

A woman in a blue lab coat and a patterned dress is walking on a dirt path in a rural, tropical setting. She is holding several brown folders. The background shows lush greenery, including palm trees and banana plants. A large red circular graphic is overlaid on the image, framing the woman and the text.

**ADVOCATING FOR NATIONAL
COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKFORCE
STRATEGY IN BANGLADESH**



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“ Community Health Workers are vital and essential to uphold the community based health care interventions and Bangladesh National Strategy for Community Health Workers from 2019-2030 is a milestone in the health workforce development of the country. The strategy is a comprehensive tool and guide for service providers, policy makers and health program evaluators. Save the Children will continue to provide technical support to Government in their commitment to drive Universal Health Coverage for all, in line with the SDGs. ”

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Summary

Save the Children advocated for and lead the development of a Community Health Worker Strategy 2019-2030 in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh child mortality has dropped from 65 deaths per 1000 live births in 2007 to 45 deaths per 1000 live births in 2017-2018 ^[1]. This huge reduction in numbers was only possible due to the contribution of the Community Health Workers (CHWs) who are the backbone of the entire health system, working tirelessly on the frontline, providing health services to the most vulnerable groups of population residing in the remote wetlands of Bangladesh. Commonly referred to as 'doctor apas', as a gesture of respect and love from the community, these frontline workers comprise of almost 50% of the total health workforce.

Even after stellar successes in combatting epidemics during floods, diarrheal disease control, high routine immunization and family planning coverage through extensive community engagement, there was no particular policy guidelines developed for the frontline workers. The Bangladesh Government developed a Health Workforce Strategy in 2015 which provided a framework of key interventions. However, it severely lacked detailed information on CHWs modality of working, deployment, definition etc. which led to lack of coordination, uncertainty and inefficiency in strategic direction of work.

Through continuous advocacy efforts over the last 3 years, Save the Children in Bangladesh and its' partners have developed the National Strategy for Community Health Workers. Developing and maintaining strategic partnerships, working through coalitions, influencing policy makers at national and sub-national level and providing technical assistance were some of Save the Children's key contributions in this advocacy win.

The Bangladesh National Strategy for Community Health Workers (2019-2030) was launched during the 2nd international symposium for CHW held in November 2019 in Bangladesh and disseminated across all 64 districts. The 3-year advocacy agenda was funded by USAID through Improving Community Health Workers Project. Every activity in the project was budgeted and tracked through donor disbursement indicators. Moving forward, Save the Children's role will be to provide technical support to the Government and other agencies in integrating this strategy into the Bangladesh National Health Workers Strategy as a supplementary document.

[1] National Institute of Population Research and Training (NIPORT), and ICF. 2019. Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey 2017-18: Key Indicators. Dhaka, Bangladesh, and Rockville, Maryland, USA: NIPORT, and ICF.

History of Community Health Workers in Bangladesh

Bangladesh developed a cadre of CHWs in the 1960s. The country has had stellar success of Control of Diarrheal Diseases, Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI), Family Planning (FP) with extensive community engagement and combatting epidemics during three consecutive floods in 1988, 1998 and 2004.

Nevertheless, the health status of the poor and vulnerable in Bangladesh remains challenging even today, and families may suffer from financial catastrophes. Communicable diseases, poor maternal and child health and malnutrition are responsible for high levels of preventable morbidity and mortality. The country is facing an epidemiological transition to chronic and non-communicable diseases, along with environmental hazards from air and water pollution, injuries, and unhealthy behaviors such as tobacco use and violence which require urgent interventions from the CHWs in creating demand, influencing behavioral change and generating supply.

Health Structure in Bangladesh

Bangladesh has a health system involving a three-tier service delivery system from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MOHFW) with a comprehensive network of public facilities at tertiary, secondary, and primary levels, although in practice it is quite pluralistic and unregulated. There is a mix of public, private, NGO, and traditional informal provider. Each part of the system has largely distinct sources of financing, although the bulk is focused on Government service delivery. In order to be consistent with the notable progress towards the SDG targets and reduce mortality rates for under five in Bangladesh, an effective case management approach through trained CHWs is required. To improve the access, utilisation and equity of care, the MOHFW has taken several initiatives aiming to provide community clinics (CCs) with a catchment population of 6000-8000 people in rural areas to deliver essential service packages for women, children and the poor. The CCs have been built and are staffed with front line health workers who play a very vital and essential role to uphold the community based healthcare interventions.

