

Challenges in Achieving SDG 2 - Zero Hunger in Bangladesh: An Analytical Study on Food Certainty in Bangladesh from Zakat Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted by the United Nations (UN) on 25 September 2015. It consists of 17 interconnected goals intended to be achieved over the next 8 years (2030). Most of the goals are present in Bangladesh and goal number two “end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture” is one of them. However, the current progress scenario towards achieving SDG 2 in the country is unsatisfactory due to some obstacles. As the world's third largest Muslim country, Zakat has huge potential as a source of revenue in Bangladesh. Undoubtedly, Zakat is one of the most important tools of Islamic finance that can play a vital role in alleviating hunger in the country. The study aims to identify the challenges faced by Bangladesh to acquire goal number 2 of SDG and particularly analyse the impact of zakat on improving the food safety status in the country which will facilitate the path towards achieving SDG 2 – Zero Hunger. This study is expected to contribute primarily to the government and zakat management institutions of Bangladesh to optimize the feasibility and utilization of the zakat mechanism.

Keywords: *Challenges, SDGs, Zero Hunger, Food Certainty, Bangladesh, Zakat.*

INTRODUCTION

In the eyes of the world, development is the symbol or measure of the civilization of a country (Rejab, S. N., & Lateh, N., 2022). According to the Brundtland Commission, it refers to sustainable development that is, ascertaining that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Robert & Leiserowitz, 2015). Sustainable development has three most indispensable components: economic, social, and environmental. Every single component needs to be given equal priority (Andi, 2009). Hence, the support of various parties, public or private, is required to mobilize the energy to push the country towards excellence in the general development of the

national economy and society (Rejab, S. N., & Lateh, N., 2022). However, it has been observed that countries are getting more vulnerable to many social and economic problems with the rapid increase in social and environmental challenges and are unable to address them or limit their effects (Jouti, 2019). Amidst this concern, on 25 September 2015, the United Nations (UN) launched the 2030 Agenda with the concept of 'Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)' (Rejab, S. N., & Lateh, N., 2022) by replacing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (Atah, Nasr & Mohammed, 2018) featuring on the slogan "Leaving no one behind" (involving all parties without exception) so that all benefit from human rights-based sustainable development (Alfiani, T., & Akbar, N., 2020).

Subsequently, 193 countries agreed on this new agenda (with 17 most significant goals) at the UN General Assembly (UN, 2020). Bangladesh has also adopted SDGs like other countries. According to the SDG index, Bangladesh has a better position in the process of achieving SDGs than some South Asian countries (Sachs, et al., 2020). Bangladesh aims to achieve UN Sustainable Development Goal number two - Zero Hunger by 2030 through ending hunger and malnutrition and ensuring access to adequate, safe, and nutritious food for all (GED, BPC, G. 2018). However, for a densely populated country like Bangladesh, achieving this particular goal will not be that easy. In fact, providing essential food products to this huge population with limited resources is a big challenge. Taking this issue into account, the Bangladesh government has taken several initiatives to reduce food uncertainty. Despite these efforts of the government, there is still a deficit of food in the country (Tarique, K., et al., 2016). However, recently a notable improvement has been observed in the level of hunger compared to the past. A report by Global Hunger Index (2021) shows that Bangladesh has ranked 76th out of 116 countries and achieved a GHI score of 19.1 out of 100 points, dropping its hunger level to "moderate" for the first time (GHI, 2021; Bhuiyan, M., & Khan, T. T., 2021). Unfortunately, the food intake rate is still not satisfactory in the country. It is worth mentioning that Bangladesh still lags behind in reducing food uncertainty and achieving goal number two of the SDG due to various challenges such as price hikes, food insecurity, consuming less nutritious food, food adulteration, syndication, and problems with agricultural sustainability. Hence, this particular sector of hunger reduction still requires special attention and more alternative initiatives to overcome the challenges and acquire SDG 2- Zero

Hunger.

As a comprehensive religion, Islam addresses every aspect of a human being (e.g., economic, social, political, etc.) apart from the spiritual aspects. It is a complete religious provision that provides comprehensive guidelines for the development of every single aspect of society. Indeed, economic development is a significant aspect of human beings. So, all aspects of economic development through trade, industry, and agriculture are adequately dealt with by Islamic rules and regulations (Uddin, M. N., et al., 2021). Zakat is a vital tool in Islamic financial policy and economic system that can ensure food security for the poor through poverty alleviation programs as it ensures the redistribution of wealth that can eradicate poverty which is the basis of world hunger (Atah, U. I. et al., 2018). It is historically proved in both the Islamic and conventional worlds that zakat has a greater impact on poverty alleviation than conventional methods (Uddin, M. N., et al., 2021) and it does the same thing in hunger-reduction.

