



SAPLING PROGRAM LEARNINGS & RESULTS: BREASTFEEDING SUCCESS STORY

BUILDING MOTHERS' CONFIDENCE AND COMMITMENT TO PRACTICE BREASTFEEDING AND OTHER ESSENTIAL NUTRITION ACTIONS

Misperceptions about breastfeeding can prevent ideal infant feeding practices, critical in achieving children's physical and cognitive development. For optimal child health, the World Health Organization recommends exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life, followed by continued breastfeeding with nutritious complementary foods for at least two years.

In Bangladesh and other low-resource settings, recommended breastfeeding practices are not always followed because of misperceptions among mothers, grandmothers and other community influencers, including the common misunderstanding that some women cannot produce a sufficient breastmilk supply and traditional beliefs about the importance of rice and other foods believed to positively influence a baby's growth and happiness.

These beliefs, combined with a lack of information and lactation support, and logistical barriers for women whose household or economic responsibilities require them to be away from their children, have discouraged women from practicing one of the most impactful behaviors to ensure healthy development: breastfeeding.

The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), a remote, mountainous region in southeastern Bangladesh, is home to over 12 different ethnic groups with limited access to information, services and nutritious foods needed to improve maternal and child health. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) supports the Government of Bangladesh to address these needs through a multi-sectoral Resilience Food Security Activity known as "Sustainable Agriculture and Production Linked to Improved Nutrition Status, Resilience and Gender Equity" (SAPLING). SAPLING is designed to foster sustainable change, working through government and community systems to improve gender-equitable food security, nutrition and health practices as well as resilience among vulnerable households and communities. SAPLING has worked with over 54,000 households in Bandarban District, equipping mothers and families with the knowledge and support to practice optimal breastfeeding, child feeding, maternal nutrition and care practices. SAPLING has also strengthened the capacity of government and traditional health practitioners to motivate women to practice ideal maternal and child nutrition and health behaviors. The following results have been achieved throughout the life of the project:

42,355

Individuals reached nutrition and health education (98% women)

82%

of mothers engaged in early initiation of breastfeeding within 1 hour of giving birth. This increased from 37% in FY 2017

86%

The proportion of exclusively breastfed babies in the area increased to

LAL RUAT'S STORY

Lal Ruat is now able to confidently explain to others in her household and community that exclusive breastfeeding reduces the chances a baby will die from common childhood illnesses, such as diarrhea or pneumonia, and can help speed up recovery of sick babies.

While attending cooking demonstration sessions organized by SAPLING to help women learn and practice locally appropriate recipes using nutrient dense, locally available foods, Lal Ruat learned more about how to prepare nutritious complementary foods to begin feeding her son after six months of exclusive breastfeeding. **SAPLING also promotes handwashing with soap at critical times and other safe food preparation and hygiene behaviors along with early childhood development practices to optimize nutrition and health outcomes.**

SAPLING has helped Lal Ruat raise a healthier and happier family, and she was grateful for this when she saw evidence of her son's physical development during growth monitoring sessions with her community health service worker. As a result of SAPLING's community mobilization efforts, 6,700 children received growth monitoring combined with nutrition and health counseling, including Lal Ruat's son. She shared, "exclusive breastfeeding has helped my child maintain a steady weight. I love seeing the 'green' appear during his growth monitoring sessions." She adds, "It gives me great pleasure when I can see the steady growth of my child."

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Photo: Nazmul Alam/HKI

"I didn't give only breastmilk and nothing else to my first two children. However, after I attended SAPLING sessions and learned about the advantages of exclusive breastfeeding, I followed this recommendation for my third child who was born in April 2017. He is doing well and growing big right in front of me. Before, I was not aware [of the benefits of breastfeeding] and only followed advice provided by elders. Now I realize that the traditional practice of giving water to new babies is not the best for them."

LEARNING HOW TO COOK VEGETABLES FROM THE GARDEN FOR NUTRIENT RETENTION



Photo: Meredith Jackson-deGraffenried/HKI