

# MULTISECTORAL APPROACH FOR NUTRITION IN BANGLADESH: A SAGA OF CIVIL SOCIETY'S ROLE

In Bangladesh, the Civil Society Alliance for Scaling Up Nutrition (CSA for SUN) persists since 2012. It is a member-based alliance where members are drawn from different organizations that are working to address nutrition specific and sensitive issues at the national and sub-national levels. CSA for SUN has already gained credibility in helping move forward national nutrition programs through advocacy and its national and subnational presence. The Alliance is the official affiliate of the Global Scaling up Nutrition Movement working to influence policy into practices and share multi-sectoral program experiences with the Bangladesh National Nutrition Council (BNNC), Institute of Public Health and Nutrition (IPHN), and the UN SUN network to combat malnutrition in Bangladesh.

The objective of the Alliance is to: 1) create a strong, coordinated, and vibrant civil society platform to establish a strong civil society appearance within the SUN network; 2) provide technical support towards the development of nutrition strategies and the National Plan of Action for Nutrition 2 (NPAN2); and 3) lobby to prioritize the nutrition agenda and mobilize key nutrition actors to promote and support maternal, adolescent and child nutrition.

In 2015, Bangladesh endorsed the National Nutrition Policy (NNP), which recognizes the relevance of a multisectoral coordination<sup>1</sup> and preparation for a costed plan for nutrition. Together with the government and the UN, civil society organizations (CSO) generated evidence from the ground on multisectoral engagement process, operational experiences at different layers, connecting different government sectors to recognize their role in promoting and supporting nutrition activities, and translating strategies for improved nutrition outcomes.



*Rountable discussion on Multisectoral Approach by CSA for SUN*

## **Establishing multisectoral platforms to advance the nutrition agenda**

CSOs attempted to establish a multisectoral platform at the lowest administrative unit called union, and then to the upazila (sub-district), to engage multiple government agencies, sensitize them on nutrition, and encourage joint efforts for nutrition so as not to be completely reliant on just a single ministry. In 2012, CSOs started their journey at the subnational level and within three to four years, they were able to demonstrate intermediary impact and share these results with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoH&FW).



*Consultative workshop for the development of Operational Guideline for Nutrition for the multisectoral platform.*

<sup>1</sup> Bangladesh National Nutrition Policy 2015, Object 5.5: Strengthen multisectoral programmes and increase coordination among sectors to ensure improved nutrition



*BNNC Director General and MoH&FW Additional Secretary joined the workshop on operational guideline.*

Following the recommendations in NNP 2015, NPAN2 was formulated under the leadership of MoH&FW and participated by relevant government agencies, UN, and CSOs. Given the dismal situation of nutrition in Bangladesh, it was acknowledged that massive multi-sectoral efforts are required to reduce high malnutrition rates.



*Training on multisectoral nutrition with senior government officials at the district level*

NPAN2 could be implemented more effectively if existing development partners and CSAs support IPHN and BNNC. CSOs offered to develop a Terms of Reference for the Nutrition Coordination Committee's implementation of multisectoral nutrition programming nationwide using country experiences and lessons learned.



*Launching ceremony of the Participatory Multisectoral Annual Nutrition Action Plan 2019-2020 in Sunamganj with the planning minister, Mr. MA Mannan, MP.*

With support from the BNNC, MOH&FW, and the government, CSA for SUN was able to develop an operational guideline for the multisectoral platform, which also named district-level platforms as District Upazila Nutrition Coordination Committee (DNCC) and those in the subdistricts as Upazila Nutrition Coordination Committee (UNCC).



*Workshop on online M&E system development attended by the Nutrition Coordination Committee*

### **Developing M&E system for the multisectoral platforms**

After the annual multisectoral plans were formulated, the BNNC led the process in developing a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system for the multisectoral platforms. In order to deliver nutrition-related services, coordination among government agencies is dependent on a unified, systematic and centralized information flow. This will enable the DNCCs and UNCCs to implement, monitor, and review the progress of their nutrition action plans, and the BNNC to regular monitor the Committees' performances. CSA for SUN developed and proposed a digital monitoring system for DNCC and UNCC. Following rigorous consultations with relevant government agencies and the SUN network, the M&E web portal for the committees was conceptualized, tested, and finalized.

