The USAID-funded Resilience Food Security Activity, Sustainable Agriculture and Production Linked to Improved Nutrition Status, Resilience, and Gender Equity (SAPLING), has engaged over 57,000 households across five sub-districts (upazilas) in Bandarban District of the remote Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) region of Bangladesh since October 2015. SAPLING’s goal of improved gender-equitable food security, nutrition, and resilience of vulnerable households is achieved by capacity strengthening of ethnic minorities, women, and youth to increase their agency in decision-making about their lives and communities. This process is fundamental for sustainable economic transformation and community well-being.

Before SAPLING

- Moderate to severe hunger were twice as high in female-headed households than in households with both adult males and females.¹
- Women were reported to earn less than men for the same job, particularly in day labor roles, and were found to be largely excluded from leadership roles in government, religious, social, and community-based committees.²
- Both men and women shared perceptions that women are subservient to men, with the man considered to be the head of the household and the primary cash-earner.³
- Women’s smaller body size and limited exposure outside of their communities meant that women were deemed less capable than men to perform income earning roles and make informed decisions.⁴
- 60% of women were achieving average dietary diversity, with an average dietary diversity of under 5 food groups. Women in households living below the poverty line were less likely to have minimum dietary diversity.⁵
- Women had less access to savings, healthcare and information than men.⁶

BRIDGING INEQUALITY

- SAPLING built access to and control of fundamental assets, including social and financial capital, and diversified livelihoods for women and their households.

- Group-based, adult experiential learning techniques in training sessions and activities equipped female participants with the technical skills necessary to produce nutritious foods for their families, earn incomes, make decisions, plan for production, safeguard the health of their families, and become leaders within their groups and communities.

- SAPLING’s interventions positioned women to directly address some of the barriers to their empowerment. These activities served to increase women’s visibility outside the home and improve their status as decision-makers, demonstrating their capacity to husbands and community members, and build long-term sustainable community development.

- Men’s groups tackled perceptions and norms that blocked women’s pathways to empowerment by engaging in facilitated discussions on business and livelihoods, a channel to discussing more sensitive topics, such as gender equality.

- SAPLING reached 10,620 adolescent girls aged 10-19 in FY20 through group sessions on issues such as menstrual hygiene, nutrition, and reproductive health.

KEY RESULTS IN FY20

- **97%** of the 46,685 homestead food production participants were women. They learn about improved agriculture production practices, production planning and management techniques, nutrition for themselves and their families, and other topics to increase resilience and food security. A total of **96%** reported applying one or more improved agricultural technology.

- **93%** of women engaged in at least two disaster prevention activities (a 22% increase over FY19 data) to protect gains to food and nutrition.

- **98%** of the 10,251 income generation participants were women working along the value chain from primary producer to negotiators, advocates, and business leaders. The opportunity to serve as Local Business Advisors and Market Committee Members - high-powered market actors – is essential to increase women’s financial independence and build social and political capital. **263 (96%)** of SAPLING’s 274 Local Business Advisors are women and **72%** are from ethnic minorities.

- **94%** of women reported being involved in decision making on when to sell produce grown (up from **70%** in FY19) and **99%** were involved in deciding what to do with the income generated from the produce sold (up from **77%** in FY19).

- **84%** of the 14,982 savings and lending group participants were women, creating access to financial services and increasing their absorptive and transformative resilience capacities and ability to invest in livelihoods opportunities.

- **83%** of new mothers reported early initiation of breastfeeding. SAPLING engaged 14,908 pregnant and lactating women in maternal and child health and nutrition activities, strengthening capacity to practice optimal infant and young child feeding, manage nutrition using a 1000-day approach, and ensure their children have the necessary vaccinations, treatment, and monitoring to prevent malnutrition and infection.

KEY RESULTS IN FY21

100% of women who were engaged in income generation reported undertaking market activities themselves.

WOMEN’S SELF-EFFICACY SURVEY, JULY 2021

- **90%** men and women surveyed from Mro, Marma, and Bengali groups
- 100% of respondents said women are now more confident, having participated in Family Nutrition Centers (FNCs)
- **99%** of respondents reported increased community support for women as income earners
- **90%** of respondents reported increased social support for women earning incomes