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## **Empirical Understanding of Social Protection Programmes in Southwest Coastal Areas of Bangladesh: A Postmodern Perspective**

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### **Abstract**

Social protection programmes in Bangladesh aimed at reducing the vulnerability of the poor has become exceptionally challenging because of high exposure to weak institutional governance, and frequent natural disasters. As a matter of fact, both the coverage and the types of social protection programmes have been expanded to support the extremely poor households in Bangladesh over the last decade. However, the boundaries between 'protection approach' associated with risk reduction and 'promotion approach' regarded as the pathways to raise incomes and employment opportunities of the poor have remained understated in policy discourse. This paper addresses how an Interpretivist methodology can be used in exploring the current complexities of social protection programmes in extremely poor households with reference to disaster-affected areas in southwest coastal Bangladesh, giving a particular attention to the interpretation of the beneficiaries as well as service providers. This paper employs an interpretative framework for collecting qualitative data because of its ability to make sense of the complex situations of social protection programmes by generating multi-contextual information provided by the beneficiaries of social protection programmes. During the initial fieldwork of the research, the research participants pointed out that there exist strong prevalence and dominance of local politics considered as 'underlying issues' in the delivering process of social protection programmes, which is further associated with power-relation between the rich and poor class of the society. However, the

current policy discourses of social protection programmes have overlooked those highly pertinent phenomena both in local and national context. This paper argues that the aspects of availability, accessibility and utilisation of social protection programmes is not straightforward as each aspect is further associated with social relations and complex social understanding. An interpretive methodology along with illustrative data collection and analysis techniques can become effective to explore those complex societal understanding related with social protection programmes. Finally, within the adopted interpretive framework, the integrated view related with availability, accessibility and utilisation aspects of social protection programmes need to be addressed while creating a sense of meaning and understanding of overall situation of social protection programmes.

**Keywords:** Interpretivist methodology, Embedded case study, Social protection programmes, Southwest coastal Bangladesh.

## Introduction

### Being Outsider, Becoming Insider

Existing literature of social protection suggests that since social protection schemes target not only poverty but also vulnerability reduction, it can play a very important role in compare to the other development interventions (Page, Sibanda, Kureya , & Kalibwani, 2005). Social protection programmes in South Asia form three different levels such as social provision, social prevention, and social promotion where social provisions are designed to meet basic needs deficits among the poorest sections of the population; social preventive measures are intended in the face of contingencies, and social promotional measures are planned to provide trajectories out of poverty (Kabeer, 2009). Many other researchers such as Barrientos and Hulme (2008), and Sabates-Wheeler and Devereux (2008) describe social assistance, social insurance, and labour market regulation in relation to the above-mentioned three levels of social protection programmes. The Government of Bangladesh is implementing 93 development projects that can be further classified into four broad categories such as cash allowance and asset transfer programs, microcredit programs, food security programs for poverty reduction, and training programs for capacity development (Ministry of Planning, 2014). The social protection programmes in Bangladesh are predominantly focused on rural areas because the poverty rate is three times higher in rural areas than urban areas, where nearly 70 per cent of the country's population lives (International Fund for Agricultural Development, 2014).

Considering the importance of social protection programmes in Bangladesh, I began this research project anticipating that researching on issue like 'social protection programmes' in Bangladesh would be extremely challenging because previous researches have found that social protection programmes in Bangladesh contain

some serious problems such as inappropriate targeting, inadequate coverage, and severe leakage and corruption issues (Mannan & Ahmed, 2012). In fact, my experiences of the prevailing complexities of social protection programmes in Bangladesh during the fieldwork were far beyond than my initial anticipation. At the beginning of fieldwork, the research participants asked me a wide range of questions in numerous forms such as my benefits of working on the social protection programmes, my political inclination, my personal engagement with local politicians and government officials (if I know any local politician from their areas), participants' associated risks of providing me the 'inside' information, and the future consequences of the results as well as their benefits from the research. Truly speaking, my initial role was to become an interviewer to the research participants. Understanding the wide range of questions asked by the research participants, I interchanged my role, in particular, from an interviewer to an interviewee that ultimately provided me the opportunity to familiarise myself to the local people and the research participants. As a result of that many recipients of the social protection programmes provided me some crucial information such as local political leaders act as a gateway of social protection programmes; beneficiaries of social protection programmes are unable to tell to anyone that the supports are not enough for them to maintain the basic need; and the beneficiaries of social protection programmes need to accept whatever they get as if it is better than nothing. Though these underlying issues were open secret to the local people, the dynamics and its extent were not straightforward to me. More specifically, when I made my first contact with my research participant Rohima Banu (pseudonym), Rayenda Union, Sharankhola Upazila, Bagerhat, her initial reflection about the social protection programmes was:

*"Don't you think if I would tell you the full story of my 'widow card', government is going to take back my 'widow card'? I don't want to lose my 'widow card' because of you. I got this card after waiting for six years."*

The reflection of Rohima Banu regarding the social protection programmes made me realise that every research participant was expecting a strong trustworthy relationship from me in order to share the insights of social protection programmes. Most of the research participants were keen to share their stories of social protection programmes with me. However, in many situations, some of them were not confident to discuss everything with me, especially the influence of local politicians on social protection programmes in their local areas. I had to work extensively on 'rapport building' to make the initial contact with the beneficiaries of social protection programmes via the household heads. In doing so, I had to put aside all the situational orders and practices that I experienced before, and to subordinate myself in order to get an insider's perspective of social protection programmes (Luders, 2004: 225).

