Adapting food-based strategies to improve the nutrition of the landless: A review of programmatic challenges in HKI’s Homestead Food Production program in Bangladesh

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Abstract
Helen Keller International-Bangladesh’s homestead food production (HFP) model is a food-based strategy to improve the micronutrient intake of individuals, increase household food security, and advance women’s empowerment. Individuals in ultra-poor households with minimal land access are among the most food-insecure and malnourished in Bangladesh. Recognizing the urgent nutritional needs of these 36.5 million landless people, HKI Bangladesh has been adapting its HFP model to reach this marginalized population.

The standard HFP intervention includes gardening, poultry production and nutrition behavior change communication. Targeting HFP to the landless ultra-poor in Bangladesh requires modification of this package to focus on technologies (such as rooftop or floating gardens) that maximize yields and focus on nutritionally rich varieties that can be produced on micro-plots. Given their limited production capacity and immediate income needs, interventions for the ultra-poor require interventions that include skill-building and income earning opportunities linked to agricultural production, such as training mobile seed sellers or community-based vaccinators. Intensive behavior change communication and nutrition counseling is essential for nutrition outcomes. Communication approaches and messages, however, need to be tailored to address the specific nutritional needs of the targeted, ultra-poor community.

Using available literature and datasets from HKI’s 20-year history of HFP in Bangladesh, this paper will briefly review evidence of HFP’s nutritional impact on the land-constrained. The authors summarize programmatic challenges to working with this group, and propose modifications to ensure that the most marginalized can derive equitable nutrition benefits from this food-based approach.

Key words: Ultra-poor; landless; Bangladesh; dietary diversification