent, these criteria are difficult measure. Sen (1995, 2000) claims that a norms of ‘cheating’ causes type II or inclusion error in targeting through information distortions. In this study, it was scrutinized the process of inclusion into VGD taking the means-testing for targeting in the mind. In so doing, several questions were asked through in-depth informal interview. From the field observation, it was found that almost a majority of the clients do seek their incorporation into the program through elected membership of their ward. A few beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of VGD informed about their social network and its consequent roles. The present study explains the significant quotes of interviewees in this context. One widowed VGD client having a fifteen year old son, is a beneficiary of other SFP named ‘widow allowance’ [BidhobaBhata]. As regards the rule of SFPs, one client cannot be included into two programs simultaneously. Even one client cannot be allowed for more than one period of inclusion into the program (VGD Manual, 2011). Nevertheless, this client is enjoying the allowances for more than seven years. Her husband died approximately fifteen years ago when her son was only three months old. She resides in a ‘brick-built house’ that has been constructed with the help from her brothers and maternal uncle [*Mama*]. She informed about her inclusion into VGD program:

“... almost seven years ago, former ward member called me to his house and told me to give him a ‘photograph’ that will help me to get ‘widow allowance’. I myself roared and cared cattle in the house; also, I made ‘Pankha’ [hand made fan with bamboo strips] to sell in the market/bazaar. While I saw, two other women of the village receive ‘VGD’, immediately I went to him again and requested him to include me in the ‘VGD’ program. The union office took my photograph again and started giving the VGD allowances.”

As regards inclusion error, in the case of this client, we find that suppressing information occurs not only for client’s so-called ‘cheating’, but also the norms of inclusion helps clients for doing so. It was clear from her information that social network plays a pivotal role toward inclusion error. The researcher was curious about her double inclusion and asked it to the union secretary, who informed the case of this client as “special,” since the Chairman requested for her

inclusion. I made a query to know the fact/s behind her involvement in two programs for several years simultaneously. It was divulged that changed changed her last name “Begum” into “Khatun”, which she carried through the mission all through almost like an incognito. This evidence also satisfies that, the practice of incentive distortion simultaneously is present with information distortion. The client is enjoying the ‘widow allowance’ in cash, and also taking ‘rice grain’ from VGD program. It would be explained that, the clients access the program through several channels like *sympathy, social capital and personal agency* (Matin and Hulme, 2003), and these channels cultivate the opportunities for both information and incentive distortions. Thus, the process of inclusion into VGD is rather distant from existing means-testing criteria. As clients know the possibility for inclusion, they exercise their human agency stifling their asset bases.

Another newly included VGD client informed that her inclusion in the program was possible because of her husband’s friendship with the ward member. For quite a longtime, her husband maintained a very good relation with the member. When the ward member was sentenced to jail before being elected, her husband spent much time and money for processing his (member’s) bail. She explained the story of her inclusion into the program:

“Back in 2012, one night, my husband told me to go to photo studio to take a picture. I asked him, ‘what to do with the ‘photograph’? My husband then replied that my name will be included for ‘Mashura’ [VGD]. I kept asking the reasons for taking the ‘VGD’. My husband replied that the ward member wanted me to take the opportunity of the Mashura’, as he is grateful to us for previous devotion while he was in jail; he just wanted to compensate”.

According to the VGD inclusion criteria, she was a wrongly included client in the program. She kept informing that her husband earns at least Taka (Bangladeshi currency) one thousand per week from fishing throughout the year. As such, he is not a casual laborer, but a self-employed fisherman. She never knows the criteria for being a member of the VGD program. It seems that there is a provision exists within the process of inclusion, which is inherently demonstrated for nurturing clients’ information and incentive distortions. Without demanding to get the access into the program, the client is enjoying the incentive just due to the friendship network of her husband. If this type of provision exists within the inclusion process, it can provoke other clients to commit information and incentive distortions with a consequent inclusion error in participation. The story of inclusion of this client into the VGD program informs us about the role of social network, which replicates a positive relation with inclusion error.

It was assumed that the lack of social network might cause exclusion error. In order to scrutinize it, the researcher identified some potential clients who are excluded from VGD program. From another village a ‘would-be’ client who is widowed and have three under-five children was interviewed. Her husband died keeping a six-month son. Currently, she is surviving by selling trees from her house and also thinking to take a loan from the ‘Grameen Bank’ (A national NGO) intending to establish a small poultry at her house. If she does not get the loan, she added, her plan is to sell land and will move to her father’s house. Regarding the VGD program, she anxiously told her story:

“I went to the ward member numerous times for the inclusion who assured me with “OK” sign. Later, when I met him again, he arrogantly remarked that I became crazy to get it. He asked me to have patience for next year since this running year none was enlisted for

‘Mashura’. You (addressing researcher) will be surprised to know that, ‘wives of all thieves, thugs, and touts get the VGD, but government does not provide me that’.