Lack of a Community Health Workers Strategy

In Bangladesh, the total number of healthworkers both in Government and Non-Government organization combined is over 150,000. Given the different nomenclature of positions, the capacity and level of knowledge for different health workers is difficult to aggregate. Although their magnitude and depth of work, particularly in reducing mortality rates there was no specific policy guidelines developed for the frontline workers. The Bangladesh Government developed a Health Workforce Strategy in 2015 which provided a framework of key interventions and supportive actions to address health worker's management issues and challenges. However, it did not articulate community health workers' definition, scope of work, modality of working, career development, posting or deployment structure. Leading to uncertainty in the strategic direction of health workforce in Bangladesh.

TIMELINE

2012- 2017

- Save the Children's technical expertise in health system strengthening through CHWs through different programs.

2018

- Collaboration with Government for Developing the National Strategy for CHW.
- National Steering Committee developed for developing National Community Healthworkers Strategy

2019

- Approval of Position Paper and Road Map by National Steering Committee
- Draft Strategy Development
- Consultative Workshops for feedback on draft strategy
- Approval of National Strategy for CHWs by National Steering Committee
- Approval of National Strategy for CHWs by National Steering Committee
- The Bangladesh National Strategy for Community Health Workers (2019-2030) was then launched during the 2nd international symposium for CHW

2020

- The strategy to be costed after development of action plan for implementation at scale.



HOW DID SAVE THE CHILDREN CONTRIBUTE TO THIS ACHIEVEMENT?

Partnership Building for Consensus Development

The ability to collaborate and partner with key public health actors and civil society organizations has been critical in the entire advocacy process. Our partners range from local authorities to the national government, which helps to overcome the bureaucracy of public institutions. We played a critical role in the development and endorsement process by convening a multi-stakeholder platform by working with the entities within the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare which include Directorate General Family Planning and Directorate General of Health Services, as service delivery is operated by both structures at different levels.

Save the Children formed strategic partnerships with other establishments such as World Health Organization, UNICEF, UNFPA, USAID which shared the same objectives to work cohesively rather than following a competing modality. The media and journalists were also actively engaged in highlighting our advocacy work. By working cohesively, it was possible to generate breakthrough solutions and therefore have sustainable impact for children, their families and communities.

By working in smaller and bigger capacity, Save the Children proposed the concept of developing a national strategy for CHWs to the Ministry. Once we had approval and commitment from the Ministry, the National Steering Committee for Community Health Workers were brought onboard together with UN bodies, technical experts, public health practitioners, academicians, technical experts



Providing Technical Support to Government

Save the Children in Bangladesh maintains a good working relationship with the MOHFW and the several departments working under it. They have over 15 years of experience in providing technical support in health system strengthening through CHWs through their multiple project interventions and work on the ground through community mobilization, local government engagement, creating linkages between health facilities and health workers, case management of preventable diseases at community level, mobilizing resources for the community workers.

Save the Children worked in partnership with different professional bodies in building capacity of public health staff and played a catalytic role in deploying a national consultant and working within a broad multi-stakeholder platform to develop the first draft of the strategy. Then steadily facilitated several consultations and feedback, eventually leading to the development of the strategy.



Working at National and Sub-National Level

Save the Children organized events at national and sub-national levels with policy makers and politically influential people and organizations. These events presented opportunities to discuss Save the Children's multi-dimensional advocacy approaches, presenting recommendations and lessons learnt. Soon national-level dialogues on health services were promoted to influence policy change.



The health sector and other development partners initiated meetings in various capacity to develop Position Papers and Terms of References on CHW. The multi-stakeholder's platform was broken in smaller working groups to work on particular sections of the strategy. A series of consultation at national & sub-national were undertaken through which recommendations were collated and compiled. Finally, a draft strategy was developed and disseminated in 6 divisions of Bangladesh through divisional meetings.