As a part of 'rapport building,' I oriented myself to the extremely poor household heads and their family members by explaining my interests of conducting this research in their localities. During the initial discussion with the extremely poor

household heads, I assured that my political ideology and association with the government officials and local politicians would not make any harm to anyone. It took more than a week simply to establish a reliable platform to collect information from the research participants. In every initial discussion, I consistently mentioned that all information from them would be kept safely and confidentially make sense of the underlying issues of social protection programmes. On top, I shared my first week's experiences of living in their villages to bring a common topic to discuss so that we could start the discussion with the familiar topics. A good rapport is signalled by emotions that feel harmonious and cooperative, and trust can be recognised through facial expression and bodily language (Johnson, 2002:109). I could clearly see the positive changes in their behaviour and emotional attachment after sharing the information such as my current place of living in their villages, my favourite tea-stall in their local areas, and my overall experiences about the lives of the coastal communities.

To make sense of the contexts of the information, I made more than three visits to the participants and their family members, and that created greater reliability and consistency in providing information regarding exploring the underlying issues of social protection programmes. Due to my repeated visits to the households of the research participants, the extremely poor household heads seemed very enthusiastic to participate in the interviews along with the beneficiaries of social protection programmes. During the initial discussions at household level, the family members of the beneficiaries of social protection programmes started unpacking the situations like 'No one wants to listen our stories,' 'We feel so fortunate that you have gave the opportunity to talk freely,' 'We can not discuss the limitations of social protection programmes with anyone like you because we are worried about the consequences.' Some of the research participants were surprised to see my methods of data collection, mainly adopting the semi-structured but informal interviews. During the interviews at the household level, some of the research participants mentioned that they previously participated in other research activities where they became familiarize with questionnaire, not an oral interviews like story-telling approach. Although my primary interest was to collect information about social protection programmes from the extremely poor household heads and their associated personnel, I did not give any strong verbal impression of that I came to them only to collect information. That soft impression of data collection provided a detailed understanding of the contexts of the information of social protection programmes.

During the data collection, I primarily applied two broad strategies to generate my understanding of social protection programmes. The first one was to get to know the issues that people were interested to discuss about social protection programmes. The second one was to explore the issues that people did not want to discuss about social protection programmes. In addition, I emphasised the other relevant issues of social protection programs that people were not able to discuss without my support. For interviewing the research participants, I firmly relied on these three dimensions

as major considerations of data collection (Mayo, 1945). The information provided by the research participants guided me not only to generate a clear understanding of the complexity of social protection programmes but also to interpret the underlying issues of social protection programmes and its consequences on the lives of the extremely poor households. This paper primarily focuses on generating multi-contextual information provided by the beneficiaries of social protection programmes, and the perspectives of the research participants have helped me to develop an insider's perspective of social protection programmes, as opposed to outsider's perspective.

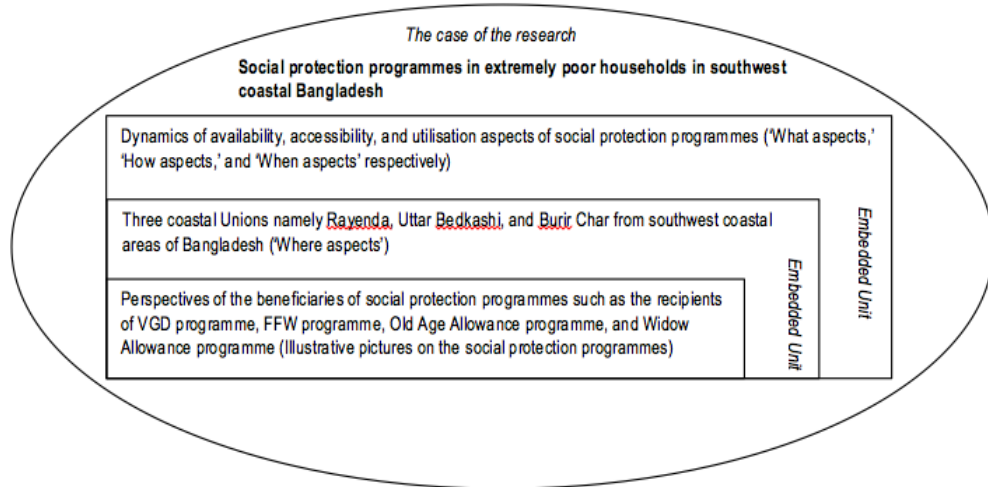
### **Research Approach: Embedded Case Study with Qualitative Inquiry**

