

## Workshop report

# Platforms for healthier Diets Bangladesh

Date: November 20, 2018

Location: Lakeshore Hotel, House no: 88, 46 Rd No 41, Dhaka 1212, Bangladesh

Authors: Nazmul Alam<sup>1</sup>, Marion Herens<sup>2</sup>



Led by IFPRI

On November 20<sup>th</sup> 2018, Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation (WCIDI), together with IFPRI Bangladesh, organized a workshop in Dhaka, as part of IFPRI's program Food Systems for Healthier Diets (FSHD). The objective of this daylong meeting was to share the findings of a web- and desk-based review of platform initiatives to see the broad range of diverse initiatives and collaborations working on food security, food safety, nutrition and agriculture for nutrition. The study sought to better understand what collaborations, or platforms, already existed in FSHD focal countries; and how they were organized. The 22 participants were people actively involved in the platforms, and involved in food system and nutrition issues in Bangladesh at large. This report summarizes the research findings as presented in the workshop and the key lessons and conclusions from the discussions on platforms in Bangladesh that followed.

## Background

Understanding where and how to intervene in transforming food systems to ensure access to healthy diets is a goal of considerable size, and unlikely to be accomplished by one organization alone. It requires active networking between multiple stakeholders, engaged in different parts of the food system. Researchers from WCIDI explored multi-stakeholder collaborations on food systems in Bangladesh and Nigeria, Vietnam and Ethiopia.

## Identifying platforms

A literature review was done on existing definitions and roles of platforms and their results, and on the definition of healthier diets. Based on the generated overview of concepts and definitions from the literature, key identifiers and descriptors for 'platforms' and 'healthy diets' were defined. For healthy diets, the definition for **diet quality** was used. Diet quality is central to healthy diets and encompasses aspects of both *adequacy* (getting enough of desirable foods or food groups, energy, macro- and micronutrients) and *moderation* (restriction of

In 2017, the CGIAR Research Program on Agriculture for Nutrition and Health (A4NH) launched its second phase (until 2021). Led by IFPRI, A4NH brings together four other CGIAR Centres and two academic institutions plus the talents and resources of a wide range of partners. The Food Systems for Healthier Diets (FSHD) flagship, led by Wageningen University & Research (WUR), examines potential leverage points in food systems in low- and middle-income countries for addressing non-communicable diseases and micronutrient deficiencies through more balanced consumer diets. Inclusive and sustainable food systems should guarantee consumers availability of, equitable access to and efficient delivery of safe and healthy food requiring interconnectedness between agro-food systems and other (health, education) systems.

The study on Platforms for Healthier Diets, conducted by Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation (WCIDI) is an effort to trace forms of interconnectedness and to explore the role of platforms as mechanisms for strengthening food system transformations for healthier diets. WCIDI has built an extensive international track record on supporting processes of innovation and change through facilitating multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSP), brokering knowledge, management for impact, and capacity development.

unwanted foods, food components or nutrients such as fat, sugar, sugar-sweetened beverages, and sodium).

**Key identifiers for platforms** were *shared aim*, or common goal, of the platform; *structure* or organisational forms of the platform; *urgency*, or underlying motive to form a platform; *functionality*, or predominant activities of the platform; and *linkages* across scales. A desk- and web-based review of platform initiatives at CGIAR level, and at country level was conducted, including platform composition, mechanisms of functioning and identification of international and national linkages.

Next, **network mapping** was done (using NodeXL sheets and Gephi software) to visualise platforms, clustering organisations and key connectors or bridging actors with multiple memberships.

### Platforms in Bangladesh

Inge Brouwer, Wageningen University and FSHD leader, updated the participants on the learnings of complex food system issues and how this food system is important to shape the healthier diet practices. Marion Herens presented the findings of the platform identification in Bangladesh. The secondary analysis of the data shows the presence of 24 national level platform (multiple actors for a single cause) are working towards the nutrition aspects in Bangladesh. However, not a single platform is directly involved with healthier diet issue, rather more concentrated on malnutrition aspects.

