

Conclusions Student Consultancy Project Michaelmas Term 2015

Project client: Anant Jani, Asha for Education (Oxford)

Project focus: Malnutrition Positive Deviance Guidelines for India

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Outline:

For this strategic review consultancy project, we collected data on factors influencing malnutrition across several different regions in India. The aim was to give an overview of what factors could be addressed by projects aiming to improve nutrition of children and expecting mothers across India, and identify those factors that are easy to implement on a small scale, and any factors that vary significantly across demographic factors.

Findings:

Broadly, our findings showed that there was no significant indication of region influencing malnutrition status. Whether or not urban areas were relatively more malnourished than rural areas was unclear, though the expectancy is that food diversity and availability is higher in rural areas. We did find some negative implications of crowding in urban areas being unhelpful, which is probably related to the strong influence of the presence of appropriate sanitation facilities and clean drinking water availability and storage.

Relatively small behavioural changes that were indicated as helpful were for example: washing of hands (with soap) after defecation and before food preparation or eating, breastfeeding newborns soon after birth (pref. <1hr), feeding infants with complimentary liquid foods from 6-7 months of age, teaching mothers basic rules of hygiene around the home, to feed sick children and to cook nutritious meals. Other significant implementations are the provision of multivitamin supplements, immunisation and deworming programmes.

On a much larger level it is seen that education and literacy of mothers and women in general leads to a decrease in malnutrition. Not only does education of women mean mothers gain a better understanding of cause and effect, but it also combats a (rather prevalent) fatalistic attitude towards life and empowers them to take control of their lives, make informed decisions and gives them a platform to stand up to male dominance when necessary. This last factor is a broad societal perception that needs to change, however this can hopefully be addressed in smaller ways through the smaller scale methods of combatting malnutrition through providing information and education, as mentioned above.

One last thing that should be noted is that not all modern changes have been helpful in all areas of societal progress, and some have even negatively impacted child nutrition. The loss of food security and variety has been caused through: switching from personal farming to cash-cropping which in effect removes independent, cheap and varied sources of nutrition; or child education taking away the labour source for herding cattle with a loss of cattle as a consequence. It is wise to keep in mind that certain broad developmental programmes might unbalance stable traditional situations, and provide for alternatives or locally tailored implementation.

Conclusion & Contacts:

There is much information available from the table as attached. We involved some experts in the field in giving information and feedback, and some references for further contact are given below. These experts confirmed that some of our ideas, e.g. about the importance of female education and autonomy, were of current interest to modern projects targeting malnutrition in India (James Levinson).

Odisha/Orissa area: Sourav Bhattacharjee [sbhattacharjee@unicef.org]

Bihar area: James Levinson [james.levinson@gmail.com]

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Agricultural focus: Alfred Gathorne-Hardy [alfred.gathorne-hardy@some.ox.ac.uk]; Barbara Smith [barbarasmithmail@gmail.com]; Pieter Raijmakers [pieter.pamocpon@yahoo.com].

Please cite Leonie Rajmakers when contacting them so they have a reference point for the project.