A research design is important before conducting any particular research activities because it guides the researchers to situate them within in the empirical world, and also to connect the research questions to data (Punch, 1998: 66). However, the strategies can vary substantially if anyone is conducting a qualitative research as it calls for considerable flexibility in design ranging from data collection to data analysis (Bazeley, 2013: 33). I consider the term 'qualitative research approach' to entail a nonmathematical process of interpretation, carried out for the purpose of discovering concepts and relationships in empirical data, and findings are not arrived at by statistical procedures (Strauss & Corbin, 1998: 11). Qualitative research design also requires a broader and less restrictive design, but the conduction of qualitative studies includes meticulous thinking (Maxwell, 2009: 215). Bazeley (2013: 33) calls that meticulous thinking as planning in qualitative research, which helps to ensure the research remains purposeful, by being considerate about finding new information along with practical difficulties of fieldworks. Meticulous thinking in qualitative research, as Marshall and Rossman (2006: 24) describes, is a nonlinear process, and because of that it has become possible to capture Rohima Banu (pseudonym) and others' complex experiences of social protection programmes. On top, this paper adopts a qualitative research design because it provides a wide range of interconnected interpretative practices, hoping to get a better understanding of the underlying issues of social protection programmes of Bangladesh (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005: 4).

This paper adopts qualitative research design in exploring the issues of social protection programmes because the extremely poor households are 'hard to reach' group in the society as they do not have a fixed place to live. In many cases, they build their houses on government's land, legally or illegally (Rahman & Zaman, 2017; Awal, Rashid, Islam, & Imam, 2013). Many of them are not included in the official statistics due to their temporary settlement status. Since there is a lack of existing reliable data about the extremely poor households, the use of probability statistics, in particular the random sampling would limit the understanding of social protection programmes. Another important reason for choosing the qualitative method of inquiry is that there is little known about the experiences of extremely poor households concerning to the

supports and limitation of social protection programmes. The use of qualitative methods of inquiry would give voice to the beneficiaries of social protection programmes.

Within the qualitative methods of inquiry, this paper adopts case study research because it provides detailed understanding of social protection programmes which can be established by talking directly with recipients and associated personnel, by going to their homes or places of work, and by allowing them to tell the stories (Creswell, 2007: 40). The most distinctive characteristic of qualitative inquiry, as Erickson (1986) says, is its emphasis on interpretation, and case study research provides an intense contact with a "field" or life situation where we are able to gain in-depth understanding of the context for more illustrative interpretation (Miles & Huberman, 1994: 6). This paper adopts a single case study, that is, the social protection programmes in the southwest coastal Bangladesh. The single but complex case study of social protection programmes in southwest coastal areas requires an embedded case design because the social protection programmes in southwest coastal Bangladesh can be broadly classified into four categories namely food security programmes for poverty reduction; cash allowance and asset transfer programmes; microcredit programmes; and training programmes for capacity building (Ministry of Planning, 2014; Hulme, Maitrot, Ragno, & Rahman, 2014). In addition, the dynamics of availability, accessibility, and utilisation aspects of social protection programmes differ from regions to regions. This research project incorporates three embedded subunits which indicates three different levels or components of the case (Yin, 1989; Scholz & Tietje, 2002). The embedded subunits provide specific understanding of the broad case. The subunits are designed after doing an extensive literature search on social protection programmes in Bangladesh. My previous research experiences on southwest coastal Bangladesh are also used to design the level of units, in particular whether the subunits would be Union or Upazila (Rahman & Zaman, 2017).



**Figure 01: Conceptual framework of the case and embedded units of the case .**  
*Source: Author generated from the conceptual understanding of the works of Scholz and Tietje (2002)*

The first embedded unit is the dynamics of availability, accessibility, and utilisation aspects of social protection programmes in southwest coastal Bangladesh. This mainly shows the overall status of different types of social protection programmes in southwest coastal Bangladesh. Within the first embedded unit, the main task is to question the 'What aspects,' 'How aspects,' and 'When aspects' of social protection programmes. The second embedded unit is the three unions of southwest coastal areas of Bangladesh that is linked with the question 'Where aspects' of social protection programmes. Three Unions namely Rayenda Union, Uttar Bedkashi Union, and Burir Char Union of southwest costal regions of Bangladesh are selected to understand the variations in social protection programmes across different geographic settings. The final embedded unit is the different types of beneficiaries of social protection programmes such as the recipients of Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) and Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) programme, Food For Work (FFW) programme, Old Age Allowance programme, Stipend for Primary Students programme, Honorarium for Freedom Fighters programme, and Widow Allowance programme. By incorporating the experiences of the different beneficiaries of social protection programmes, it has become possible to generate an illustrative picture of the social protection programmes in southwest coastal areas as a whole (see figure 01 for details of the schematic framework of the case and its embedded subunits).