In Bangladesh, **24 national level platforms** were identified, 17 of which in some way or the other address malnutrition issues or diet quality. No existing platforms were found to deal with healthier diets as such, nor was diet diversification very prominently described. The main focus of most narratives revolved around prevention and reduction of malnutrition, often stunting, and tackling micronutrient deficiencies, the latter mainly in relation to bio-fortification interventions. In addition, six CGIAR related platforms of relevance to FSHD were identified, three of which were categorised as international research consortia (Harvest Plus, World Fish, LANSa), and three were multi-stakeholder research projects (IFPRI's Agriculture, Nutrition, and Gender Linkages (ANGeL) project, Transform Nutrition and Spring Nutrition, both of which ended in 2017). Figure 1 shows the network of platforms and their membership size based on the desk study.

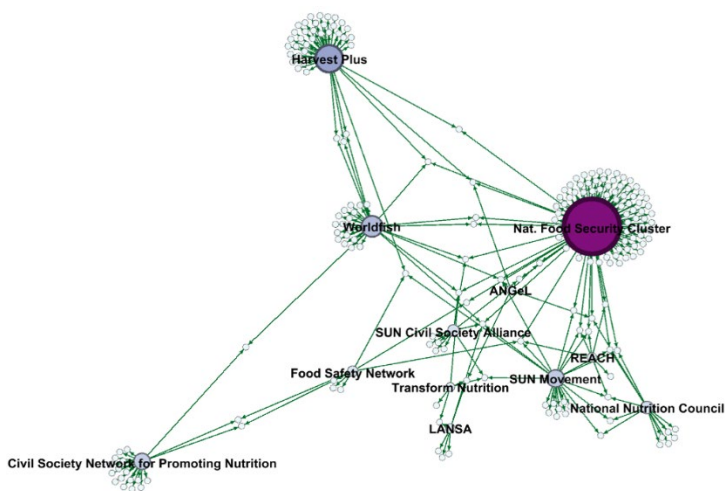


Figure 1 Bangladesh platform mapping

The findings were validated with the audience. Additions were given such as the Bangladesh Institute of Research

and Training on Applied Nutrition, and the FAO led network on mitigating nutrition. It was also noted that not all platforms identified were active in the field.

Many organisations, NGOs and institutions were also mentioned, which are actively engaged in various networks for food security and nutrition, but often without an established name or label. It seems that some NGOs operate as a network organisation working with many stakeholders, which is then very similar to a platform.

The number and variation of platforms and organisational activities raised the concern relating to overlap and lack of coordination. A national coordination structure was suggested to streamline all efforts.

Figure 2 presents the platform initiatives in connection to members. A number of organizations are a member of multiple clusters, dubbed 'connectors'. While the connection between a platform and a member does not say whether this member organisation is particularly active or influential, it is relevant to see which organisations could form the linkage with other platforms. It was interesting to note that main connectors included Building Resources Across Communities (BRAC), Save the Children, USAID, and FAO.

