

## THE CONTRIBUTING FACTORS FOR WORK DISINCENTIVE RESULTED FROM FOOD STAMPS PROGRAM: THE CASE OF MONGOLIA

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### Хураангуй

Энэхүү судалгааны ажлын зорилго нь Монгол Улсын Хүнсний талон хөтөлбөр хөдөлмөр эрхлэлтийг урамшуулахад нөлөөлөл бий эсэхийг судлахад оршино. Судалгаанд Хүнсний талон хөтөлбөрийн үр шим хүртэгчид, хөтөлбөрийг хэрэгжүүлэгч засгийн газрын мэргэжилтнүүдтэй ярилцлага хийх замаар анхдагч эх үүсвэрийг цуглуулан чанарын судалгааны аргыг ашигласан.

Судалгаа нь гурван үндсэн сэдвийг хамарсан. Үүнд: Хүнсний талон хөтөлбөр нь уг хөтөлбөрийн үр шим хүртэгчдийг хөдөлмөр эрхлэх сонирхолд сөргөөр нөлөөлж байгаа эсэх, мөн хөдөлмөр эрхлэх сонирхолыг бууруулж буй хүчин зүйлс болон Засгийн газрын зүгээс авч хэрэгжүүлж байгаа арга хэмжээ зэрэг багтаж байна.

Хүнсний талон хөтөлбөрт дараах үндсэн сегмент хамрагдаж байгааг судалгааны дүн харуулж байна.

Чадамжгүйн улмаас хөдөлмөр эрхлэх боломжгүй бөгөөд уг хөтөлбөрт хамрагдаж байгаа эмзэг бүлгийн хүмүүс,

Хөдөлмөр эрхлэх боломжтой боловч хамруулалтын алдаанаас болж уг хөтөлбөрт хамрагдсан хүмүүс, Ядуурлын шугамнаас доогуур амьдарч байгаа, хөдөлмөр эрхлэх чадвартай боловч уг хөтөлбөрт хамрагдсанаар хөдөлмөр эрхлэх сонирхолгүй байгаа хүмүүс.

Хүнсний талон хөтөлбөрт хамрагдаж байгаа нь хүмүүс Засгийн газар болон хандивлагчдийн дэмжлэгээс хараат болох төлөвтэй байна. Энэ байдал нь ядуурлыг бууруулах, амьжиргааг дэмжих тууштай шийдэл биш юм.

Иймд энэхүү судалгаа нь хүмүүсийн хөдөлмөр эрхлэхгүй байх сөрөг хандлагыг өөрчлөхөд чиглэсэн хувилбарыг санал болгож байна.

**Түлхүүр үгс:** Хүнсний талон хөтөлбөр, хөдөлмөр эрхлэх сонирхолгүй байх, хөтөлбөрөөс үр шим хүртэгчид, төрийн албан хаагчид.

### Abstract

This research is focused on exploring whether the model of Mongolia Food Stamps Program is working the way it is designed for, as positive to work incentive or whether it is creating the work disincentive. The study has employed qualitative research methods utilizing primary data sources by conducting interviews with beneficiaries of Food Stamps Program and Government officials in charge of the program.

Three main thematic areas have been covered the study including whether Food Stamps Program has work disincentive effects on beneficiaries, the factors contributing to the work disincentives, and Government intervention to reverse the work disincentives effect of the Food Stamps Program.

The research findings show that there are segments of societies who are vulnerable and covered by the Food Stamps Program but are not expected to work due to their in capabilities, people who are enrolled to the program by error of selection emanating from lack of control, but are able to work for additional income who are affected by the work disincentive effect of the Food Stamps Program, and there are people living under poverty line and eligible to receive Food Stamps Program but are affected by the work disincentive effect of the Food Stamps Program.

Because of Food Stamps Program intervention, people intended to be dependent on support given to them from donors and Government. The dependency syndrome is not sustainable solution for poverty alleviation and wealth creation for citizens. Therefore, the study will offer an alternative which contributes to develop work incentive projects that encourage the citizens to shift their attitude towards productivity.