She also went to the former elected member of the ward to get help in this regard, but she failed. When I was talking about the case of this potential client with other women beside her house, they informed that the ward member choose clients for ‘Mashura’ only from his kith and kin clan. Therefore, in a very local level, decisions about the clients who will be included, is seemingly a decisional concern of the local representative of union council. If somebody is not well-connected with the member, he/she would have less possibility to access the program.

Another excluded client informed that the member of her ward will not include her name as she belongs to a different social category. Her husband is a patient, who suffers from blood cancer. Having five children (three daughters and two boys), her two daughters are physically disabled and one has learning disability. On the other hand, two sons are too young to take care of any sort of responsibility—one is four years old and the other is one and a half. Apparently, she is a genuine client for the VGD and meets all the requirements to become included. However, she is excluded from the program:

“The ward member is my neighbor; my house is located in front of his house. He belongs to ‘Kiran’ category and I belong to ‘Maimal’ category¹. We are six families in this village who belong to ‘Maimal’ category. The member cannot tolerate us due to this reason. I went to him several times when it was identified my husband is suffering from cancer. He suggested me moving from here to my father’s house. If I decide to move, he will help me for buying the land of 1.25 decimals. This village is tinged with ‘Kiran’, and they never want our well-being beyond any reasonable doubt. One ‘Maimal’ family is very rich, they live in America; every month, they give me the support of rice. I do work as a made-servant to their family and they pay little amount of money by which I buy lentils, oil, and spices”.

Concerning the issue of inclusion and exclusion errors in VGD program, the evidence shows that categorical boundary (Tilly, 2006) has a mixed effect on social policy; it generates both inclusion error and exclusion error. It can also be said that, as being the majority in this locality, this categorical boundary also creating a system of ‘opportunity hoarding’ for the political elite in a local context. According to their information, both these excluded clients know very well about the causes of their exclusion, but no evidence was found whether they tried to resist the wrong inclusion or claimed rigorously about their inclusion. The cases of first and second clients exemplify the inclusion error, while the last case clearly indicates exclusion error due to the lack of social network. It does not mean that the whole program is embroidered with such a norm of practice, rather in case of genuine clients, the researcher found the provision of including clients with proper judgments. Moreover, some excluded clients never contact anyone or seek help from their neighborhood even to get them incorporated into the program.

¹ According to the local people, ‘Kiran’ means a category of people who historically serves the Chowdhurys (A tax collector class under British rule) and ‘Maimal’ is another community who are engaged in fishing.

Patron-Client Relationships and Errors in VGD

In rural Bangladesh, elected political leaders are considered an elite category along with elites identified in terms of land ownership, heredity, occupation, etc. (Van Schendel, 1981). Due to limited cultivated land and for rising population growth, the relation between these elites and the rural poor can be seen as ‘patron-client’ relationships (Jansen, 1990). ‘Elite capture’ is a situation where elites use disproportionate power over a social policy that might produce inclusion error in targeting (Hossain, 2007). This elite category exercises its power in myriad ways. For example, landed elites employ local farmers through a process of share cropping which in turn develop a patron-client relationship between the two categories (Jansen, 1990). Similarly, it can be assumed that not only in agriculture, but in other employment sectors like apprenticeships in private business enterprises also might create a patron-client relationships between categories. For political elites, apparently it is very easy to maintain a patron-client relationship with poorer segment of the society as they hold and exercise power in a local context. In the previous section, we discussed the inclusion procedure of the first client, which reveals a kind of elite capture. It can be assumed that this client would be obedient forever to those who helped her to get access in two SFPs at a time and will cast her vote for them.

It seems to me that, the whole VGD inclusion process runs under a local patronage system. As an influential union member (for being the nephew of the chairman), it is his own prerogative that who will be included into the list of VGD clients. Among others, one client from his village is a VGD client who is a made-servant for long and works at the house of the member of that ward. The decision of choosing her is the prerogative of the member. As she works for long at the member’s house, then her inclusion into the VGD replicates the incentive distortion occurred by the client. In the study area, it was found that the elected members themselves solely selected the majority clients of the VGD program. When I asked the question regarding excluded client to her ward member, he reluctantly replied:

“Every day, a lot of clients come to me for being included into various programs. But how can I manage them as only limited members can be incorporated into such programs? I know the ‘Obosta’ [socio-economic condition] of most of the inhabitants in my ward. Those whom I know about their worst condition, I only put their name in the VGD list.”

It can be assumed that, a system of political patronization within the clan is creating a patron-client relationship. This is to inform that; this member does not know all criteria of VGD selection. However, based on his own judgments, he selects the clients for VGD. In response to the case of excluded client, the member argued that, this year he could not manage the number as he could include only five clients from his ward to the VGD program. He will try to include her name in future period of VGD’s inclusion program. If the process of inclusion is seen as the prerogative of elected members, a kind of patron-client relationships takes place within the process as he chooses those who are inclined to him and belongs to his occupational category.

