

CME**Multi-Stakeholder Partnership in Nutrition: An Experience from Bangladesh**

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Abstract

Context and legitimacy: Bangladesh, a country with 160 million people, is among the 20 countries which have had major accomplishments in reducing child mortality and improving maternal health (Millennium Development Goal 4 and 5 respectively). The government of Bangladesh aims to transition into a middle income country by 2021, and is committed to reduce social discrimination, environmental degradation, physical insecurity, socio-economic-cultural vulnerability and to secure and sustain an annual rate of GDP growth of 10% from 2017.

Key Words

Malnutrition; Nutrition

Introduction

Malnutrition in Bangladesh, like in many other South Asian countries, has been an enigma and coloured with many different connotations. There is now greater recognition that it should be viewed as a slow onset disaster and achieving success in addressing malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies is a key challenge. Various research and studies show that Bangladesh ranked 57 in the Global Hunger Index, accounts for 6% of the global underweight problem. Over 75% of the population lives on less than \$2 a day and 29% live on less than \$1.25. Malnutrition in Bangladesh is still alarmingly high. The National Micronutrient Survey 2011-2012 suggests that like poverty; malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies have differential vulnerabilities. Women, people in the bottom two quintiles - 'poorest and poorer' and people living in rural and slum areas have very high rates of malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies. The survey shows that amongst children less than 5 years of age stunting is 32.1% (slum 51.1%), wasting is 19.3% (slum 20.3%) and underweight is 30.0% (slum 47.4%). Only 44% of young children receive adequate complementary food. Rice dominates the daily diet and per capita per day intake of rice is 416

gm. Poor dietary diversity and low intake of animal-source foods contributed to malnutrition and micronutrient deficiency. The intensity and complexity of this problem calls for collective efforts to fight malnutrition together. This paper deals with multi-sector and multi stakeholder partnerships which includes participation of key stakeholders like the community, businesses, government and civil society organizations in key thematic, policy and programmatic areas of nutrition.

The multi-stakeholder partnership model is based on the principles of a win-win situation, long term relations among the partners to share risks and rewards, exchange skills, converge in social, human and financial capital and technologies for enhancing delivery on nutrition outcomes. Bangladesh, as a pioneer in nutrition and development, has demonstrated few examples of multi-sector and multi-stakeholder partnerships engaging the government, businesses and civil society. The country has the potential to develop business opportunities of about \$2.2 billion in the food and food processing sector. The Bangladesh policy and program has the scope to mandate multi-sector and

multi stakeholder partnerships especially in areas of food security, nutrition and health.

In the multi-stakeholder partnership domain, the community remains the core and is central to the operation. Its success demands and depends on people's participation both in the demand and supply side of the intervention. It is also known that malnutrition is invisible and has long been a way of life for the poor and marginalised. Malnutrition, not being infectious and not being in the vote bank agenda, like other development agendas, has created little space for itself in the political domain. Inability to supply, access and utilisation of nutritious foods, a high level of exclusion, gender inequity, unequal power relations, poor governance, economic constraints, myths and misconceptions are key underlying causes that exacerbate malnutrition and micronutrient deficiency. Though herculean the tasks, Bangladesh has set few islands of excellence in multi sector and multi-stakeholder partnership.

Few islands of excellence: The list below, illustrates some cases of multi-sector and multi stakeholder partnership in nutrition.

Large Scale Food Fortification through the Universal Salt Iodization Program: A public business partnership model: One of the oldest nutrition programs, dating back to 1989, the Control of Iodine Deficiency Disorder (CIDD) Project under the Ministry of Industries involves almost 180 small, medium and large salt mills working in close partnership with government and with technical support from UNICEF, MI and GAIN. The National Micronutrient Survey 2011-12 reportedly showed that only 58% of households consume adequately iodized salt. With a target to achieve 90% coverage by 2016, the government, salt mills and development partners are working in tandem to achieve this result. On the partnership front, the participation of consumers, poor communities and producers is yet to realize its full potential. An analysis shows that from 2004-05 to 2009-10, income of the people increased by 59%, whereas the price of salt increased by 97%. Moreover, the regulatory monitoring and quality of the iodised salt remain a challenge. The perception has been changed against businesses largely due to these reasons. The successful partnership depends upon

consumer awareness, participation, affordability and accessibility to quality iodised salt by the poor.