Engaging and Influencing Policy Makers

Developing a strategy is bureaucratic which makes policy change lengthy cumbersome, especially where there is involvement of Government departments, NGOs and civil society organizations involved. Save the Children and its' partners strengthened collaboration with particular ministerial members to expedite the advocacy process which enabled them to contribute at different stages of policy development at national and global level. They promoted national-level dialogue on health services which aimed to increase the capacity of the Ministry of Health to change policies at national and local level.

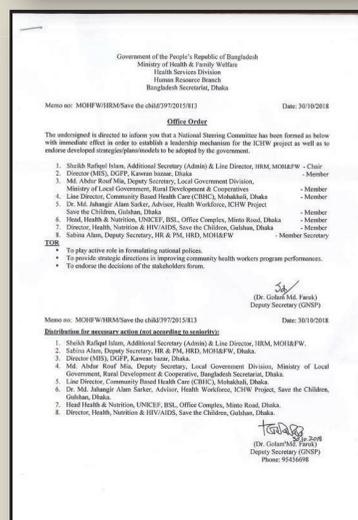
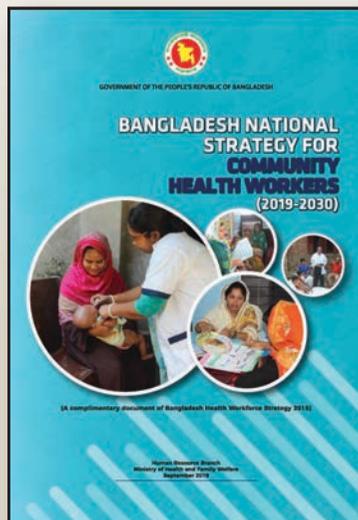
Results

The **Bangladesh National Strategy** for Community Health Workers developed for 10 years denotes a wider understanding, structure, framework and strategic direction for the CHWs. The strategy was disseminated in over 500 districts in Bangladesh with the corresponding Government health managers. The Government has ownership and commitment on implementing the strategy at scale which will have a high impact for children. The strategy will ensure greater health outcomes at the community level primarily on maternal and child health.



EVIDENCE

- Bangladesh National Strategy for Community Health Workers 2019-2030
- Launch of the National Strategy for Community Health Workers at the 2nd International Symposium for Community Health Workers
- Endorsement Letter from the Minister, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare
- National Steering Committee Approval letter
- Working groups strategy plans
- Meeting minutes from sub-national level
- Links to media coverages



IMPACT ON CHILDREN

The development and approval of this strategy ensures an authorized guideline for community health workers and their ways of working. This will contribute to the efforts of reducing maternal and child mortality in the country with increased access to basic primary health care. Mortality declines can be associated with improved coverage of effective interventions to prevent or treat the most important causes. Programmes to ensure high coverage of vaccine preventable diseases, treatment of diarrhoea and acute respiratory infections, implementation of immunization programs and delivery of newborn health interventions will be more effectively undertaken by community health workers, which is crucial for reductions in child mortality.

COSTS

Funds from USAID through Improving Community Health Workers project of USD 2 million dollars for 4 years.

NEXT STEPS

Moving forward, Save the Children's role will be to provide technical support to the Government and other agencies in integrating this strategy into the Bangladesh National Health Workers Strategy as a supplementary document. Furthermore, we will work towards developing a costed action plan and implementing the new policy nationwide. This technical assistance will be both thematic and managerial at the system level.



CASE STUDY: Sheuli save many more lives in Bangladesh

“I felt anxious and helpless as there was nobody to guide me. I did not know how to make the community aware of basic health issues. They did not know about the importance of vaccination for children,” Sheuli Rani Das recalls her experience when she started her career as a frontline health worker 8 years ago.

Save the Children through its’ Improving Community Health Workers Project developed Community Health Workers Strategy, built capacity of staff by providing training and technical assistance on community-centered health service models, working in teams by engaging community and local government to improve demand for services and transform health centers in order to ensure better care for the community and expanding coverage of services.

