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

EMPOWERING CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS, AND YOUTH IN BANGLADESH WITH LIFE SKILLS, VOICE, AND LEADERSHIP

The Sustainable Agriculture and Production Linked to Improved Nutrition Status, Resilience and Gender Equity (SAPLING), a USAID-funded Resilience Food Security Activity, has engaged over 57,000 households in Bandarban District of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) region of Bangladesh since October 2015.

SAPLING's goal to improve gender-equitable food security, nutrition, and resilience of vulnerable households is achieved by capacity strengthening of ethnic minorities, women, and youth. This improves their ability to make decisions about their own lives and within their communities. This process is fundamental for sustainable transformation and community well-being.

SAPLING has empowered 20,000 children, adolescents, and youth by:

- increasing knowledge on health, nutrition, and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH)
- building life skills, including problem solving and communication
- providing opportunities for voice and community leadership

In Bandarban

23% of the population is 10-19 years old[1]

15.3 YEARS is average age of marriage for women aged betweeen 15-17[2]

Education levels among ethnic minority youth are very low.

35% of adolescent girls are literate

45% of adolescent boys are literate

10% of 15 to 19 year olds have completed primary school[3]

In the CHT, where access to services is limited and poverty rates are high, girls are often unable to complete their education or achieve their life goals due to early marriage or limited financial resources.

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CRS CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES

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Barrier 1: **Family poverty**

Barrier 2: **Pressure to leave school to get married or get a job**

Barrier 3: **Geographic and social marginalization limits access to critical resources, including quality education and vocational training centers**

Barrier 4: **Sociocultural norms limit youth involvement in community groups and decisions**[4]

Adolescent Girl Groups:

- SAPLING's 'Girl Groups' strengthen:
  - problem-solving abilities
  - critical thinking skills
  - self-esteem
  - confidence
- Promote positive and lasting health and life skills prior to marriage and childrearing
- Increase knowledge about personal and menstrual hygiene, reproductive health, nutrition, safe motherhood, and self-esteem

11,978 adolescent girls have been empowered through girl groups with knowledge and skills to improve their health and nutrition and access their right to education

Supporting adolescent girls' health:

2,040

health service providers trained on adolescent nutrition

56

secondary school teachers trained on menstrual hygiene management

EMPOWERMENT IN SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES

SAPLING developed a youth handwashing and illness prevention curriculum that was integrated into the Government of Bangladesh's Little Doctors program. The program is a peer educator approach to encourage young student leaders to motivate peers to adopt healthier behaviors.

2,141 LITTLE DOCTORS

(1,048 girls and 1,093 boys) were trained by SAPLING in 144 sessions to become health and hygiene champions in their schools and communities.

5,778

adolescents in secondary school (2,983 girls and 2,795 boys) learned about safe water, handwashing, and safe disposal of human feces from 56 WASH-champion teachers created by SAPLING. The approach adapted UNICEF's WASH-in-Schools curriculum into the local context.

300

Natural Resource Management student champions (141 girls and 159 boys) received the knowledge and skills to increase reforestation and more sustainable land use practices in their communities through participation in their school-based **Forest Management Brigades (FMB)**. FMBs create opportunities for adolescents to learn about deforestation, soil and river erosion, and their relationship to floods and landslides. Students establish nurseries to nurture saplings and plant trees, sharing skills and knowledge with other youth.

2,400 RED CRESCENT YOUTHS

(including over 700 young women) and **90 Urban Community Volunteers** were trained on first aid, search and rescue, disaster risk management, volunteerism, and leadership. To promote the RCY movement in secondary schools and incorporate disaster response education into the curriculum of grades 6-12, SAPLING recruited 777 high school volunteers (344 girls and 433 boys) to form **Red Crescent school groups.**

[1]SAPLING Household Census and Wellbeing Report. 2018.
[2]ICF International. 2017. Final Report: Baseline Study of Food for Peace Development Food Assistance Projects in Bangladesh.
[3]SAPLING Household Census and Wellbeing Report. 2018.
[4]SAPLING Qualitative Research Report. 2018.

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