Using the Demand Generation I-Kit for Life Saving Commodities to Improve Maternal, Neonatal and Child Health in Bangladesh

Despite significant improvement in maternal and child health indicators and overall health outcomes, the decline in neonatal mortality in Bangladesh has not been satisfactory. Newborn deaths declined from 52/1,000 in 1994 to 28/1,000 live births in 2014, which now accounts for over 60 percent of all under-five deaths, compared to 39 percent in 1991 [1,2]. Birth asphyxia, severe infection and complications of pre-term births are currently the leading causes of newborn deaths in Bangladesh [2,3]. The accessibility and quality of essential newborn care at the community level – especially for marginalized, poor and disadvantaged populations – is a major concern. Evidence suggests that up to 50 percent of newborn deaths worldwide occur in the first 24 hours of birth and 75 percent during the first seven days after birth [4]. BRAC Bangladesh, the largest non-governmental organization (NGO) worldwide, has been implementing maternal, neonatal and child health (MNCH) and related activities both in urban (slums and poor settlements) and rural areas of Bangladesh for almost a decade.

In 2015, the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (icddr,b), BRAC and BRAC University (BRACU) initiated a project to increase demand for and utilization of MNCH commodities and to build the capacity of Community Health Workers (CHWs) to deliver newborn health care. This project utilized three core activities to achieve these objectives:

1. Development of MNCH communication materials
2. Development of MNCH training guidelines
3. Training CHWs on MNCH using the new guidelines

Development of the demand generation materials and activities was informed by the resources and guidance available in the Demand Generation Implementation Kit (I-Kit) for Underutilized, Life Saving Commodities. The I-Kit’s commodity-specific content and adaptable strategies allowed for the rapid development and thorough revision of new and existing communication materials, and has been used as a framework for revising the BRAC MNCH handbook and the CHWs MNCH training. The project activities – training the CHWs and the distribution of revised the MNCH handbook – have been pilot tested in two rural sub-districts and one urban slum where BRAC is currently implementing its MNCH programs.

Formative Research
To update BRAC’s MNCH materials, in particular the commodities to be included in the revised handbook, BRAC conducted formative research, including a thorough literature review focused on papers published in international and national journals about neonatal
health in Bangladesh. Unpublished literature such as reports, global guidelines, national guidelines, handbooks and behavior change communication materials relevant to MNCH care were also searched and reviewed by the project team. The major thematic areas of the Demand Generation I-Kit – family planning, maternal health, neonatal health and child health – were used as a framework to review the literature. The summaries of each theme were prepared accordingly in a report and shared with the Health Communication Capacity Collaborative (HC3) team.

Four in-depth interviews were conducted with mothers of children under one year of age to understand their perceptions of the existing MNCH handbook and ask for their feedback. BRAC also conducted interviews with BRAC CHWs in order to obtain their feedback on the existing handbook and the improvements they would like to see in the revised version. A consultation meeting was held with an MNCH expert, researchers and program staff working in the areas of MNCH, and their feedback and suggestions on the handbook were also collected.

Refining the Intervention

All the information obtained from the literature review, and the feedback and comments collected during the expert review, interviews and consultation meeting were all considered by BRAC before determining the content that would be added to the handbook and training guidelines. The recommended contents were also reviewed by the HC3 technical team and their feedback was also obtained. Finally, all the revised contents were shared with the BRAC management team – the Director of the Health Nutrition and Population Program and the Communication division at BRAC – for final approval.

Using the summaries identified in the four thematic areas, and explained in detail within 13 underutilized commodities, a total of 10 commodities were adopted into the BRAC handbook and training guidelines. These include maternal health (use of oxytocin and misoprostol); neonatal health (use of Chlorhexidine, resuscitation device and injectable antibiotics); child health (Use of Amoxicillin, oral rehydration salt and use of Zinc); and family planning (promotion of emergency contraceptive pills and contraceptive implants).

