



NEWSLETTER
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**RESILIENT FOOD
SYSTEMS FOR A
NUTRITION SECURE
COMMUNITIES IN
BANGLADESH, INDIA
AND NEPAL**



PREFACE

Nutrition Smart Communities Creating Impactful Changes with Climate-Smart Inclusive Food Systems.

Whatever the era is, agriculture will continue to be the basis of livelihood and a prime source of safe and nutritious diets. Therefore, it becomes important to know how to diversify production and farming systems, which can improve access to diverse diets and address all forms of hunger and malnutrition.

The reasons for the poor state of farmers could be many. Whether there is a minimal growth of crops or a fear of natural hazards or a case of inaccessible facilities or lack of training; the truth is that one who grows food for all, often receives no proper nutrition for self and family. Nutrition Smart Community is an initiative of Welthungerhilfe to promote Sustainable Integrated Farming System (SIFS) in Bangladesh, India, and Nepal. The program helps farmers to improve their access to diversified diets.

Our farmers specifically women smallholders work hard to grow healthy and diversified crops. Ironically, numerous farmers are unable to get access to appropriate nutrition. When we say 'Nutrition', it is not just about consuming food to satisfy the appetite. Instead, it refers to consuming the important ten food groups through regular dietary habits. Setting the food systems right and making them climate-smart, inclusive, and accountable with the help of sustainable agriculture is a challenge that Nutrition Smart COMMUNITY has undertaken.

Participatory training and micro-level planning for farmers have generated confidence and resilience among them. SIFS has been developed by following the core principles of nature like collaboration, co-existence, and energy recycling. It has integrated techniques like soil and water conservation, energy security, rainwater harvesting, cropping sequence etc. for better management of space and utilization of time by increasing cropping intensity and decreasing fallow periods. SIFS is planned and implemented with the participation of farmers, frontline workers, and civil society representatives in active collaboration with the Government and local governance bodies.

The program has demonstrated results as it has helped the farmers to increase their income and reduce seasonal migration by providing options for self-sufficiency. Women and children are now consuming the minimum acceptable diets. There is a growing interest and recognition for this evidence-based and sustainable model.



What is a Nutrition Smart Village?

- An informed village that understands 'nutrition' in its practical terms and takes appropriate steps to address them. It is a village where –
- There is no hunger and food insecurity.
- All families are aware about the importance of 'First 1000 days- window of opportunities', for healthy children and healthy mothers.
- Community is aware of the linkages between agriculture, natural resources, WASH, income and nutrition education with nutrition.
- Every woman in the reproductive age group and adolescent children consume at least 5 food groups out of 10 on a regular basis.
- Every child receives home cooked balanced diet in appropriate frequency and consistency.
- An active village committee which promotes interconnections between agriculture, natural resources, WASH, nutrition, and protection of natural habitats.
- Families grow and buy safe, seasonal and local produce. Communities drive the local 'haat' or market by creating the demand for safe and environment friendly products.
- The community value uncultivated foods and traditional recipes.
- Every family has access to safe drinking water.
- Every family maintains safe sanitation and hand washing practices.
- Communities are aware of the government schemes and entitlements and can make service providers accountable.





Towards Realising the Goal of Nutrition Security through Sustainable Integrated Farming Systems

Good nutrition has the power to unleash human capital potential and supercharge demographic dividends. It can increase growth, productivity, and GDP. The return on investment in sustainable nutrition is significant. For one dollar invested in nutrition, there is an average return of sixteen dollars. The first 1000 days of life starting from conception to two years of age are critical – these are the days of embryonic and foetal growth and development of multi-organ functions along with cognitive and higher brain functions.

In the South Asia region, 16.9 percent population faces hunger, and the region houses the highest number of undernourished (NoU) – more than 330 million. Similarly, 40.6 percent of the population was found moderately or severely food insecure in 2021. Three-quarters of preschool-aged children with micronutrient deficiencies live in South Asia (99 million) followed by sub-Saharan Africa (98 million), or East Asia and the Pacific (85 million). Over half (57%) of non-pregnant women of reproductive age with micronutrient deficiencies live either in East Asia and the Pacific (384 million) or South Asia (307 million). The rising anaemia, obesity and overweight indicate the double burden of malnutrition- a broken food systems. Sustainable Integrated Farming System (SIFS) is a strategic fit for South Asia and rest of the world to nourish the undernourished and transform production and farming systems.

Inclusive and Integrated Farming System - for a Sustainable Dietary Diversity

Nutrition Smart CommUNITY promoted by the Welthungerhilfe (WHH) is a purpose-driven program that supports rural communities in responding to the multifaceted causes of hunger and malnutrition. It adopts Sustainable Integrated Farming System (SIFS), an approach that combines diverse themes and functions like food, nutrition, energy, livelihood security, and climate change adaptations. Nutrition Smart CommUNITY program is operational in malnutrition and hunger hotspots and targets the most marginalised. The multisectoral malnutrition-free Nutrition Smart Villages are islands of excellence and generating interest in the continent of Africa, including Ethiopia in East Africa, Malawi in Southern Africa, and Sierra Leone in West Africa.