**Key Words:** Food Stamps Program, Work Disincentives, Beneficiaries, Government Officials.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Mongolia is a landlocked country located in the Central Asia, bounded on the north by Russia, and on the southeast and west by China. The total population of Mongolia in 2017 was 3,177,899, increased by 57,964 thousand or 1.86 percent compared with previous year. 64.19 percent of the total population are under 35 years of age. Specifically, 30.46 percent or 967,896 of the total population are children aged 0-14 years, 63.17 percent or 2,007,430 people aged 15-59 and 6.37 percent or 202,573 are seniors aged 60 and older. (National Statistics Office in Mongolia, 2017)

Mongolia's economic performance has improved dramatically with GDP growth increasing from 1.2% in 2016 to 5.1% in 2017 and 6.1% in the first quarter of 2018. ([www.worldbank.org.com](http://www.worldbank.org.com), 2018)

Even though the country has been recorded with significant economic progress, poverty is still a severe socio-economic problem that the Government and people of Mongolia are faced with in the context of Mongolia the urban and rural poverty differs by its nature and existing performance. According to the National Statistical Office in Mongolia (NSO), the poverty rate reached 29.6 percent in 2016 – an increase by 8.0 percentage points from the poverty rate of 21.6 percent in 2014. This shows that 907.5 thousand people out of total 3.0 million people in Mongolia were living in the poverty. In 2016, the poverty depth amounted to 7.7 percent representing a growth of 2.5 percentage points from 2014 level, and poverty severity amounted to 2.9 percent, an increase by 1.0 percentage point from 2014 level. (National Statistics Office in Mongolia, 2017)

The welfare state in Mongolia is relatively new, along with the development of a free market economy. Due to the welfare state being so recently established in the mid-1990s, Mongolia faces a range of diverse pressures and challenges as a result of profound economic, social and demographic circumstances: transition from a centrally planned economy; financial challenges for the Government; decline in the relative standard of living; an increase in poverty; deterioration of the general measures of population health and growth in the numbers of unemployed. Since 2004, the rapid expansion of social welfare programs has been a new

phenomenon for Mongolia, which was partly made possible by economic growth in tandem with new political will to represent the needs of the people and to influence political capital gained during elections. (Gochoosuren. B, 2013)

Mongolia adopted the Law on Social welfare in 1995 and respective amendments have been made in years 2012, 2013, 2015, 2016 and 2017. In accordance to this law the Government has an obligation to provide decent support and assistance to people in need of physical and emotional comfort. There are two forms of social support in Mongolia-cash transfer and social service and these include 71 different help and assistance in total. Over 34 percent of Mongolia's welfare spending goes to the poorest 20 percent of the population.

The Food Stamps Program aimed to support the basic food consumption for extremely poor families, initially during the food crisis of 2008/2009, and subsequently for the longer-term. The program's key expected impact, in line with the current monitoring and evaluation framework, is that of reduced vulnerability to food insecurity of poor households'. The Food Stamps Program is also expected to improve recipient households' diet, quality of food, and access to social services. Other feasible positive impacts include reduction in stress and social status. (Oxford Policy Management, 2014) The program distributes stamps to selected eligible households that can be redeemed for a specified list of ten high protein foods and staples at specified shops. The Ministry of Population Development and Social Protection issued revised guidelines for the Food Stamps Program in March 2013, following the revised Social Welfare Law in January 2012 that provided the Food Stamps Program's legal foundation. (Oxford Policy Management, 2014)

Recipients receive stamps to a value of (MNT) currency of Mongolian 16,000 per month for each adult and MNT8,000 per month for each child in the household. This was expected to deliver an average of MNT12,000 per capita per month, compared to a predicted monthly per capita consumption of MNT76,000 for the poorest 5% of households. (L Carraro,2013)

More than half hundred years Food Stamps Program is going on (currently known as a Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in the United States. But attempts

to introduce similar schemes in developing countries have had less success. recently implemented developing countries. In Mongolia it has been implemented for ten years. Therefore, there is an extended literature review on United States of America while it is very limited for the developing countries, specially there is a gap on Mongolian Food Stamps Program.