The local political elites are the dominant categories who capture the client’s inclusion. A wrongly included client named receives VGD for the last three phases. She never comes to the center for food collection. Instead, her husband (57-year old) receives the food every month. The elected member of her ward is the nephew of the union chairman. The union secretary also rented a house in this village and maintains a very good relation with the member. With the help of a broker, the name of this client was included into the program as a joint choice of the elected

member and the union secretary. For the last five years, her husband teaches the children of the member, which I assume, helping her family to get incentives for long from the union council.

From the study it is prevalent that most of the choice for selecting the clients of VGD is made by the 'Union Parishad Elites'. The local leaders try to feed those people through public service provisions who are better connected to them either by service or by religious and kinship connections. The evidence echoes the alerts made by Wong (2010) and Cleaver (2002). While citing them, it can be argued in this study that if the very notion of elite capture is overlooked in a social policy, the policy might compel into a deadly/ineffective practice within the institutional arrangements. Within the rules of the game of VGD program, it is intended to feed those vulnerable segments of the society who are really needy. But, reality exhibits a very poor and non-tuned system of practices apparently quite away from the formal rules of VGD inclusion. From the observation in the field, it seems that it is a general practice of norms for the needy that they have to be obedient and must have better nexus with political elites. In this regard, Hossain adds in her study: 'if the local political classes are unsupportive of the program and unwilling to deliver the incentives fairly the program would only operate with great difficulty' (2007:12). In the present study, the observation of the dependency relation between clients and political leaders support her claim because their power is unchallenged which also have been seen in the previous section. Correspondingly, it also can be claimed that this patron-client relationships are nurturing incentive distortion for the food-secure households.

Financing, Governance and Political Process of VGD Program

Hossain examined the process of execution of VGD program. In her review, VGD program follows the process as, "a series of bureaucratic directives, which is delivered through the chain of command, from the coordinating Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs to the Directorate of Relief and Rehabilitation, down through to the Upazila implementing officers. At this point, the directive is sent for the grain to be delivered to the union distribution point, from where the Union Parishad takes it over. Grain is typically delivered on the same day of each month, usually the 15th, and it is always possible to see some hopeful poor people waiting around the 'Union Parishad' offices on these days (on which more below). Officially, women are supposed to receive 30 kg of wheat grain (or rice in price equivalent to 30 KG of wheat) each, for an 18 month period" (Hossain, 2007:4). Having this information in hand, the researcher tried to explore the system of financing, provision of governance, and the political process behind VGD program. Also, the researcher tried to find out links of these processes with inclusion and exclusion errors. With a prior appointment, the researcher met 'Upazila Officer of Women Affairs (UOWA)' who is responsible for all women related SFPs under the ministry of Women and Children Affairs. The UOWA was asked 'how do they decide whether or not to finance VGD?' He explained the system of financing of VGD as cited in below:

"Since 2011, VGD is financed by the Government of Bangladesh². Formerly, it was a donor-assisted program and was financed by WFP. Now WFP provides only technical support. Central Government allocates yearly budget for the program. As the total number of VGD clients are fixed, so tentatively the allocated budget can fill-out the yearly cost of the program. But it depends on the market price of the grains. If the prices

² This information is ambiguous, the researcher tried to confirm the financier of the program; no where it was found that GoB finances this program rather WFP is still financing it.

grow up, the Government adds subsidy. VGD is the oldest SFP that targets vulnerable women in order to move them out from food insecurity. Financing VGD is a political decision and the ministry of Women and Children Affairs is the liaison ministry in this process. Basically, there is a political interest behind the program, because it covers more than two million vulnerable women in Bangladesh, You can just consider them as the vote bank for political party!”

The officer avoided some questions on political dynamics between ruling party and their opposition. However, he informed that, the Upazila office has no power at all toward VGD program. The only job is to deliver and distribute the rice among clients. On the eve of discussion, it seems to the researcher that VGD is merely an ongoing program and officers perform only their routine work. The necessity of tuning the program, especially the effectiveness is not very important to the administrative system. According to the statement of UOWA, the food for VGD is not bought by the ministry of Women and Children Affairs, rather from DC (District Commissioner) office, the directorate of ‘Relief and Rehabilitation’ does so for each district. The issue of inclusion and exclusion errors in participation is sometimes overlooked. Regarding this issue, the officer stated:

“Probably VGD is one of public service provisions where the existence of corruption is minimal. Only at the union center who measures the weight of rice one might commit a mistake (!) by giving less than the desired amount. There are five hundred VGD cardholders in the Upazila and I am only the officer with two members of staff. It is not possible for an officer to scrutinize all those clients as it is costly and time consuming. There is no provision of an incentive (honorarium) for us to do so. Generally, we rely on union chairmen who know the clients better. However, if somebody complains to us regarding the inclusion error then we check it and take measures”