Purpose

Purpose 1: Achieving a resilient, inclusive, and accountable food system that can promote sustainable integrated farming system deeply aligned with country visions and UN SDG-2

Purpose 2: Develop culture and context-specific, data-driven and evidence-based models potential for scale-up and replication.

Purpose 3: Building an institution of excellence that can set agenda and engage in breakthrough research.

Sustainable Integrated Farming System (SIFS)

Developing home-based nutrition gardens focusing on integrating crops-trees-aquatic system-bird-livestock so that all the resources are optimally used to increase dietary diversity, reduce cost in food production, consume safe food, and increase income through marketable surplus. The approach ensures improving natural resources, like forest etc., around the village to include uncultivated food in the die

Farmer Field School (FFS):

Nutrition Smart CommUNITY follows Farmer Field School (FFS) concept, under which, farmers from the selected villages are provided trainings on Sustainable Integrated Farming System (SIFS). These farmers demonstrate it on their own farms and nutrition gardens; and train other farmers who are interested in replicating the farm design. For effective crop planning and resource management, the farmers are supported with farm planning process.

A capacity-building process is done through FFS on the resource farmers' field, taking that field as the field school, following peer teaching, and action-reflection-based non-formal methods with a tentative skill-based curriculum.





Bangladesh, India, and Nepal- Demonstrating Islands of Excellence

Nutrition Smart CommUNITY is actively contributing to 460 villages in the most vulnerable regions of Bangladesh, India, and Nepal. The communities are taught to take up multi-level approaches and initiatives for leading a healthy and nutrition-secure society.

Scale and Outreach: Country-wise information about SIFS

Country	Number of SIFS Farm Owners			Villages
	Total	Male	Female	
Bangladesh	550	295	255	110
India	1062	905	157	200
Nepal	553	496	57	103
Total	2165	1696	469	413

The Impact

Embedding participatory planning and monitoring mechanisms, **Nutrition Smart CommUNITY** programs have successfully *diversified both, production, and farming systems to include poultry, fishery, dairy, and horticultural crops, which has improved access to diversified diets.*

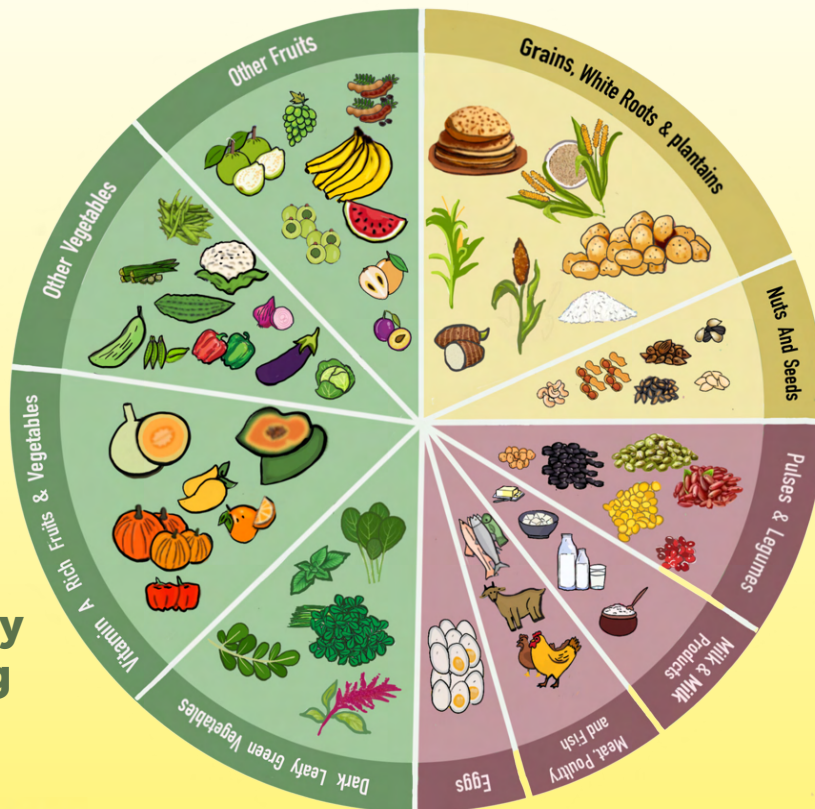
We have demonstrated impacts that are evidence-based and data-driven.