## The Research Participants: Different Types of Beneficiaries of Social Protection Programmes

All the participants in this research were above 18 years of age. Out of 24 beneficiaries of social protection programmes from three research sites, 50 per cent were female respondents and the rest 50 per cent were male respondents. Although the total numbers of male-female participants were same, both Rayenda Union and Uttar Bedkashi Union had disproportionate number of male and female participants. The main purpose to include disproportionate number of male and female participants in the first two research sites was to explore the issues of social protection programmes, prioritizing male and female dimensions. In the final research site, Burir Char Union had equal number of male and female participants to form a more gender-balanced composition.

Most of the selected beneficiaries were involved in informal economic activities that indicated they did not earn their livelihood from any formal sector/ jobs. More than one-third of the respondents for the individual interviews were day labour. Besides the day labour, both fishing in the rivers and shrimp fry collection were also common occupation in each research site, as many respondents were located close to the riverside areas and earned their living from rivers. There was only one illiterate respondent. However, the overall literacy of the respondents was still limited within 'only can write their own name' stage. Most of participants informed me that their literacy level improved from 'no literacy to this stage, as they had to enrol in the government's 'adult literacy' programme in order to get access to the social protection programmes (see table 01 for details of the participants along with their location).

**Table 01: Details of the beneficiaries of social protection programmes in different research sites**

Category	Types of information	Name of the Research Sites			Total
		Rayenda Union	Uttar Bedkashi Union	Burir Char Union	
Age of the respondents	30-35	-	3	1	4
	36-40	3	1	3	7
	41-45	1	2	1	4
	46-50	-	1	2	3
	51-55	1	-	-	1
	56-60	1	-	1	2
	61-65	1	-	-	1
	65+	1	1	-	2



Sex of the respondents	Female	2	6	4	12
	Male	6	2	4	12
Occupation	Housewife	1	1	1	3
	Day labour	2	3	5	10
	Fisherman	1	-	2	3
	Shrimp fry collector	-	3	-	3
	Cobbler	1	-	-	1
	Umbrella repairer	1	-	-	1
	Service holder	-	1	-	1
	Beggar	1	-	-	1
	Masonry worker	1	-	-	1
Literacy	Illiterate	1	-	-	1
	Can only sign name	5	5	8	18
	Can read and write	2	3	-	5
Types of main support schemes	Widowed allowance	1	-	2	3
	Schooling stipend for son/daughter	1	1	1	3
	Rice allowance and Training	4	3	2	9
	Aged allowance	1	2	1	4
	Divorced allowance	-	1	-	1
	Disabled allowance	1	1	1	3
	Fishermen allowance	-	-	1	1

Source: Fieldwork, 2013 (updated in 2018)

### **Theoretical Underpinning of Social Protection Programmes: Interpretivist Methodology**

Considering the present situation of social protection programmes in Bangladesh, both the coverage in terms of total number of beneficiaries, and the level of supports in terms of amount from the support programmes have increased over time. However, the 2 per cent allocation of the country's GDP to social protection programmes still remains comparatively lower than the other South Asian countries, which is about 5 per cent (Islam, 2010; World Bank, 2006) Considering both the "promotion approach" which is undertaken to raise the incomes and employment

opportunities of the poor and the “protection approach” which is undertaken to reduce the vulnerability of the poor, the types of social protection programmes varies over regions (Khuda, 2011). Due to different target groups, the number and focus of the social protection programmes get changed. For example, the percentage of widowed female is remarkably higher than male widowed population, and in many cases, the widowed females have to depend on their family members and relatives for their living. That is why the government is supporting the widowed females through implementing seven female-focused programmes such as widow/destitute women allowance programme, Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) programme, Rural Employment and Road Maintenance Programme (RERMP), Rural Employment Opportunities for Public Assets (REOPA), Secondary Stipend programme, Vulnerable Group Development for Ultra-Poor (VGD-UP), and Maternal Health Voucher Schemes (Hulme, Maitrot, Rango, & Rahman, 2014). Through social protection programmes, the government is mainly targeting to protect the poor from all types of social, economic, and natural shocks (Ministry of Planning, 2009). However, the perception of the benefits from social protection programmes varies over regions and also between the beneficiaries and non- beneficiaries (BBS, 2007). Therefore it’s important to describe the main objectives of the major social protection programmes along their selection criteria in the context of Bangladesh (see table 02 for details).