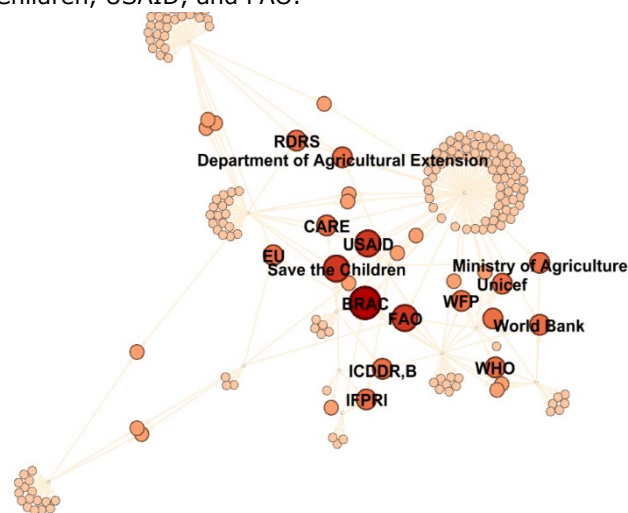


Figure 2 Bangladesh key connectors

It is worthwhile to note that BRAC as a Bangladesh-based connector, also operates internationally. The common denominator appears to be that connectors are organisations with a broad mandate to tackle food and nutrition security, encompassing funding and implementation of agricultural development projects but also emergency aid.

## Key messages of the group discussions

In Bangladesh, there is no single platform that works on healthier diets. The existing platforms are mainly focus on aspects of malnutrition, are mainly project driven and lack multiple strategies, all have single and generalized strategy for example, “promoting fortified food for all”. Most of the platforms are missing the community focused action. A lack of coordination among the platforms was noted, and private and public partnership were missing (networking with Government agencies).

After the presentation of the findings, workshop participants split in smaller groups to discuss how platforms can contribute to food systems for healthier diets? Conditions and bottlenecks for successful functioning of the identified platforms in Bangladesh were discussed, and platform’s contribution to scaling up sustainable food system innovations and anchoring healthy and sustainable diet considerations.

*What role do platforms currently play in promoting food systems for healthier diets?* To support the existing platforms, there is a need to ensure that they are institutionalized. A plan of action could help the current platforms to operationalise multiple strategies drawing on public-private partnerships, partnerships with ministries (local and international), based on the needs and demands of communities. They need to have a strong linkage with the government agencies in order to fulfil the Public Private partnership (PPP) dimension of the development strategy. The PPP or the inter agencies linkages will enact as sustainability part of the platform. There should be a target group data base of each platform. This will ensure proper monitoring and avoid the possible duplication of work.

Enabling actors are:

- Ministry of Health,
- Ministry of Agriculture,
- Department of Agricultural Extension
- Agriculture Information and Communication Centre
- Bangladesh Institute of Research and Training on Applied Nutrition
- National Agricultural Research System
- Institute of Nutrition and Food Science
- Department of Agricultural Marketing
- Implementing partners and donors

The nutritional issues should be taken up to the national level. There is a need to initiate a nutritional Hub from Grassroots level to national level, to strengthen consumers movement, and to create synergies between platforms.

*What are enablers and barriers for platforms in Bangladesh?* In order to reorient platform narratives from reducing malnutrition towards healthier diets, the main challenges for platform in Bangladesh to work as a single entity relate to the fact that most platforms are donor based programs. Chances for sustainable funding are low. As soon as they are completed many platform become inactive. For platforms to sustain one would need ownership and continuity. Often, there is a lack of collaborative vision or clear objective, and lack of interagency exchange of information. There is a lack of strong coordinated leadership and power imbalances between stakeholders are usually not very well addressed.

What helps platforms is a proper strategy with different pillars. Healthier diet should also address different pillars of the food system and making clear in which area they are going to focus. The existing collaboration within the platforms and other actors is an asset, although power balances need to be considered. Identifying outcomes, establish work plans and financial sustainability also help. Platforms need to be provided with support to carry out designated activities that will support other activities too, such as brining out good practices of platforms. Also of help would be the development of a common National level Hub for healthier Diets that will ensure all the agendas to align with the country’s priorities.

*Can existing platforms play a role in changing the discourse from ‘reducing malnutrition’ to ‘healthier diets’?* Existing platforms can make impact to change the discourse. In order to do so, the mind-set of the policy makes would need to change from food security to food system thinking, and move away from specific groups at risk of malnutrition (children under 5 years of age, lactating mothers) to nutrition for the overall population, in particular also including the elderly. This would require modifying the existing policy to make it more action oriented, build capacity of platform members as well as policy makers, alongside the necessary resource allocation.

