

Improving Nutrition, Health and Livelihoods through Enhanced Homestead Food Production: A Strategy to Reduce Child Marriage in Rural Bangladesh

BACKGROUND

Adolescent girls (10-19 years) are particularly vulnerable to malnutrition, which could have lifelong impacts on their families, community and the economy. Poor nutrition status of adolescents also create an intergenerational cycle of malnutrition, adversely impacting the physical health of future generation as well as long term human capital in Bangladesh.

Adolescents experience high rates of malnutrition: 26% stunting, and 36% low BMI (Helen Keller International, 2014) in Bangladesh. This cycle perpetuates as over 50% of children born to girls 15 years old or younger are stunted. Statistics are worse in southern Bangladesh, particularly in Khulna Division, because the average age of marriage is 15.5 years. More than 8% of women experience birth intervals of less than 24 months and 32% of married adolescents aged 15-19 years do not use contraception (NIPORT, 2015). The prevalence of anemia in Sathkhira among the adolescent girls is 55% (UN REACH, 2010). Previous research and interventions have proved that when the income of poor families enhanced through any means, this results is an increase on the age of marriage.

Helen Keller International is implementing “Improving Nutrition, Health and Livelihoods through Enhanced Homestead Food Production: A Strategy to Reduce Child Marriage in Rural Bangladesh” project, funded by International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Canada in Debhata Upazila, Sathkhira District, to address these issues.

GOAL

To establish whether a gender-transformative, enhanced homestead food production (EHFP) model can improve household food and nutrition security, dietary diversity, income, and sexual and reproductive health (SRH) outcomes and delayed child marriage among Bangladeshi girls.

OBJECTIVES

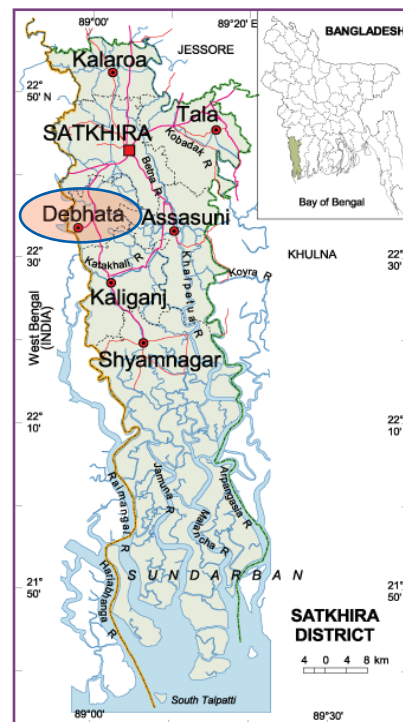
1. Test the effect of an EHFP model on household food security
2. Assess the impact of household and community level interventions on adolescent dietary quality, nutritional status and the prevalence of anemia
3. Identify the EHFP income generation threshold that influences family decisions to delay child marriage
4. Identify the determinants of adolescent empowerment and participation in household decision-making through EHFP
5. Inform and contribute to evidence-based policy and decision making related to nutrition, health, income generation, SRH and delayed age of marriage.

GEOGRAPHIC COVERAGE

Debhata Upazila, Sathkhira District.

HYPOTHESIS

Through the EHFP program and program interventions, we hypothesize that the prevalence of anemia will decrease by 20%, dietary diversity will increase by 15%, and the prevalence of marriage among unmarried adolescent girls in the intervention area will decrease by 20%.



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Two different approaches will be applied to identify the most effective way to address this problem. A group-based approach (the creation of adolescent clubs for girls aged 13 to 15 years) and a community-based approach (local community organization strengthening) will be adopted to change the detrimental norms responsible for early marriage.

STUDY DESIGN

A cluster-randomized controlled trial will be conducted in which 1200 girls (aged 13-15 years) are divided into 74 after-school Youth Clubs (36 clusters in each arm). They will participate in a 24-month program to sensitize women’s empowerment themes through hands-on workshops. All participants (control and EHFP groups) will be exposed to SRH, WASH, and IYCF, while those in the EHFP group (treatment arm) will also receive EHFP training and inputs intended to improve nutrient intake and provide an income source for the adolescent girls’ family.

DURATION	36 months, January 2020-December 2022
IMPLEMENTING AGENCY	Helen Keller International
RESEARCH PARTNER	Mount Saint Vincent University, Canada
FUNDED BY	International Development Research Centre (IDRC)