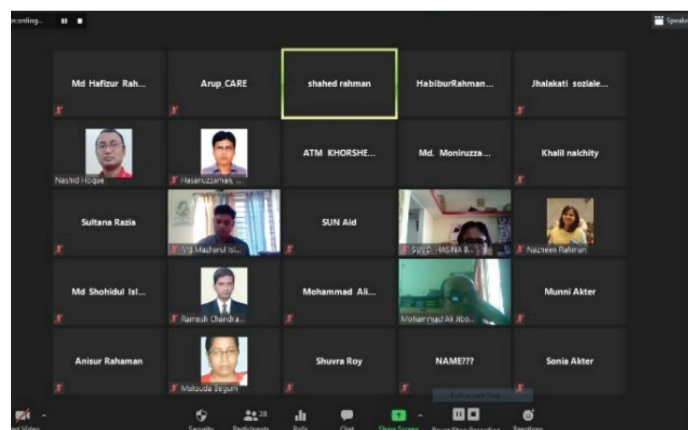
To successfully use this M&E system, maintenance and support are required to cover all ICT-related concerns such as the server administration, continuous system monitoring and troubleshooting, and operating the whole system smoothly. With this tool, the Nutrition Coordination Committee is expected to be functional, vibrant, and accountable to improving nutrition in Bangladesh's district and sub-district levels.

### **Building capacity for advocacy during COVID-19**

When COVID-19 hit, CSA for SUN improved the



capacity of more than 200 members in order to contribute significantly to the government's COVID-19 response committees. CSA for SUN trained them how to disseminate key messages around COVID-19 and lobby for the inclusion of poor and very poor populations in social safety nets to help address their acute financial crisis. CSA for SUN organized a virtual training attended by 84 members from Rangpur (23-24 August 2020), Khulna (26-27 August 2020), and Barisal (7-8 September 2020).



Webinar on nutrition advocacy during COVID-19 organized by CSA for SUN for Alliance members.

### Combating misinformation amidst Covid-19

Nutrition-related activities in Bangladesh were severely affected by the pandemic and flagrant misinformation is prevailing. To help address this, CSA for SUN conducted awareness raising activities in communities to counteract superstitions, confusion, and misconceptions about COVID-19 prevention. The campaign was effectively carried out through the Masranga Television, poster and leaflet distribution, and Miking in the community.



In areas where face-to-face events are allowed, CSA for SUN carried out trainings on advocacy and nutrition governance for alliance members.

In addition, nutrition awareness activities were also done to inform people how to boost their immune system and the role of health facilities to help nutritionally vulnerable groups like pregnant and lactating women, children under 5 years old, and adolescents. During the pandemic, their needs were largely ignored. Therefore, CSA for SUN conducted miking, leaflet, and poster distribution of COVID-19 information in 219 unions, 10 municipalities, 45 Upazillas and 3 city corporation under 9 districts. The campaign reached 1,301 health facilities, 4,472 service providers, 13,320 pregnant women, and 10,920 lactating women.



CSA for SUN organized a roundtable discussion on the impact of COVID-19 on Food and Nutrition Security: Immediate policy and strategic actions through multi-sectoral approach.

### Policy advocacy on investment to combat Covid-19 and promote nutrition

During the Observation Breastfeeding Week, CSA for SUN organized two webinars on sustainable and universal coverage of breastfeeding and nutrition advocacy. Held on 16-17 August 2020, the event was attended by 16 organizations and five government policy makers (e.g. donors, UN, USAID, UNICEF, Breastfeeding Foundation, and others organizations).

CSA for SUN also organized a roundtable discussion with the Daily Prothom-Alo on the impact of COVID-19 on Food and Nutrition Security: immediate policy and strategic actions through multi-sectoral approach. Held on 10 December 2020, this was attended by 15 organizations and policy makers.