

Bangladesh's own gender equality expertise helping to improve women and girls' nutrition

GENDER EQUALITY GOOD PRACTICE NOTES

NUTRITION INTERNATIONAL is committed to supporting Bangladesh's national government and local stakeholders to unleash the power of nutrition for women and girls in the country and is working alongside the Bangladesh National Nutrition Council (BNNC) to strengthen the effective operationalization of the country's second National Plan of Action for Nutrition (NPAN2).

Through its Technical Assistance for Nutrition project, Nutrition International's Nutrition Technical Assistance Mechanism (NTEAM) is providing technical assistance to operationalize NPAN2. NTEAM is working with technical assistance provider Dr. Iqbal Kabir and his team of experts, who are providing technical support for resource mobilization and multisectoral planning for delivery of prioritized nutrition actions at the national level, support for effective planning and implementation of nutrition priorities at the sub-national level, and enhancing coordination among core nutrition platforms under BNNC for better synergy of nutrition actions.

Recognizing that gender equality is essential to the success of NPAN2's operationalization, NTEAM also recruited Amita Dey as a technical assistance provider to support gender mainstreaming in the assessment of key

health and nutrition programs. Amita is a senior gender and development consultant with 30 years of experience in Bangladesh who was worked on mainstreaming gender in different sectors including livelihood, agriculture, nutrition, and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH).

BNNC initiated a bottleneck analysis to identify obstacles that have limited the ability of their multisectoral nutrition plans to reach targets at the local level. NTEAM contributed to this analysis through the identification of bottlenecks and an inquiry of their social dimensions, particularly how gender relations have prevented success and impacted nutrition outcomes. To analyze these bottlenecks, NTEAM worked closely with BNNC's Director of Policy, Planning and Coordination and Gender Focal Point Dr. Zubaida Nasreen.

Amita played a central role in conducting a detailed gender analysis of the bottlenecks and ensuring that these issues are reflected within the report to impact policy and programmatic changes. It was found that gender norms negatively impacted the government's efforts to curb malnutrition by creating inequitable gender dynamics and dramatically limiting the effectiveness of programs, especially when trying to reach traditionally excluded groups such as women and adolescent girls in vulnerable situations. For example, the team identified a range of bottlenecks affecting the country's ability to reach targets related to the *Minimum Acceptable Diet* for children aged 6 to 23 months.



Amita's analysis found that many of the bottlenecks identified are inherently gendered, such as the non-engagement of male members of the household who are often decision-makers and control resources around food and diet, and the low educational level of mothers and caregivers which has a negative impact on awareness of nutrition. Within the bottleneck analysis report, NTEAM has made recommendations to respond to, and overcome, these challenges to improve coverage. This includes recommendations that:

1. BNNC make mandatory the **inclusion of male household members as a target audience** in social and behaviour change communication strategies and program design.
2. Expand non-formal and mass education programs to **incorporate more mothers and caregivers** who have limited educational attainment.
3. Revisit existing policies and programs to increase coverage for **girls' education**.

To implement the recommendations, the team recognized the importance of engaging multisectoral stakeholders and has suggested using multisectoral nutrition coordination committees at the district and upazilla (sub-district) levels to work with the agriculture, health and WASH sectors, which implement the majority of nutrition interventions in Bangladesh.



The team is also in the process of developing a community-based model to include community actors in overcoming these bottlenecks, which will take into consideration existing governance structures, opportunities, and community and household dynamics. The model will include participation from multisectoral stakeholders, civil society and the private sector, and feature decision-making, awareness-raising, capacity-building, and gender mainstreaming activities. The parameters of the model are being finalized.

On February 9, BNNC, with support from NTEAM, coordinated a "Consultative Workshop on Assessment of the Key Bottlenecks Analysis for the Coverage of Nutrition-Sensitive Interventions in Bangladesh." The workshop was attended by 56 participants representing relevant ministries and partners to validate the report and recommendations.¹ The stakeholders endorsed the report and recommended actions, and acknowledged gender as a structural bottleneck that cuts across sectors and impedes improvement in nutrition outcomes.

If you would like to find out more about this process or get involved, please contact Dr. Iqbal Kabir at afmiqbalkabir@gmail.com and Amita Dey at dey.amita@yahoo.com. If you would like more information about how Nutrition International supports the nutrition of women, children and girls in Bangladesh, [please visit our website*](#) or contact Nutrition International's Bangladesh Country Director Saiqa Siraj at ssiraj@nutritionintl.org.

¹ The workshop included representatives from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, National Nutrition Services, Ministry of Agriculture, Cabinet Division, Health Service Division, Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock, Ministry of Food, Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MOPME) Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, Planning Division, Institute of Nutrition and Food Science-University of Dhaka, Department of Public Health Engineering, Department of Livestock Service, Directorate of Food, Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, Bangladesh Livestock Research Institute, Social Development Foundation and Palli Karma Sahayak Foundation under the Ministry of Finance, Department of Livestock, participants from BNNC including the Director General and development partners including UNICEF, WHO, WFP, FAO, FCDO, and USAID. Two Additional Secretaries (Admin & Public Health, Health Service Division and Coordination, Cabinet Division) and two Joint Secretaries (Public Health, Health Service Division and Ministry of Women and Children Affairs)

* <https://www.nutritionintl.org/our-work/our-global-projects/asia/bangladesh/>