Bangladesh is the third largest Muslim country in the world. Many current reports show that Zakat has huge potential as a revenue source in Bangladesh (World Bank & Islamic Development Bank Group, 2017; Naya Diganta, 2022; Noyon, A.U., 2021). Thus, it is worth mentioning that Zakat can be one of the most important tools that will alleviate hunger and ease the way towards achieving the SDG 2- zero hunger in Bangladesh. However, an efficient and organized Zakat management system is a must to get optimum results. Unfortunately, the overall scenario of the Zakat management system is insufficient in Bangladesh. Therefore, it is high time for the government to pay special attention to Zakat as a significant mechanism to increase food intake rate and achieve zero hunger. Taking

the above facts into account, in this paper, the authors reviewed previous literature on the topic, attempted to find out major challenges that hinder reducing the hunger rate and achieving SDG 2 - zero hunger in Bangladesh, discussed the massive impact of Zakat in ensuring food security in the country which will lead to the achievement of goal number 2 of the SDGs, and recommended some initiatives to be taken to improve the food certainty status under the Zakat mechanism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

SDG and Its Goal Number 2 - Zero Hunger

The UN General Assembly adopted the UN Millennium Declaration at the UN Millennium Summit in September 2000. The declaration called for a global partnership to reduce extreme poverty. It has been considered as the initial global strategy with measurable goals on which all member states of the United Nations and the world's leading development institutions agreed. Subsequently, in order to support this particular declaration, Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General of the United Nations, set out eight accompanying goals which were set with a deadline of 2015. Eventually, these particular goals have been named the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (Woodbridge, M. 2015). However, OIC member countries as a group have observed significant progress in accomplishing the goals of MDGs. But, this progress has been uneven, and there was widespread inequality between and within countries (SESRIC, 2016). According to Adegbami and Adesanmi (2018), MDGs have failed to achieve many of their development goals in many developing countries (Adegbami, A. & Adesanmi, O., 2018). Later on, the new global 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with 17 goals officially came into force on 1 January 2016 and replaced

the MDG (Janoušková, S., et al., 2018). In fact, these new goals were set in order to address the shortages that were noticed in the MDGs' goals (Otekunrin, O. A., et al., 2019).

Zero hunger is one of the significant sustainable development goals aimed at achieving global food security by 2030 (Ahmad, S., et al., 2021). Particularly, this Goal 2 was set to address the importance of food security and nutrition within the broader agenda and called on member states to “end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture” by 2030 (Otekunrin, O. A., et al., 2019). Ayoola et al.(2018) have addressed that there are five specific targets of this Goal 2: first, By 2030, end hunger and ensure access to safe, nutritious, and sufficient food; second, By 2030, end all forms of malnutrition; third, By 2030, double the productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers; fourth, By 2030, ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices; and fifth, By 2030, maintain the genetic diversity of seeds, plants, and animals (Ayoola, J., et al., 2018). According to the UN (2017) and IITA (2017), it has three particular implementing mechanisms namely: Increasing investment through enhanced international cooperation, Correcting and preventing trade restrictions and distortions in the world agricultural markets, and Adopting measures to ensure the proper functioning of food commodity markets and their derivatives and facilitate timely access to market information (UN, 2017; IITA. (2017).

SDG 2 - Zero Hunger in Bangladesh

Bangladesh is one of the top countries that have significantly achieved the Millennium Development Goals (MDGS) (Chowdhury, S. et al, 2011). According to Rahman, M. M. (2020), Bangladesh is one of the pioneers in

the institutionalization of the SDG implementation process (Rahman, M. M., 2020). The SDG index shows that Bangladesh has achieved a better position than some countries in South Asia (Sachs et al., 2020). As a signatory to the 2030 Agenda, Bangladesh has adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the National Plan and the government has taken a number of initiatives that have made some remarkable progress (Khatun, H. et al., 2021). Rahman, M. M. has stated that Bangladesh Prime Minister's Office (PMO) has appointed the Chief Coordinator for Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Affairs. Besides, a monitoring and coordination system has been set up by forming an "SDG Implementation and Monitoring Committee". The government has set up a "National Data Coordination Committee" "National Data Coordination Committee" to accelerate the process of collecting authentic data and its use to measure the progress of the SDGs (Rahman, M. M., 2020). According to Ashraf M. et al. (2019), the General Economics Division, Planning Commission has formulated the Seventh Five Year Plan of Bangladesh (SFYP) for 2016-2020, "Accelerating Growth, Empowering Every Citizen" for the years 2016-2020, Which can be considered as a blueprint for the initial complex stage of implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Ashraf M. et al., 2019). However, there are still some sectors that require special attention (Khatun, H. et al., 2021). Ashraf et al. (2019) revealed a number of sectors that need special attention such as Resource Mobilization, Population momentum, Unplanned urbanization, Natural disasters, and climate change, Utilization of resources, Skill development and quality education, Competitiveness, Governance challenges, and Taming inequality and regional disparity (Ashraf et al., 2019). Besides,

Sabbih, M. A. (2018) identified some of the challenges faced by Bangladesh in implementing the SDGs, such as proper alignment with national planning and policy processes and coordination. He addressed that the availability of factual information, partnership, and active participation of stakeholders is highly challenging for the country. According to him, weak institutional capacity, weak governance, and inconsistencies in policy will have more impact than resource mobilization (Sabbih, M. A., 2018).

Achieving SDG-2 "Zero Hunger" (food security, improved nutrition, and sustainable agricultural development) is one of the major challenges in Bangladesh (Shrestha, R. B. et al. 2020). According to UNICEF (2016), hunger is a significant issue in Bangladesh which is reflected in malnutrition and undernutrition, infant stunting, and child wasting (UNICEF, 2016). The annual report of the Global Hunger Index (2018) shows that Bangladesh has improved economically but still faces a huge national hunger problem (GHI, 2018).

Rahman, M. M. & Neena, S. B. (2019) found that the government has adopted policies and programs to ensure food security and address specific hunger and nutrition issues including introducing nutrient-rich rice varieties, and adaptive crop varieties such as salt-tolerant rice varieties, high-yielding varieties, and crop diversification. However, achieving this goal is still difficult due to several challenges including resilient agriculture, food adulteration, maintaining genetic diversity, establishing gene banks, removing barriers to trade in international markets, and improving rural infrastructure (Rahman, M. M. & Neena, S. B., 2019).

