

BANGLADESH PROMISING PRACTICES FOR TRANSFORMING WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' NUTRITION

Introduction

The strong link between gender equality and nutrition requires an integrated approach for sustainable transformation. The [Gender Transformative Framework for Nutrition](#) (GTFN) highlights the importance of addressing gender inequality to improve the nutrition and health of women and girls. This document presents the outcomes of three projects implemented by World Vision in Bangladesh, all demonstrating the successful integration of gender-transformative approaches into the design and implementation of nutrition programmes. Each project was evaluated using the GTFN matrix, focusing on the [seven key domains](#) of gender-nutrition transformation: equitable food systems; gender and adolescent-responsive health systems; equitable education; economic inclusion; safe and equitable water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH); social protection; and resilience to environmental and political crises.

This guide highlights promising practices from three projects: Bangladesh Initiative to Enhance Nutrition Security and Governance (BleNGS), Nutrition Sensitive Value Chains for Smallholder Farmers (NSVC), and Right2Grow. By showcasing promising practices and making recommendations for integrating gender-transformative approaches into future projects, these promising practices for gender-nutrition transformation could be scaled up.





Bangladesh Initiative to Enhance Nutrition Security and Governance (BleNGS)

The [BleNGS project](#) (2018–2023) aimed to improve nutrition through agriculture-based interventions, while integrating nutrition education, behaviour change, and women's empowerment. BleNGS supported livelihoods for vulnerable women with agricultural inputs and livestock, emphasising high-value nutritious crops and strengthening market linkages for farmers. The project also promoted gender equality by engaging men through community groups. BleNGS enhanced nutrition in health systems by incorporating nutrition education into home visits for adolescent girls and pregnant and breastfeeding women, as well as supporting growth monitoring and promotion for children under five. BleNGS addressed the GTFN domains of equitable food systems, gender- and adolescent-responsive health and nutrition systems, equitable education, and economic inclusion.

Promising practices

- **Gender- and adolescent-responsive health and food systems for women's empowerment:** The project supported community health systems in better understanding and addressing the needs of adolescent girls and pregnant and breastfeeding women. Initiatives included home visits, community nutrition promoters, adolescent girls' nutrition clubs, adolescent-led theatre-based awareness programmes, and nutrition-sensitive agriculture interventions. These efforts facilitated behaviour change and the transformation of social norms, and resulted in a 19.5% increase in exclusive breastfeeding rates and a 33% increase in women's participation in household nutrition decision-making.
- **Engaging men in gender equality:** The MenCare approach is a group-based learning model that promotes men's involvement in caregiving. Couples and other caregivers, such

as grandmothers, play a vital role in tackling unequal gender norms and eliminating barriers to household decision-making and nutrition. The BleNGS project held 14,847 MenCare sessions, reaching over 10,000 participants to increase agency for women.

- **Women's participation in governance:** BleNGS implemented [Citizen Voice and Action](#) groups in 46 community health clinics, advocating for improved government and health service provision. As a result, 141 more women and girls joined community clinic governance groups, increasing female representation by 6%.

Lesson learned: Further programming is needed to engage men and promote women's participation and leadership in national systems and programmes to achieve widespread implementation and acceptance of changing gender norms.



Nutrition Sensitive Value Chains for Smallholder Farmers (NSVC)

The [Nutrition-Sensitive Value Chains for Smallholder Farmers](#) (2017–2023) project focused on improving the nutrition of smallholder farmers, particularly women and their households, through value chain development and increasing market access, livelihoods, and income. The project also focused on household dietary diversity and women's empowerment in decision-making, as well as healthcare seeking behaviour and improved infant feeding practices. This project addressed the GTFN domains of equitable food systems, nutrition education, economic inclusion, and gender-responsive health systems.

Promising practices

- **Market access for women:** NSVC created market linkages that prioritised female farmers, improving their income and ability to purchase nutritious foods. As a result, women farmers' income increased by 40%, enabling them to afford nutrient-rich foods and increasing their decision-making power related to finances.
- **Integration of WASH and health:** The project integrated care-seeking and education on nutrition and WASH, leading to a 13% increase in food consumption for pregnant women, a 10% increase in women attending at least four antenatal care visits during pregnancy, and a 20% increase in household handwashing practices. These improvements contributed to gender transformation with shifting gender norms around women's health and well-being.
- **Inclusive training programmes:** NSVC provided gender-sensitive training for farmers to support equitable and peaceful relationships between husbands and wives. These sessions resulted in reductions in domestic violence, increased agency for women, greater financial decision-making power for women, and higher male participation in domestic activities.

