

## SUCHANA: Ending the Cycle of Undernutrition in Bangladesh

“SUCHANA: Ending the cycle of undernutrition in Bangladesh” is a multi-sectoral nutrition programme which aims to achieve a significant reduction in stunting amongst children under two years of age in Bangladesh by catalysing support across government and other stakeholders. The programme adopts an integrated approach to nutrition specific and nutrition sensitive intervention to prevent chronic malnutrition within the critical 1,000 days from conception until a child reaches its second birthday

### Context and Rationale

Within Bangladesh, although the prevalence of stunting (shortness in stature compared to child’s age) has declined from 51% in 2004 to 36% of children under five in 2014<sup>1</sup>, levels of stunting still remain well above WHO and government thresholds. Some six million children are estimated to be chronically malnourished and uptake of key infant and young child feeding (IYCF) practices remains poor. Chronic malnutrition has long-lasting, irreversible effects on the child’s development, including mental development, health, school performance and later on, work productivity.

The human and economic cost of malnutrition is huge. Left unchecked, it can result in a 2-3 % loss in national income due to its long-term impact on productivity; chronic malnutrition during childhood may lead to late enrolment in school, and the missed education means that such children may earn 20% less than children with complete education<sup>2</sup>. Malnutrition in Bangladesh is estimated to cost approximately US\$1 billion a year in lost economic productivity<sup>3</sup>. A recent analysis indicated that nutrition specific interventions may prevent 15% of deaths and about 20% of the current burden of stunting and 60%<sup>4</sup> of wasting.

### Programme Description

Save the Children in Bangladesh (SCiBD) has mobilised a catalytic coalition of 8 organisations to design and implement the unique and ambitious Suchana programme that will accelerate a reduction in the incidence of stunting among children under 2 years of age in two districts of Sylhet division in Bangladesh. The programme will capitalise upon the expertise and experience of the coalition to catalyse efforts by government and other Bangladeshi stakeholders (such as the private sector, civil society and diaspora) to identify and scale up sustainable, context-specific programmes that can break the intergenerational cycle of malnutrition, by applying a lifecycle approach that intensifies during the critical 1000 days from conception. Recognising the nutritional needs of women even before pregnancy, and the connection between adolescents’ nutrition, early marriage, early pregnancy and child undernutrition, the programme will give specific emphasis to the empowerment of adolescents and young unmarried women.

Significant focus will also be given to improving nutrition governance that translates political commitments into practice. This is crucial for wide-scale impact and sustainability, as changes in increased access to and utilisation of health and nutrition related services, the economic empowerment of women and adolescent girls and improved knowledge,

skills and power to adopt appropriate nutrition behaviour and practices will only be temporary; unless supported by the realisation of a strong vision of improved nutrition governance at all levels and sectors. Similarly, the programme has a heavy focus on the generation of evidence to directly attribute the reduction in stunting to the programme. This will contribute to global debates on undernutrition and influence the design and implementation of policies and practices, leading to scale up, adaption and replication of the Suchana model by government and others. In order to maximize the impact of the gathered evidence and ensure that it is able to catalyse impact at the national level, the coalition will develop a dynamic advocacy strategy. This will draw upon the support of key national and international advocacy partners and mobilise the urban elite and growing middle class of Bangladesh, diaspora and child advocacy groups to boost accountability which in turn will strengthen the provision of services, and their sustainability, at the community, district and national levels.

The impacts of this programme will be lasting changes from the household to the national government level that challenge the drivers of chronic malnutrition that have passed down generations to perpetuate unacceptably high levels of stunting in Bangladesh. This will translate into improved development and economic outcomes for children and the country as a whole, as healthy well-nourished children become healthy and productive adults, who go on to raise healthy well-nourished children of their own.