Chowdhury & Hossain (2018) found that Bangladesh has one of the highest population densities (Chowdhury & Hossain, 2018). According to Statista

(2020), Bangladesh has ranked 10th in the world in terms of overpopulation (Statista, 2020). Chowdhury & Hossain (2018) noted that providing food and basic amenities for this huge population with limited resources is a big challenge (Chowdhury & Hossain, 2018). Uddin, M. J., & Uddin, Md. N. (2018) pointed out that achieving Goal 2 “Zero Hunger” of SDG would be a major challenge for Bangladesh in the absence of adequate social security for vulnerable and poverty-stricken people (Uddin, M. J., & Uddin, Md. N., 2018). In contrast, Khatun, H. et al. (2021) observed that optimal utilization of demographic dividends could also accelerate the progress of achieving the goals of SDGs by ensuring effective participation of young active populations in the current development process. Notably, crop production, especially paddy production has increased despite ethnographic pressures having pushed the availability of cultivable land. In addition, adequacy in fish and livestock production has been achieved and progress has thus been made towards achieving “zero hunger” (Khatun, H. et al., 2021).

According to Roy, D. et al. (2019), as a developing country, Bangladesh deals with the challenge of food insecurity. Even if people's income increases, the quality of food is unsatisfactory. Food consumption has improved but balanced diet intake is still far below standards. A significant portion of the population is still severely food insecure and malnourished. Despite improvements in many areas of food security, the people of Bangladesh lack food diversity, leading to malnutrition. The Bangladesh government has taken a number of steps to ensure food security, but they were not enough to address this chronic problem. Researchers maintain that there is a need for all stakeholders to combine efforts towards tackling food insecurity. Roy, D. et al (2019) asserts that NGOs should work from the same platform

to address the challenges affecting food security in Bangladesh (Roy, D. et al., 2019). Arefin, P. et al. (2021) found that improving agricultural productivity and making it environmentally sustainable, and improving crop nutritional value can help achieve food security and sustainable development goal 2 “Zero Hunger” in Bangladesh (Arefin, P. et al., 2021).

Zakat and Zero Hunger

Ismail, A. G., & Shaikh, S. A. (2017) noted that zakat is an essential institution within an Islamic economic structure for poverty alleviation and economic welfare. They found that food insecurity and hunger are among the most significant problems in Muslim-majority countries. They mentioned eradicating poverty and hunger is one of the main goals of the future development agenda (Ismail, A. G., & Shaikh, S. A., 2017). Alfiani, T., & Akbar, N. (2020) suggested that the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) requires a greater role of zakat as a means of financing (Alfiani, T., & Akbar, N., 2020). Amalia, R. Y., & Huda, N. (2020) argued that Zakat plays a significant role in achieving SDGs since Zakat and SDGs have the same goal so work programs go hand in hand with each other (Amalia, R. Y., & Huda, N., 2020). Nurzaman & Kurniaeny (2019) opined that there is a significant relevance between Zakat and the SDG because Zakat is a tool for Islamic economic development that aims at the implementation of the Maqāṣid Sharia (Nurzaman & Kurniaeny, 2019). Atah, U. I. et al. (2018) opined that Zakat can assure food security for the poor through poverty palliation programs since Zakat guarantees the redistribution of wealth that can alleviate poverty which is the basis of hunger in the world. In fact, there is a strong causal relationship between poverty and hunger. Therefore, in order for a person to have easy access to food, he must always have the

sufficient purchasing power to consume quality and quantitative food (Atah, U. I. et al., 2018).

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a descriptive and analytical approach. Employing the descriptive approach, an overview of the present scenario of SDG 2 achievement in Bangladesh has been provided. The analytical approach, on the other hand, has been employed in gaining a deeper understanding of the problem by analysing current issues and identifying new insights along with opportunities for improvement. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the major challenges that hinder the achievement of SDG 2- zero hunger in Bangladesh, a qualitative research methodology has been used. This approach works for the study, as its primary objective is to examine several factors associated with accomplishing SDG 2 from a broader point of view, along with potential recommendations to manage the zakat fund in attaining zero hunger, specifically in enhancing food certainty status and facilitating the achievement of SDG 2 in the entire country. Moreover, secondary sources such as books, journal articles, newspapers, annual reports of organizations, government and non-government documents, online websites, editorial reports, documents of international organizations such as the UN, FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, WHO, IITA, and World Bank, as well as other internet-based sources, have been reviewed for this study. Furthermore, the authors examine the gathered data to identify the challenges to the administration of Zakat in Bangladesh. In addition, the authors suggested some new insights and readiness in order to enhance the food security status in accomplishing SDG 2 via the Zakat mechanism.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The authors have only made an attempt to address the main challenges in achieving SDG 2 in Bangladesh without providing the solutions to overcome those challenges. In addition, they specifically analysed the impact of zakat on enhancing the food certainty status in the country which will facilitate the path towards achieving SDG 2 – Zero Hunger.

