BACKGROUND

Adolescent girls (10-19 years) are particularly vulnerable to malnutrition, which could have lifelong impacts on their families, community and the economy. Poor nutrition status of adolescents also create an intergenerational cycle of malnutrition, adversely impacting the physical health of future generation as well as long term human capital in Bangladesh.

Adolescents experience high rates of malnutrition: 26% stunting, and 36% low BMI (Helen Keller International, 2014) in Bangladesh. This cycle perpetuates as over 50% of children born to girls 15 years old or younger are stunted. Statistics are worse in southern Bangladesh, particularly in Khulna Division, because the average age of marriage is 15.5 years. More than 8% of women experience birth intervals of less than 24 months and 32% of married adolescents aged 15-19 years do not use contraception (NIPORT, 2015). The prevalence of anemia in Satkhira among the adolescent girls is 55% (UN REACH, 2010). Previous research and interventions have proved that when the income of poor families enhanced through any means, this results in an increase on the age of marriage.

Helen Keller International is implementing “Improving Nutrition, Health and Livelihoods through Enhanced Homestead Food Production: A Strategy to Reduce Child Marriage in Rural Bangladesh” project, funded by International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Canada in Debhata Upazila, Satkhira District, to address these issues.

GOAL

To establish whether a gender-transformative, enhanced homestead food production (EHFP) model can improve household food and nutrition security, dietary diversity, income, and sexual and reproductive health (SRH) outcomes and delayed child marriage among Bangladeshi girls.

OBJECTIVES

1. Test the effect of an EHFP model on household food security
2. Assess the impact of household and community level interventions on adolescent dietary quality, nutritional status and the prevalence of anemia
3. Identify the EHFP income generation threshold that influences family decisions to delay child marriage
4. Identify the determinants of adolescent empowerment and participation in household decision-making through EHFP
5. Inform and contribute to evidence-based policy and decision making related to nutrition, health, income generation, SRH and delayed age of marriage.

GEOGRAPHIC COVERAGE
Debhat Upazila, Satkhira District.

HYPOTHESIS
Through the EHFP program and program interventions, we hypothesize that the prevalence of anemia will decrease by 20%, dietary diversity will increase by 15%, and the prevalence of marriage among unmarried adolescent girls in the intervention area will decrease by 20%.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
Two different approaches will be applied to identify the most effective way to address this problem. A group-based approach (the creation of adolescent clubs for girls aged 13 to 15 years) and a community-based approach (local community organization strengthening) will be adopted to change the detrimental norms responsible for early marriage.

STUDY DESIGN
A cluster-randomized controlled trial will be conducted in which 1200 girls (aged 13-15 years) are divided into 74 after-school Youth Clubs (36 clusters in each arm). They will participate in a 24-month program to sensitize women’s empowerment themes through hands-on workshops. All participants (control and EHFP groups) will be exposed to SRH, WASH, and IYCF, while those in the EHFP group (treatment arm) will also receive EHFP training and inputs intended to improve nutrient intake and provide an income source for the adolescent girls’ family.

DURATION
36 months, January 2020-December 2022

IMPLEMENTING AGENCY
Helen Keller International

RESEARCH PARTNER
Mount Saint Vincent University, Canada

FUNDED BY
International Development Research Centre (IDRC)
PROJECT BENEFICIARIES

Total Direct Reach
- Households 1200
- Adolescents 1200
- Parents 1200

Total Indirect Reach
- Households 25,000
- Individuals 125,000

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Participation in Enhanced Homestead Food Production + Nutrition + Gender Sensitization + Adolescent Activities

- Training on vegetable and poultry production
- Asset transfer (i.e., Chicken/Poultry shed)
- Agricultural inputs
- Nutrition + SRH education
- Gender Sensitization Session
- Parents awareness session on SRH, Nutrition and Gender
- Formation of adolescents club
- Community Stakeholder orientation

Increased production of nutrient rich food
- Increased household income
- Selling surplus produces
- Increased spending on nutritious food

Increased knowledge on Nutrition + SRH + Gender
- Consumption of nutrient rich food
- Increased household food security
- Increased consumption of nutrient rich food by households

Increased knowledge on negative consequences of child marriage
- Enabling environment with increased knowledge + Awareness
- Increased self efficacy and agency
- Increased participation in decision making

Improved nutritional status of adolescent girls
- Delayed Child Marriage

Increased Economic Empowerment

INTERVENTION COMPONENTS

i) Homestead Food Production
- On-farm livelihood activities training
- Homestead gardening
- Input support (seeds, fertilizer, etc)

ii) Nutrition & WASH Education for Adolescent Girls
- Essential Nutrition Actions
- Essential Hygiene Actions
- Adolescent clubs dealing with SRH

iii) Parent Awareness & Stakeholder’s Orientation Around Adolescent Decision Making
- Awareness sessions with parents
- Sensitize local influential stakeholders

iv) Gender Transformative Approach Fostering Empowerment & Decision Making
- Gender Transformative Approach (GTA) through Nurturing Connections©

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