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

SAPLING LEARNING CORPS: BUILDING WORKFORCE READINESS

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

SAPLING focuses on improving gender-equitable food security, nutrition, and resilience of vulnerable households. Engaging young people in development activities is fundamental to the sustainable transformation of community well-being.

LEARNING CORPS FELLOWS PROGRAM

FELLOWS
82
GENDER
Male: 37 | Female: 45
JOB PLACEMENT AFTER GRADUATION
60

LEARNING CORPS FELLOWS

Educated young people from Bandarban often migrate to nearby urban centers to find employment because of a lack of opportunities in their communities. The SAPLING Learning Corps was a professional career development program for 18-29 year old college graduates that included on-the-job training, mentoring, and work experience. The program helped them be better prepared to join the workforce, and strengthened local labor pools.

Fellows were chosen through a competitive application process for 12-month fellowships with SAPLING. The fellowship included a monthly stipend, structured coaching sessions with experienced supervisors, and hands-on experience in a specific skill area of the fellows' interest.

Placements ranged from operations, such as accounting and human resources management, to technical areas, such as maternal and child health and nutrition, disaster management, livelihoods, gender equality and social inclusion, WASH, environment, and monitoring and evaluation.

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RUN LE MRO'S STORY

Run Le Mro was born in a remote area of Ruma sub-district in Bandarban. When she was around five years, her family moved to Bandarban Sadar for better education opportunities for her and her three siblings. Two years later, her parents returned to their traditional jhum farming practice and Run Le and her siblings were admitted to Mro Residential High School. After completing her Secondary School Certificate, and later her Higher Secondary School Certificate from a girls' school in Chittagong, Run Le began her studies at the University of Chittagong for a Bachelor and a Master of Arts in Anthropology. As a student of Anthropology, Run Le wanted a career in humanitarian assistance. The opportunity came when she applied to be part of the short-term research team on SAPLING's formative qualitative research. Further motivated for a career in development, Run Le successfully applied to SAPLING's Learning Corps program where she began work as a Maternal and Child Health and Nutrition (MCHN) Fellow in Thanchi sub-district. As a MCHN Fellow, she received trainings to build her knowledge and skills, assisted her supervisor in facilitating caregiver group sessions, and helped teach primary school Little Doctors on nutrition and hygiene practices.

Run Le says being a Learning Corps Fellow gave her the confidence to speak publicly. "My whole time spent in SAPLING as a Learning Corps Fellow was full of learnings and beautiful memories. If I had to pick one as my favorite memory that would be my first time going to a remote primary school for the Little Doctor program where I had to share awareness messages with the students in front of their teachers. As an introverted person I used to be very nervous about public speaking. But, my nervousness instantly went away seeing the cheerful faces of those little children and I enjoyed every bit of the moment I spent with them."

The Learning Corps Fellows learned valuable life skills. "The most important life lessons I learned as a SAPLING LCF are time management skills, learning how an office environment works, such as being respectful to others' opinions and being cooperative with each other. Those learned life skills during my time in the LCF program are still helping me in every way in my career."

Run Le thinks, "The life aspirations of a person keep changing, depending on the circumstances. For example, when I was an anthropology student in Chittagong University, I used to aspire to work in the development or humanitarian sectors, working for the marginalized communities. I got the opportunity to work in the development sector through SAPLING's Formative Research and Learning Corps Fellow program. However, my aspirations changed to be a teacher during my experience as a Learning Corps Fellow when I went to different primary schools, especially schools in far remote areas for the Little Doctors program, and I realized how much I enjoyed teaching the children, helping our younger generation to learn something. That's when I set my life goal to be a full-time teacher and, now, I am working as a teacher in Thanchi Girls High School."

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