RESULT

Challenges in Achieving SDG 2 - Zero Hunger in Bangladesh

Usually, hunger refers to the anguish linked with a lack of food. It is defined by the FAO as a distressing or painful physical sensation resulting from inadequate dietary energy intake. It can result from inadequate nutritional intake or loss of absorption of nutrients needed by the human body (WFP 2009). The aim of Sustainable Development Goal 2 of the United Nations is to end global hunger, increase nutrition, and support agricultural sustainability over the next 8 years. To explain it in more detail, this particular goal of the SDG aims to end all forms of hunger and malnutrition, ensure all people have access to adequate and nutritious food throughout the year, promote sustainable agricultural practices, improve the livelihoods and capacities of small-scale farmers, and allow equitable access to land, technology, and markets, by 2030 (Michailidis, A., et. al., 2020). This is a crucial goal because nowadays many people in rural areas are leaving agriculture behind and moving to urban areas and cities. Some countries are facing dire situations due to rapidly decreasing agricultural land, food insecurity, human malnutrition, especially child malnutrition, and simultaneous famine. Indeed, when agriculture is not sustainable, the country's food security agenda is

threatened. Apart from malnutrition among the younger generation from resultant food insecurity, this could also pave the road for famine, an adverse political situation, and eventually the outbreak of civil war (Abduh, M., 2019). Thus, all aspects related to “zero hunger” should always be a matter of concern.

Bangladesh is one of the countries that have made the most progress on the SDGs since 2015 (Journals of India., 2022). However, it still lags behind in achieving the goals of SDG, especially its Goal 2 “Zero Hunger” which is the topic of this paper, due to various challenges as follows:

- *Price Hikes*

A rapid and continuous increase in the prices of basic commodities is called inflation. In most cases, inflation is an essential factor that leads to social and economic instability and chaos (Abdul Latif, M., & Hanif, M., 2016). Bangladesh is the world's seventh most populous country. It is an agriculture-based country where over 60% of people are directly or indirectly dependent on agriculture and the majority of them live in abject poverty (Islam, M. E., & Chowdhury, F., n.d.). Despite some progress in the socio-economic and demographic sectors, Bangladesh still faces challenges in providing its population with basic needs, especially food. Since independence, it has struggled with poverty and food security in the constant struggle to achieve development goals (Rahman, K. M., 2019). Rising inflation in Bangladesh has become a serious concern in recent years (Rahman, M. M., 2015). In particular, the food inflation trend is increasing in Bangladesh mainly due to an increase in global food grain prices (Rahman, K. M., 2019). The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has considered Bangladesh as one of the 37 countries that are facing crises due to rising food prices (Rahman, M. M., 2015). As a

low-income country, most of the people in Bangladesh face difficulty in making their livelihood with their limited income due to the frequent rise in the prices of daily necessities. An increase in food prices forces people to reduce the quantity and quality of their food baskets. Moreover, the rise in prices of essential commodities places people in a more vulnerable situation. Soaring prices of staple foods are adversely affecting the nutrition of the population. Because when food prices rise, people are forced to limit their food intake which leads to malnutrition (Rahman, K. M., 2019). According to the reports of several widely circulated newspapers in Bangladesh, the prices of essential commodities including rice, pulses, edible oil, and sugar have increased several times in the last few months of 2022. As a result, the middle and lower middle and lower classes of society are in dire situations. (Hanif, M. A., 2022; Munna, M. R., 2022; Anwar, R., 2022). The Bangladesh Bank reported that food inflation increased from 5.3% in July 2021 to 6.2% in March 2022. Yet, the real pressure of higher prices has been felt much more than what is shown in official figures (Khatun, F., 2022). Rural people are the worst victims of Consumer Price Index (CPI) pressure as inflation in rural areas was recorded at 8.09% in June 2022. Conversely, the inflation rate in urban areas was relatively low (6.62%) in May 2022. In fact, food inflation is affecting the rural population at a higher rate as its rate has risen to 8.93% in June 2022 (Kabir, FHM. H., 2022). According to Former World Bank Lead Economist Dr Zahid Hussain (2022), mismanagement of the demand-supply situation is one of the reasons for the high inflationary pressure in Bangladesh (Kabir, FHM. H., 2022).

- *Food Insecurity*

Food insecurity is a severe problem not only

in developing countries but also in developed countries (Nirmala, V., & Shaurav, K., 2017). The World Bank (1986) defined food security as “access by all people at all times to enough food for an active and healthy life” (World Bank, 1986). According to FAO (2009), food security has four pillars which are availability, access, utilization, and stability (FAO, 2009). *Food availability* is concerned with the supply of food through production, distribution, and exchange (Gregory, P. J., et al., 2005). *Food access* means food affordability and allocation along with individual and household choices (Nath, C. N., 2015). *Food utilization* refers to food metabolism by the individual (Nath, C. N., 2015). *Food stability* means the capability to acquire food over time (Nath, C. N., 2015). The food insecurity situation in Bangladesh is dire (Roy, D., et al., 2019). Overpopulation and land depletion (Shaheen & Islam, 2012) have made the need for food security imperative in Bangladesh (Roy, D., et al., 2019). According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the number of food insecure people in Bangladesh has increased from 2.4 percent in 2018 to 5.2 crore in 2020 (Rahman, A., 2021). Yet, in terms of the four pillars of food security, it is worth noting that Bangladesh has made significant progress in one particular pillar which is ensuring food availability (Roy, D., et al., 2019). Bangladesh is an agricultural country where more than half of the population is directly engaged in agriculture to survive (Jolliffe et al., 2013). In fact, staple food crops are abundant, especially rice, which is considered to be the main food. Moreover, the country has made significant progress in the production of wheat, potatoes, and vegetables (Hossain, M., 2014). In addition to the crop sector, there has been significant progress in fisheries and livestock production. It is the world's fourth largest