Project Laser Beam (PLB): A business, civil society and community partnership: The partnership was unveiled in September 2009 by PLB founding partners; UN World Food Program, Unilever, Mondelez International Foundation (formerly Kraft Foods Foundation), DSM and the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) at the Clinton Global Initiative and later joined by BRAC, Consumer Action Bangladesh, Friendship, HKI, JITA and WaterAid. The objective was to implement both non-market and market-based solutions in a complementary way to effectively address child under-nutrition in the community. In a five year period, 12 interventions were implemented and they reached 2.48 million target group members across the entire country - including mothers and children during the first 1,000 days and the communities. The project demonstrated key achievements in reaching out the target group members by creating holistic solutions through food and micronutrients, water and sanitation, health and hygiene, food security and income generation programs. Although the partnership ended in September 2014, the partners of PLB will continue their fight against child under-nutrition by supporting the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement. While successful in demonstrating a business, civil society and community partnership in multi-sectors, there has been a challenge in securing buy-in from the policy makers and political leaders in this partnership.

Maternal Infant and Young Child Nutrition (MIYCN)

- **Home Fortification Program:** A private sector, civil society and community partnership: Since 2010, as a part of short and medium term solution to address the critical first 1,000 days of a child's life; GAIN has been supporting the distribution, compliance and consumption of micronutrient powder added to daily home-made meals built on promotion of exclusive breastfeeding and appropriate complementary feeding. Bangladeshi families use five ingredient sachets of a micronutrient powder called 'Pushtikona' - which celebrates the local food. The project builds health and nutrition capacity of community frontline health workers using a theory of women's empowerment and increases access to

better nutrition for hundreds of thousands vulnerable households across Bangladesh. Renata, one of the largest pharmaceutical companies in Bangladesh, supplies 'Pushtikona', which is sold both through regular pharmacy channels and the network of over 90,000 BRAC health volunteers across the country. The program has a very high level of engagement with the community, community groups and local government bodies and integrates social accountability, social mobilization and social sanction activities. However, the partnership with the government has been a challenge due to government's reluctance to support a business model in the home fortification program.

Large Scale Food Fortification through fortification of Vegetable Oil with Vitamin A:

A Public business partnership: Dating back to 2010, GAIN established a strong model of a multi-sector partnership in order to improve the nutrition status of the country through promoting availability of and access to vitamin A fortified vegetable oil. The program is being implemented through a formal partnership with the Ministry of Industries and local private vegetable oil refineries. In late 2013, the government made it mandatory to fortify all vegetable oil by enacting a law as a strategy for a sustainable solution. The passage of mandatory legislation without the buy-in of the local private refineries created tension between refineries and government. GAIN is catalysing actions to create a level playing field for the local businesses involved in the program and greater participation, accountability and demand of the consumers and community for a successful multi-sector partnership model in the country.

The Agriculture and Nutrition Extension Project (ANEP):

A civil society-business and community partnership: The Agriculture and Nutrition Extension Project (ANEP) has been supporting vulnerable families to make healthy food choices in southern Bangladesh since January 2012. The ANEP aims to sustainably raise agricultural productivity, promote effective market linkages and nutritional awareness to improve the nutritional behaviour of poor rural and urban households. ANEP is a partnership between International Development Enterprises (iDE), WorldFish, CIMMYT, International Rice

Research Institute, Save the Children International, CODEC, CEAPRED and BES and is funded by the European Union (EU). ANEP urban interactive nutrition education sessions aim to increase knowledge on maternal, adolescent and child nutrition and improve skills to support practice of appropriate age-specific feeding behaviours. This is complemented by the promotion of seasonal production of vegetable varieties, which are both high in vitamins and micro-nutrients and commercially viable. To bring nutritious vegetables to market, ANEP has developed durable commercial linkages between rural producers and markets serving low-income urban consumers using a Participatory Market Chain Approach (PMCA). Data from the project suggests that using targeted nutrition education in combination with agricultural inputs and rural-urban market linkages delivers synergies which can improve nutrition behaviours amongst the most vulnerable.

