Bangladesh Narrative

Country Context

About two in five children under the age of five suffer from chronic malnutrition (stunting) in Bangladesh. Iron deficiency remains a major public health concern, affecting about half of pre-school children and pregnant women. A major reason for this alarming nutrition situation is the predominance of rice in people's diets. Initially, government agricultural strategies and policies were focused on increasing food grain production, particularly rice, to ensure basic food security. This has resulted in a lack of diversity in people's diets. The lack of diet diversity leads to micronutrient deficiencies, particularly in iron, zinc, vitamin A and iodine which can have serious health implications, including increased susceptibility to disease, blindness and death.

More recently however, the importance of balanced nutrition is being recognised in the policy sphere; It has been included as one of the core objectives in the National Food Policy in 2006 and is embedded in the associated Plan of Action 2008-2015, with the objective of achieving adequate nutrition for all individuals, especially women and children. The government plans to invest in improving the nutrition situation with community based nutrition activities through livelihood approaches, which are complemented by health oriented awareness campaigns. To ensure food safety and improve food quality, a surveillance system of food borne illnesses will be strengthened. The government also finalised a Country Investment Plan in March 2011, which includes a set of 12 priority investment programmes to improve food security and nutrition in an integrated way.

What is LANSA?

Leveraging Agriculture for Nutrition in South Asia (LANSA) is a programme of research which aims to generate evidence that, with practical application, can improve nutrition outcomes in India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan. The research under LANSA will explore the fundamental, underlying and immediate determinants of nutrition.

LANSA Research in Bangladesh

BRAC is the lead institution for LANSA research in Bangladesh, working with the Leverhulme Centre for Integrated Agricultural Research (LCIRAH), the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and the Institute of Development Studies (IDS). The primary goal is to promote agricultural development activities that establish a direct linkage between agriculture and nutrition so that policies and interventions by the government and

non-government organisations explicitly address problems of malnutrition through agricultural development policies and strategies. In that alignment BRAC has been leading and collaborating on research projects under the three thematic pillars of LANSA.

Enabling Environment

An evidence review[1] was conducted to assess the emphasis of the literature on different agriculture–nutrition pathways in Bangladesh. The findings show gaps in knowledge in all of the pathways, but especially in the areas of agriculture as a source of livelihoods, and women's role as intermediaries between agriculture and good nutrition and health within their household. Nutrition-related outcomes, such as dietary diversity and women's empowerment, need to be measured more explicitly when evaluating the impact of agricultural production systems and development initiatives.

A study on the agricultural and other determinants of child nutrition in Bangladesh[2] traces the effect of income, agricultural production and market access on household food availability; the allocation of household food availability to individual food consumption of young children and the impact of individual child diets on nutrition outcomes. This allows tracing of the linkages between income generating activities and child malnutrition and the identification of "leakages" in the system. Ultimately the findings may be used to more diagnostically inform policymakers on how agriculture-related interventions can have a greater impact on child nutrition.

An analysis of the Food Security Nutrition Surveillance Project[3] was conducted to understand the variation in maternal and childhood undernutrition in Bangladesh across regions and seasons. The study finds significant regional differences, with alarmingly high levels of undernutrition prevailing in the waterlogged areas (haor) in the north-east and in coastal areas. These findings imply that to address the problem of undernutrition adequately, it is important to identify context-specific risk factors for under nutrition and undertake appropriate interventions.

Agri-food value chains

LANSA in Bangladesh seeks to analyse the nutrition focus of food value chains beyond the farm. Three case studies are underway, following up from a country review of interventions in the categories of naturally nutrient dense foods, fortified foods and food distribution chains. Women and adolescent girls are among the highest priorities for nutrition interventions, and the analysis of case studies gives careful consideration to how particular initiatives like the school meal programme

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[1] S. Yosef, A. D. Jones, B. Chakraborty, and S. Gillespie, 2015. Agriculture and Nutrition in Bangladesh: Mapping Evidence to Pathways. *Food and Nutrition Bulletin 1-18.* 2015

[2] D. Heady, 2015. The other Asian enigma: Explaining the rapid reduction of undernutrition in Bangladesh. *LANSA Policy Brief, Issue 1,* January 2015

[3] M. Mohsena, B. Chakraborty, M. Hossain, 2015. Seasonal and Regional Variation of Maternal and Childhood Undernutrition in Bangladesh: an Analysis of Food Security Nutrition Surveillance Project Data (LANSA Research paper, unpublished)

reach, or fail to reach these groups. The institutional frameworks within which markets operate are being considered and also the role of private sector actors as partners for public sector initiatives.

Nutrition sensitive farming approaches

A formative study[4] was conducted, to understand the perceptions and needs of local farming communities using the existing programmatic framework of BRAC. The key findings of the study indicate that meaning and significance of nutrition sensitive farming approach is yet not well understood by the farming communities despite huge potential of their farming for nutrition. The findings highlight the importance of conveying nutrition sensitive agricultural messages that will sensitise the communities to realise the potential of agriculture in achieving better nutritional outcome.

How will this research make a difference?

Through the programme of research and regular engagement with government and non-governmental stakeholders, LANSA aims to use the evidence emerging from the research to inform policy and programme decisions to enhance nutrition through agriculture. For instance, policy makers will be encouraged through dialogue 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 may 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.

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[4] B. Chakraborty, F. Akter, U. S. Mukta and M. Hossain, 2015. Farming Systems for Improved Nutrition: a Formative Study. (LANSA Research paper, unpublished)