

Bangladesh Reflective Practice Story

Bringing researchers and policymakers together in the battle against malnutrition

Reaching out to Stakeholders in Bangladesh

Over the recent years Bangladesh has been experiencing steady economic growth – yet malnutrition among children and women is widely prevalent. Stunting resulting from chronic malnutrition and iron deficiency remain major health concerns among pre-school children and adolescent girls respectively.

Governments have adopted agricultural strategies and policies focusing on increasing food grain production, particularly rice, to ensure basic food security and tackle malnutrition. But increased rice production was not accompanied by equal increase in production of major crops like pulses, oilseeds, fruits, vegetables, fish, meat and eggs which are essential for dietary diversification; thus malnutrition remains rampant.



BRAC Executive Director speaking at the seminar

In the long run, the lack of diet diversity can have serious health implications, including increased susceptibility to disease, blindness and death. The importance of balanced nutrition or nutrition security is more recently being recognised in the country's policy sphere. The National Food Policy 2006 and the associated Plan of Action 2008 - 2015 aims to achieve adequate nutrition for all individuals, especially women and children.

With this background BRAC is involved with LANSA which is a programme of research exploring how South Asian agriculture and related food policies and interventions can be designed and implemented to increase their impacts on nutrition, especially the nutritional status of children and adolescent girls.

Through the programme of research and regular engagement with government and non-governmental stakeholders, LANSA aims to use the generated evidence to inform policy and programme decisions to enhance nutrition through agriculture.

For example, encouraging policy makers to consider factors such as seasonal perspectives and education (especially of females) in the hunger and nutrition debates. The multifaceted nature of undernutrition means that it can be effectively addressed only when several sectors and strategic efforts are combined together.

The research aims to contribute to policy changes that will strongly establish the agriculture-nutrition linkages and enhance nutrition outcomes in Bangladesh. As the country still lacks enough evidence on agri-nutrition linkages, the research findings will address the gaps to help policymakers take the next step forward.

The study findings would also help relevant stakeholders in strongly advocating for and influencing policies and programme interventions for improving nutrition through agriculture. The challenge of the programme lies in reaching out to the policymakers, policy influencers and relevant stakeholders.

HIGHLIGHTS:

The seminar served as an interactive avenue to foster a sustainable impact on policies in Bangladesh by establishing a strong linkage between agriculture and nutrition

An early analysis of the probable stakeholders' perception for this programme concluded that although there are different ways in which South Asian agriculture can improve its impact on nutrition, sensitising key influencers to the importance of nutrition for the health of a country's population appears as a critical issue.

This should in turn serve as the premise for political commitment, intersectoral coordination to implement nutrition-relevant policies, adequately resourced nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive programmes, and sufficient capacities at all levels.

For reaching out to the target audience of the research, the programme takes up dissemination activities targeting its stakeholders.

The programme is designed to bring out various publications (reports, policy briefs, journal articles, newspaper editorials, blogs, etc), to have strong presence in online forums (website, social media, e-discussions), conducting public forums (seminar, workshops, symposiums), participating in focused stakeholder groups (like the national nutrition working group), getting feedback from the stakeholders on the dissemination work etc.

In June 2015, BRAC organised a research dissemination seminar to share the findings of some of the LANSAs research work on agriculture and nutrition in Bangladesh by BRAC and IFPRI - to policymakers, policy influencers, development practitioners, academicians and researchers.

The secretary of the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock was invited to be the chief guest of the event, emphasising and indicating the conceptual shift of the nutrition discourse in Bangladesh which now focuses more on enhancing fisheries and livestock rather than focusing mainly on production of agricultural crops.

About 70 stakeholders who were different policy makers from GOs and NGOs, Researchers, Journalists attended the seminar. The event served as an interactive avenue to foster a sustainable impact on policies in Bangladesh by establishing a strong



Research dissemination seminar in progress

linkage between agriculture and nutrition and focused on bridging the gap between research and policy making.

Throughout the event, it was evident that participants and discussants were engaged and curious about LANSAs research work. The chief guest said that the seminar has lessened the gap between researchers and policy makers and encouraged researchers to keep on reaching out to policy makers with relevant research findings.

The event was able to attract media interest and news was published in six Bengali and English newspapers, and an op-ed was also published in an English daily. It was also covered by electronic media and a radio channel.

Overall, this knowledge sharing platform was another step forward in addressing the challenges of malnutrition in Bangladesh by building a direct connection between researchers and policymakers.

Key Contacts: For further information

Zeenat Ahmed,
Lead Research Uptake,
LANSA-BRAC
zeenatahmed.lansa@gmail.com

Web Links:

<http://lansasouthasia.org/blog/brac-arranges-knowledge-sharing-event-stakeholders>
<http://www.jugantor.com/old/second-edition/2015/06/15/279232>
<http://epaper.thedailystar.net/index.php?opt=view&page=18&date=2015-06-15>