Integrated Community-led School Nutrition:

Redefining multi sector partnership: In 2012, GAIN supported an innovative and pioneering community-led integrated school nutrition program providing a homemade hot cooked meal with the objective of increasing school attendance and improving nutrition of children aged 5 to 11 years. The program was implemented by BRAC and Banchte Shekha. An effort was made to integrate the program with other sector and program elements such as participation of the members from mother's club, transparency and public accountability, provision of de-worming, safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene. It used foods and commodities grown locally at household level thus strengthening local value chain and agribusiness. The local producers, vendors, retailers and agents in the value chain participated in the program making it a truly multi-sector partnership. The program demonstrated key results like strengthening local value chain, change in hunger and malnutrition status, reducing school dropout, increasing attendance and gaining a very high level of policy and political will. With a plan to replicate this program, the government of Bangladesh assigned both WFP and GAIN to develop a National School Feeding and Nutrition Policy.

Defining appropriate policy through multi-sector partnership: National Strategy on Prevention and Control of Micronutrient Deficiencies, Bangladesh (2014-2023): The National Micronutrient Survey 2011-12 witnessed public discourse on a need for a national strategy on the prevention and control of micronutrient deficiencies with technical support from GAIN, icddr, UNICEF, MI and other development partners. The strategy consultation process led by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare witnessed a multi-stakeholder participation. The draft strategy includes the role of business, including social marketing, among other key components and actions. This signals a landmark achievement in the multi-sector partnership model in the policy development process.

Bangladesh has more examples of multi-stakeholder partnership models. GAIN in partnership with the government of Bangladesh, private rice mills and their association is implementing a research pilot on Zinc enrichment of rice at the soaking process. To improve the nutritional and social status of female garment workers, GAIN is working to roll out a pioneering pilot on access to nutritious foods in partnership with garment industries, civil society organisations and garment workers. There is a growing momentum on the partnership with trade and chamber bodies. The participation of business representatives in roundtables and discussion series on nutrition demonstrate Bangladesh's commitment. The country has witnessed the pilot of health insurance models, contract farming and many single commodity cooperatives to demonstrate multi-stakeholder partnership models. There are discourses on integrating technology promotions, livelihoods, food security and family farming approaches in nutrition to maximise multi-sector partnership and encourage participation of local entrepreneurs and agents in the value chain.

Key features and practices in multi-stakeholder partnership

The multi-stakeholder partnership model in nutrition is an evolving concept. Largely catalysed by civil society organisations; the partnership is yet to realize its full potential. It is going through a process of evolution and devolution being influenced by the products, programs and enabling conditions. Some of the key features of this partnership are as follows:

- Public interest supersedes business interest: For the purpose of public interest and public accountability, various policies and legislations are made to ensure proper accountability and transparency. Development organisations play the role of 'insider' and 'outsider' and catalyse actions, sometimes against the will of business sector.
- Civil society as a catalyst for change: The partnership is catalysed mostly by civil society organisations, development partners and social activists. The business sector and community are yet to fully participate in the partnership process.
- Multi sector partnership has potential for multi-stakeholder partnership: In case of PLB and the School Nutrition Program, it has been observed that due to inherent nature of multi sectoral approach there has been need and relevance for multi-stakeholder partnership. This demonstrates that for a successful multi-sector partnership there is a need for an integrated approach and program focus elements including change in social position, nutrition condition and creating an enabling environment.
- Single product partnership model: The businesses engaged in nutrition partnerships use single product or a single commodity as a vehicle to address missing micronutrients. This is visible in case of vegetable oil, iodised salt and 'Pushtikona' micronutrient powder. The focus on single product or commodity, which is largely viewed as product and project driven approach, at times misses program, process, participation and policy elements and singles out the business sector.
- Redefining the scope of the business sector in nutrition: In a country, where the primary producers are also consumers and key trade agents in the value chain, their role in business cannot be overlooked. In the community-led school nutrition program, the 'grow-sell-consume' approach was successfully applied to build a successful multi-sector partnership model involving key agents in the trade channel and value chain.
- Debate on Aid and business model to provide sustainable solution influences the role and relations in partnership: The role of business is