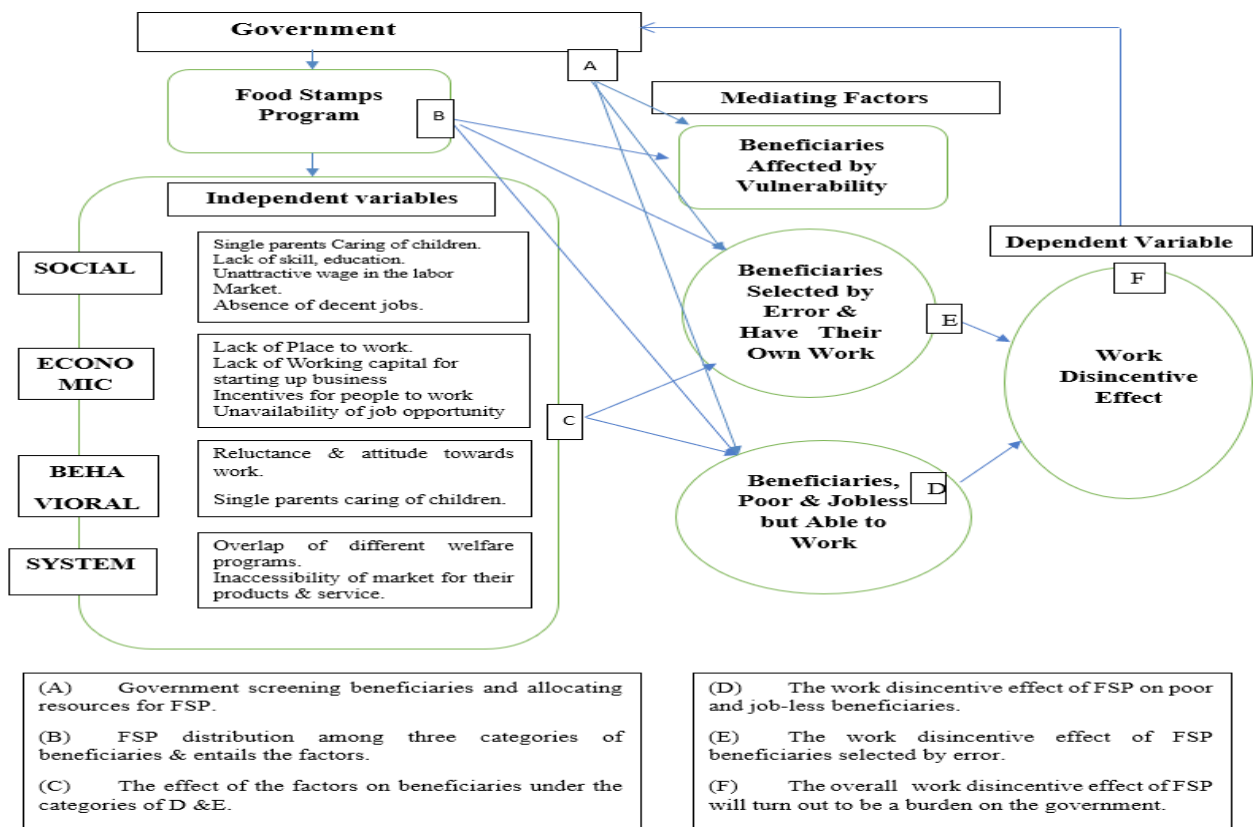
This research employed the welfare dependency theory according to which a person or household is reliant on Government welfare benefits for their income for a prolonged period, and without which they would not be able to meet their daily expenses. (Wikipedia)

## 2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This research creates own *conceptual framework*.

- a) **Food Stamps Program** is a policy of the Government of Mongolia designed to support the poor households identified;
- b) **Beneficiaries** are the household members identified /eligible to receive Food Stamps Program support by the Government;
- c) **Work disincentive** is the negative effect of the Food Stamps Program on the attitude of the beneficiaries.

### Conceptual Framework



To achieve research objectives, the qualitative research design has been used. As it is a fact-finding study on concrete impacts on Food Stamps Program, adequate and accurate interpretations of the findings are provided. In addition, this study reflects on what can be the best way to design this program and is concerned on contributing factors for work disincentive in this program.

The research has been conducted in central Government and Khovd province, one of the rural provinces of Mongolia and a host of the

most welfare dependent population in the country. The other reason for choosing this province is that it is rural where cultural and social values play critical role in social welfare area. Khovd province is located in the western part of Mongolia. Categories selected are based on purposive sampling, by identifying potential respondents from the government and beneficiaries.

The study employed the interviewing and the interview questions have been designed in view of the objectives of the study. These data have

been collected through open-ended interview questions that were used to gather data on the perceptions and experiences of the respondents on their real thinking of the subject matter. For the purpose of this research, these questionnaires were administered through open-ended interview with the selected participants via phone.

Data was collected during the interview of two categories of people regarding the Food Stamps Program Mongolia. The first category in Khovd province consists of 10 beneficiaries who were selected from inter-sectoral database and receive Food Stamps Program while working age.

