



NEWS RELEASE

Growth Fails to Reach 15% of the Rural Population

Dhaka, Monday, 16 October 2006: Fifteen percent of rural households are **invisible poor** who are extremely marginalized, chronically hungry, mostly headed by females and are functionally landless with few income earners in the family and a large numbers of dependants.

According to the preliminary findings of a recent study commissioned by World Food Programme (WFP) Bangladesh, majority of the “invisible poor” households are excluded from the socio-economic progress. They have been termed as "invisible" underscoring the fact that their plight is unseen and unheard. A second slightly better off but still "**vulnerable**" group, representing 32 percent of the households surveyed are seasonally food insecure though with more livelihood options than the invisible poor.

The socioeconomic profiling study of WFP conducted in the highly poverty prone rural areas in the Haor basin, North central chars, Northwest, Drought zone, Coastal area, and CHT has identified four discrete socioeconomic classes of households.

On the occasion of the World Food Day 2006 the WFP Bangladesh Representative Douglas Broderick while sharing these preliminary findings of the study noted, “ *These findings allow us to better identify households in greatest need. The study describes their characteristics and livelihood in relatively great detail. Our responsibility is to contribute to making the invisible poor "visible"; thereby increasing the chances that our assistance, and the assistance of our partners, will be better targeted towards addressing their needs.*”

The other two comparatively better off groups are “**on the edge**” and “**Non-vulnerable**”. Those ‘on the edge’ represent households whom have made some socioeconomic gains in recent years however they could easily slide backwards if exposed to disasters or other economic shocks. Non-vulnerable households are much better off and almost always food secure. These two groups represent 37% and 16% of the surveyed households respectively.

The study found asset ownership to be highly correlated with income and food security indicators. The value of household assets for non-vulnerable groups is approximately 95 times more than that of the invisible poor. Non-vulnerable households own more than 265 decimals of functional land for cultivation, while the corresponding figure for the invisible poor is only 38 decimals. The value of assets owned by female-headed households is only two-thirds the value of assets owned by male-headed households. Female-headed households also own smaller areas of land, fewer livestock and fewer assets compared to male-headed households.

Among **invisible poor** 53% of households are food insecure year-round, another 21% for more than half the year. Chronic food insecurity has been associated with a poor quality diet and an inability to access adequate food for the family throughout the year. The **Vulnerable households** are seasonally food insecure and have access to sharecropping as a livelihood strategy. **Households on the edge** are more food secure than households in the previous two categories; many have managed to experience improvements to their livelihood in recent years. No chronic food insecurity throughout the year exists for these households.

WFP is currently involved in a programme strategy process designed to priorities activities and target resources most effectively and efficiently in the regions and areas of highest need. This study was commissioned to provide WFP with a more in-depth and robust analysis of socio-economic and livelihood indicators to guide and confirm the geographic targeting and types of households to be supported in the new Country Programme (2007 – 2010). WFP in collaboration with the Government of Bangladesh and other partners identified six priority regions of the country, where extreme poverty and food insecurity is highest.

The socioeconomic profiling study will be finalized in the coming months.

END

For more information, please contact:

Douglas Broderick

WFP Representative, Bangladesh

Tel: +880-2-8116344, 8119064-73

M. Emamul Haque

Head, Advocacy Unit, WFP, Bangladesh

Tel: +880-2-8116344, 8119064-73, Ext. 2189

Cell: 0171 301-3983