It was observed from the local service center that, out of fifty clients, only thirty-nine of them received their incentives by the designated dates of food distribution. At Upazila level, there is no provision for monitoring and evaluation of the VGD program. From the information given by the UOWA, it seems that a partial system of governance might encourage inclusion errors at local level. The UOWA tells a story about canceling a client’s inclusion and including another genuine client in a union council. According to him both inclusion and exclusion errors occur due to the lack of moral ethics. The officer adds that a ward member must know the genuine client for VGD registration at his ward, so if he is morally weak, then these types of problems might occur. But, if the administration is reluctant toward the error and stay far away from monitoring the participation, it might be an open-ample opportunities at operational level to commit errors in inclusion.

The political interest and the political process behind VGD program is rather complex. In general, the ruling party tries to channel the whole process in favor of their own interest. An important aspect of the program is that if any major misdeed happens, then the opposition also does not avail the opportunity to create a massive demonstration against the misdeed. This is only because of political interest, especially for capturing votes. According to the view of local political leaders, the political process of VGD is mainly manifested in *commitment* and *humanitarian* responsibilities of every government. However, they do recognize that, it is the sole responsibility of the government to protect the poor from extreme vulnerability.

Most of the political leaders assume that inclusion and exclusion errors are not a major problem in VGD, because, to some extent, all of the recipients are poor indeed. The researcher interviewed local Upazilla Chairman in order to scrutinize the inclusion and exclusion errors in relation to political process behind VGD program. The gist of the interview is explained below:

“The total number of clients for VGD is decided centrally considering the number of the population of that region along with socio-economic conditions. Beanibazar is considered a rich region and that is why, there are only five hundred VGD clients in this Upazila. Several times we pressured our MP (Member of Parliament) to increase the number but it remains the same. The motto of VGD program is that no one will die for lack of ‘Bhat’ (rice). Every government follows the program without interruption since its inception because price level of rice plummeted abruptly and the poor cannot afford it. So it is a great effort to keep vulnerable people from acute food insecurity. The issue (inclusion and exclusion errors) mentioned here is rarely reported to us. I do believe all of our chairmen and members are morally strong and they do not commit such errors intentionally. The main cause of inclusion and exclusion errors in VGD occurs due to the culture of ‘SomanBhag’ [equal share]. It is a general consensus among chairmen and members that they share all projects equally, so the VGD is not a distinct SFP; rather, allSFPs suffer from the same problems. But whatever errors occur, you can find all of the clients are basically poor.”

In her long interview, the Upazila chairman mentioned a story about an inclusion error and after a scrutiny she found that on the eve of registration, the client was genuine, but after few days she got a job what made her illegal into the program. The chairman tried to justify errors while apparently it contradicts with the rules of inclusion into the VGD. In the case of wrongly included clients, one has double registration and the other has the regular family income from husband for which the chairman requested the researcher to report it to UOWA. Repeatedly, the chairman insists the factor ‘equal share’ is one of the major sources of both inclusion and exclusion error. She argues that there are some wards where the number of poor is huge, so occurring exclusion error in those wards is quite normal. Consequently, those wards where the number of poor is very little, inclusion error occurs sometimes. In the second case, the chairman assumes that local ‘Choukidars’ [messenger] may influence members to include some names so that they can get some rice to sell.

In the very political process of VGD program at an operational level, existing literatures escape (or ignore) one crucial element, which the Upazila Chairman mentioned as the practice of ‘equal share’. The researcher found only 50 VGD clients in the studied where he conducted most of the observation and interviews. All nine members along with the union chairman in this union equally take the opportunity to select five VGD members of their own. In contrast, it is not the same scenario of poverty as well as the number of poor people in every ward. It can be inferred in this regard that this political culture of ‘equal share’ is one of the key sources of both inclusion and exclusion errors. A system of ‘patronage selectivity’ (World Bank, 2006) might stem from this culture and eventually it happens. The ward members use their own discretion to enlist the clients’ name which prompt both inclusion and exclusion errors. Thus, in connection to the previous section, it is also evident that most of the time political elites manufacture the inclusion and exclusion errors in VGD.

Political Mediation and Errors in VGD Program

Broker (locally known as *tout*), is a powerful category who mediates political interest and monetary benefits between citizen and elites. In relation to monetary transaction for being included into VGD program, the researcher tried to explore information. Among eight clients (four of them are wrongly included and four are genuine clients), except one, none reported about any monetary transaction they made with any individual. A nineteen-year-old orphan girl who is a genuine client informed that she paid ‘one hundred Taka [Bangladeshi currency]’ to her ward member for getting the ‘Mashura’ card. Albeit the culture of bribing is very minimal or insignificant, still there exists this culture at the operational level.

