



SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE AND PRODUCTION LINKED TO IMPROVED NUTRITION STATUS, RESILIENCE, AND GENDER EQUITY

SAPLING PROGRAM LEARNINGS AND RESULTS: INCREASING AGRICULTURAL YIELDS

Empowering women farmers to grow nutritious foods and earn incomes with climate-smart technologies.

UKRA'S STORY



Access to diverse, nutritious foods is essential for families to be food secure, healthy, and resilient to shocks and stressors. It is a key pathway out of poverty. The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) are a remote, mountainous region in southeastern Bangladesh. Families here have traditionally grown most of their food using shifting cultivation agricultural techniques known as "jhum".

Resettlement, large-scale commercial agriculture, and deforestation have forced rural families to cultivate on less fertile, smaller plots. Reduced access to fertile land, combined with chronic water scarcity and natural disasters has resulted in smaller agricultural yields and less available food for families in the CHT.

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I want my children to be educated. Increased production in the garden helps my family to meet the cost of education. This gives me immense pride as I farm this plot I have leased, to create a better future for my children.

Ukra Ching Marma is a mother of three who lives in Bandarban Sadar and farms on a plot of land she leases close to her home. After her training with SAPLING, she has increased the diversity of nutrient-dense vegetables grown in her plot.

In turn, Ukra Ching has been rewarded with increased yields that provide nutritious foods for the consumption of her family. She has also managed to increase household income generated from the sales of surplus crops once the food needs of her family have been met.



SAPLING teaches rural families to use simple, low-cost techniques to grow nutrient-dense food in small spaces with efficient soil, crop, and water management practices. These include:

- Composting.
- Natural pesticides.
- Intercropping and cover crops.
- Live fencing, hedgerows, raised beds, mound gardens, sack gardens, drip irrigation, and contour farming techniques.

These then promote improved agricultural yields.

Education with different family members and community influencers on the benefits of optimal nutrition practices across the life span helps motivate behavior change within the entire family, based on a better understanding of the linkage between improved nutrition and children's physical and cognitive development.

During SAPLING group discussion sessions, Ukra learned about the nutritional benefits of the different vegetables she is growing with seeds initially provided by SAPLING. Now, she is able to ensure that her family regularly eats a variety of vegetables and protein-rich foods.

After only one year of participation in SAPLING, her pumpkin patch was overflowing, and she sold approximately 100 kg of pumpkin. She was then able to invest in her children's education.

Using methods she learned from SAPLING, Ukra has stored seeds to keep up production of nutrient-dense vegetables for her family.

SAPLING OVERVIEW

The Sustainable Agriculture and Production Linked to Improved Nutrition Status, Resilience and Gender Equity (SAPLING) is a six-year, USAID-funded Resilience Food Security Activity that began in October 2015.

Since then, the program has worked with over 57,000 poor and extreme poor households in Bandarban District of the CHT. The program focused on improving gender-equitable food security, nutrition, and resilience of vulnerable households.

Using a multi-sectoral approach, SAPLING has:



Increased household access to diverse and nutritious foods



Promoted maternal and child health and nutrition



Improved household and community resilience



Facilitated discussions with women and men



Empowered participants to identify and address gender inequalities related to improved farming, nutrition, health practices, earning, decision-making, and control over income and assets