fish producer (FAO, 2016). Nevertheless, about 32 percent of people live below the poverty line and do not have access to adequate food (FAO, 2011). This indicates that other dimensions (*Food access, Food utilization, and Food stability*) of food security are still lagging behind in Bangladesh (Roy, D., et al., 2019). Research has shown that Bangladesh still suffers from limited access to adequate food despite its remarkable achievements in food production. Although 60 percent of people living in rural areas are directly or indirectly involved in agriculture (Hossain, 2014), people have unequal access to food due to land distribution inequality (Ahmed, et al., 2013). Bangladesh also suffers from a lack of proper nutrition and utilization of food. It has been observed that although food consumption has increased in the last few decades, the intake of adequate nutritious food is far below standard (Roy, D., et al., 2019). Furthermore, Bangladesh faces many challenges including climate change, poverty, land loss, overpopulation, market instability, and post-harvest losses in achieving food security from national to local levels. The Bangladesh government has already taken some measures to achieve food security, but many more strategies are needed to achieve complete food security (Roy, D., et al., 2019).

- *Consuming Less Nutritious Food*

Food consumption, energy, and nutrient intake are a major concern nowadays as they determine the nutritional well-being of a population (Rahman, M. N., et al., 2022). However, the health and nutritional status of Bangladesh's population is still facing challenges despite significant progress (Fahim, S. M., et al., 2021). The nutritional well-being of a remarkable portion of the population in Bangladesh is still neglected because of insufficient access to adequate, healthy, and nutritious food. People in

Bangladesh suffer from energy deficiency due to consuming less than the recommended amount of food, leading to malnutrition (Rahman, M. N., et. al., 2022). Due to low purchasing power, especially people from poor families consume cheaper and less nutritious food (Rabbi, M. F., et. al., 2021) such as they eat only rice and sometimes skipping meals (Farzana, F. D., et. al., 2017), which often degrades the quality of their diet (Rabbi, M. F., et. al., 2021). According to five United Nations organizations (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, and WHO), a person's daily consumption of healthy food in Bangladesh is around Tk 276. Yet, 73 percent of the population cannot spend this money to buy healthy food (Prothom Alo, 2022). Being food insecure and unable to eat healthy foods affects health, especially nutritional status. Currently, 11.4 percent of the country's population is suffering from malnutrition. This rate was 14.2 percent a decade and a half ago (Prothom Alo, 2022). Although the people of Bangladesh nowadays eat more vegetables, fruits, and animal products, the amount should be higher. This is because the average energy consumption of the Bangladeshi population is about 280kcal less than the actual demand (Rahman, M. N., et. al., 2022). A recent report shows that nearly 3/4 of Bangladeshis cannot afford healthy food which is a shocking statistic. It found that the percentage of people unable to afford healthy food was 77.4% in 2017, and the number dropped to 73% in 2022 (Dhaka Tribune, 2022).

- *Food Adulteration*

Food adulteration has been defined by The World Health Organization (WHO) as; "the partial or total replacement of healthful ingredients or the addition or use of prohibited substances to artificially produce the impression of freshness in stale food" (WHO, 2017). Thus, food adulteration

means low-quality food, which is not in accordance with the definition of safe food given by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO). However, adulteration of food and food products can be unintentional or deliberate. Unintended adulteration comprises naturally occurring low-quality food, lack of rainfall, drought, poor stocking conditions, etc. Contrariwise, deliberate adulteration is intended to defraud or deceive customers (Rahman, M. A., et al., 2015). Bangladesh has been plagued by adulterated food issues for decades (Basma, N., 2017). Dealing with food adulteration is a big challenge in Bangladesh (Arefin, A., 2020). Most of the food products in Bangladesh, whether they are manufactured or processed, are unsafe to consume or adulterated to varying degrees. In fact, this problem plods at every level of the food chain, from production to consumption. As it has been observed, food manufacturers, processors, restaurants, fast food outlets, and many others are somehow involved in this blown practice of food adulteration (Ali, A. N. M. A., 2013). Commonly adulterated food products in Bangladesh include fruits, meat, milk, vegetables, fish, wheat, butter, ghee, spices, rice, bacon, sweets, beverages, baby food, etc. Calcium carbide, thiophene, formalin, colour injection, and sweetener are mixed with fruits. Formalin and bleaching dyes are most often used in vegetables, and formalin is used in fish (Mahfuz, M., 2014). There are 150 food items that have been estimated in the country by the International Centre for Diarrheal Disease and Research, Bangladesh (icddr, b). It has been reported by the Institute of Public Health (IPH) that over 50% of the food samples they tested were adulterated (OP-ED., 2018). In Bangladesh, many people suffer from food-related diseases (Alston, M., et al., 2016) such as cancer, diseases related to the liver, kidney, and heart, and mental and physical

growth problems in children (Huq, Z. K., 2022). Nearly 150 million people suffer from food adulteration-related diseases in South Asia with Bangladesh topping the list (Mahmud N., 2020).