## Target Area and Target Population

The programme will roll out in Moulvibazar and Sylhet Districts of Sylhet Division. Out of a population of 9,910,219<sup>5</sup> in Sylhet Division, 20.7% live below the lower poverty line (HIES 2010). Sylhet division is characterized by deep-seated inequality with the highest regional Gini coefficient of 0.319 (IFPRI, 2013) while the Division as a whole performs poorly on key health and nutrition indicators. It displays the highest national rates of stunting at 49.6% (BDHS-2014), the highest U5 mortality at 83 per 1,000 (BMMS, 2010), the high fertility rate of 3.6 (BMMS, 2010) and the lowest rates of immunisation (DGHS, 2014). Recent figures from HKI Surveillance confirm Sylhet Division is characterised by high levels of food insecurity at 79% (HKI, 2011). Sylhet Division is also prone to severe flash flooding. The Suchana Programme will target households most vulnerable to malnutrition, namely those with adolescent girls, newly-weds, pregnant women, and lactating mothers with children under the age of two years from a mixture of rural extreme poor and moderate households, directly reaching approximately 250,000 households and 1.4 million people<sup>6</sup>.

## Programme Basics

**PROGRAMME TITLE:** Suchana: Ending the Cycle of Undernutrition in Bangladesh

**PROGRAMME GOAL:** Significant reduction in the incidence of stunting amongst children under two years of age in Sylhet and Moulvibazar districts. The coalition aims for at least 2 percentage point additional reduction per year (total 6 percentage points additional reduction in 3 years of interventions) against a current annual decline of 1.4 percentage points /year in the rate of stunting among children under two.

**PROGRAMME PURPOSE:** Catalyse support across government and other stakeholders for a coordinated, multi-sectoral approach to undernutrition at the national level

### SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES:

1. Improved nutrition governance at sub-national and national level demonstrated by enhanced coordination within and between ministries and sectors at the national and local level, increased resource allocation to nutrition and effective implementation of nutrition related policies and programmes on the ground
2. Enhanced capacity of government frontline service providers to deliver nutrition related (both specific and sensitive) services in an effective and inclusive manner and increased uptake of services by nutritionally vulnerable groups (PLW, children under two years of age, adolescent girls and newlywed couples from extreme poor and moderate poor households)
3. Extreme poor and moderate poor households with pregnant women, lactating mothers with children under 2 and adolescent girls are empowered to overcome economic barriers to nutrition and become more resilient to social, economic and climatic shock
4. Increased knowledge, skills and power of extreme poor and moderate poor households, particularly women and adolescent girls, to practice and support appropriate IYCF and MCHN behaviour and challenge harmful gender norms (early marriage, early pregnancy and GBV)
5. Deliver a solid and rigorous knowledge and evidence base to galvanise momentum for change to support scalable interventions that address chronic malnutrition throughout Bangladesh.

**TARGET GROUP:** Poor and very poor households with women of reproductive age (15 – 45 years) in the Sylhet and Moulvibazar districts of Sylhet Division, Bangladesh. Some activities will include men and the wider community.

**NUMBER OF DIRECT BENEFICIARIES:** approximately 250,000 households and 1.4 million people<sup>7</sup>.

**PROJECT DURATION:** 2015-2022

**PROJECT AREA:** Moulvibazaar District and Sylhet District, Sylhet Division, Bangladesh

**PROGRAM PARTNERS:** SCI, HKI, iDE, WorldFish, Icddr,b, CNRS, RDRS, and FIVDB

**PROJECT FUNDING:** The project is funded by DFID and EU

## References

1. Bangladesh 2014 DHS Report
2. (Grantham-McGregor et al. (2007). Development potential in the first five years for children in developing countries. The Lancet, 369: 60-70)
3. State of Food Insecurity in the World, 2012 (FAO) [www.fao.org/docrep/016/i3027e/i3027e03.pdf](http://www.fao.org/docrep/016/i3027e/i3027e03.pdf)
4. Bhutta, A. et al. (2013). Evidence-based interventions for improvement of maternal and child nutrition: what can be done and at what cost? The Lancet [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(13\)60996-4](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(13)60996-4)
5. 2011 Census
7. Based on the recent Household Economy Approach in Sylhet, 38% are extreme poor and 30% are moderate poor and the limit of adolescent age range from 15-19 using average household size of 5.6 which is based on the average household size for Moulvibazar and Sylhet District (Bangladesh Census, 2011, SCIBD Household Economy Approach Sylhet: agriculture plain zone).
8. Based on recent Household Economy Approach in Sylhet, 38% are extreme poor and 30% are moderate poor and the limit of adolescent age range from 15-19 using the average household size of 5.6 which is based on the average household size for Moulvibazar and Sylhet District (Bangladesh Census, 2011)

