



**SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE AND PRODUCTION LINKED TO IMPROVED NUTRITION STATUS, RESILIENCE, AND GENDER EQUITY (SAPLING)**

# HKI SAPLING PROGRAM OVERVIEW

On September 30, 2015, Helen Keller International (HKI) was awarded a five-year cooperative agreement by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to lead the Sustainable Agriculture and Production Linked to Improved Nutrition Status, Resilience and Gender Equity (SAPLING), Resilience Food Security Activity (RFSA).

The Activity will run through September 30, 2021 with an estimated budget of US \$31,058,024. The program is implemented in five upazilas in Bandarban District of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) to support the Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs (MOCHTA) in achieving its Sustainable Development Goals.

SAPLING engages pregnant and lactating women (PLW), and children under two, communities, government, and relevant institutions through interconnected pathways that:

- build livelihoods assets
- improve health and nutrition
- improve disaster risk management (DRM)

**INTERVENTIONS AND PATHWAYS UNDER SAPLING:**

- Integrated Enhanced Homestead Food Production (IEHFP) which is a platform for improving agricultural practices, nutrition, household preparedness, and gender equality. All other interventions are integrated with the IEHFP groups

Over the course of the activity, SAPLING has engaged over 107,000 participants to improve gender equitable food security, nutrition, and resilience in the Bandarban Sadar, Lama, Rowanchari, Ruma, and Thanchi Upazilas of Bandarban District through three, interrelated purposes.

**PURPOSE 1**

Increased income and access to nutritious foods attained more equitably by both women and men

**PURPOSE 2**

Improved nutrition and health status of children under five years of age, pregnant and lactating women (PLW) and adolescent girls

**PURPOSE 3**

Improved ability of households, communities, and systems to mitigate, adapt to and recover from human induced and natural shocks and stressors

- Income Generating Activities (IGA) and market facilitation
- Savings and Internal Lending Communities (SILC)
- Maternal and child health and nutrition (MCHN)
- Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH)
- DRM
- Local capacity building
- All interventions were conducted through a Gender Equality and Social Inclusion pathway.



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## SAPLING GOAL

Improved gender equitable food security, nutrition and resilience of vulnerable people in the CHT region of Bangladesh.

SAPLING aims to integrate social and behavioral change communication, natural resource management, and gender transformation across all program elements.

SAPLING will directly benefit an estimated 80% of the total population in the five upazilas of Ruma, Lama, Bandarban Sadar, Thanchi and Rowangchari. SAPLING beneficiaries will comprise:

- Households with pregnant or lactating women and/or with children under two years of age
- Poor and extreme poor households

## ACHIEVEMENTS AND ACTIVITY RESULTS

SAPLING has trained 49,269 poor and extreme poor individuals on improved homestead food production and established over 2,660 Family Nutrition Centers in more than 1,500 villages. Activities include capacity building in agriculture, nutrition, WASH, risk reduction, and facilitating planning and problem solving. Results include increased use of improved agricultural technologies among participants from 84% in fiscal year 2017 (FY17) to 96% in FY20 (October 2019-September 2020).

SAPLING has also trained 10,323 IGA participants in improved production and business planning and increased their market access through the establishment of new inclusive market structures. Seven collection points, 19 aggregation points and 274 local business advisors (LBAs), 86% of whom are women and 72% ethnic minorities, support this market system. In particular, LBAs facilitate linkages between buyers and sellers, negotiate collective sales, and bargain on behalf of producers. These initiatives have resulted in SAPLING producers reporting increased market access from 32% in FY17 to 76% in FY20.

To increase access to financial services, SAPLING established 815 Savings and Internal Lending Communities (SILC) with 14,982 members. Capacity building includes financial literacy, support in planning, saving and taking loans, and administration and management. Members have saved a total of BDT 20.28 million (US \$239,249), with an average savings of BDT 1,354 (US \$15.97) per member. Eighty percent of SILC members have taken out loans, with an average loan size of BDT 3,352 (US \$39.56) per member. Half of the SILC groups have also opted to create interest-free emergency loan funds, which have proven critical in disaster recovery.

Using the 1,000-day approach, SAPLING's Community Health Service Workers (CHSWs) have facilitated monthly awareness raising sessions with 14,908 PLW on the importance of early initiation and exclusive breastfeeding, infant and young child feeding, essential hygiene actions, and early childhood development. CHSWs also provide individual counselling to the PLW to support nutritional best practices and promote health services. CHSWs have also facilitated regular growth monitoring and promotion with 8,209 children under two and motivated approximately 16,000 children under five to participate in biannual Government Vitamin A Supplementation

campaigns. SAPLING motivates women to attend antenatal and prenatal care services at nearby clinic and supported the government to offer regular satellite clinic services in 21 remote locations, providing access to women who would not otherwise have been able to seek care. SAPLING has also facilitated capacity development sessions with 12,251 adolescent girls on life skills, nutrition and hygiene. The project saw significant

increases across key MCHN measures: between FY17 and FY20, Women's Dietary Diversity (consuming at least 5 of 10 food groups) rose from 60% to 95%, early initiation of breastfeeding rose from 37% to 83%, exclusive breastfeeding within the first six months rose from 70% to 86%, and the percent of children 6-23 months consuming animal source foods rose from 73% to 96%.

Additionally, SAPLING initially supported the repair of 59 water systems in 53 villages, enabling 9,182 individuals to gain year-round access to safe water. In response to COVID-19, the activity also constructed 27 new handwashing stations and repaired 24 water systems, increasing access to handwashing and clean water for an additional 18,786 community members. To promote WASH sustainability, SAPLING focused on capacity building of WASH institutions including Government of Bangladesh (GOB) WATSAN committees at upazila, union and ward levels, 100 village-level Water User Committees (WUC) and training of district Department of Public Health and Engineering (DPHE) repair technicians. SAPLING also provided WASH-in-schools training for high school teachers and almost 6,000 of the GOB's Little Doctors (peer educators in grades 3-5) to promote personal hygiene and nutrition in school and at home. Results reflect these efforts with women washing hands at five critical times rising from 7% to 33% from FY17 to FY20.

SAPLING strengthened local DRM structures including training 2,390 DRM volunteers in collaboration with the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society and Fire Service and Civil Defense and reactivating and strengthening operations of GOB Disaster Management Committees in all 24 unions, two pourashavas and five upazilas. As a result, SAPLING participants expanded their use of DRM practices, with both men and women implementing at least two risk reducing practices increasing from 42% to 93% between FY17 and FY20.