A range of additional MNCH-related information was included in the handbook and training guidelines, including tobacco prevention and control, nutritional supplements and food charts for mothers, hand washing guidelines, kangaroo mother care, maternal and neonatal danger signs, recommended schedules for baby bath and referral information in case further care is needed.

Project Outcomes

The project outcomes, guided by the three main objectives, include:

- **Revised MNCH Handbook:** The revised BRAC MNCH Handbook will be used in ongoing BRAC MNCH programs in both urban and rural areas. During the training sessions, CHWs responded that the revised handbook is much more interactive. It now includes a combination of clear pictorials of common underutilized MNCH services and short and simple messages accompany each pictorial.

- **Revised Training Guidelines:** The revised CHW training guidelines reflect the revised BRAC
MNCH Handbook. The CHWs think the updated MNCH messages will be very helpful for improving the quality of MNCH services at the community level.

- **Training of Trainers:** Six trainers have been trained to date on the revised MNCH booklet and training guidelines.

- **Training of the CHWs:** The CHWs trained include Midwives, Swasthya Karmi [5] and Swasthya Sebika [6], who are the key service providers of BRAC MNCH programs at the community level. Over 220 CHWs have been trained, and trainers will continue to conduct trainings in other sub-districts where BRAC currently has its MNCH and Essential Health Care Package programs. The CHWs gave feedback on the revised MNCH handbook during the training and reported that it helped them enhance their level of MNCH knowledge and skills for service delivery.

- **Distribution of Revised MNCH Handbook:** The revised MNCH Handbook is currently being distributed to women residing in sub-districts with trained CHWs. The CHWs also opined that distributing the revised handbook will have a substantial impact on disseminating important information for improving MNCH care throughout Bangladesh.

Next Steps

- Over two million copies of the revised BRAC MNCH Handbook were printed in November 2016. These copies will be distributed to rural and urban BRAC MNCH program areas. BRAC currently plans to distribute over 100,000 copies of the revised handbooks to its MNCH program areas every month.

- The revised BRAC MNCH handbook is expected to reach over 120,000 households in urban areas and over 5,168,712 households in rural areas, where BRAC is currently implementing its MNCH programs. BRAC has also planned to make this revised handbook available in the 63 districts where the Essential Health Care Package program is operating. The estimated number of households in these 63 districts is yet to be determined.

- BRAC currently has over 100,000 CHWs, including 57,000 Swasthya Sebika (SS) exclusively for the BRAC program, 37,000 SS for the Directly Observed Treatment, Short Course (DOTS) program and 6,000 Swasthya Karmi (SK) providing services across Bangladesh. BRAC plans to scale up its MNCH program throughout the country. As a result, training on the revised BRAC MNCH Handbook will be provided to over 100,000 CHWs in the country.

End Notes


5. Swasthya Karmi (SK) are paid BRAC community health workers, who have minimum of ten years of formal schooling and have received trainings from BRAC.
6. Swasthya Sebika (SS) are unpaid BRAC community health volunteers, who have basic level of education and have received trainings from BRAC.

Resources

- Every Woman, Every Child
- Demand Generation I-Kit for Underutilized, Life Saving Commodities

Contacts

BRAC
Dr. Lal Rawal, MPH, PhD
Senior Associate, Health Systems and Population Studies Division, icddr,b
Faculty, JPG School of Public Health, BRAC University
dr.lalrawal@gmail.com; lbrawal@gmail.com

Project Team: Prof. Malabika Sarker; Dr. Ariful Islam; Dr. Raisul Haque; Bachera Akter; Mahmood Kazi; Mostafa Sarwar; Syed Imran Ahmed

HC3 Program
Johns Hopkins Center for Communication Programs
Sanjanthi Velu, Team Lead
svelu1@jhu.edu
Lindsey Leslie, Program Officer
lindseyleslie@jhu.edu

www.healthcommcapacity.org

Project partners and technical team from HC3, BRAC Bangladesh and icddr’b Bangladesh with the final product – BRAC MNCH handbook, 2016