

Impact Story 15:

Empowering Adolescents for Healthy Eating in Bangladesh

THE OPPORTUNITY

In Bangladesh, one fifth of total population are adolescents (10-19 years). Of these, 15.6 million are girls and 16.3 million boys (source: [World Population Prospects](#)). Adolescence is a time of rapid physical growth, with increases nutritional needs. Dietary patterns established during adolescence can contribute to nutrition-related issues with far reaching consequences for long-term health. Adolescence is 'the second window of opportunity' in terms of nutrition intervention, who will contribute to the nations' future economy and be parents of the next generations.

According to [State of Food Security and Nutrition in Bangladesh 2015](#), 36% of adolescents are suffering from malnutrition. Nutritional status and dietary intake data shows that thinness has decreased dramatically, but is still at high levels for both girls and boys. Meanwhile, obesity is increasing (around 8%). Micronutrient deficiency data estimates for adolescent girls is significant: anaemia is at 17-26%, iron deficiency 7-10%, Vitamin A deficiency 5%, and iodine deficiency 40%. These deserve attention as they hold the key to breaking entrenched cycles of poverty, inequity, and deprivation, and expose young people to avoidable health problems.

Furthermore, research by GAIN revealed a limited availability of nutritious foods for adolescents, especially around schools. Easily accessible and popular snacks included packaged highly processed treats prepared by street vendors such as deep-fried puri (deep-fried bread), singhara (deepfried potato pockets) and jhalmuri (puffed rice with fried vegetables and spices). The option to choose healthy foods was lacking.



THE SOLUTION

In 2018 GAIN Bangladesh began implementing an adolescent nutrition programme titled 'Nourishing Dreams'. This was designed in partnership with adolescents themselves, and has at its core making a pledge to eat better and work towards improving availability of healthier food in their surroundings. Campaign partners included National Nutrition Services (NNS), the Institute of Public Health Nutrition (IPHN), the Channel I (media partner), Dhaka FM (radio partner) and Institute of Development Studies (IDS, research partner). The flagship campaign – Bhalo Khabo Bhalo Thakbo (BKBT: <https://www.bhalokhabobhalothakbo.com/>) (Eat Well Live Well) – was launched that inspired more than one million adolescents to take the pledge.

The campaign inspired the adolescents to articulate and express their dreams for their lives and to realise the connection between nourishing their bodies with nutritious foods and fulfilling their dreams in the future. The campaign taking a multi-pronged approach, first creating the desire amongst adolescents to want to eat better diets (demand), and secondly, working with food businesses (food vendors, private food providing organizations and public institutions) to ensure the supply side gears up over time to address the new demand.

BKBT came up with a series of the intervention including:

- **PLEDGE PLATFORM: Activating motive to transfer into actions.** The campaign was designed to generate pledges as a symbol of intention to eat better foods **Focusing on individual actions** – the campaign aimed to support adolescents' collective journey towards demanding more nutritious food. For instance, support pledgers and schools to work together with food vendors to improve the availability of more nutritious snacks around schools.
- **SOCIAL MEDIA FOR CHANGE: Interactive marketing for healthy foods online.** BKBT considered social media the key to reach adolescents. The social media page posts topics on healthy foods and wellbeing in an interactive and positive way. During the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown it engaged many young people with series of quarantine activities. This included informative cartoons with ideas on how to use time

positively during quarantine. It also hosted many mini contests on healthy and tasty food recipes where winners were given small rewards. During the pandemic, the campaign replaced planned in-person activities such as school events, with online and radio activities (e.g., mini-campaigns, online competitions, influencer reach, radio shows) to support adolescents in meeting their pledge commitments.

- **E-LEARNING TOOL: Content for learning on food and nutrition.** A unique e-learning platform (<https://elearning.bhalokhabobhalothakbo.com/en>) has also been launched under the campaign website to make learning about healthy, nutritious, and safe food more enjoyable for adolescents. The learning experience includes watching audio-visual materials on safe and nutritious foods targeted to adolescents, take quizzes to self-evaluate and receive e-certificates on competition. Another section of learning content is 'Let's Play' where participants unlock cards on fun food riddles, have a chance to receive a badge, and share on social media and get access to a nutrition library to keep learning more.
- **NUTRILEADERS HUNT: Online competition for future leader of nutrition.** BKBT introduced the first ever online based nutrition leadership contest amongst adolescents, via the [Nutri-Leaders Hunt 2021](#) competition to assess their (i) nutrition knowledge, (ii) nutrition negotiation skills and (iii) presentation/advocacy power in creative ways.
- **ENGAGING CELEBRITIES AND PARTNERSHIP:** The campaign garnered support from many social media and public influencers to motivate young people and their desire to eat better foods. Mashrafee Bin Murtoza, former cricket captain & Member of Parliament; Jaya Ahsan & Arifin Shuvoo, renowned actors; and Anisul Haque, Bangladeshi author, screenwriter, novelist, dramatist, and journalist, joined hands to support messaging from the campaign.
- **•ADOLESCENTS' NETWORK CREATED:** Enabled adolescents to recognise their collective power to drive change in their communities through partnership with various community adolescent clubs, school clubs and youth leaders to take this campaign forward. The Facebook community and competition which generated a continuous pool of adolescent and youth leaders to take the campaign forward.

THE IMPACT

A consortium of researchers from the Institute of Development Studies in Brighton, UK, and the Development Research Initiative (DRI) in Bangladesh, led the external evaluation of the BKBT campaign. The consortium employed a mixed methods approach to assess the BKBT's contribution to i) better snack food choices among adolescents, and ii) adolescents' motivations and actions towards building a social movement for improving the availability of nutritious snacks.

The Government of Bangladesh highly appreciated the BKBT campaign to create awareness on the issue. Using leadership building and equipping adolescents with knowledge and skills on healthy food choices. The National Nutrition Services led the launch event of the e-learning platform and announced the campaign milestone of 1 million pledges in 2020.

The BKBT campaign was successfully integrated into everyday life to build a narrative that resonated with various sub-groups of the target audience (i.e., boys, girls, younger and older adolescents from different areas and socioeconomic status groups). Through both physical events at 3,000 primary- and high-schools and online activities, the campaign was able to spark the interest and engagement of adolescents for improving their consumption of nutritious foods.

The qualitative endline survey suggested that adolescents who actively engaged with the campaign supported different narratives of the campaign. Most of these narratives focused on individual behaviour change towards healthier food choices among adolescents. This included the framing of BKBT as an educational campaign aimed at raising young people's general awareness of the importance of eating nutritious foods to stay healthy, consuming more homecooked foods and avoiding snacks and foods from outside the home. This finding was supported by the quantitative endline survey and the online survey in which 89% and 81% of adolescents respectively understood the campaign as an effort to encourage adolescents to eat nutritious snacks.

“ We, the 32 million teenagers of Bangladesh, have been spending our tiffin money on foods that aren't nutritious and don't prepare us to chase our dreams. But this is our tiffin money, it is something that we control. So, as individuals, we pledge to change our food habits and use our tiffin money to buy more nutritious foods. But our options are limited. There are not enough good choices for us to make. So, we must work together to change the way food is produced, manufactured, and sold so that we can make nutritious, tasty choices every day. That is why we must all take the pledge. Together we can make this change.”



Through social media, BKBT has reached 6,981,91 people and the BKBT Facebook page has over 88,000 followers. The e-learning platform and engagement based online competitions tools has 15,000 visitors in the site, 836 registered for the e-learning and 589 completed full courses, the number is still increasing everyday.

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