It was found that the local brokers take part within the inclusion process of VGD at the studied council office. A client is a VGD client for consecutive three periods. Her husband is a private tutor in the vicinity of his village. The union secretary lives in this village too. The client herself never receives her allowance rather her husband who is fifty seven year old receives the food on behalf of her. On the second day of food distribution (23rd of September, 2013), client’s husband came to the union council office and the researcher took his interview in a separate room. While the researcher was talking with client’s husband, the union secretary passed on a sarcastic comment: ‘take his interview; this is a corrupted VGD client’! The interviewee construed their inclusion story and socio-economic condition which is extracted in below:

“I usually work as a private tutor, my wife works at BRAC. My eldest daughter is married; second one is going to appear ‘Degree Examination’ [final exam for under-graduation degree] from local college. My only son is studying in second year of intermediate class and the youngest daughter is studying in class nine. My earning from private tutoring ranges between five to ten thousand taka a month. My wife earns only two and half thousand from BRAC. We did not usually take VGD. Five-six years ago, the *tout* who is close to our family, came to our house and said ‘why you do not take ‘Mashura’ give me a photograph of aunt, I will include her name in the ‘Mashura’. How did he do it? I do not know the answer at all. But since then we are receiving this rice from union council.”

Soon after finishing the interview, he received his food. This time he printed his wife’s name on the receiving list as while others stripped their finger- prints. In his interview that he mentioned that the *tout* has a very good relation with the union secretary. The *tout* also lives in the village where the ward member lives. That is what brought the cohort hard. An employee working at ‘UISC’ office said that the *tout* mainly maintains the relation with secretary, not for VGD or other feeding programs, but for RMP [Road Maintenance Program].

Nevertheless, the case of this client ascertains that inclusion error occurs in VGD with a kind of mediation made by brokers. Also, this case highlights the incentive distortion issue in social policy. As this family is not food insecure, however, they are still receiving food aid from the program. In rural Bangladesh, these categories of brokers or ‘local *touts*’ maintain a strong vis-à-vis relation with political leaders apart from maintaining relationship with other intermediate categories. These brokers can also improve their social position in the village. The most remarkable case in this regard is the case of a ward member, who is an elected member in his ward. Formerly, he was not only a broker, but was involved with stealing. In course of time, brokers may derive their social contacts by which they change their social status ultimately. It could be inferred that transformed status of *touts* also reproduces errors in social program too.

This finding complements the study of Hossain (2007) where she repeatedly mentioned the role of ‘local brokers’ toward targeting error in SFPs, especially in VGD. Sen (2000) explains about the ‘cheat’ clients who understate their information and trigger inclusion error. Available evidences complements this idea of Sen. However, a further tuning toward *information distortion* could be added by highlighting the corruption made by respective authority, which creates opportunity for clients within the underestimation process. Although Sen (1995, 2000) warned about corruption for potentates in a passive form of bribing, this study bestows that it is a form of ‘mutual contact’ among mediators, executives, and political leaders which advances ‘mutual benefit’ in one program with the expense of errors in another program.

Social Norms, Agency Constraints, and Exclusion Errors

There are several reasons that exist within the social institutional arrangements as well as within the individual characteristics of existing and ‘would be’ clients, which might affect participation in a social program (De Herdt, 2005). Taking Sen’s (2000) theoretical claim of *appearing to the public without shame* into consideration, this study focuses on whether any prevalence of social norms persists or not within the social awareness that might cause exclusion error in the VGD program. Toward that end, the researcher firstly interviewed a ward member named who states that:

“The first and foremost condition to get food from VGD or helps from other programs is to come at ‘Moidan’[public place]. Most of the women in this area maintain a remarkable ‘Lojja’ [being ashamed] among themselves that restrict them to access government success. Several times, I approached a widow in this village to join in program, she did not respond as she feels very shy to work or to appear in a public place.”

In the words of member, it was found that *appearing to the public without shame* is not only a determinant, but also a crucial personal choice of individual, which causes errors in participation. This ‘Lojja’ or ‘being ashamed’ is a personal characteristic that constrains individuals to valorize their agencies (De Herdt and Bastiensen, 2008). But it seems that this personal characteristic is also a temporary psychological state of body and mind. The above-mentioned member narrates that:

“I have a client in my village, who was too ashamed of joining ‘Mashura’ immediately after getting herself widowed about four years ago. Her surroundings pressured her to join VGD. After joining, another woman accompanied her to collect food from union council office. Few months later, she was able to interact with everybody without any ‘Lojja’. She requested me to put her name in other program too, which I did ultimately. She is a member of RMP program now.”