- 70% of women of reproductive age consume ≥ 5 food groups per day.
- Minimum acceptable diet (MAD) among children aged 6-24 months: Bangladesh - 41%, India - 31%, Nepal - 12%
- Households aware about their entitlements: Bangladesh - 35%, India - 66%, Nepal - 72%

Food-insecure rural communities in the selected areas have reduced chronic and acute malnutrition through the systematic and effective scale-up of evidence-based solutions. With the help of systematic behaviour-change campaigns, children and women are made aware to consume diverse diets and adopt healthy behaviour.

Ten Food Groups

Choose at least 5 groups a day to be strong & healthy.



Immunity Boosting Foods

Half of your daily diet should be vegetables and fruits

Energy giving foods

Eat more than 1/3rd cereals and grains in your diet daily

Body Building foods

Eat 1/3rd pulses and legumes and 1/3rd milk and milk products and/or eggs/meat/fish in your diet daily

SIFS Outcomes:

- Produce from the garden and farm increases consumption of food groups in the daily diet.
- Dependence on the market for green leafy vegetables and fruits decreases; savings are used to buy other food from the 10 food groups.
- Average food availability from nutrition garden and farms increases by 3-4 months.
- Families received increased income from excess production.
- Purchase of unsafe food and fast food from the market by communities reduces considerably and more fresh fruits and vegetables are consumed.
- Strengthens linkage of resource-poor families with Government schemes- agriculture, horticulture, fisheries, animal husbandry permaculture, Krishi Vigyan Kendra, agriculture farms/university, etc.

Our Stories of Change- Hearing from People's Voices

Bangladesh: Sonali Chakma is a 42-year-old farmer who lives in Shantipur village of Kobakhali union of Dighinala Upazilla, Khagrachari. Due to her keen learning attitude and efforts, Sonali got SIFS model established on her own farm on land covering 20 decimals of area. The farm focuses on promoting a nutrition garden through multi-food groups.



Today I have become self-sufficient and most of the villagers adopted organic production technology and increased income. This makes me happy.



Nepal: At present, Madhu Kant Mukhiya from Rajgadh, Nepal, owns duck farm, livestock, fruit trees, vegetable, multilayer farming, and aquaculture. He has overcome challenges, improved his farm's productivity, and enhanced the economic well-being of his family. His journey serves as an inspiration for others in the community.

...being a SIFS champion, I motivate and convince other farmers in my village to adopt and practice the sustainable integrated farming system. At the same time, some farmers have converged their farming system from mono-cropping to mixed cropping.

India: Bhagirath Yadav is a resident of Dilari village of Bijawar block in Chhatarpur district of Madhya Pradesh. He with his family members' support dug the stony ground beside his house. Now, Bhagirath grows a wide variety of vegetables, cereals, and fruits.



Gradually, we have been able to create around 75 decimals (32,667 sq. meters) of space suitable for cultivation. And on around 30 decimals of land, we grow only vegetables. On remaining plot, we grow other crops like corn, fodder crops etc.





Food Systems Academy- Building an International Centre of Excellence

Deeply aligned with UNSDG-2 on achieving Zero Hunger and country visions where we work: WHH is conceptualising a “Food Systems Academy” under the larger ambit of Nutrition Smart CommUNITY. It will be an international Centre of Excellence and a knowledge aggregator. The academy would set agenda and provide techno-managerial support and engage in breakthrough research for nutrition-secure and resilient food systems. The pioneering Centre of Excellence envisages to transform the global food systems landscape and provide informed choices to the marginalized smallholder farmers we work with to address all forms of hunger and malnutrition in a sustainable way.

Skilling Small and Marginal Farmers for Better Health and Nutrition

Building human resource potential is the core of the program. Using participatory processes, we build capacities of small and marginal farmers so that they can demand their entitlements and adopt right farming system. 8000 farm families covering 40,000 family members have been benefited from the program. The policymakers and civil society organizations have shown great interest in our capacity-building modules and materials.

Skill Training and Capacity Building with the Partners

All partners in Nutrition Smart CommUNITY aim to achieve results by developing skills and expertise together. This enables the trainers to further convey their messages in the community through trainings and workshops.



Collaboration with the Government

The collaboration with the Government of Bangladesh, India and Nepal have been well established to implement the SiFS model. Our engagements are deep-rooted, and we have been a partner of choice in leading/ co-leading numerous campaigns and movements along with other development partners.

Bangladesh: Through a formal agreement with Bangladesh Agriculture Research Institute (BARI), Nutrition Smart CommUNITY has started to conduct a study on “Assessing the nutritive value of the uncultivated foods found in CHT and Haor regions”. Accordingly, the project got an official approval from Director, Horticulture Research Center (HRC), BARI and prioritized 18 types of uncultivated vegetables/crops from CHT (12 nos) and Haor (6 nos) regions. The study will help to mainstream these foods by assessing the nutritive value of the uncultivated foods found in the Haor and CHT regions. BARI has engaged two Fellows (Agriculture University students) to conduct the study successfully.