**Table 02: Major social protection programmes along with the objectives, and selection criteria**

Programme Names	Major Objectives of the Programme	Selection Criteria
Food-For-Work Programme and Rural Maintenance Programme	Employment generation for the poor, mainly during lean period through rural infrastructure creation and maintenance	(i) Person who owns not more than 0.50 acre land; (ii) Affected landless person due to river erosion and natural disasters
40/60 Days Employment Generation for Extremely Poor	Enhance employment and purchasing power capacity of extremely poor	(i) Unemployed but willing to work and unskilled poor person including only the day or agricultural labour, who does not have any other opportunity to get employed; (ii) Active person aged between 18 and 60 years; (iii) Landless male or female poor-income people, who do not have pond or livestock to earn income
Vulnerable Group Development	Provide training and financial help for self-employment in income generating activities	(i) Especially provided to female headed households consuming less than two full meals per day

Vulnerable Group Feeding	Deliver relief in times of natural disaster and meeting emergency needs	(i) Disaster victims
Gratuitous Relief	Provide relief support immediately after the natural and man-made disasters to only worst affected distressed and poor persons/households	(i) Recipient needs to get an approval from the concerned Member of Parliament/Upazila Chairman/Upazila Nirbahi Officer/Union Council Chairman; (ii) No household would get support unless it is affected by aforementioned disasters
Test Relief	Employment generation through rural road maintenance	(i) Person who owns not more than 0.50 acre land; (ii) Affected landless person due to river erosion and natural disasters
Old Age Allowance	Provide old age cash allowance to the poor men and women	(i) Recipient must have the age of 65 and above. Age limit is flexible for women, especially after attaining 62 years a woman becomes eligible, but priority will be given to those who are physically infirm; (ii) Recipient must earn below 3,000 BDT annually; (iii) Chronologically priority is given to widow, divorcee, wifeless, spouseless and deserted from family
Allowance to widowed, deserted and destitute woman	Provide cash to the women in times of distress	(i) Recipient must be the age between 18 to 65 years, but priority is given to senior most widow and husband deserted destitute women; (ii) Priority is given to widow, divorced woman, husband deserted woman; (iii) Priority is given to wealthless, homeless, landless respectively
Allowance to person with disability	Provide cash to person with disability	(i) Recipient must be age of 5 years and above; (ii) Recipient must have registration certificate of disabled person issued by the District Social Services Office
Stipend for Primary Student	Provide cash assistance to encourage poor guardians to send their children to the school instead of engaging them in income generating activities	(i) Poor families are identified based on the following criteria: distressed widow-headed, day-labour, families of low-income rural professional groups (fishermen, weavers, potters, carpenters, cobblers, blacksmiths etc.), families of autistic students, and families of insolvent ethnic communities; (ii) Performance criteria such as results, rate of attendance in classes

		applies to the students to continue eligibility for the stipend
Maternity Allowance for Poor Lactating Mother	Provide cash to the women in increasing their ability to have balanced, nutritious elements and health check-up	(i) Recipient must be age of minimum 20 years or above; (ii) Monthly income must be less than 1,500 BDT; (iii) Must be the main source of income of a poor family; (iv) member of a landless and asset less family

Sources: (Datta 2014; Hossain & Kappestein 2014; Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, 2014; The Department of Social Services, 2014; Rahman, Matsui, & Ikemoto, 2013; Social Security Department, 2013; Ahmed, Zohir, Kumar, & Chowdhury, 1995)

This paper undertakes that all the above-mentioned social protection programmes in Bangladesh are social invention. As a result, the boundaries of the different types of social protection programmes such as social provision, social prevention, and social promotion are artificial, which means those things are socially constructed. Social constructivism relies on constructions of something are mental, as with constructivism, but they are generated as much through social relationships and conversation as through interaction with objects (Hepburn, 2006: 39). Therefore, the exploration of meanings and understandings of social protection programmes based on the actual words of different types of beneficiaries may represent different perspectives of social protection programmes. For instance, the meanings and understandings of social protection programmes have manifold effects on different types of beneficiaries such as Vulnerable Group Development (VGD), Old Age Allowance, Disabled Allowance, Stipend for Primary Students, and Widow Allowance.

**i) Perspective of the beneficiaries of vulnerable group development (VGD) programme: a major type of social protection**

*“I have got six members in my family. The income of my husband is not enough to feed my four children. I actually get nineteen 'sher' [equivalent to around twenty four kilogram as 1 sher = 1.25kg] rice under the VGD programme, but I know the union council is supposed to give me thirty-kilogram rice. I have accepted that! What the poor people can do against them. Luckily, I am receiving the support. I can not imagine how I am going to feed my young children without the VGD supported rice. Now, I can buy some vegetables and other cooking stuffs from our earnings. If I would not get that rice support, I have to spend most of our income for rice. VGD is a huge help for my family.”*

- Hasna Parvin (pseudonym), Day labour, Rayenda Union, Sharankhola Upazila, Bagerhat

**ii) Perspective of the beneficiaries of widow allowance programme: a major type of social protection**

*"I can easily borrow things from people in my need. People also give me things as they think that I am able to return their money as I have this widowed allowance card. If I don't have this card, I have to beg sometimes in order to arrange my food. Many many thanks to government for thinking about our helpless situation, giving some supports to widowed women."*

- Jomila Khatun (pseudonym), Shrimp fry collector, Uttar Bedkashi Union, Koyra Upazila, Khulna