Hence, it is comprehensible that being ashamed is a temporary psychological matrix from which individual may come out with the help of others. However, there might have some regulative role of social institutions, which trigger the shame for individuals. Cleaver (2005) explains that in collective action, agency constraints and agency enablement might be the cumulative product of social processes. Thus, if there are some social factors, which constrain the agencies of individual, it might affect participation in collective action. Eventually, it also can cause errors in targeting in a social program. The researcher interviewed the above-mentioned potential client of VGD program in order to explore this issue. She is forty-five years

old, her husband died three years ago who was a ‘Rickshaw’ [three wheeler vehicle] puller. She has a sixteen-year old daughter. She explained the causes for not being included in the VGD:

“Everyone including ‘member’ tell me to join VGD, but I do not intend to join because I know if I join, it will be difficult for my daughter to get married (‘Meyer biyediteparbona’, in local dialect). You know, it’s a common practice on the eve of negotiation for marriage that, ‘what does the parent of daughter do?’ If I go to ‘union office’ for food, everybody will label ‘kharapcharitra’ [extra-marital sexual relation] to me. For the sake of Allah, if my daughter is married, I will try to enlist my name for ‘Mashura’.”

Although she is very astute about using her agency, still the fear of *stigmatization* is a strong social norm in rural Bangladesh, especially for rural women. Therefore, the practice of this norm restricts the agency of the poor to access social benefits. Johnson (2012) warned policy planners about the regulative role of social institutions which constraints agencies of the poor. The case of above client alerts us about the gendered aspect of being ashamed or suffering from the ‘fear of stigma’. Eventually, this fear or shame affects participation in social programs and causes exclusion errors. De Herdt (2005) mentioned that there have been some true reasons for being ashamed. In this connection, we can claim that previous social position (or social status) might be responsible for being ashamed. In other village a client lives alone in her own brick-built house with ten decimals of homestead land. Ten years ago, her only son died in a road accident in the Middle East. After his death, her husband started a small business in the local ‘bazaar’ (market place). Three years ago, her husband also died. Regarding the causes of exclusion into the VGD, she explained her thoughts:

“My husband maintained a weighty personality. Everybody around me believes that I have lot of money. Some of my relatives also believe so. Soon after the death of my husband, I did not go anywhere. My husband saved some money for us. I spent a big amount on my ‘Appendis’ (Appendicitis) operation. I started to sell ‘battle leaf, battle-nut, oil, and green chilly’ from my house and still I am continuing this. Sometimes, I do feel ‘Kosto o Obhav’ [Stress and lack of money] and struggling to survive. For two reasons I do not want to take ‘Mashura’. Firstly, I have a belief that if I take ‘Mashura’, the souls of my deceased husband and son will feel sorrow. Secondly, if I take ‘Mashura’, people will call me in bad name and will label ‘the wife of ‘omuk’ [husband] eats the rice of VGD which is highly disgraceful for me.”

Both these cases allow us to complement Sen’s (1995, 2000) analysis of *Disutility and Stigma* along with De Herdt’s (2005) claims on capability reasoning. In addition to that, the case of last client repeatedly reminds us about the issue of *self-respect* which Sen believes to lead to exclusion error in social policies. Along with self-respect, another important dimension is also observable here, i.e. social position. It seems that, being a fully eligible client for VGD, she does not want her to become a VGD client and she mentioned two clear reasons. Both *self-respect* and *previous social position* are responsible for exclusion error in VGD. Albeit *social sympathy* and also *social channels* are available to clients, still they do not want to participate into social program. It confirms that, only social factors are not solely responsible for agency constraints rather individual characteristics are also liable for prompting constraints. On the contrary, social awareness also can enable agencies to participate into social programs. In the case of another

client we find that when ‘Somaj’ (society/people around her vicinity) supports an action of an individual, it triggers more motivation for that individual to participate in more collective actions. Hence, the role of social norms is bi-polar, i.e. both positive and negative to individual agencies. In this study, a personal decisional concern was one of the inherent objectives to explore the agency constraints and enablement. Either to participate or not to participate was considered as agency enablement and constraint respectively. To conclude, the study shows that social norms simultaneously restrict individuals as well as also enable them to participate into the program. When it restricts individuals, exclusion errors take place in social policies; or else, it can also help make a social program successful.

Summary

Drawing on Sen’s *political economy of targeting* (Sen, 1995) and Cleaver’s analysis on agency constraints (Cleaver, 2007) along with other studies (Tilly, 2006) on poverty reduction, this study finds that, both individual attributes and social factors are responsible for inclusion and exclusion error. It can be claimed that, the means-testing criteria are not fully unambiguous to target the really needy clients although most of the time these criteria are not followed in the selection process of VGD clients. Socio-economic condition of every ward is not similar. Therefore, norms of equal share in such a region can easily foster inclusion error in VGD program because a really needy client of one poor ward will lose the possibility of participation, if a client is included from a comparatively rich ward. It seems to the researcher that, VGD as a social program is being performed as a ‘political distribution scheme’. Those who are in power, enjoy their elite status in the local area and dominate the program, which creates a spillover on food for some poor connected to them. Occupational distinctiveness in the locality also has created categorical boundaries among inhabitants which in turn affect participation in the program within the local context. Because of these categorical boundaries, majority tries to follow ‘opportunity hoarding’ from the program. Some hegemonic norms like ‘fear of stigma’, ‘customs related to marriage system’ and ‘previous social status’ constrain the agencies of the poor which motivate clients toward exclusion error. From the study it was not found any evidence on short route accountability of governance. Clients sometimes realize the causes of deprivation, but do not make any clout to resist it. Not in the sense of agricultural patron-client relationships exist, rather a patronage system controls the whole inclusion procedures. Prevalence of brokers’ role toward inclusion process is observed, but the notion of monetary transactions are minimal in the studied area. Finally, declared nutritional commitment of VGD program is not integrated with the program operation. Highlighting major factors responsible for targeting errors in relation to VGD program in the studied area can be depicted as below –