The second category includes 5 people from those who are experts and in charge of Food Stamps Program. The main reasons for interviewing experts were their roles in policy making and implementation, obtaining ideas on the functioning of the food stamp program and its work disincentive effect on the beneficiaries.

All interviews were conducted in Mongolia and voice recorded. The interviewees were promised anonymity and gave their consent to tape record the interview. Respondents were representatives of the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, General Agency of Labor and Social Welfare, Division of Labor and Social Welfare and ADB. The respondents are of high level of public service and demonstrate a lot of experience in the social welfare area, especially with Food Stamps Program.

The collected qualitative data has been analyzed through different methods to respond to my research questions. A two-way method is used as data has been collected and compared from two categories of respondents- the government and beneficiaries.

This would help in finding out the perceptions and changes on policy implication. The main concept of the research is focused on exploring whether the model of Mongolia Food Stamps Program is working the way it is designed for, as positive to work incentive or whether it is creating the work disincentive. Then considerations were given on what factors contribute for work disincentive and why. In this way, almost all the factors have been analyzed keeping in view the main research questions and conceptual framework.

### 3. RESEARCH RESULTS

#### ***Factors Influencing Beneficiaries to Remain Sticky with the Food Stamps Program***

- Regarding the question as why people are sticky to food stamps program while food stamps program is not helping them in transforming them from dependency, the beneficiaries suggest that there are 2 main points that influenced them. The first one being demographic and the second one economic.
- Regarding the demographic issues they assert that the number of family members, single parenthood, the situation of aging people, and parents who are living with disability child, are among the major factors influencing them. The second issue they raised was economic ones -unavailability of job opportunities, low salary and inflation due to which the beneficiaries remain sticky to Food Stamps Program.
- Out of ten beneficiaries who are participants in this research, five have been receiving food stamps for one year, three for two years, one for three years and for seven years. On average, the respondents have been receiving Food Stamps Program for about four years.
- In responding to the question as why the beneficiaries still want to stay in food stamps program, they state that the burden emanating from big numbers of family size, single parenthood, low salary being unable to cover their necessity, and joblessness are among the major reasons for them to continue to stay in the food stamps. On the other hand, some beneficiaries argue that they would want to stay in the program to get money to cover their children`s university tuition and overdue bank loan. In rare case few people want to remain receiving Food Stamps Program due to their reluctance to look for a job.
- The reaction of respondents to the question as to how long they can survive if the Government stops giving them food stamps can be categorized into three major points. The first category consists of half of the respondents those who say that they cannot survive and yet the second category consists half of the respondents who replied that they

can survive even if the Government stops the Food Stamps Program. Even though fifty percent of the respondents replied that they can survive without Food Stamps Program, they did not mention how they could make it possible.

- Regarding the question what the hindering factors in are looking for job to generate income rather than waiting for Food Stamps Program, four of the respondents replied that because low wage and the salary they get will not be sufficient for their livelihood. Four of the respondents opined that they could not find job at all. While one respondent said the job is not decent for him to get employed for. One respondent coined the point despite the job availability the capacity to work is one of the factors as the respondent mentioned, age can be one of the determinant factor. For the question they asked whether the food stamp they are receiving is sufficient or not for their family to survive, eight of the respondents out of ten replied that Food Stamps Program they are receiving is enough for them to survive, while the rest two respondents said that it is helping.
- The respondents reacted to the questions as to what supplementary income they have besides Food Stamps Program as follows: five of them replied that they have additional job, three of receive child support additional money from the Government and one respondent said he/she has no job at all.

#### **Work Disincentive: Implication of Food Stamps Program**

- Respondents identified Work disincentive victims as follows: jobless people, single parent, parent with infants, disabilities and sick people, aging people, temporary workers, four respondents replied that no one will be victim with work disincentive, and two respondents replied that all beneficiaries are victims of work disincentive implication of Food Stamps Program.
- Regarding the question whether Food Stamps Program has discouraging effect on the beneficiaries to find a job, five respondents replied that it does not have effect on beneficiaries, three respondents said that it varies from people to people and two respondents replied that it can affect reluctant people mainly.

- In response to a question as why they are discouraged to find a job rather than being dependent on Food Stamps Program, two respondents said that is because some people are lazy, and some youth people do not want to work opting to be dependent on their families.

