



With the support of LEAN project, May Hla Koi Marma learned how to grow and cook nutritious food for her daughter Nua Wong.

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“I AM NOW PREPARING SAFE FOOD FOR MY CHILDREN AND ME”

The “**Leadership to Ensure Adequate Nutrition**” (**LEAN**) project operated in the remote Chattogram Hill Tracts in Bangladesh from September 2018 to February 2024. Co-financed by the European Union, this 11 million Euro undertaking was implemented by a consortium of United Purpose, Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition and Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation in collaboration with three local partners. A capitalization conducted in February 2024 confirmed that the project reached more than **347,000 people**, in particular women in the reproductive age, adolescent girls and children below five years. Respondents consistently reported an enhanced awareness about the importance of a balanced diet. They told that they increased and diversified their nutrition.

LEAN project at a glance

Overall objective: To contribute to improved maternal and child nutrition in the Chattogram Hill Tracts

Target area: 3 districts, 18 Upazilas

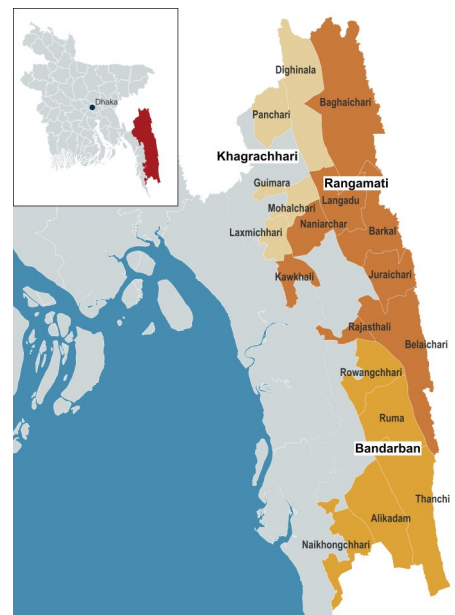
Target group: 82,000 pregnant and lactating mothers, 100,000 children <5 years, 100,000 adolescent girls

Budget: 11.5 million EURO

Financial Partner: European Commission

Implementation period: 9/2018 - 2/2024 (66 months)

Consortium: United Purpose (lead), Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition, Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation, Caritas Bangladesh, Integrated Development Foundation, Jum Foundation



THE CONTEXT

The Chattogram Hill Tracts belong to the most remote areas of Bangladesh. More than 1.6 million people from 13 ethnic groups inhabit the three districts. The area is characterized by livelihoods depending on traditional farming practices, difficult access, sparsely spread governmental services, long distances to markets and a complex governance structure. Poverty rates are higher than in the plains. Malnutrition is widespread resulting in stunting, wasting and underweight of children below five years.

LEAN BASIC INTERVENTION MODEL

In response to a call of the European Union, the consortium developed a simple but systemic concept to address malnutrition that can be summarized under the title “Policy – Pull – Push”.

Policy: In its first result area LEAN worked towards an enhanced delivery of relevant government services through improved coordination, allocation of budgets for nutrition and influencing policies.

Pull: The second result area aimed at creating demand for an improved nutrition through awareness building. As means served campaigning, interventions in schools and facilitating adolescent clubs. The most important intervention was “Women Business Centers” (WBC) that served as hubs to spread the message about nutrition but also sold hygiene products and direct nutrition inputs. They also served as sales-points for agricultural products.

Push: Through fostering selected value chains, linking producer groups with input and sales markets, LEAN promoted the supply with nutritious food. The main implementation mechanism was the introduction of Local Service Providers (LSP) who facilitated linkages between producers and public and private actors.