Table-2: Causes of inclusion and exclusion error in VGD.

Category	Poor	Non-poor
Participant	Success Ethical judgment made by the political leaders	Inclusion Error - Social network, - Patron-client relationships, - Elite capturing,

		• Norms of equal share • Hiding information • Political mediation
Non-Participant	Exclusion error • Categorical boundaries, • Stigma, • previous social position	Success • Never seek for incentive

Source: Author's compilation

Conclusion

After a brief overview on targeting errors in social policies, it can be concluded that inclusion and exclusion errors occur in VGD program in Bangladesh due to multi-faceted factors around clients' surrounding. Both socio-institutional factors and personal attributes simultaneously initiate inclusion and exclusion errors. Means-testing with a specific measuring rod is crucial within the rules of the game of a social policy. VGD is no exception in this regard. The rules and requirements of VGD inclusion is explicitly defined, but in practice, the implementation of these rules are little ambiguous. A set of variables adjoined with few social facts and individual attributes can be identified from the present study which fosters inclusion and exclusion errors in VGD. Social network, elite capture, categorical identities, social status, partial and imperfect governance systems are the most prominent social facts. On the contrary, behavioral pattern and capacity of individual to exercise their agencies are also conscientious for inclusion and exclusion errors. Here, it is summarized the key-factors from the fieldwork considering conceptual framework, research questions and hypotheses of the present study which prompt inclusion and exclusion error in VGD. In relation to factors explained by Sen in his political economy of targeting, the following table adds few crucial factors which prompt errors in participation.

Table-3: Factors related to inclusion and exclusion error in VGD.

Factors	Information distortion	Incentive distortion	Stigma	Governance	Political sustainability	Elite capture	Social network
Inclusion error	+	+	-	+	-	+	+
Exclusion error	-	-	+	±	-	+	-

Source: Author's compilation; In the table, the sign '+' means *presence* of the factor in respective error, '-' means *absence* of such factor, and '±' means mixed relation with respective errors.

The study finds that, the presence of information and incentive distortions, weak governance, elite capturing in a manner of patron-client relationships and the role of social network are responsible for inclusion error. On the contrary, dominant factors for exclusion error are observed as fear of stigmatization, weak governance and the elite capturing. Sen mainly emphasized the individual attributes, which prompt the inclusion and exclusion errors. However, in this study, we explain why and how these individual attributes are affected by other socio-political and cultural factors.

Focusing the hypotheses of the research, it is addressed all researchable sub-questions to the relevant respondents. In relation to the first set of sub-questions, the study finds that if donors decline to finance the program, government will continue VGD for two noted reasons: *political interest* of voting, and *humanitarian* as well as long-standing *commitment* toward the citizen of the country. The main political interest relates the ‘voting sensitivity’, as there is a huge amount of clients involved in the program. As long as financing of the program is donor-oriented, the government will not want to stop running the program. Being one of the oldest supplementary feeding programs in Bangladesh, a general entitlement of the population has been generated with VGD, which follows a long-standing commitment of the government toward its citizen, especially existing and future clients. Survival of the program is completely a political decision taken by the central government. Local level political and administrative units just perform their routine task to implement the program. As regards VGD, the demands made by local Member of Parliament to increase the number of clients will be executed or not, it completely depends on the central actors.

A system of long-route accountability (WDR, 2004) within the ‘partial governance provision’ is observed from the study. No short-route accountability or no informal resistance toward exclusion error exists. However, a female client showed her agony against the ward member, but none ever claim their entitlements vehemently to the union office or to the sub-district offices. The idea of the ‘partial governance system’ explains the provision that if somebody raises any complain again inclusion and exclusion errors—which happens very seldom—the local administrative office takes measure against it. The researcher argues that this system of partial governance or the lack of accountabilities encourage and create ample opportunities for local actors to commit inclusion and exclusion errors.