### **iii) Perspective of the beneficiaries of disabled allowance programme: a major type of social protection**

*"My brother and I do not have any assets or savings as my father did not leave anything for us. My wife looks after my brother. He can not move and can not do anything by himself. It is big mental pressure for my family. My brother is fortunate that he receives the money from this government. I have to use his allowance for his expenditure. It is not enough but I am happy to get this little help. We are poor. Any kind of small help is a big help for us. We can't leave his money in the bank for long term. Whenever the money comes to bank, we have to withdraw the money immediately as I have limited income. This allowance is releasing at least a small burden from my shoulder."*

- Aziz Hawlader, (pseudonym) elder brother of the beneficiaries, Day labour, Burir Char Union, Barguna Sadar Upazila, Barguna

The different perspectives of social protection programmes from three different types of beneficiaries show that they construct the meanings and understandings of their social protection programmes in such ways as they engage with their surroundings. Objectivism generally implies that social phenomena and their categories have an independent existence or separate from actors (Bryman, 2012). In contrast to objectivism, what constructionism offers is that there is no true or valid interpretation (Crotty, 1998: 47). Therefore, considering the constructionist viewpoint, the meaning and understanding of social protection programmes cannot be described simply as 'objective', which means there is no fixed external reality. Another important issue, constructivism holds the notion that researcher's own accounts of the social world are constructions (Bryman, 2012: 33). Therefore, in this research, I can only present specific version of the meanings and understandings of social protection programmes in extremely poor households, and that cannot be regarded as the definitive one. I believe that the gathered information from the research sites would be value-laden, and in some extent, would reflect my personal biases in interpreting the social reality. Social reality can be resembled as a function of shared meanings; it is constructed, sustained, and reproduced through social life (Greenwood, 1994: 85). Social reality is a constantly shifting emergent property of individuals' construction (Bryman, 2012). Guba (1990:17) highlights that constructivists not only reject objectivity but also celebrate subjectivity. However, I prefer not to treat the above three individuals experiences of social protection

programmes 'subjective'. Crotty (1998: 43) makes a clear distinction between 'subjectivism' and 'constructionism' as researchers tend to create meaning within 'subjectivism' while we construct meaning within 'constructionism'. Here comes the issue of subjectivity, in contrast to objectivity in interpreting the results of research. I consider that the subjective interpretations of the 'benefits of social protection programmes from three different individuals are useful and fulfilling. In addition, I accept that there is some 'objective' meaning of the 'benefits of social protection programmes'; and, these different meanings emerge from three different beneficiaries' interaction with the 'social protection programmes' and how they receive and utilise the 'benefits of social protection programmes.' This holds a position in between 'objectivity' and 'subjectivity'. Considering that I admit there would be many other ways of interpreting the results of this research.

### **Illustrative Approach of Data Collection: Generating Insider's Perspectives of Social Protection Programmes**

In relation to my constructivism stance, I have tried to construct the narratives of social protection programmes based on the stories of research participants. To get to know their stories, I need to listen to their stories, and interpret those stories at the same time to create a sense of understanding of social protection programmes. In relation to this, what I have tried to do is to collect data and interpret data simultaneously. This joint collection and interpretation have given the opportunity to understand the situation, in particular how social protection programmes affect extremely poor households in southwest coastal areas of Bangladesh.

While conducting interviews with the research participants, I have given particular focus on two issues namely sensitivity towards social protection programmes, and the perspectives and contexts of the information from the research participants. During the interviews, many household heads have explained their experiences about social protection programs from different perspectives such as sometimes they have told their stories from the head of their families; sometimes they have explained their stories as a member of the community. Many of them have discussed their experiences about the government support programmes after cyclone 'Sidr' and cyclone 'Aila' as well as what is going on at present with social protection programmes. To understand and make sense of their information, I have incorporated the context of information.

At the beginning, their stories did not seem academically contributing to me. Gradually, I realized that their stories were far more diverse than the existing literature. I also realized that their voices are almost absent in relation to our current understandings of social protection programmes. Therefore, I have adopted an open-minded approach to collect data from research sites. I have allowed the respondents to talk freely so that they could be able to share their priorities through their stories. Their stories have given the opportunity what I would need to know from them, and not only what I would like to hear from them. I have tried to gain experiences of social

protection programmes from their stories, not the stories that I was only interested in. As Saldana (2011: 83) describes fieldwork experiences can influence a researcher's epistemological premises, including value, attitude, and belief systems, if he or she is open to discovery and change. From this understanding, I have explored a clear relation between my research paradigm and data collection methods.

Various aspects of data were collected from numerous sources. I gave particular attention and priority on data collection as effective data gathering and sampling strategies can ensure quality of data for analysis (Bazeley, 2013: 35). In my first research site, Rayenda Union, different lists of publicly available information of the beneficiaries of social protection programmes were collected from Rayenda Union Council office. Those lists of information helped me to generate some insights of the existing situation of the social protection programmes. In one hand, I could completely rely on those lists of information to select the respondents. However, social protection programs contain a wide range of challenges, as Mannan and Ahmed (2012) describe, inappropriate targeting, severe leakage, and corruption issues. Therefore, I could not rely totally on selecting the respondents on the basis of those publicly available lists.

