



CLP Impact Series

## **Improving Nutrition in the Chars**

### **The CLP's Contribution**



## **Chars Livelihoods Programme**

Reducing Extreme Poverty on the Riverine Islands of North West Bangladesh



# Improving Nutrition

The CLP's Contribution



## Nutrition in the Chars

Women and children living in the *chars* are typically burdened with undernutrition. Mothers are usually short, underweight and suffer from anaemia. Such conditions have an impact on their children's nutrition, as undernourished mothers often give birth to low birth weight (less than 2500g) babies. Undernutrition also makes mothers more prone to infectious diseases and affects their long term working potential.

Many children in the *chars* are at risk of undernutrition before birth and have a low life expectancy. Indeed, children born from undernourished mothers are 20% more likely to die before the age of five (UNICEF, 2007). Affected by anaemia, stunting and wasting, undernutrition in children leads to long term cognitive and physical impairments.

### Causes of undernutrition

An array of factors can cause undernutrition in the *chars*. These include:

- Poor socio-economic conditions
- Poor dietary intake
- Poor dietary diversity
- Inappropriate feeding practices
- Reduced breastfeeding

- Diseases and infections
- Low access to clean water and sanitation
- Infrequent use of flip flops
- Poor hand washing practices
- Lack of nail trimming

It is important to note that undernutrition is not only about food quantity and quality. Access to basic health services as well as access to clean water and sanitation have a great impact on preventing undernutrition.

## Measuring Nutrition in the Chars

Nutritional status can be measured in a number of ways. The WHO recommended method is non-invasive and involves measuring a person's height and weight (anthropometry).

The CLP monitors children under five years of age and mothers' nutritional status using both anthropometry and by measuring haemoglobin concentration (a measure of anaemia) from a finger prick of blood. Specific information is reported on:

Mothers	Food Utilisation
Maternal Weight Body Mass Index (BMI) Haemoglobin concentration	Height-for-Age Weight-for-Height Weight-for-Age Haemoglobin concentration

The anthropometric measurements for children under five provide additional insight into the different levels of undernutrition.

Height for Age	→	Stunting	→	Chronic undernutrition
Weight for Height	→	Wasting	→	Acute undernutrition
Weight for Age	→	Underweight	→	Chronic and Acute undernutrition

## The CLP's Interventions to Improve Nutrition

The CLP aims primarily to improve the nutritional status of its 67,000 core participant households through a combination of direct and indirect nutrition interventions.

Indirect activities include:

- improving access to clean water and sanitation
- providing social development training on nutrition and WASH
- promoting homestead gardening
- providing an income generating asset

As part of its health interventions, the CLP also undertakes a few direct nutrition activities. When a child is found to be undernourished, the CLP responds with the provision of deworming tablets and micronutrients including iron and folic acid (IFA).

From early 2013 the CLP will be rolling out additional activities, through a 'Direct Nutrition Project'. This project will aim to improve the nutritional status of the CLP's core participant households especially pregnant and breastfeeding women, children under five and adolescent girls. Specific activities will include regular nutrition counselling, hygiene promotion, as well as the provision of deworming tablets and IFA supplements, all free of charge.



## The Impact of the CLP on Nutrition



In order to understand the impact of the programme on nutrition, the CLP outsourced the analysis of its data which had been collected from a panel sample of mothers and their children over several years. The broad findings are presented below according to maternal and child nutritional status.

## Maternal Nutritional Status

The impact of the CLP on maternal nutritional status has shown mixed results.

The results showed that mothers have gained weight and increased their BMI over time. This upward trend indicates an improvement in maternal nutritional status.

The results also revealed a consistent decrease in haemoglobin concentration levels. This suggests an increase in the percentage of mothers found to be anaemic over time.







## Child Nutritional Status

The impact of the CLP on child nutritional status has also shown mixed results.

The results revealed an increase in mean haemoglobin concentration levels, suggesting a reduction in the percentage of anaemic children over time.

However, the results highlighted a marked increase in prevalence of underweight and wasted children. The data also showed that among children there were variations in levels of stunting over time.

## Moving forward

These results revealed the need to improve the nutritional status of *char* dwellers. More efforts need to be made to reduce anaemia among mothers and reduce the percentage of underweight and wasted children. Moving forward the CLP will be implementing its 'Direct Nutrition Project' with the aim of improving nutritional outcomes of the programme.

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The Chars Livelihoods Programme works with extreme poor households living on island *chars* in North West Bangladesh. The Programme aims to improve the livelihoods, incomes and food security of at least one million extremely poor and vulnerable women, men and children living on the *chars*.

The CLP provides a package of interventions with the aim of improving social and economic assets, reducing environmental and economic risks, and increasing access to markets and services. For further information on the CLP's impact on nutrition, please visit the Publications page of our Website. The most relevant documents are:

Mascie-Taylor, N. (2012) *Analysis of the CLP's Nutritional Monitoring Database*.

This brief is part of the CLP's Impact Series, which outlines the CLP's impact across key thematic areas. So far, these briefs have addressed Food Security, Female Empowerment and WASH. The last forthcoming brief in this series will address Livelihoods.

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Learn more at:  
[www.clp-bangladesh.org](http://www.clp-bangladesh.org)

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