India: In India, our program is deeply aligned with the target POSHAN Abhiyaan (National Nutrition Mission), the Prime Minister's Overarching Scheme or Holistic Nourishment and National Mission on Natural Farming. Our farmers are engaged in promoting the cultivation of millets (Sri Anna) and organic and natural farming that is climate-smart and nutrition-sensitive. In collaboration with the Department of Women and Child Development (DWCD), a millets-based cookbook was released on 7th October 2021 at a public event by the Honourable Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh - Shivraj Singh Chouhan.

Nepal: In a pioneering move, the Local Government spent 1.3 million Nepalese rupees for the first time in the fiscal year 2021/22 within the Nutrition Smart CommUNITY (NSC) project areas in Nepal. This significant financial expenditure reflects the Local Government's commitment to the issues of malnutrition within the community and its impact on human development. During the fiscal year 2022/23, a collaborative effort between the local government and the Nutrition Smart CommUNITY led to the implementation of anthropometric mass screening in both districts. Furthermore, to enhance local capacity and sustainability, four Nutri-Entrepreneurship units has been established with four LANN+ (Linking Agriculture and Natural Resource Management plus WASH towards Nutrition Security) self-help group to produce Nutri-mix in Rajgadh Rural Municipality.





Our Ambitious Agenda

Transforming Agriculture Sector - Making It Climate Smart and Nutrition Sensitive

Climate-smart agricultural interventions intended to bring changes in nutritional status are known as nutrition-sensitive agriculture. Changes in nutrition or health are bound to make changes in agricultural production. In a similar manner, changes in agricultural sector are bound to bring changes in individual health and nutritional status. The relationship between agriculture and nutrition shows the mutual dependence on climate change, nutrition, health, and agriculture. It is widely acknowledged that in the agri-nutrition linkage space, climate change is real and makes the food less nutritious. South Asian countries have adopted a production-focused approach focusing primarily on 'growth and self-sufficiency in domestic food grain production largely to mitigate calorie hunger. This approach ignores the improved access to safe, diverse and nutritious diets. The critical factors in agri-nutrition space like climate change and soil health, food safety and value chain, food waste, nutrition and women smallholder farmers have been missing for decades.

There has been perpetual neglect to the plights of the farmers specifically women smallholder farmers in the Agri-Nutrition sector. In South Asia, women account for more than half the agricultural workforce vis-à-vis the global average of 26%.[1] Unequal power relations and landownership pattern, and inter and intra-household disparities compound the problem. In comparison to their male counterparts, women are more vulnerable to chronic food and nutrition insecurity and shock-induced food insecurity because of societal norms.[2] This has led to the rise of all forms of hunger and malnutrition. The double burden on malnutrition in South Asian countries indicates broken food systems and thus compounds poverty. The time has come to look beyond food self-sufficiency and follow a multi-sectoral approach for a well-nourished South Asia. Nutrition Smart CommUNITY program recognizes the value of climate-smart and nutrition-sensitive agriculture that can enhance the well-being of farmers. Integrating agriculture with nutrition holistically for a sustainable food system has been the priority. There has been wider acknowledgment on women including smallholder farmers as they are key actors in the food systems as producers, pregnant and lactation mothers, wage workers, processors, traders and consumers.

Nutrition Smart CommUNITY will deepen its engagement with key policymakers and program leaders and convene multi-sectoral dialogues for resilient food systems and nutrition-secure Bangladesh, India, and Nepal. We would disseminate our learnings and best practices for scale-up and replication. Our partners are our pillars of strength. With their support, we will continue to build our climate-smart nutrition-sensitive agri-food systems for a sustainable planet and sustainable future.

[1] South Asia women in Agriculture during Covid-19, International Potato Centre (CIP). April 2020 <https://cipotato.org/blog/south-asia-women-agriculture-during-covid-19/>

[2] A Review of Evidence on Gender Equality, Women's Empowerment and Food Systems. May, 2021 https://bonndoc.ulb.uni-bonn.de/xmlui/bitstream/handle/20.500.11811/9132/fss_briefs_review_evidence_gender_equality.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y



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 Email: info.india@welthungerhilfe.de

Newsletter Team :

Mamunur Rashid and Anka Malik – WHH Bangladesh, Pratibha Srivastava and Isha Banerjee – WHH India, Deependra Chaudhari and Pratishtha Rai - WHH Nepal

Editor and Publisher

Sachin Kumar Jain and Pratiksha Srivastava - Vikas Samvad Samiti, Basanta Kumar Kar - Chief Advisor, Nutrition Smart CommUNITY

Print–

Regional Nutrition Program, Vikas Samvad Samiti