Several approaches had been employed to locate the extremely poor households because there were not easily reachable and didn't seem to have reliable published information. At first, a brief consultation was conducted with the union council chairman, community members, and non-government organizations' officials to locate the probable areas to find the extremely poor households. In this regard, a topographic map produced by Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) was used to mark the settlement of the poor communities. In general, the landless poor households often tend to settle on 'khas land', which is state-owned land usually located in marginal areas along the coasts and rivers (FAO, 2010). Therefore, along with the marked location of poor communities on map, I made a reconnaissance visit around those 'khas land' areas.

Reconnaissance visit, locational analysis on map, community consultations, and the lists of information from Union Councils offered me a greater reliability in selecting sample than random sampling procedure. I adopted a priori but flexible selection criteria to select the respondents for interviewing. Some of these criteria were as such types of social protection programmes, duration of supports, sources of earnings, no. of family members, duration of living in the research sites, location of house, and available resources. Those criteria were not strictly maintained as I mainly highlighted how well they were able to communicate with me or how easily I was able to access the information for my research. I have given special attention to deliberately select the worst as well as the best experiences of social protection programmes as it becomes difficult to explore the phenomenon of interest from average experiences because the characteristics of the phenomenon of interest are

diluted and mixed in with other characteristics from other experiences (Richards & Morse, 2013: 221).

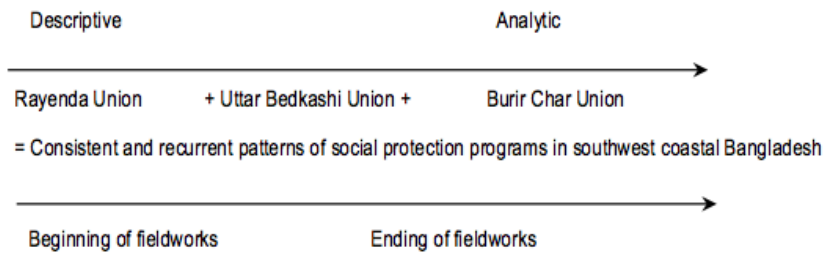
I have adopted purposeful sampling because it has allowed me to choose research participants in such a way that I was interested in (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008:167). Purposive sampling are able to offer the opportunities to select the participants that they are familiar with the required information, are willing to reflect on the phenomena of interest, and are interested to participate and spend their time (Spradley, 1979). In addition, research participants were selected in such ways so that they would lead me to understand, to assert, perhaps even to modify information for generalizations (Stake, 1995:4). I selected my research participants with the above-mentioned foremost criteria to maximise my learning about social protection programmes.

This was necessary to sample several sub-sites in order to obtain a more complete picture of the research domain. However, an additional complication arises if there are several sub-sites essential to a proper understanding of what is going on (Layder, 2013:118). Research sub-sites were selected in such ways that could establish the representativeness of social protection programmes in southwest coastal areas of Bangladesh. Those three Unions of southwest coastal Bangladesh were selected on the basis that they were able to make sense of the research problem and questions. The selection of research sub-sites held the ideas of 'problem sampling', which provides data of maximum relevance to the focus and questions of research (Layder, 2013: 121). Problem sampling holds a much looser and more general theoretical role to play, and offers the possibility of conceptual and analytic discovery (Layder, 2013: 121; Daniel, 2011).

At least one research participant was selected from the four broadly classified types of social protection programmes included food support programmes such as Vulnerable Group Development (VGD), Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF), Gratuity Relief (GR), and Test Relief (TR); cash allowance such as widow allowance, destitute woman allowance, schooling stipend, aged allowance, and handicap allowance; microcredit programmes such as loan programs for extremely poor people with minimum interest; and training and education programmes such as disaster preparedness training, adult education program, and health and hygiene practice training (Ministry of Planning, 2014). Kvale (1996:102) emphasises that in qualitative interview studies, the number of sample size necessary depends on a study's purpose, and that can be either too small or too large in number. Therefore, I conducted eight interviews from each research site. From Rayenda Union, I collected a descriptive understanding of social protection programmes from the research participants. As the fieldworks continued to the second research site, in particular Uttar Bedkashi Union, I collected both descriptive and analytic information. In my final research site, Burir Char Union, I collected more analytic information than the descriptive one (see figure 02 for the details of data collection and analysis process).



The main intension was to generate a comprehensive understanding of social protection programmes in southwest coastal areas of Bangladesh.