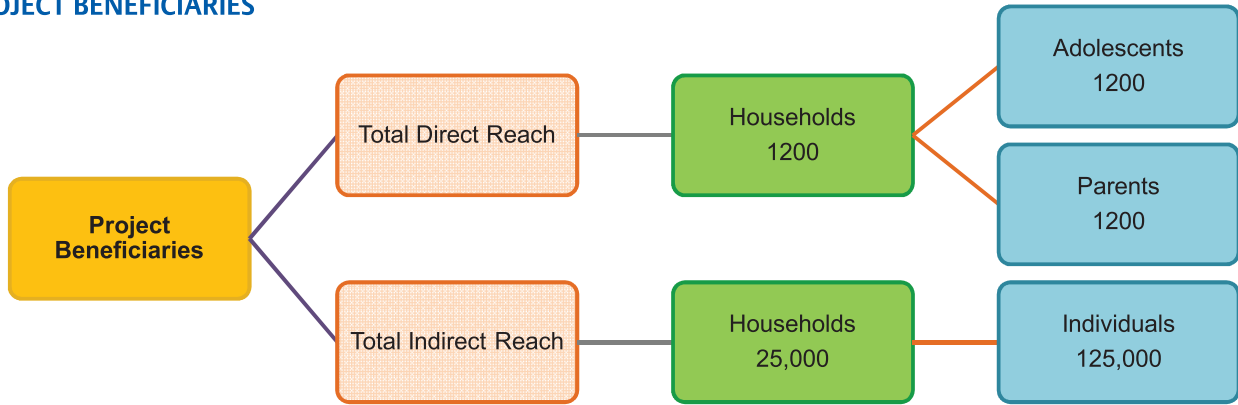
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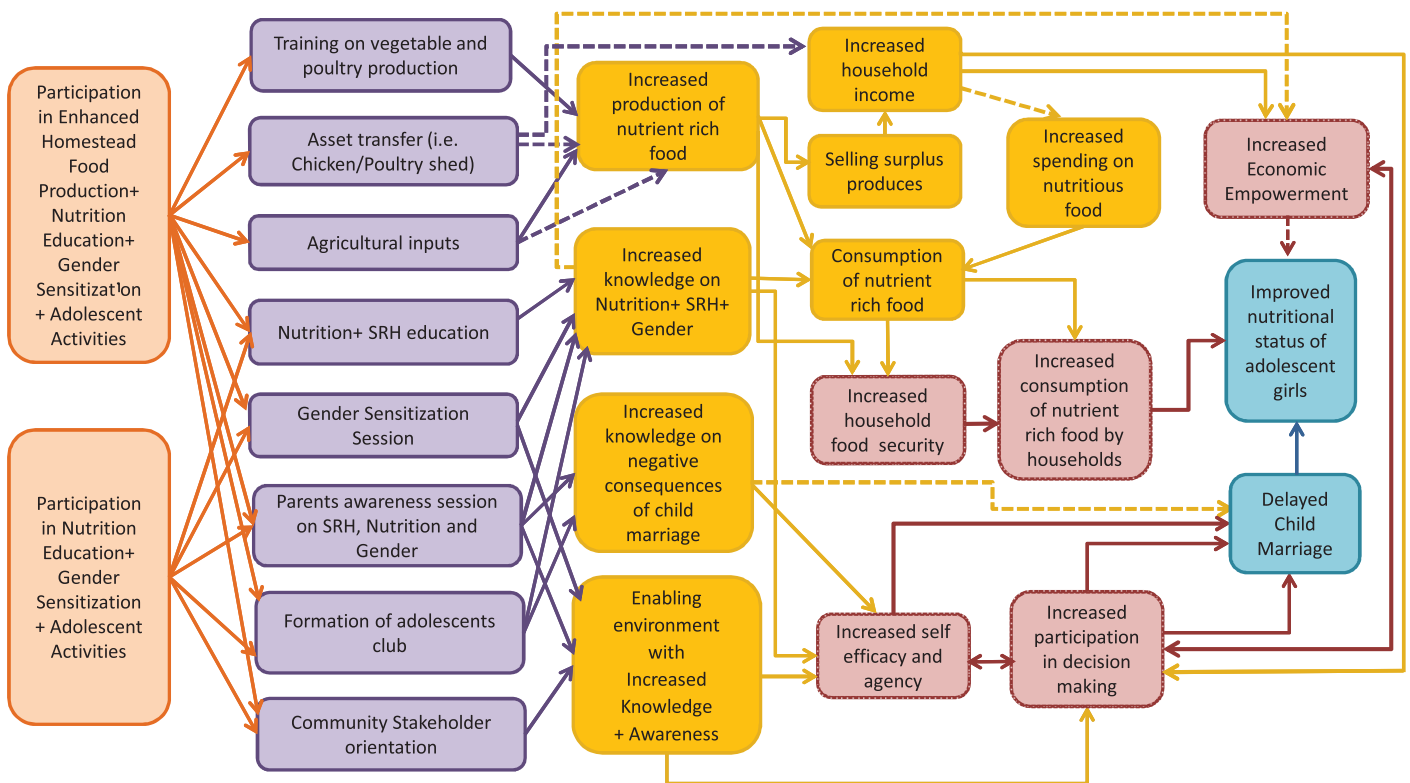
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PROJECT BENEFICIARIES



CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



INTERVENTION COMPONENTS

i) Homestead Food Production

- On-farm livelihood activities training
- Homestead gardening
- Input support (seeds, fertilizer, etc)

ii) Nutrition & WASH Education for Adolescent Girls

- Essential Nutrition Actions
- Essential Hygiene Actions
- Adolescent clubs dealing with SRH.

iii) Parent Awareness & Stakeholder's Orientation Around Adolescent Decision Making

- Awareness sessions with parents
- Sensitize local influential stakeholders

iv) Gender Transformative Approach Fostering Empowerment & Decision Making

- Gender Transformative Approach (GTA) through *Nurturing Connections*®.

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