#### **Expectation of the Beneficiaries from the Government**

- Nine of the respondents relied to the question of their expectation from the Government that the Government should facilitate and create job opportunities for those people under Food Stamps Program, in connection with this one respondent requires the Government to provide the place to work by using her skills.
- Regarding the question of their expectation from the Government concerning obtaining sustainable income generation, the respondents explained their opinion as follows: need for space or place for pigs breeding, car repairing tools and place, market linkage for their hand made leather products, tailor machine and place, nursing services and place, small business, children caring center, short term bank loan, any job that can generate income for their sustainable livelihood, however one respondent replied that he had no idea.
- All respondents strongly agree that Food Stamps Program is not a long-lasting solution for them to rely on.
- All respondents reported that the Government have not provided them a clear direction as to how to graduate from the Food Stamps Program and join a sustainable income generation scheme for them for their future life. They are suggesting that they have potentials, but the Government did not offer them the alternative opportunity.

#### **Food Stamps Program and Role of Government**

- The respondents representing the Government suggested regarding the policy they recommend increasing the work incentives of the Food Stamps Program beneficiaries can be categorized in to three major parts; two of them emphasize the importance of education and training to equip the beneficiaries with skills that can enable them to create a job for themselves. The

other category underscores the importance of employment promotion scheme that the Government need to develop. Finally suggested is the additional incentives to the beneficiaries who want to go for work that can help them generate further income.

- Regarding the questions whether the food stamp is causing the work disincentive sequences or tendencies to the beneficiaries, the Government officials respond that the main purpose of the food stamps program is to ensure the safety of vulnerable people, i.e. unemployed child, elderly persons, and people with disabilities, entails most of the program covers 80%the purpose of the program is met.so according to the respondents there is no need to expect those categories of people to work. On the other hand, because of selection error some people who can work may be enrolled in the Food Stamps Program, and for those whose income level is lower but able to work, the

program can have work disincentive effect.

- Sorting out the several factors causing the work disincentive tendency, the respondents said that the overlap of most of welfare programs and the lack of control, the fact that the poorest of the poor usually get satisfied with daily need that they earn from food stamp, the fact that politicians are interested in raising the size of welfare program targeted to vulnerable households to increase the number of electoral votes for political purposes, labor market is not attractive and encouraging in that the wage the market offers is lower than the benefits the beneficiaries get from the Food Stamps Program, lack of skill of beneficiaries to look for a job, mothers who are engaged in caring children are not able to look for a job, and Government has no requirement conditions for the beneficiaries that encourage them to look for extra income generating job and graduate from Food Stamps Program.

**Food Stamps Program Work Disincentive Factors: Convergence & Divergence of Beneficiaries and Government Officials’ Views.**

*The Convergence and Divergence of Beneficiaries View*

Whether Food Stamps Program has work disincentive effect on the beneficiaries		The Government officials & beneficiaries agreed
Convergence	FSP is primarily designed to ensure the safety of the vulnerable people, who are not expected to work.	
	Who has low income, but expected to work after being enrolled in the FSP, the FSP has negative effect on working incentives.	
Divergent	For those beneficiaries who can work but wrongly selected because of lack of control mechanisms the FSP has adverse effect on their work incentives.	This is only supported by the Government officials
The Factors Contributing to Work Disincentives		
Convergent	Reluctance and attitude towards work.	
	Lack of skills, education,	
	Single parents Caring of children	
	Lack of awareness on how to create job,	
	Getting satisfied with daily basic needs,	
Divergence	Unattractive wage in the labor market	Factors identified and agreed only by beneficiaries.
	Lack of Place to work,	
	Inaccessibility of market for their products	
	Alcoholic addiction	
	Absence of decent jobs	
	Unavailability of job opportunity,	
	Lack of Working capital for starting up business	
	Absence of additional incentives for people to work	
Overlap of different welfare programs	Mentioned as a factor only by Gov officials	

**The Convergence and Divergence of Government Officials View`**

Government intervention to reverse the work disincentive effect of Food Stamps Program		
Convergence	Creation of Job opportunity	Both beneficiaries and government officials agreed on these factors
	Educating and awareness building	
	Market linkage for their product	
Divergent	Delivery of Vocational training	Only beneficiaries suggested that there should be government intervention measures.
	Provision of Loan facilities	
	Introducing Small and Micro Enterprises and business	
	Attractive wage	
	Putting in place stringent screening system	This intervention measures are suggested by government officials only
	Employment promotion	
	Job requirement as a condition for those who can	
	Further and detail study	

The table demonstrates major areas where the beneficiaries and Government officials hold similar and different positions during the interview. This does not mean the two parties demonstrate their disagreement, instead it can be implied as they either explained in a similar way or one party described and the other not. The importance of the table summary is to concentrate on the demand side or suggestions from the beneficiaries one can understand that they need a robust intervention of the Government.