**Figure 02: Stages of data collection and data analysis. Source: Author generated from the conceptual understanding of the works of Rahman & Zaman, 2017**

As I must collect consent from all of my participants, I have used self-selection process rather than statistical randomization in this research. Therefore, true randomness would be prohibitive in an in-depth interview study (Seidman, 2006:51). I have not persuaded anyone to participate in this interview for his or her benefit. Some key issues like participants' interests, availability of their time, and reflections of social protection programmes have played important role during the participant-selection process. I have conducted all interviews in 'natural settings' that means conducting interviews at participant's place of residence or work (Denzin & Lincoln 2005:3; Becker, 1986). Therefore, sometimes I faced some difficulties from the other family members of extremely poor households who were enthusiastically participating with the main interviewee. In some situations, this extra information about social protection programmes from other family members of the households helped me. In some situations, those spontaneous participation from the other family members made the situations little bit complex, and interviewees were dominated by the outsider's information. In that case, I waited without offending anyone until my interviewees felt comfortable again to talk. I then asked the main interviewee for his or her opinion about the presence of other family members. If he or she remained comfortable to continue the interview in presence of other family members, I continued the data collection.

Both note taking and audio recording were used during interviews to establish greater trustworthiness, and conformability in interpretation (Denzin & Lincoln 2005: 24). Researchers generally transform the spoken words from interviews into a written text to study, and audio-recorded interviews can work most reliably with the words of participants (Seidman, 2006: 114). The audio-recording device (Sony ICDUX533FB Notetaker) was placed visibly during the interviews, in particular in front of the interviewee. Due to the small size of the audio-recording device, it did not take much attention of the participants. In many situations, I realised that participants were not getting critical enough about the sensitive issues like

corruption, bribery, and political influences while talking about the social protection programmes. I got the impression from them that this could be related with the use of audio-recording device. Warren (2002: 92) highlights that many researchers have experienced the “on and off the record” associations during conducting qualitative interviews. In that situation, I completely stopped the audio-recorder, and asked them to talk freely as there would be no recorded information. I gave much emphasis on taking notes in that circumstance. In addition, I explained again that aliases and pseudonyms would be used to protect the identities during data transcription, data analysis, and dissemination of research findings. The explicit confirmations from me about the unidentified source of information made them comfortable and open to discuss about the ‘underlying issues’ of social protection programmes.

Kvale (2007:35) suggests seven stages of an interview inquiry wherein he particularly highlights the conduction of interviews based on an interview guide with a reflective approach to generate knowledge. All interviews were conducted with interview guide. I used mostly open questions because it allowed the respondents to express themselves in their own words, not any suggested answers (Gillham, 2000; Foddy, 1993: 128). In order to draw out the most complete story about various subjects or situations under investigation, I included four types of questions while I developed the interview guide for individual interviews with extremely poor household heads. The four types of questions were categorised as throwaway questions, essential questions, extra questions, and probing questions (Berg, 2001:75). Before asking any throwaway questions, I explained in details about this research to the research participants. For example, I clearly mentioned that I was interested in the issues of social protection programmes, in particular about the supports they were getting from the governments and non-government organisations. In addition, I admitted that being a stranger or an outsider in their locality, this would be impossible for me to know what was going on about their supports without detailed explanations from them. My strong naivety about the local politics and surroundings made the research participants relax, and in some cases made them fearless to talk about corruption and leakage issues of social protection programmes. All the interviews were conducted with a flexible time frame such as 9am, 3pm, or even 8:30pm. The respondents were asked to provide suitable time so that they would be able to spend sufficient time for the interviews. At the time of initial contact, I have given some hints to the potentials research participants about the topics that I was particular interested in. The interviews with the beneficiaries of social protection programmes were conducted in easily accessible place, mostly in their front rooms of their houses. Small monetary incentives were offered to the extremely poor households heads for participating in interviews. Each research participant received 200 Bangladeshi Taka (approximately US\$2.5), which was above the average daily wages of agricultural workers in rural areas of Bangladesh (BBS, 2011). This small monetary incentive was given to compensate their time and also to acknowledge their participation in this research.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper accepts the issues of subjectivity in exploring the meaning and understanding of social protection programmes in southwest coastal areas of Bangladesh through interpretive methodology as social protection is a concept constructed by the society which means different things to different beneficiaries. Considering the variety of supports ranging from asset transfer to cash allowance provided by the government of Bangladesh, social protection concept holds the nature of subjectivity within the definition of social protection. This paper intends to create a new sense of understanding of social protection programmes through approaching the beneficiaries keeping their sensitivities as well as listening to their stories on the aspects of what they are getting, how they are getting, and finally, when they are using the benefits of social protection programmes. This paper argues that the stages from 'availability of social protection programmes' to utilisation of social protection programmes' are not straightforward and unidirectional. This paper also recognises that there exists complex social relationship in every aspects of social protection programmes ranging from the selection process to delivery of social protection programmes. Therefore, it demands a new methodology namely interpretive methodology with embedded case units that can explore the meaning and understanding of social protection programmes considering the complex societal relationship as well as social class conflict, especially between the beneficiaries of social protection programmes and the local politicians.

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