

Participatory Tools for Community Nutrition Education

The success of community-based nutrition education through Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) approach depends on the tools which actively engage the participants on the topic. Aimed at transforming community's behaviour in nutrition and hygiene practices, the PLA tools engage women through action-based methods, such as cooking demonstrations, role plays etc. Facilitated by the Anganwadi Workers, the tools empower the community, especially the women of reproductive age to improve their family nutrition.

Storytelling for Sensitisation on Nutrition

Anganwadi Workers are trained for effective storytelling to sensitise the women on various social and behavioural issues through stories narrated around daily life situations. This process sensitises the women and helps them to speak up on the issue of malnutrition. Topics such as intergenerational cycle of malnutrition, gender inequality, exclusion, maternal health/nutrition and rights and entitlements are covered in these stories.

Setting the Priority for Action through Picture Cards/Pebbles for Voting

Anganwadi Workers use a voting game for setting the priority for action on malnutrition. The picture cards and pebbles help the women to identify and prioritise the nutrition problems of their village. Based on the seriousness of the problem, the participants prioritise the one/s to address first.



Participatory Preparation of Seasonal Food Calendar

Based on the understanding of the seasonal crops and their availability, a seasonal food calendar is developed during a PLA meeting. Mapping of all cultivated and uncultivated foods in the village, identifying seasonal availability of fruits and vegetables mainly forest and local produce are done during this meeting in form of a calendar. It proves to be an effective tool in finding nutritious variety throughout the year.



Cooking Demonstration with Locally Available Food

In cooking demonstrations, the Anganwadi Worker demonstrates different traditional local cuisines in front of the PLA participants and explains how daily recipes can be enriched, e.g. with moringa leaves. A focus is also on preparing homemade child-friendly food to promote complementary feeding among children between 6-23 months. Women bring their locally available food to the PLA session. The Anganwadi Worker discusses with women the nutritional value of the different foods and role of different nutrients for immunity, growth and development of children.

Community Picnic for Children Under 2 Years

It is organised by Anganwadi Workers as a community event engaging Gram Panchayat (village council) and Community Leaders in an open space. During the picnic, women in groups of two are engaged to make nutritious recipes adopting hygiene practices and feeding the young children with bowl/spoon. Various community local games like Khichdi game (selecting different variety of ingredients to make nutritious porridge) is organised to motivate mothers to cook specially for young children.



Content and Topics of Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) Nutrition Trainings

Developed on the basis of understanding the social context of the project area, the PLA content lays the foundation of an effective PLA training to spread nutrition education. Disseminated over 20 meetings, the PLA content is designed to improve the nutritional knowledge and practices of women and children. It empowers women to come together and break the cycle of malnutrition in the community.

Undernutrition Causes and Life Cycle Approach

During the PLA session, the Angawadi Worker uses picture cards to explain the intergenerational cycle of malnutrition to the mothers. She facilitates the discussion on how to break this cycle at different life stages (adolescent, pregnancy and childhood). This process helps mothers to realise the importance of diverse dietary intake and growth monitoring.



Importance of Local Food Groups

Local food groups are important to ensure year-round availability of nutrient-rich food for the community. Under this topic, the participants are engaged to develop a seasonal calendar based on the different available foods during the year. It is noteworthy to mention that villages are rich in uncultivated food varieties. This meeting helps the community to understand the nutritional values and consumption of these food groups, such as chia seeds which are rich in omega-3 fatty acids.



Dietary Diversity – 10 Food Groups

This nutrition education meeting focuses on the importance of 10 food groups in a daily diet. The role of different nutrients in growth, vitality, energy and protection is discussed through a participatory session. The purpose of this session is to understand the importance of nutrition and daily intake of 5 - 7 food groups in their diet. The Anganwadi Worker supports the participants to identify the 10 different food groups to have a balance diet.



Complementary Feeding Practices for Small Children

This topic is implemented through a community event where the participants are engaged to understand the importance of timely initiation of complementary feeding, adequate in quantity, quality and frequency (children between 6 - 23 months). This process also facilitates mothers to prepare home-based child friendly age-appropriate food. It particularly focusses on increased Minimum Meal Frequency (MMF) and Minimum Dietary Diversity (MDD). Practices like de-worming, therapeutic feeding and hygienic hand washing are also discussed.

Gender Inclusive Approach



Community Meetings – Community Dialogue and Dissemination

Community meetings are organised by women groups to initiate dialogue and disseminate learnings from PLA meetings to the larger community, including men and elderly people, youth, and all service providers. Community meetings involve and engage majority of the people from the village in the nutrition discussions. These meetings are usually planned creatively with traditional decorations, display of food group exhibitions and educational materials. Local leaders, Gram Panchayat members, Anganwadi Workers and Accredited Social Health Activists also help in organizing these meetings. The women groups present the strategies and seek larger community support for implementing them for better health outcomes in the village.

Community meetings are found to be a good platform to discuss nutrition specific and nutrition sensitive issues, challenges and collective action planning to improve nutrition security of the community.