*What is the added value of a platform in food system transformations for healthier diets?* – Platforms bring together experienced individuals and actors who can be very influential. A relevant taskforce can take up responsibilities for coordination and leadership, knowledge sharing and resource mobilization around the platform. Having an in-depth scenario assessment will be very helpful for assigning different strategy.

## Key Recommendations

- Define clear strategies and plans of operations for each platform;

- Enhance external communication of the platforms to i) increase awareness on the activities of the platforms, ii) increase opportunities for collaboration and iii) avoid duplication of work;
- Work on inclusion of the Healthier Diets concept in different guidelines (IYCF guidelines, nutrition guidelines for other target groups, f.e. adolescents and elderly);
- Develop complementary materials for behavioural change campaigns (BCC), and address healthier diets as part of BCC and training sessions on mal/over nutrition;
- More generally, create more exposure of Healthier Diets in every discussion on nutrition and health;
- Focused chapters in national level education curriculum.

### Mapping Network dynamics

In a second group exercise participants were asked to map out the dynamics of three platforms which, according to the desk study, seem to be major platforms with a high number of (key connecting) members; i) the National Nutrition Services (NNS), ii) Bangladesh Safe Agro-Foods Efforts (BSAFE) Foundation; and iii) the SUN Business network (SBN). Participants who's organization is a member of the platforms helped to inform the map. The map included a list of platform **outputs**, platform **members** on coloured cards classified as core and non-core members and **flows** of money, information, advice etc. between the platform and other stakeholders.

*The National Nutrition Services (NNS)* generated the following outputs:

- IYCF guideline (Food based) developed and relevant stakeholders are trained
- Nutrition priorities identified and costing (NPAN2) program plan.
- Frontline workers of DGHS & DGFP are trained on Food based dietary guideline.
- IPHN MIS Dashboard on Nutrition information



- (District and upazila) developed by DGHS
- Food based dietary guideline developed.

- Learning agenda to influence policy (triple burden of malnutrition)

Types of support flows centre around technical support, advice and capacity building. Members considered most influential by the participants are the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), which is the Lead, and the Institute of Public Health & Nutrition (IPHN).

*The BSAFE Network* is largely structured around individual platform members active in the domain of food safety and consumers awareness. Each member and organization has their own support area for the platform. The sole



purpose of this platform is to ensure public awareness on food safety. Types of flows in this platform related mainly to advocacy, awareness creation, research and development, including also capacity building, and demonstrations. Ranking of influence was not done in this groups.

*SUN Business Network* is collaborating with many private and public associations. They are linking with various likeminded organizations and agencies for improved nutrition.



Types of support flows centre around technical and/or financial support, advisory support and capacity building, and bringing actors together. Members considered highest influential by the participants are the Ministry of

---

Industry (MoIND), WFP, GAIN Bangladesh and Ministry of Agriculture. Others are the Bangladesh Food Safety Authority, (BFSA), the Ministry of Food and the Directorate General of Health Service (DGHS).

The meeting was concluded by vote of thanks from the Flagship leader Food Systems for Healthier Diets, Dr Inge Brouwer. WCDI and IFPRI Bangladesh, on behalf of the A4NH program, express their gratitude all 22 workshop participants for their active participation and contributions. A resource folder with workshop presentations, background materials, photos, and media citations are available online, through dropbox. The results of this workshop will be used by the FSHD research program to build a deeper understanding of platforms as mechanisms in support of food systems transformations for healthier diets. For questions or more information on this study, contact [marion.herens@wur.nl](mailto:marion.herens@wur.nl).

#### [Report Identifying platforms for Healthier Diets](#)

**Please cite as**

Alam, N., & Herens, M. (2019): *Platforms for Healthier Diets in Bangladesh*. Workshop Report. Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation, Wageningen University & Research, Wageningen.

**Photos**

Marion Herens, WCDI