

For better and long-lasting nutrition, begin with the young

Raising awareness about nutrition and diet diversity among school children from tribal villages in India



How LANSA addresses the problem

Farming System for Nutrition (FSN) feasibility study is an action research study in India under the LANSA programme, being piloted in two fragile rain-fed but different agro-ecological locations, Wardha district of Maharashtra state and Koraput district of Odisha state. The research design involves examining the feasibility of crop and animal husbandry, home and community nutrition gardening and nutrition awareness interventions and their impact on nutritional outcomes. Focus group discussions (FGD) revealed the households had a relatively poor understanding of balanced diet and proper nutrition. To empower communities to better understand nutrition and benefits of consuming a balanced diet, MSSRF-LANSA staff began to include nutrition and health messages while communicating with the village communities.

To have an impact on children in the study villages, a tailor-made strategy of effective nutrition messages along with engagement activities was drawn up. It was felt that the use of simple yet attractive teaching tools would enable LANSA to play a vital role in influencing and shaping the child's understanding, attitude and behaviour toward nutrition. The strategy was aimed at children between 8 – 14 years of age studying in state funded schools in these villages. Novel ways to communicate and gauge understanding of the concept of nutrition were used; observations / reactions were recorded after giving time for the messages to sink in, to help assess their improved understanding of nutrition and better health.

Context

The FSN feasibility study is under way in five villages in Wardha district and seven villages in Koraput district. Baseline survey was conducted between January – May 2014 to record the nutritional status of households in the villages these included anthropometry (height and weight), and biochemical assessment (blood hemoglobin levels for children 1-5 years and 12 to 17 years girls). The results of the baseline survey (Table 1) were shared with the communities. FGD were conducted in early 2015 with school children to gauge their knowledge on nutrition, personal hygiene and sanitation.

Although village schools teach hygiene and sanitation, there seemed to be a lack of understanding of this knowledge and application of these concepts to real life situations and daily practices and behaviours.

To bridge this gap and ensure uptake of disseminated messages, a strategy was developed for effective delivery of nutrition messages and engagement activities for the village children studying in the rural state funded schools.

Indices	Wardha		Koraput	
	N	%	N	%
Anthropometric				
5 - 9 years (BMIZ <-2SD)	157	33.1	472	41.1
10 -14 years (BMIZ <-2SD)	255	54.1	404	29.5
15 -17 years (BMIZ <-2SD)	114	51.8	206	17.5
Biochemical				
12-14 years girls (Hb <12 g/dl)	70	71.4	153	58.8
15-17 years girls (Hb <12 g/dl)	60	73.3	104	64.4

Table 1: Nutrition status of children of school going age

HIGHLIGHT:

"I came to know about fruits like amla, guava, lemon, mango, papaya and some vegetables like bitter gourd, cauliflower and moringa are rich in vitamin C, which helps to increase immunity in the body."

-Barsha Harijan, Female, Class VII, Upper Primary School, Chikima village, Koraput

LANSA Research to Action

As a first step, in September-October 2015 the importance of balanced diet for overall good health, and the benefits of sanitation and personal hygiene were explained in simple language to the children using colourful posters and presentations. A drawing competition for the children was then organised in Koraput in October and in Wardha in December 2015, to find out whether the messages were understood. The children were highly motivated and enthusiastic; 111 students from 4 villages in Koraput and 45 students from 4 villages in Wardha participated; the best drawings were announced and selected for photo display on the MSSRF LANSAs nutrition annual calendar.

Each month had a picture with clear and simple nutrition messages on balanced diet, sanitation and hygiene in the local languages (Odiya and Marathi). The calendars were distributed in July 2016 to schools.

Households in the FSN study villages also received a copy of the Nutrition Calendar. Copies were also handed over to the Gram Panchayat, ICDS Centres, Block Development Office, Block Resource Centre, and Village Education Officer. Some copies were disseminated to local NGOs and displayed in village tea shops.

HIGHLIGHT:

“I look at the calendar and read the nutrition messages, it is easy to remember. I came to know that the balanced diet should include fruits, vegetables, fish, meat, egg, etc.”

-Ramesh Harijan, Male, Class VII
Upper Primary School, Bhejaguda village, Koraput

Outcomes and Impact

The village schools were already participating in the LANSAs school nutrition garden initiative under the FSN feasibility study since 2015. Qualitative assessments and observations made by some of the school children who were interviewed (highlighted in the boxes), show that messages on nutrition and balanced diet, health and hygiene, are having better uptake as a result of the strategic efforts to raise awareness on nutrition using participatory approaches with young community members.

Key Contacts:

For further information

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Web Links:

<http://lansasouthasia.org/blog/need-nutrition-awareness-transferring-food-field-plate>

<http://lansasouthasia.org/blog/sprouting-school-nutrition-gardens-fsn-study-villages>



“*I realised that personal hygiene is important for good health, so now I cut my nails regularly and wash and wear clean clothes every day.”*

Pranav Satish Gurnule, Male, Class VIII,
Z. P. High School, Susund village, Wardha

Local government officials, viz. Block Development Officer, Block Education officers and Child Development Project Officers at district level in Koraput were very appreciative of the LANSAs – MSSRF School Nutrition Calendar.

Next Steps

Initial qualitative evidence indicates that schools are good platforms to reach children on nutrition education. We can impact young minds and through them reach out to their families. Through schools, LANSAs would be able to reach the most vulnerable sections of society, especially girl children who tend to leave school earlier.

A follow-up to assess the impact of LANSAs School Nutrition Calendar among the school children and members of the community in the FSN study villages will be conducted through one-on-one in-depth interviews with students, their parents and relevant officials.

HIGHLIGHT:

“From the calendar I now understand that Vitamin A is important for our eyes and if we eat curry leaves and green leafy vegetable we will have better eyesight. I also learned the importance of washing hands with soap after using the toilet.”

-Priya Krushanaji Lonbaile, Female, Class VIII,
Zilla Parishad High School, Susund village, Wardha