Street Theatres

Street theatre is an effective communication tool used to disseminate key messages to the community. It is useful for sensitising and advising the community to adopt healthy behaviours. Local artists and cultural groups become ambassadors for promoting nutrition practices in the community with street plays, songs and community dialogue. Scripts are focussed on disseminating key messages around nutrition subjects, such as 10 food groups, dietary diversity, and quantity, quality and frequency of the food for women and children.

Through the street play training process under the project, 20 artists were trained as local resources to reach out to more than 7000 spectators across 36 villages in Sheopur and Chhatarpur districts of Madhya Pradesh.



Improving Hygiene Practices for Better Nutrition Outcome

Tippy Tap

Handwashing with soap is very important and through women group meetings in villages, local solutions are promoted to have a facility to keep water and soap to ensure regular practice of hand washing. Tippy taps are the easiest low-cost local solution designed by the community to have water and soap available at one place. Pre-used containers, which would otherwise go to waste are used to make these tippy taps.



Matka Filter

A matka filter is an indigenous solution to iron-free clean drinking water in rural India. It consists of three earthen pots placed on top of one another and includes coal, brick and cotton to filter the water through the three step system. This also ensures safely covered water management system for the usages and filtration of water, making it fit for drinking. Anganwadi Workers are creating awareness on the use of the matka filters as the strategy for safe drinking water. The local communities are also adopting it to ensure intake of safe drinking water.





Success Stories

The PLA Success Stories tell how a community can achieve nutrition security with the support of people with a vision. Among many, here are some success stories for the world to seek inspiration from.

Ramvati Adiwashi (*Game Changer Awardee under 'Women in Agriculture' Category*)

Ramvati Adiwashi is an enthusiastic tribal women who attended PLA meetings and understood the importance of locally available food, traditional recipes, diverse food habits, nutrition gardening, maternal & child health care and WASH practices such as using local water filter systems "Matka filters". She established a homestead nutrition garden as well. The regular consumption of diverse vegetables by her family has led to a considerable improvement in the dietary diversity and thereby, contributed to improving the health of her family members. Her dependence on the market for buying vegetables has reduced substantially. She also increased the family income by selling the additional vegetables in the local market. She started to motivate other women with her rich experience.

"With my small initiative, I motivate and mobilise other women to establish nutrition gardens and make them aware of the importance of dietary diversity, hygiene practices through Tippi Tap, use of Matka Filter to get safe and clean drinking water. It gives me immense pleasure that this small initiative of creating nutrition garden is being appreciated nationally and internationally, and this will motivate me to continue my work. By this recognition, many more women will come forward from my community to join hands for a better future of our village." - Ramvati Adiwashi

Ramvati Adiwashi is one the seven Game Changer awardees under 'Women in Agriculture' category initiated by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) in 2020.

Rohini Awasthy (Anganwadi Worker)

A mother of one child, 30 years old Rohini Awasthy is an Anganwadi Worker, who has been working for the betterment of the community in Ganj village of Chhatarpur district since the year 2012. Being a PLA trainer, Rohini has observed remarkable changes in the community from the perspective of food and nutrition security such as an increase in mobilisation rate among women, growth monitoring, number of nutrition gardens and vegetable consumption, improved hand washing practices and involvement of males, Self-help groups, Panchayat, Child Development Project Officer and Auxiliary Nurse Midwifery in the nutrition discussion. Lack of information about nutrition among men as well as water scarcity are some of the challenges she has observed. During her home visits, she particularly tries to involve men to address these challenges. Rohini has also improved her own knowledge on nutrition through capacity building trainings on the PLA approach.

"At the beginning, I felt insecure about facilitating PLA trainings. But through my training, I became self-confident." - Rohini Awasthy



Shukla Family

The Shukla family from Daharra village is one among many, who have benefitted from the PLA trainings. It was during the PLA sessions conducted by Roshni Tiwari, the Anganwadi Worker from Daharra, that the Shukla family learnt about the symptoms of anaemia and that it is caused by unhealthy diet and malnutrition. It was then that they discovered that their family has been suffering from anaemia for years. As a measure introduced during the PLA meetings to address nutrition needs of a family, the joint family with considerable number of women and children, has started a nutrition garden in their backyard. A family member mentioned that the garden has so far produced a variety of fruits and vegetables, like pumpkin, jackfruit, carrots and mangoes. The family also told about the hygiene practices they have adopted. It was during the meeting with the family that Kasturi and Rukmani Shukla, two of the women in the family shared about a family story that changed their perspective towards nutrition forever.

A couple of years ago, one of their children Rajnish Shukla, who was 14 years old at the point of time when they shared the story, was detected with acute anaemia and suffered from spasms. He had high fever and lost much weight. And subsequently, part of his lower body was paralysed.

"If we would have known about the importance of a diverse & healthy diet for children & pregnant women then his immune system might have been stronger and he could have kept the disease away" - Shukla Family