undermined due to the overall emphasis on a food based approach to nutrition and state accountability. The rationale for business and market based approaches emanates from the requirement for a sustainable and cost effective solution. This discourse has largely influenced the partnership, participation and relation. In a few cases, the country has witnessed public delivery models for ultra-poor and simultaneously market based models for the people in upper strata thus providing space for both public and private sector working parallel.

- **Centrality of operation:** Micro centrality: The partnership with community is seen as prime and central. At the same time, in many cases the culture of silence, diluted governance and public accountability mechanisms leave the poor as passive recipients. In order to realise the full potential of the partnership; it is necessary that the community become an active participant in the partnership process from the beginning.
- **An evolving governance process:** The partnership structure and process is seen as more informal and vertical. This is due to the evolving partnership relationship. In many cases, it starts with civil society community partnership and then business sector and public sector participate in the process. In some cases, public partnership is seen in the replication and scale up phase. Vertical partnership at times creates scope for unequal power relations. However, some of the civil society nutrition platforms and public-business partnerships have demonstrated governance structures and included democratic election processes to elect office bearers.

Scope of multi-stakeholder partnership:

Articles 15 and 18 (1) of the Bangladesh Constitution mandates for basic necessities; including food, raising the level of nutrition and improvements in public health. The Health Population Nutrition Sector Development Program (2011-2016) articulates mainstreaming of nutrition and provides opportunity for multi sector partnership. Honourable Prime Minister and Chairperson of BRAC are the member of the global SUN lead group. The government of Bangladesh has a Multi Stakeholder Platform on SUN which steers partnership in nutrition. With a large presence of hundreds of development partners, SUN

Civil Society Alliance and a national civil society platform on nutrition, called Nutrition Working Group (NWG), regularly meets and defines the agenda. Although, these platforms have very limited direct partnership with businesses and community, they still provide enormous potential for to ensure public accountability. The Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Food and Ministry of Industries through various programs engage in nutritious food and public business partnership. A national policy and strategy on multi-sector partnership with a focus on rural health was laid down with financial and non-financial incentives for businesses. A Public Private Partnership Advisory Council (PPPAC) is chaired by the Prime Minister. The presence of community level volunteer and programs to breaking passivity and making nutrition as a public movement will unleash the potential of the community to a partner in change.

The rapid urbanisation, growing middle class and early adopter consumers provide an opportunity for businesses in nutrition. The \$2.2 billion food processing sector in Bangladesh grew on average 7.7 percent per annum between fiscal years 2004/05 and 2010/11. The beverage industry more than doubled during the same period to \$29 million, showing an average growth rate exceeding 8 percent per annum. This creates opportunity for business sector in nutrition.

Business is engaged in fortification of edible oil, salt, rice and other product value chains, medical products, vaccines and technologies. Currently, the local production meets about 97% of the overall local demand for drugs and 100% of that for the essential drugs. It provides an opportunity for public business and community financing mechanisms and risk-pooling systems that are nearly non-existent except in small pockets of NGO innovation.

The patronage to a 'food based approach' and finding a solution through homemade and home grown culturally specific foods by food and nutrition rights activists, key policy makers and political leaders provides an opportunity to recognize that often business sector partners are local business people, entrepreneurs, small and mid-size businesses. The discourse on food and nutrition being part of fundamental rights is gathering momentum. As a result, new and unusual partners like trade unions, cooperatives and quasi-judicial

bodies are joining nutrition platforms and debates. It is opening up scope and opportunity for new alignments, power relations and emergence of nutrition in public domain. The partnership space is likely witness many unusual roles and relations in multi sector, multi stakeholder partnership through campaigns and movements.

Several opportunities, but challenges persist:

The growing patriotism and many historical reasons significantly influence the perception on multi-national and transnational companies and business organizations.

