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

SAPLING PROGRAM OVERVIEW

On September 30, 2015, Helen Keller Intl (HKI) was awarded a five-year cooperative agreement by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to lead the Sustainable Agriculture and Production Linked to Improved Nutrition Status, Resilience and Gender Equity (SAPLING), Resilience Food Security Activity (RFSA).

The Activity will run for six years with an estimated budget of US $31,058,024. The program is implemented in five upazilas in Bandarban District of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) to support the Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs (MOCHTA) in achieving its Sustainable Development Goals.

Over the course of the activity, SAPLING has engaged over 107,000 participants to improve gender equitable food security, nutrition, and resilience in the Bandarban Sadar, Lama, Rowanchari, Ruma, and Thanchi Upazilas of Bandarban District through three, interrelated purposes:

PURPOSE 1
Increased income and access to nutritious foods attained more equitably by both women and men.

PURPOSE 2
Improved nutrition and health status of children under five years of age, pregnant and lactating women (PLW) and adolescent girls.

PURPOSE 3
Improved ability of households, communities, and systems to mitigate, adapt to and recover from human induced and natural shocks and stressors.

SAPLING engages pregnant and lactating women, children under five, men, senior women, adolescents, community leaders, government, and relevant institutions through interconnected pathways that:

01 Build livelihoods assets

02 Improve health and nutrition

03 Improve disaster risk management (DRM)

Interventions and pathways under SAPLING

01 Integrated Enhanced Homestead Food Production (IEHFP) is a platform for improving agricultural practices, nutrition, household preparedness, and gender equality. All other interventions are integrated with the IEHFP groups.

02 Income Generating Activities (IGA) and market facilitation

03 Savings and Internal Lending Communities (SILC)

04 Maternal and child health and nutrition (MCHN)

05 Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH)

06 Disaster and Risk Management (DRM)

07 Local capacity building

All interventions were conducted through a Gender Equality and Social Inclusion pathway.

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SAPLING goal

Improved gender equitable food security, nutrition and resilience of vulnerable people in the CHT region of Bangladesh.

SAPLING aimed to integrate social and behavioral change communication, natural resource management, and gender transformation across all program elements.

SAPLING directly benefited an estimated 80% of the total population in the five upazilas of Ruma, Lama, Bandarban Sadar, Thanchi and Rowangchari. SAPLING beneficiaries comprised of:

01 Households with pregnant or lactating women and/or with children under two years of age

02 Poor and extreme poor households

SAPLING RESULTS

Livelihoods support

01 — Trained 49,226 poor and extreme poor individuals on climate-smart agricultural techniques for improved homestead food production.

02 — Established over 2,660 Family Nutrition Centers in more than 1,500 villages.

03 — SAPLING activities include capacity building in agriculture, nutrition, WASH, risk reduction, and facilitating planning, and problem solving.

04 — Improved agricultural technologies among participants from 84% in FY 2017 to 96% in FY 2020.

05 — Trained 10,323 IGA participants in improved production and business planning and increased their market access through the establishment of new inclusive market structure.

06 — 7 collection points, 19 aggregation points and 274 local business advisors (LBAs), 86% of whom are women and 72% are ethnic minorities established.

08 — LBAs facilitated linkages between buyers and sellers, negotiated collective sales, and bargained on behalf of producers.

09 — SAPLING producers reported increased market access from 32% in FY17 to 76% in FY20.

10 — Established 815 Savings and Internal Lending Communities (SILC) with 14,982 members.

11 — Capacity building included financial literacy, support in planning, saving and taking loans, and administration and management.

12 — Members have saved a total of BDT 20.28 million (US $239,249 USD), with an average savings of BDT 1,354 (US $15.97) per member.

13 — 80%of SILC members have taken out loans, with an average loan size of BDT 3,352 (US $39.56) per member.

14 — 50% of SILC groups have also opted to create interest-free emergency loan funds, which have proven critical in disaster recovery.

Health services

Using the 1,000-day approach, SAPLING's Community Health Service Workers (CHSWs) have facilitated monthly awareness raising sessions with 14,908 pregnant and lactating women (PLW) on the importance of early initiation and exclusive breastfeeding, infant and young child feeding, essential hygiene actions, and early childhood development. CHSWs also provide individual counselling to the PLW to support nutritional best practices and promote health services.

CHSWs have facilitated regular growth monitoring and promotion with 8,209 children under two. They motivated approximately 16,000 children under five to participate in biannual Government Vitamin A Supplementation campaigns.

SAPLING motivated women to attend antenatal and prenatal care services at nearby clinics and supported the government to offer regular satellite clinic services in 21 remote locations. It provided access to women who would not otherwise have been able to seek care. SAPLING has also facilitated capacity development sessions with 12,251 adolescent girls on life skills, nutrition and hygiene.

The program saw significant increases across key MCHN measures:

MCHN CATEGORY	FISCAL YEAR 2017	FISCAL YEAR 2020
Women's Dietary Diversity (at least 5 out of 10 food groups consumed)	60%	95%
Early initiation of breastfeeding	37%	83%
Exclusive breastfeeding within the first 6 months	70%	86%
Children between the ages of 6 to 23 months consuming animals source proteins	73%	96%

WASH

To promote WASH sustainability, SAPLING focused on capacity building of WASH institutions. These institutions included Government of Bangladesh (GoB) WATSAN committees at upazila, union and ward levels, 100 village-level Water User Committees (WUC) and training of district Department of Public Health and Engineering (DPHE) repair technicians.

SAPLING also provided WASH-in-schools training for high school teachers and almost 6,000 of the GOB's Little Doctors (peer educators in grades 3-5). The training promoted personal hygiene and nutrition in school and at home. Women now wash hands at five critical times, from 7% in FY 17 to 33% in FY20.

Disaster and risk management

SAPLING strengthened local DRM structures including training 2,500 DRM volunteers in collaboration with the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society and Fire Service and Civil Defense. This reactivated and strengthened operations of GOB Disaster Management Committees in all 24 unions, two pourashavas and five upazilas.

As a result, SAPLING participants expanded their use of DRM practices, with both men and women implementing at least two risk reducing practices increasing from 42% to 93% between FY17 and FY20.

SAPLING initially supported the repair of 59 water systems in 53 villages.

This enabled 9,182 individuals to gain year-round access to safe water.

In response to COVID-19, the activity also constructed 27 new handwashing stations and repaired 24 water systems.

This increased access to handwashing and clean water for an additional 18,786 community members.

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