- *Syndication*

"Syndication" is a process carried out for a specific purpose like venture capital syndication (Cai, et al., 2018). It can be conducted for both good and bad purposes, depending on the syndicators' intention. If the intention is like earning abnormal profits or defrauding the ultimate customer, it can be called "bad syndication" (Khan, & Islam, 2009). On the contrary, it can be good when it is formed on noble activities such as making adequate supplies without stockpiling goods (Hosain, M. S., 2021). According to Hosain, M. S. (2021), in the context of Bangladesh, "Syndication" is a pre-planned process of forming an interest group consisting of key players in the market to earn a large amount of profit for a particular product (Hosain, M. S., 2021). Given the Bangladeshi scenario, it can also be stated as a joint effort to raise the price of a particular commodity by way of creating artificial market demand by controlling the supply, which is possible when the supply of that particular good or service is controlled by one or a few importers, dealers, or market leaders (Hosain, M. S., 2021). Several reports show that despite adequate production, storage, and import of essential commodities in Bangladesh, prices of many commodities including rice, lentil, flour, onion, potato, edible oil, ginger, sugar, milk, and vegetables have gone up manifold due to the recent syndication of some traders, warehousemen, and mill owners (Sabur, S. A., et. al., 2021; Hosain, M. S., 2021; Hossain, A., 2020; Bangladesh Post., 2020; Financial Express, 2022; The Daily Star, 2022). Indeed, this corrupt practice is

disrupting the lives of the common people in Bangladesh by making it difficult and impossible for the common people to earn a proper livelihood. As seen, traders raise prices for the sake of the international market but do not reduce the price of goods according to the international market. Consequently, traders increase and decrease the prices of goods at will, control the supply and market, and extort huge sums of money from the public (Hossain, S. M. N., 2019; Hosain, M. S., 2021; Islam, S., 2022).

- *Problems with Agricultural Sustainability*

Sustainable agriculture is "a system that is economically viable, improves environmental quality and the resource base on which agriculture depends, provides basic human food and fiber needs, and improves the quality of life of farmers and society over the long term" (Crews et al., 1991; Flora, 1992; Kambewa, 2007). It is also defined as a commitment to meeting people's food and fiber needs and improving living standards for farmers and society now and in the future (Abubakar, M. S. & Attanda M. L., 2013). Bangladesh, a country covering an area of 147,570 square kilometres, is one of the world's predominantly agricultural developing countries (Rahman, M. (2017) where 60% of the total land is used for cultivation (BBS, 2016). Agriculture is the main sector of the economy of Bangladesh, which contributes about 17% of GDP and employs 45 % of the labour force (BBS, 2016). About 84% of the country's rural people are directly or indirectly dependent on agriculture for their livelihood (Mirza, M. M. U., 2015). Rice, jute, wheat, potatoes, pulses, sugarcane, tea, tobacco, etc. are the main agricultural products of Bangladesh (Quddus, M. A., 2018). It is often argued that improving production efficiency using existing resources has significant potential to

increase agricultural production and profitability. In the last two decades, the country has experienced strong economic growth and it is expected to achieve further accrual in the near future (Quddus, M. A., 2018). In spite of that, Bangladesh still lags behind in achieving sustainable development in agriculture due to several problems such as a gradual decrease in agricultural land, deficiency in soil nutrition, negligence of technology adoption, climate change, and sea level rise (Quddus, M. A., 2018), natural disaster, inadequate facilities for farmers, less empathy of governments, and so on (Tanjinul, H. M., et. al., 2019). A current report shows a poor agricultural scenario in Bangladesh where the growth rate of the agriculture sector has been declining for the last few decades. As per government data, the growth rate in the agricultural sector was 6.9 percent in the fiscal year 1999-2000. Then the growth rate decreased to 4.38 percent in the 2003-04 fiscal year. After that, although the growth rate increased little by little and reached 6.15 percent in the 2009-10 fiscal year, the growth rate again declined. In the fiscal year 2020-21, the growth rate of the agriculture sector was only 3.17 percent; according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) provisional estimates, it will decrease to 2.20 percent in the current fiscal year (Mandal, A. L., 2022).

Discussion on Food Certainty in Bangladesh from the Zakat Perspective

In essence, food is an inevitable element for human beings. This vital factor is among the main components of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as goal 2 aims to achieve zero hunger, food security, improved nutrition, and sustainable agriculture. Achieving these particular goals requires robust food security that relies on the availability and accessibility of the food, as well as on the way it is utilized. Food

reserve ensures adequate food supply and food production for a country's citizens. Undoubtedly, an adequate food reserve can play a vital role in a country's stable economic and social conditions, i.e., it enables the avoidance of price manipulation and the stabilization of food prices in the market. Consequently, this leads to a satisfactory level of food certainty in a country. Islam emphasizes the spiritual aspects of both natural and economic resources in food preservation. Zakat is one of the fundamental instruments of Islamic social finance. It is not only a religious obligation that must be complied with by all eligible Muslims but also a most important fiscal revenue in an Islamic economy. In fact, Zakat is the heart of the Islamic fiscal policy. It helps in achieving social, political, and economic development among Muslim communities as a major source of income. In particular, the Zakat fund is a form of aid that has a huge positive impact on food assurance. Thus, it can be an important tool that can play a significant role in achieving sustainable food certainty in any Muslim country.