Lessons learned: Establishing market linkages for women at different stages, initially creating formal business relationships with input dealers involving company representatives, can enhance their economic empowerment. Introducing savings strategies within female producer groups can enable sustainable investment in crops.





Right2Grow Project

[Right2Grow](#) (2018–2025) aims to achieve zero undernutrition and ensure universal access to basic WASH services. The project emphasises a community-led approach, focusing on strengthening women’s capacity as advocates, and amplifying the voices of the most vulnerable populations. This project addresses the GTFN domains of equitable food, WASH, and health systems, economic inclusion, and social protection.

Promising practices

- **Community empowerment:** Right2Grow invests in community-based organisations to collect data, share stories, and hold government officials accountable for the quality of nutrition and WASH service delivery. These efforts have resulted in a 20% increase in WASH service coverage.
- **Civil society involvement to reduce malnutrition:** The project fosters partnerships between civil society organisations, the private sector, and government authorities to address undernutrition through an integrated, multi-sectoral approach. Coordination with civil society has already contributed to a 15% reduction in malnutrition.
- **Gender inclusion:** Right2Grow ensures that women are full partners in decision-making processes by empowering them as community advocates and leaders and recognising their pivotal role in improving household nutrition and WASH access.

Lessons learned: Community and women’s empowerment are crucial for accountability and sustainable improvements in nutrition and WASH service provision. Multi-sectoral coordination improves the effectiveness of gender-sensitive interventions addressing undernutrition.

Conclusion and recommendations

Integrating gender-transformative approaches into nutrition programmes requires a multifaceted strategy to address economic, social, and political barriers to gender equality. These projects from Bangladesh highlight the importance of engaging men and communities in meaningful ways and building strong partnerships to enhance women’s access to and participation in local health, WASH, food systems, and governance. The following recommendations, based on these promising practices, can be scaled up to further gender and nutrition transformations in other contexts.

Key recommendations

- 1. Integrate nutrition education:** Promoting nutrition through food, WASH, or health systems is a cost-effective way to integrate nutrition education into ongoing interventions, such as producer groups, WASH service provision, and antenatal and postnatal care services. Continuous education on equitable food distribution, exclusive breastfeeding, and the nutritional needs of pregnant women is essential at the household level.
- 2. Engage men in gender-equality efforts:** Including men in efforts to increase gender equality is essential for sustaining progress. Programmes like MenCare have proven to be effective in educating men and changing behaviours, but they require follow up and continuous learning to sustain social norm shifts. Impact can be sustained by conducting refresher MenCare sessions, identifying successful MenCare groups to act as ambassadors in the community, and involving key local stakeholders to become MenCare promoters, including religious and local leaders and other caregivers, such as grandmothers.
- 3. Integrate male engagement into nutrition-related activities:** Interventions to engage men should be integrated into nutrition-related activities, such as agriculture producer groups, which was key to the success of MenCare in BleNGS.
- 4. Scale up inclusion of adolescent girls in nutrition programming and leadership opportunities:** Leverage the potential of adolescents as change agents and their strong desire for ownership and responsibility. Adolescents have demonstrated a high uptake of positive practices, including peer educators within adolescent clubs, adolescent-led advocacy on social norms such as preventing child marriage, improvements in nutrition knowledge, and uptake of services such as adolescent iron folic acid supplementation.
- 5. Expand opportunities for women's leadership:** Ensure women's participation in community decision-making processes, and in food, health, WASH, and education systems. Empowering women to be advocates on behalf of their communities fosters sustainable change in gender norms and social systems.
- 6. Strengthen community-driven accountability:** Formalise community-driven accountability and monitoring systems to improve the quality of nutrition and WASH service delivery. Continue to build and strengthen partnerships across sectors to sustain the momentum of gender-transformative initiatives.

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