“Doctor apa (sister), when will you come to our neighborhood? I want to vaccinate my child. This is the love and respect I get every day. It feels great to see communities becoming more aware about health of their children and themselves,” says Sheuli. The immunization rate in her catchment area has risen to 100%. The general health awareness of the community members has also improved.

ANNEX 1

Save the Children has provided technical support in health system strengthening through CHWs through their programming. The ICHW, Mamoni MNCSP, Mamota, Tackling Pneumonia in Bangladesh, Shongzog, and SNL was particularly important. The project details are mentioned below.

ICHW (Improving Community Health Workers Program Performances through Harmonization & Community Engagement to Sustain Effective Coverage at Scale)

The project is implementing activities like a Build-Operate-Demonstrate model by institutionalizing CHW program. Then activities related to testing developed strategies, and plans will be implemented in the district and finally developed strategies and plans will be demonstrated and proposed to be endorsed by the government. The ICHW project has created a District Learning Laboratory (DLL) to inform the strategy development process, reinforcing strategic recommendations including harmonizing job descriptions and demonstrating the success of innovations

Project duration: March 2016 to March 2020

Funded by: USAID

USAID's MaMoni Maternal and Newborn Care Strengthening Project

USAID's MaMoni Maternal and Newborn Care Strengthening Project (MaMoni MNCSP) through Save the Children and consortium partners works to advance learning, expand and scale up effective maternal and newborn care (MNC) interventions to substantially improve outcomes for mothers and newborns in Bangladesh. The project supports the Government's Health, Population and Nutrition Sector Program to achieve its goals of significantly reducing maternal mortality and neonatal mortality by 2022.

Project duration: April 2018-April 2023

Funded by: USAID

Maternal-Neonatal Health Care and Family Planning (Mamota) Project

Mamota project works to improve utilization of MNH-FP services to reduce maternal and newborn mortality rate in underserved communities of Sylhet district by increasing availability of quality MNH-FP services, improving quality of MNH-FP services at the facility and community level and increasing awareness and strengthen support of local government institutions.

Project Duration: January 2018-December 2020

Funded by: Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA)

Tackling Pneumonia in Bangladesh

Bangladesh is implementing a project for improve survival of children under five from Pneumonia-Known as Pneumonia Centenary Commitment. It builds upon our previous work in Bangladesh and focuses on strengthening the systems and standards for prevent, protect and treat Pneumonia of children. The project supports the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MOHFW) to engage and leverage support of Government and other stakeholders to strengthen IMCI program implementation which is renamed as National Newborn Health Program (NNHP) and IMCI that will result in improve survival of children from Pneumonia.

Project period: January 2019 – December 2020

Funded by: Save the Children UK

Shongzog

Shongzog aims to increase use of postpartum family planning (PPFP) among First Time Parents (FTPs) by embedding an additional activity into large-scale USAID-funded project "MaMoni" that already reach FTPs. In Bangladesh, Shongzog will develop, test, scale, and evaluate a "program enhancement" which could improve community based discussion groups for mothers and pregnant women to address FTP's unique needs and embed information about birthing and strengthen facility based delivery to postnatal care to address barriers specific to FTP's uptake of PPFP prior to discharge from the facility.

Project Duration: September, 2019 – September, 2023

Funded by: Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

Saving newborn lives (SNL): Bending the curve

Accelerating Progress in Newborn Survival and Health

The SNL Project's goal is newborn survival and health improved through equitable and effective coverage of high impact newborn services and practices institutionalized at scale. The objectives of the programmes are to advocate for and mobilize commitment, resources, and integration for accelerated implementation of newborn health programmes. To identify, promote, and support the generation of evidence essential to improve newborn survival and health at scale. Provide state-of-the-art technical assistance and catalytic resources to integrate evidence-based newborn care into health systems and programmes. Monitor implementation and outcomes of newborn health programmes to promote accountability and action. Manage knowledge to improve global and country level newborn policies and practices.

Programme duration: January 2013 – December 2017 (SNL 3); Since 2001 SNL is working (SNL 1 & SNL2)

Funded by: Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation



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