It is acknowledged that food uncertainty and hunger are among the major problems in many Muslim majority countries. The Muslim population faces increasing poverty because of the lack of a sustainable source of a stable level of income. The SDGs aim to achieve a number of monumental goals and the eradication of poverty and hunger is one of them. But the timeframe set for these goals is short. Thereby, comprehensive efforts involving all types of institutions should be undertaken for optimum progress, particularly in those countries that are lagging far behind the targets and badly in need of considerable effort and resources to propel themselves to achieve the goals. On average, Muslim countries have a much longer distance to go in achieving development goals than

middle-income and high-income countries. However, Islam is a religion that covers all aspects of human life, whether it is social, political, or economic. As it was able to play a significant role in poverty alleviation approximately fifteen hundred years ago. There are few notable financial systems that are effective in the world today such as the capitalist economy, socialist economy, mixed economy, and Islamic economy. The first three financial systems were developed mainly with the modern state system. On the other hand, the Islamic financial system was developed fifteen hundred years ago. Two grand plans namely MDGs and SDGs have been adopted to eradicate poverty but there has been no significant change in this regard yet. This is because of giving priority to conventional mechanisms over Islamic mechanisms in achieving this particular goal. As it is seen that in order to end poverty and hunger, the capitalist economy is getting priority over the Islamic economy like the zakat system even though it is undoubtedly an essential tool for poverty alleviation and hunger eradication.

An important point to be noted is that the UN did not specify how each country would achieve these goals during the announcement of the SDG program for 2030. Because pointing it out would just cause another global failure. Consequently, in order to achieve those goals, it opens the scope to improve and adapt the Islamic financial system for countries implementing the Islamic financial system as one of the legally recognized financial transactions (Abduh, M., 2019). Indeed, Zakat is a major economic source for Islamic countries. Efficient and systematic zakat management is capable of contributing to human development, ensuring justice and social stability by reducing income disparities among Muslim communities. Zakat is an instrument that directly alleviates poverty, as well as addresses the social problems of

hunger during transitions, and wealth inequality due to market imperfections. Moreover, it has a significant impact on reducing poverty and hunger through the economic growth of people by mobilizing resources. For example, an authentic history shows that during the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties, the best management of Zakat resulted in the economic growth of people. It is evident that during the 30 months under the leadership of Umar bin Abdul Aziz, the zakat givers were consciously giving zakat. At that time the distribution of Zakat was not only for consumption activities but also for productive activities. Consequently, no record of poor people was found. It is noteworthy that the main motto of Zakat that is actually taught by Islam is to develop the economic empowerment of vulnerable people in society instead of encouraging dependence only on charity. Therefore, the mechanism of Zakat is necessary to combat hunger by focusing on economic empowerment by creating surplus through establishing trade and entrepreneurship rather than only depending on the give and take of charity. To that effect, a highly efficient Zakat management is a requirement to achieve the optimal results.

Being the third largest Muslim country, Bangladesh has a huge potential for zakat as a revenue source. A published report by the World Bank entitled "Islamic Finance: A Catalyst for Shared Prosperity?" estimates the contribution of zakat to the gross domestic product (GDP) in 10 Muslim-majority countries. It shows that among different Muslim countries, Bangladesh has the highest Zakat economic potential, which is 1.63 percent of GDP (see Figure 1), and this rate is the second highest among Muslim countries in the world (World Bank & Islamic Development Bank Group, 2017). According to Hasan, K., if zakat collection were institutionalized in the more-than-90-percent-Muslim country of

Bangladesh, four times the current national income could be generated. It would be equal to 21% of the national budget and 35% of the national revenue collection (Naya Diganta, 2022). There are a number of public, private, and institutional sectors for the collection and distribution of Zakat in the country.

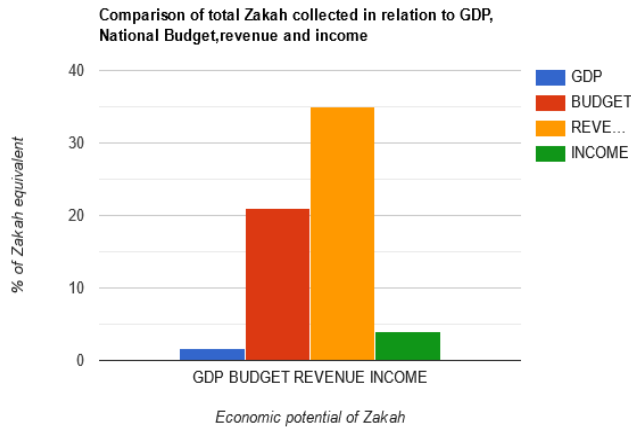


Figure 1. Zakat collected in comparison to GDP, National Budget, and Revenue

Source: created by authors

A report shows that the Zakat Fund of Islamic Foundation (Public sector) has collected Bangladeshi Taka (BDT) 5 crore 16 lakhs and distributed the amount in the 2019-20 financial year alone.