Regardless of few areas on which the two parties converge, there are several areas where they diverge while explaining and responding to the same issues. This implies that the collaboration and cooperation between the beneficiaries and Government officials are not that strong and cohesive.

**4. CONCLUSION**

- The research findings show that there are three categories of beneficiaries of food stamp program. The first category includes those people who are vulnerable and not expected to work regardless of job availability. These are elderly people, disabilities and unemployed children. As this category of beneficiaries are not expected to work, the issue of food stamp program effect on work disincentive would not apply to them.
- The second category involves those beneficiaries who can work, but wrongly selected because of lack of control mechanism, the food stamp program has adverse effect on their work incentives.

To put simply, this group has the capacity to work, but were wrongly included in the program and have faced the effect of the food stamp program disincentivize them to work, they have been dependent on the food stamp support and shown less interest to find job. One can observe from this that wrong selection of beneficiaries has the potential to entail not only miss use of resources, but also adverse effect on the attitude of people towards work.

- According to the findings, the third category of beneficiaries, is those who have low income, are living below poverty line, need government support, are eligible for food stamp program and deserve the support. Even though beneficiaries under this category are eligible for receiving food stamp benefits, they have the potential to work if situations are facilitated for them. If the opportunity is enabled, they are expected to work and gradually graduate from the food stamp scheme and create their own source of income and job. These are the potential segments of beneficiaries who are prone to dependency and exposed to work disincentive effect of food stamp program. Therefore, the food stamp program has negative effect on working incentives on this group.
- Regarding the factors contributing to work disincentives in food stamp program, the findings show that several factors contribute to work disincentives on the beneficiaries. These are unattractive wage in the labor market, lack of skills, limited education, reluctance and weak attitude towards work,

lack of work place, inaccessibility of market for their products and services, single parents caring children, alcoholic addiction, absence of decent job, unavailability of job opportunities, lack of working capital for startup businesses, lack of awareness on how to create a job, getting satisfied with daily basic needs, and absence of additional incentives for people to work.

- According to research findings, these factors are observed because of three main reasons. First, it is the limited government intervention and second, it is being the beneficiaries' low interest towards work. Third, it is the external factors such as labor market and inflation.
- Unless and otherwise these problems are solved, the work disincentives effects of the food stamp program will continue to exist which in turn lead to the misuse of scarce resource, exacerbation of the situation by enhancing the dependency syndrome and hindrance to the socio economic development ongoing in the country.
- The research findings reveal that there are several measures the government need to undertake in order to reverse the work disincentive effect of food stamp program on beneficiaries. These are creation of job opportunities for those of work capacity, delivery of vocational training, provision of loan facilities, raising public awareness, introducing Small and Micro Enterprises and business, putting in place stringent screening system to avoid ineligible beneficiaries, facilitating market linkage for their products and services, enhancing employment promotion, putting in place job requirement as a condition for those of labor capacity to filter ineligible users, putting in place attractive wage system to stabilize the market turnover, and attract people to work, eliminating the overlapping services of different welfare programs and government is expected to conduct further study to come up with holistic and sustainable solution that enables it to tackle these problems.
- Unless immediate solutions are in place, for the government it will be more costly in terms of political and social crises such as mistrust between the citizens and government which in turn can lead to political and social instability.

## 5. POLICY IMPLICATION

- The food stamp program extended to the vulnerable people, who are not expected to work, should be continued and even strengthened since it is vital for the survival and safety of these people. Furthermore, the government should ensure if the extent of the food stamp support is sufficient to cover their basic needs.
- The government should put in place strong screening systems such as modern Information technologies that can help to eliminate the overlapping programs and users and filter out ineligible people, and detect corruptive practices related to the program. In addition, the government should design a system that helps to minimize the subjective judgement and the discretionary power of politicians and experts in the process of provision of the program.
- Regarding those beneficiaries who are able to work but disincentivized to work due to their participation in the food stamp program because of the poverty they are in, the government should give attention to creating awareness to change their attitude towards work, providing them with intensive skills training that would enable them to work and the government has to devise a motivational system that encourages those beneficiaries to look for better work and graduate from the food stamp program. Taking the complexity involved in the issue at hand, the area needs further research to come up to fill the gap that might not be covered by this research scope and findings.

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