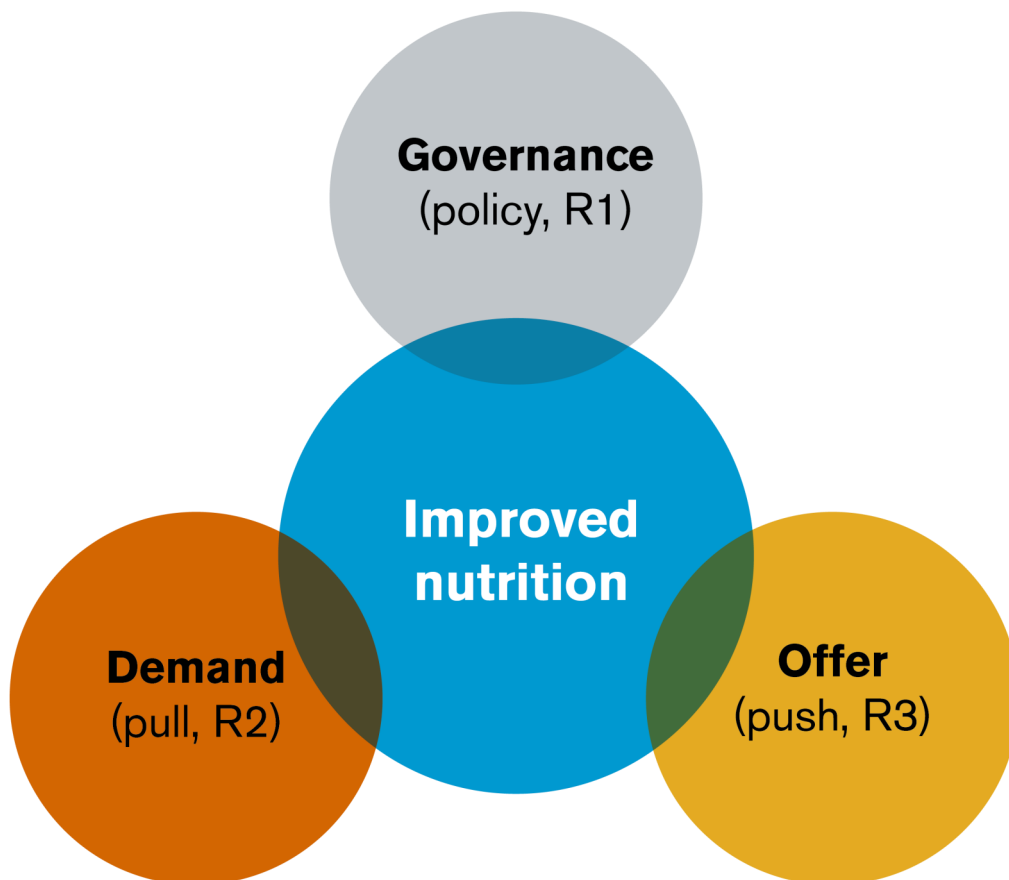


Figure 1: The basic concept of LEAN Project to improve nutrition in Bangladesh’s Chattogram Hill Tracts. Result 1 (R1): nutrition governance; Result 2 (R2): nutrition outreach; Result 3 (R3): nutrition-sensitive value chains



Jesmi Chakma is a member of a Women Business Center. She is running a petty trade shop that integrated hygiene articles into the assortment and that offers a range of additional services, such as tele-medicine.

THE IMPACTS OF LEAN

The capitalization team interacted in 30 meetings with more than 160 representatives of most of the stakeholders in two of the three LEAN districts. All of them confirmed the **relevance** of LEAN. They equally affirmed that **awareness** for nutrition has increased significantly.

The target group consistently reported **behavior changes related to nutrition** such as the number of meals per day, a more balanced diet, and increased consumption of protein and vitamin rich food items. Mothers of newborns now feed the colostrum milk, follow exclusive breast feeding and introduce after six months complementary food. Equally they mentioned **changed hygiene practices**, such as more frequent hand washing. Respondents consistently observed a reduced disease incidence among their children.

The improved food habits happened because of

- increased awareness,
- increased income
- improved economic conditions.

The driver for the **increased income** were enlarged and improved production and sales in three nutrition

sensitive value chains: vegetables, fruits and native chicken.

The project's **coverage** was impressive. By January 2024 LEAN reached **245,967** women, adolescent girls, and children below 5 years by nutrition related interventions. **101,507** households were linked to markets. This results in a share of 39% of the total population reached. The primary stakeholders talked about an **improved access to and increased demand of government services**. This can be attributed to an actively created **interlinkage between public and private service provision**.

ENABLING MECHANISMS

The three enabling mechanisms introduced by LEAN were 1) newly created multi-stakeholder platforms (MSP) at union level, 2) the Women Business Centers for health-related matters and 3) the Local Service Providers (LSP) in agriculture and livestock production. Finally, the capitalization team interacted with many surprisingly outspoken female primary stakeholders and met with strong **female leaders** with an entrepreneurial spirit.

SUCCESS FACTORS

The people with whom the capitalization team interacted consider the LEAN project as a success. The team identified the following factors contributing to it:

- LEAN's simple **intervention model**, which is based on a food systems approach based (see figure 1).
- The thematically **complementary consortium** set up including three locally based implementation partners. GAIN was the globally well recognized partner for governance aspects; UP assumed the responsibility for the overall management and had a good track record reaching communities, whereas Helvetas was known for its inclusive market systems approach.
- The **conscious involvement of local stakeholders and their perspectives** through local implementing organizations, who employed local staff speaking the local languages. They in turn capacitated local multipliers. Together they were able to provide services at primary stakeholders' doorsteps.
- The project acted as a **catalysator to boost the provision of public services**. Instrumental to this end were the coordination with and the capacity building of government representatives on all administrative levels. The interlocking of public and private service provision (WBC, LSP) helped to foster demand for government services.
- On the lowest administrative level, LEAN introduced a new coordination mechanism on nutrition, so called **Multi-Stakeholder Platforms**. Under the leadership of the Union Parishad Chairperson workers of the involved government departments, village headmen, elected ward representatives and civil society representatives meet to coordinate nutrition matters.
- LEAN created 164 **Women Business Centers**

(**WBC**). Their committee members have been trained in nutrition, hygiene, health care, entrepreneurship and leadership. The centers source hygiene articles such as sanitary pads, water filters and Direct Nutrition Inputs (e.g. iron tablets) from an outlet at district level. They also serve as sales outlet for agricultural products. WBC that are smartly located and that managed to integrate these activities into a wider commercial activity such as a petty trade shop may survive, for others the economic sustainability beyond the project's life is questionable.

The **Local Service Providers** are advanced farmers that have been trained in nutrition, advanced and climate smart production technologies and entrepreneurship. The 1,080 LSP are the heart of an approach that links producer groups with input and output markets and the government extension services. Since they sell agricultural inputs (e.g. vegetable seeds) or provide paid services (e.g. chicken vaccination) they are likely to continue their activities.



Moitree Tangohanaya is a Local Service Provider. With the help of the LEAN project she introduced modern vegetable growing techniques to her fellow farmers, which allowed them to improve their diets and income from the sale of surplus production.

Outlook

LEAN is an extraordinarily successful development intervention improving the nutrition of women and children in a systemic manner. As any development project, LEAN had to overcome multiple challenges – just to mention the remoteness of the project area and the pandemic COVID-19. The overall positive results suggest that LEAN offers learnings and best practices for future interventions on the development of food systems in difficult geographic areas.