The delivery of food (incentives) is served regularly on a monthly basis. In relation to the second set of research question; the studied union council provides VGD allowances only to fifty clients. It seems that in some villages the number of poor who might be eligible for VGD can exceed the approved number. Consequently, some other villages, the number of eligible poor for VGD enrollment is very minimal. However, from every ward it is identified five clients by the elected member for VGD inclusion. An important identification of a political culture of practicing the norm of ‘equal share’ is found from the study which causes inclusion and exclusion errors. Mostly, the past and the present elected political representatives capture the whole inclusion provision of VGD program in the studied area. As a result, the practice of their power and prerogatives stimulate a simultaneous process, i.e. ‘if a wrong client replaces a potential client, exclusion error occurs’. The study complements some prior studies on the issue of ‘elite capture’ in relation to SFPs in Bangladesh. Albeit the system of ‘political mediation’ by brokers is minimal, still there exists the practice in a more sophisticated way. Sometimes the informal relation of brokers with union council prompts inclusion and exclusion error in VGD selection. The study does not trace-out any remarkable cases where monetary transactions are dominant principle to include clients. The experiential connection teaches us that the studied area is known as a rich region in the district. Hence, the practice of monetary transaction by the poor

is rather in-existent in this region as most of the elected members come from well-off socio-economic background.

The role of local health center contributing toward the issue of errors in malnourishment among VGD clients is not expected what was assumed prior to field visit. It is found that the center provides few medicines for pregnant and lactating mothers as well as provides suggestion for balanced diet to those women who have underfed children less than five years of age. In case of emergency circumstances, the patients/clients cannot get help from a designated medical officer since the doctor is absent for quite a long time. The general attitude and aptitude, nevertheless, of VGD clients toward the service of local medical center is satisfactory.

While looking at the individual and household characteristics of VGD clients, it was found some social and individual elements, which either restrict them to be included into the program or help them toward such inclusion. Needless to say, the lack of social capital is one of the important social factors for clients that restrict them from inclusion. Those clients or the members of their household, who maintain a good relationship with local elites, can access the incentives easily. The issue of communal identity might be a cause for potential exclusion errors. For instance, a she-client believes that because of the ‘communal differences’ with local elite, she is unable to access the service, which seems to the researcher that the issue is not ignorable because in a very remote context if the discrimination is created due to communal identities, then in future it might elicit further complications beyond any reasonable doubt. This finding complements Cleaver’s analysis on ‘agency constraint and enablement’. Sometimes the ‘fear of stigmatization’ and previous social statuses are other important aspects of individual attributes which restrict the agency of individual to participate into social programs. To wrap up, among various factors, this study sheds light on few issues of social factors and individual attributes in order to scrutinize the inclusion and exclusion errors in VGD program in Bangladesh.

Recommendations

Having the experiences gathered from the field visit and the prior theoretical knowledge reviewed for the study, the researcher opines few recommendations for tuning the program or for further research in this area. The first and foremost recommendation is to study the issue of inclusion and exclusion errors in relation to agency constraint and agency enablement within the complex socio-political arrangements of Bangladesh. The author puts a further voice of qualitative approach for identifying these issues. In the individual, household or community level, the regulative role of social institution is a big challenge for policy interventions.

A professional mode of social provisioning for the poor in local political units could be adopted in order to secure the improved services toward the poor. If this massive program VGD suffers from inclusion error, it can be assumed that other SFPs might also suffer from such issues. This study does not recommend abolishing the program rather it is important to address how the program can be improved up to a certain standard level. In doing so, it can be recommended that a very simple targeting tool such as ‘land ownership’ could be adopted to identify the clients which eventually will reduce the targeting error. Even the targeting might be focused with the malnourished children who might help to target very easily taking the assistance from local health center. The VGD program should focus on specific capability deprivation such as food, clothing, shelter, income, education or health and so on to avoid such inclusion and exclusion errors. Alternatively, all feeding programs could be integrated very professionally with one another based on specific targeting tools.

In Bangladesh, corruption and weak governance are major challenges surely. Thus, a *combined inclusionary practice* engaging members from state, market, and civil society can enhance the possibility of efficiency for any program toward the poor; this inclusionary practice might reduce the transaction cost for the government which ultimately may play a vital role to service provision toward an efficient end. Considering the constraints identified from the study, the government should put much effort to *institutional change* rather than *decentralization of the organization* taking the same rules of the game. The author here finds an experiential consistency with Wood (2000) that the present structures with its associated norms in Bangladesh fail to serve a substantial quality service for the poor. In this situation, strongly vibrant and vigilant civil societies might open avenues for effective institutional change by manufacturing voice possibilities in governance and accountabilities.

Finally, adopting a reliable and efficient system of monitoring and evaluation at Upazila level could be one of the effective measures for securing quality service provision for the poor especially while taking protection and promotional measures for tackling food vulnerability. An effective system of M&E also can reduce the errors in targeting can make sure the participation of really needed and eventually can unveil the issues of accountability in governance including the service of local health center. An observed difficulty on timeliness of disbursement of incentives can be reduced too by the installation of effective M&E system.

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