



Bangladesh



▲ A woman farmer driving power tiller and cultivating in Nilphamari, Bangladesh.

PHOTO: BRAC

¹ <http://lansasouthasia.org/sites/default/files/Bangladesh%20Country%20Evidence%20Paper.pdf>

² <http://lansasouthasia.org/sites/default/files/Agriculture%20and%20nutrition%20in%20Bangladesh%20mapping%20Evidence%20pathways.pdf>

³ <http://lansasouthasia.org/content/bangladesh%E2%80%99s-story-change-nutrition-strong-improvements-basic-and-underlying-determinants>

⁴ <http://lansasouthasia.org/content/crop-diversity-dietary-diversity-and-nutritional-outcome-rural-bangladesh-evidences-vdsa>

<http://lansasouthasia.org/content/does-agriculture-promote-diet-diversity-bangladesh-study>

⁵ <http://lansasouthasia.org/content/agriculture-nutrition-and-green-revolution-bangladesh>

Bangladesh has taken initiative to address the undernutrition situation by strengthening linkages with agriculture, but rigorous scientific evidence is needed across geographical settings.

The Leveraging Agriculture for Nutrition in South Asia (LANSA) research programme consortium aims to enhance the impact of agriculture on maternal and child nutrition in Bangladesh. LANSA activities have included: mapping of stakeholder perceptions of sectoral policies and programmes, primary research, secondary data analysis, policy dialogue, capacity strengthening, research uptake and dissemination.

BRAC is the lead institution for LANSA research in Bangladesh, working with the partners, viz. Leverhulme Centre for Integrated Agricultural Research (LCIRAH), International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and Institute of Development Studies (IDS). In addition, there were research collaborations with Universities of Queensland, Heidelberg and Sydney in partnership with local universities in Bangladesh.

LANSA work

The Country Evidence Paper¹ produced by BRAC during LANSA's inception phase and the subsequent IFPRI-led review² revealed knowledge gaps in all identified pathways from agriculture to nutrition. Gaps identified in the 'agriculture as a source of livelihood' pathway included: how farming households use their agricultural income; how the status of women affects household expenditure on food, health, education; and internal allocation of resources, child care practices, also women's health.

Bangladesh has made impressive reductions in child stunting from 1996 to the present. Critical factors³ behind Bangladesh's 'story of change' in nutrition were found to be improving household wealth, parental

education (particularly mothers), wider prenatal and neonatal healthcare access, improved sanitation, also smaller family sizes and greater gaps between births. In addition, it found that diversification in crop cultivation and related investment have contributed towards nutritional achievement in Bangladesh⁴. However, community-based nutrition sensitive agricultural programmes are not yet operating at scale and government arrangements for nutrition service delivery are weak.

LANSA also examined the role of agriculture in influencing child nutrition. One study⁵ analysed Bangladesh's Green Revolution in rice production to find that districts with faster growth in rice yields saw improvements in child weight gain, but not in height or dietary diversification. The study stressed the need for

diversification, and a further LANSAs study⁶ suggested strong impacts of dairy consumption on child growth and some evidence of nutritional benefits from rice consumption, but also warned against feeding young children (< 12m) dairy milk in place of breastfeeding, emphasising the need to improve nutritional knowledge in Bangladesh.

Analysis of Food Security and Nutrition Surveillance Project data identified *haor* and the coastal belt in Bangladesh as fragile environments with reduced household ability to grow food, thus influencing nutritional status negatively. Findings from this study⁷ emphasized the importance of understanding the complex interplay of seasonality in order to find a mix of relevant interventions to address this problem.

The private sector has been playing a role in getting fortified yogurt to difficult-to-reach poor populations in Bangladesh. Grameen-Danone's Shokti doi case study⁸ found that volume sales are needed for commercial viability and therefore business initiatives will struggle to reach those who are poorest. Unresolved tensions exist for building sustainable value chains and targeting the poorest consumers. However, it is for such households that public initiatives or public-private partnerships are most critical, as highlighted by two other agri-food value chain studies.

Policy challenges

There was consensus among agri-nutrition stakeholders on the importance of political commitment to nutrition, improving literacy on nutrition-sensitive agriculture, strengthening institutional capacities and coordination, and on improving the effective use of financial resources towards better nutrition. This landscaping work provided leads to further LANSAs research in Bangladesh, and helped shape the research uptake strategy.

The monitoring reports for the Bangladesh National Food Policy and Country Investment Plan have made direct reference to LANSAs research on determinants of child undernutrition and on the importance of agriculture in addressing undernutrition in 2015, 2016 and 2017. The evidence results of some LANSAs research are reflected in the National Nutrition Policy, NPAN II (National Plan for Action for Nutrition – 2016–2025) and the Second Country Investment Plan – CIP 2 on Nutrition Sensitive Food Systems (2016–2020). The importance of multi-sectoral collaboration across ministries, priority-based interventions for vulnerable zones including coastal areas, and involvement of women in the agricultural system was highlighted to increase diversified production and consumption for healthy diets. However, policymakers need to do much more to tackle the problem of undernutrition in Bangladesh.

Stakeholder engagement

LANSAs shared its research outputs and findings widely with a range of stakeholders throughout the programme at various dissemination forums. Efforts went into obtaining stakeholder input for on-going research, and new partnerships were encouraged to narrow research and uptake gaps. The press (media) were a significant stakeholder to carry research findings to wider audiences and also stimulate policy interest in the area of undernutrition.

To engage multi-sectoral stakeholders with the research evidence, LANSAs hosted national level stakeholder consultations and knowledge sharing seminars in 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018 with senior and influential government officials from relevant ministries (Health and Family Welfare, Food, Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries) and roped in the policy influencing community – international donor agencies like FAO, WFP, UNICEF, NGOs, and other stakeholders. The value of partnerships and collaborations with multi-sectoral stakeholders became noticeable from periodic engagement efforts with those who provide support to the Policy Research Unit within Ministry of Agriculture. This contributed to building a 'champion'-like relationships for LANSAs-led evidence advocacy for inclusion in country policy documents⁹.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Through this work in Bangladesh, we have developed the following recommendations for enhancing nutrition through agriculture:

1. Appropriate policy guideline that focuses on altering the nutritional intake of poor children, especially in the regions with higher prevalence of childhood undernutrition
2. Programmes that focused on addressing specific issues like diversified diet at low cost should be implemented and evaluated
3. Expanded and enhanced nutrition programmes to improve infant and young child care and feeding practices, which still remain well below the optimum
4. Better access to improve health services required
5. Education, especially of females, should still be one of the key policy options to achieve the SDG on undernutrition in Bangladesh

⁶ <http://lansasouthasia.org/content/household-dairy-production-and-child-growth-evidence-bangladesh>

⁷ <http://lansasouthasia.org/content/fragile-environment-seasonality-and-maternal-and-childhood-undernutrition-bangladesh-1>

⁸ <http://lansasouthasia.org/sites/default/files/IDS%20Bulletin.pdf>

⁹ <http://lansasouthasia.org/sites/default/files/Bangladesh-Stories%20of%20Influence.pdf>

Credits

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LANSAs is an international research partnership, exploring how agriculture and agri-food systems can be better designed to advance nutrition in South Asia. Led by MS Swaminathan Foundation, members include BRAC, Collective for Social Science Research, Institute of Development Studies, International Food Policy Research Institute and Leverhulme Centre for Integrative Research for Action on Health. LANSAs is funded by the UK Government. The views expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect the UK Government's official policies.

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