Zakah collection and Distribution among various organization

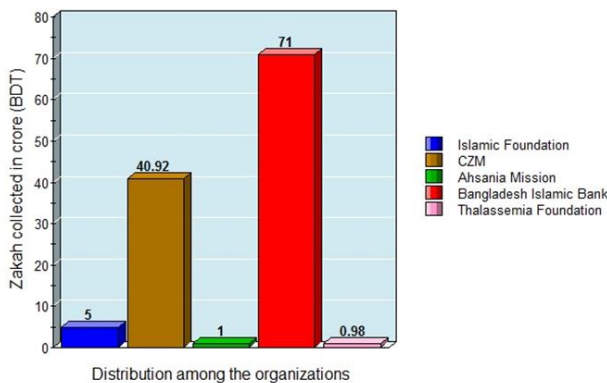


Figure 2. Zakat collected among public and various private sector organizations

Source: created by authors

As shown in Figure 2, the Centre for Zakat Management which is the country's largest non-governmental organization has collected BDT 40.92 crore from 1,600 individuals and 400 organizations in 2020. Two other private sector organizations namely Thalassemia Foundation and Ahsania Mission have collected BDT 98 lakh and BDT 1 crore respectively and spent the money to assist poverty-stricken people in 2020. Besides, Bangladesh Islamic Bank which is one of the renowned institutional sectors for Zakat spent Tk 71 crore in the zakat sector in 2019 (Noyon, A.U., 2021). All the above reports indicate the enormous potential of Zakat in Bangladesh. Unfortunately, the zakat management system in Bangladesh lacks efficiency and proper management practices despite its great potential. The overall situation of Zakat is unsatisfactory in terms of its practice and the importance of paying Zakat is not well established in society. Consequently, the absence of a solid structure for the Government Zakat Board, which is supposed to direct the administrators to collect and distribute Zakat, is quite evident. Bangladesh has a dual zakat management system in terms of zakat distribution. However, there is no official obligation to pay Zakat except for practicing it as voluntary work. It is worth mentioning that Bangladesh is eager to eradicate the hunger rate. Hence, the Bangladesh government is running various food aid programs like Food for Work (FFW), Food for Education (FFE), Vulnerable Group Development (VGD), Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF), Test Relief (TR), and Gratuitous Relief (GR), etc. to assure food certainty for the country's low-income people. Despite these efforts of the Bangladesh government, the country's food intake is deficient (Tarique, K., et al.,

2016). However, a current report by Global Hunger Index (2021) shows that Bangladesh has ranked 76th out of 116 countries and achieved a GHI score of 19.1 out of 100 points, dropping its hunger level to "moderate" for the first time (GHI, 2021; Bhuiyan, M., & Khan, T. T., 2021). Woefully, the scenario of food consumption rate is still unsatisfactory in the country. Yet, the zakat program is not among the ongoing programs to alleviate hunger. Taking this issue into account, this study attempts to identify all the interconnected barriers to achieving SDGs' goal of zero hunger. In relation to the SDG's goal 2, there are various challenges such as price hikes, food insecurity, consuming less nutritious food, food adulteration, syndication, and problems with agricultural sustainability, which were identified as the major causes of creating food uncertainty in Bangladesh. For a developing country like Bangladesh, this scenario is undesirable. Since zakat has huge potential to reduce hunger in Bangladesh, it is high time for the government and other concerned authorities to adopt zakat as a mechanism for hunger eradication to achieve the sustainable development goal 2- zero hunger.

Recommendation

Since the zakat mechanism has great potential in Bangladesh, policymakers should consider the following initiatives to improve food certainty status under the Zakat mechanism:

1. A comprehensive modern Zakat law should be enacted to improve Zakat collection, distribution, and management.
2. Well-managed Zakat institutions should be established. Since the government zakat management system is still weak and the private zakat organizations are doing well but their coverage area is limited.

3. Shariah advisory council is a must for every single zakat organization (public or private). It will advise on the collection and distribution of Zakat in accordance with Islamic Shari'ah.
4. The government should ensure efficiency, transparency, and accountability in the Zakat management system as well as monitor all related aspects.
5. The national Zakat board needs to be strengthened by recruiting dedicated and well-educated full-time professional staff. Also, part-time zakat collectors and distributors (who are pious and have at least basic knowledge of zakat rules) can be employed to collect and distribute zakat in accordance with Shariah principles throughout the country.
6. It is high time to establish a central Zakat research institution to conduct research on various aspects of Zakat. For example, conducting research on new zakatable assets, implementing technological advantages to improve Zakat mechanisms, establishing zakat banks, etc.
7. Bangladesh should enhance international collaboration with those Muslim countries (Malaysia, Kuwait, and Indonesia) that are using Zakat in a sustainable way. So that it can gain experience in planning actions to improve its own system.

CONCLUSION

"Zero hunger" is one of the significant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aimed at eradicating global hunger by 2030. But the time limit set for the target is not very long. Therefore, extensive efforts are

required to get the best results in this short period of time. Many countries are far behind the target and need considerable effort and resources to propel themselves towards achieving this target. Particularly, developing and low-income Muslim countries have to place greater emphasis than middle-income and high-income countries on achieving this goal. As Islam provides complete guidance for all aspects of human life, socio-economics enjoys a significant role in religion. As Islam takes serious steps towards the reduction of poverty and hunger for a stable society, it is imperative to put the best effort into eradicating poverty and hunger. At first, Islam inspires its adherents to be dutiful for self-defence before depending on others. Then, if they do not have sufficient means to meet their basic needs, the capable are obliged to come and provide assistance. Zakat is one of the unique mechanisms prescribed by Islam through which the wealthy can provide financial support without any interest for the extremely needy community to alleviate them from poverty and hunger. Bangladesh is a country where almost one-fourth of the total population lives below the poverty line. It has been facing several challenges in hunger reduction, many of which have been addressed above. Thus, it is difficult for the government to ensure food certainty for all and achieve SDG 2- zero hunger. Although the government has been arranging several food programs to reduce the rate of hunger, the result remains unsatisfactory. However, as the third largest Muslim country, Bangladesh has a huge potential for zakat as a revenue source that can undoubtedly play a vital role in reducing hunger and achieving the second goal of SDG. Unfortunately, it has no strong and well-organized zakat management system despite its great potential. Therefore, in this paper, the authors explored the potential of zakat

institutions to address development challenges, particularly in Bangladesh. They discussed the impact of Zakat on reducing hunger by reviewing theoretical and empirical research. The resultant analysis suggests that with proper management practices, Zakat can play a vital role in achieving the second goal (Zero hunger) of SDG in Bangladesh.

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