In recent years, Bangladesh witnessed active Quasi-judicial bodies and growing PILs (Public Interest Legislations) and a demand for right to food and nutrition. Many perceive the recent legislations like, Breast Milk Substitutes, Infant foods; commercially prepared complementary foods for children and related accessories (Regulation of Marketing) Act, 2013, The Safe Food Act, 2013, Vitamin A Enriched Edible Oil Act, 2013 and Drugs Control Amendment Act-2006 as inhibitors to business sector participation in nutrition.

The business sector needs a political economy where the predictability is very high. Since 2010, Bangladesh witnessed much turmoil and turbulence including arson, violence, shutdowns and blockades. That has affected business and influenced their priorities. Consumers, civil society activists and human rights champions see business pursuing a commercial agenda that normally ignores people at bottom of pyramid. The all-pervasive adulteration and unsafe food, diluted public accountability and governance, increase in the price of essential commodities and absence of multiple multi-sector partnership models compound this perception against the business sector.

Many policy makers and political leaders guided by people's agenda take the side of the civil society activists and engage in pro poor policies and legislations that negatively affect business interest. The overlapping approaches to nutrition (with > 10 ministries involved) affect the synergy and convergence between business, civil society, and public and community partnership. Technological obsolesce and low capacity utilisation, regulatory monitoring, complying with food safety, lack of adequate research and development, lack of

institutional capacities pose as stumbling blocks for business sector participation in nutrition.

So far, donors have shown some interest in nutrition, but the country is yet to witness a high funding priority for multi-stakeholder partnership in nutrition. In many cases the absence of a level playing field for various stakeholders, shared understanding on multi-stakeholder partnerships, sustainable models and demand side interventions create unequal power balances and affect the partnership.

Conclusion

The need for multi-stakeholder partnership in nutrition emanates from a better understanding and addressing of the underlying and structural causes, complexities and an urge to find a sustainable solution to malnutrition and micro nutrient deficiencies. Although the country has been maintaining a liberal policy of an open economic market, it needs political will to leverage multi-sector partnerships in nutrition. The public private partnership Advisory Council (PPPAC) chaired by the Prime Minister needs to be active and open to integrate the community nutrition agenda. The country needs predictability and consistency in terms of policies, programs and legislations for business sector participation. Encouraging well intended businesses to a level playing field with their representation, participation, reward and recognition are preconditions for success. The hostility and tension between the business sector, civil society activists and public sector needs to be redressed. Active involvement of local government can play an effective role in strengthening partnership governance at local level. The future lies with socially responsible businesses, being conscious about the role of the community and a recognition that business sector partners are also local business people, entrepreneurs, small and mid-size companies.; The sector has to recognise the partnership with quasi-judicial bodies, consumer rights organisations, local government bodies, cooperatives/producer's collectives, trade unions, and people's networks together with business, public and community partnership.

The business and market based actors have a social responsibility to provide an enabling environment that can ensure consumers and community have access to safe, culturally acceptable affordable

nutritious foods. In addition, in order to access appropriate technologies and agricultural knowledge which provide a range of alternatives for achieving better diet and nutrition outcomes, continuous research and development in respect of new technologies are needed. The partners can work in tandem in this direction.

The inherent quality of multi stakeholder partnership lies in the fact that the governance becomes more accountable and responsive to people's needs when it imbibes qualities of business sector for a holistic development. It can complement the partnering process which always makes multiple stronger than single.

A successful partnership requires common goals, complementarity, convergence and mutual self-help. It needs a clear defined role, horizontal integration, equal power relations and capacity of the community to bargain collectively. The public sector needs to provide an enabling environment in terms of investment opportunity, policies and legislation. The businesses can contribute innovative approaches and create economic opportunities for the poor. The community can be an active participant in the entire process. Implementing both market and non-market based approaches with diversified delivery and distribution models and a Market Intervention Operation (MIO) with a 'Price Band' are the key models for the future. Bangladesh undoubtedly needs more integrated and pro poor models, political stability and improved governance to achieve more growth with the same level of investment and many models of multi-stakeholder partnership in nutrition.

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