

Interprofessional Project On Disability, Maternal and Child Health (IPODMCH) in Bangladesh

In partnership with the Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralyzed (CRP) Bangladesh, Bangladesh Health Professionals Institute (BHPI) and the CRP Nursing and Midwifery Institute.

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Primary sites:	Bangladesh
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Overview

In 2011 the government of Bangladesh had identified maternal and child health as a priority. The level of support for people with disabilities, particularly women and children, was also low in Bangladesh. The IPODMCH project was a response to this need. The project worked to increase the capacity and availability of community workers in interprofessional maternal and child health and disability teams, with the goal of reducing maternal and infant mortality and disability rates. In addition to training care providers, the project worked to educate community members about the benefits of seeking skilled healthcare providers during pregnancy, labour, and childhood to ensure safe birth practices, nutrition, hygiene, and healthy early childhood development.



Project actions to support maternal and child health and people with disabilities in Bangladesh included:

- The IPODMCH team assembled an education team of 73 trainers. They taught modules about interprofessional approaches to disability and maternal and child health. This team trained 1114 healthcare and rehabilitation service providers (74% female) and 313 students (100% female).
- Organization of regional maternal and child health and disability networking, coordination, and accountability workshops for almost 1000 participants from community organizations.
- The project ran 425 “Awareness and Service Days” to raise awareness of maternal and child health and disability in the community. These events reached over 58,000 people.
- The project organized three policy forums and two conferences, bringing together key players in maternal and child health and disability to further policy initiatives.
- An interprofessional CRP team partnered with IPODMCH to develop and distribute a book titled “Towards an inclusive world – A guide for parents of children with cerebral palsy.”

Background

In developing countries almost 500,000 women die, and 1.5 million women become disabled annually as a result of childbearing-related causes. The prevalence of childhood disabilities in developing countries is also high, and children with disabilities can have a mortality rate as high as 80%. Research attributes these high mortality rates to a lack of healthcare services, lack of trained providers, low rates of referral, low utilization, women's low social status, and gender violence. At the time of the project proposal, Bangladesh had among the highest infant and maternal mortality rates in the world.

Rationale

The majority of maternal death and disability due to childbearing issues and disability in children can be prevented through the provision of skilled care during and after childbirth for both the mother and child. This project was meant to address maternal and child health and disability services at the community level in Bangladesh, which were fragmented and underutilized. This was a significant contributor to the high rates of maternal and childhood mortality and disability in the country. When the project began, health professionals and community workers did not utilize a referral-based system or joint practice environment (such as a family health team) resulting in poor interdisciplinary communication and care. This led to disabilities going unidentified, or death and disability occurring when it could have been prevented. Bangladesh also had very little formal education of maternal, childhood and disability health in the curricula for healthcare professionals such as physicians, nurses, or physiotherapists. This systemic issue was exacerbated by the general population's limited awareness of available healthcare and support services for mothers, children, and people with disabilities.

While there was interest from the Government of Bangladesh to aid mothers, children, and people with disabilities, particularly at the policy level. There was, however, a lack of concrete support due to a lack of knowledge and an unstable political environment. The poor understanding of interprofessional practice and inclusive maternal, childhood and disability health services among policy makers presented an obstacle to policy creation that was able to improve care.

This project aligned with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a series of eight international development goals created in 2000 at the Millennium Summit of the United Nations. MDG 4 is the reduction of child mortality and MDG 5 is the improvement of maternal health. The Interprofessional Project on Disability, Maternal and Child Health (IPODMCH) in Bangladesh targeted these MDGs, aiming to improve care for mothers, children, and people with disabilities. These goals were achieved by improving rehabilitation services, increasing understanding of disability among service providers, improving knowledge about rehabilitation services, increasing referrals, improving health services, training community birth attendants, and spreading awareness of pregnancy and childbirth related disabilities.

Actions and Outcomes

The goal of IPODMCH was to strengthen health systems in five regions in Bangladesh (Barisal, Chittagong, Moulvibazar/Sylhet, Rajshahi, and Dhaka/Savar) by improving access and inclusivity of care. The desired outcome was the reduction of maternal and infant mortality and disability. The IPODMCH project achieved these goals through implementation of activities in three broad categories:

1. **Strengthening community services** by improving utilization of maternal and infant health and disability services, increasing the quality of these services, and increasing awareness of what these services had offer and their benefits to the population.
2. **Educational opportunities** that were integrated into curricula for healthcare professionals.
3. **Support for the creation of policy** that bolstered inclusive, interprofessional services. This was designed to subsequently increase Bangladesh's ability to meet the MDGs calling for reduction of child mortality and the improvement of maternal health.

The following actions were part of the IPODMCH project:

- The project created a “The Disability, Maternal and Child Health Training Program”, a 4-module program for practitioners in the fields of disability, maternal and child health. This program increased access to continuing education opportunities for frontline community workers and built the capacity of practitioners to respond to the needs of mothers and children with/without disabilities. **IPODMCH trained 73 educators who went on to organize 36 workshops for 1114 service providers and 313 students.** Workshop participants benefitted from enhanced knowledge and skills, improved understanding of the links between disability and maternal and child health and strengthened capacity to collaborate with other professionals. This enabled them to better meet the needs of local mothers and children.
- The **IPODMCH team collaborated with the Centre for the Rehabilitation of Paralyzed (CRP) to develop a book: “Towards an inclusive world – A guide for parents of children with cerebral palsy.”** A one-year supply was printed for every parent whose child was an inpatient at the CRP Pediatric Unit. A local donor also funded the printing of an additional 1000 copies. This initiative helped educate parents learn about available community services and worked to change the pervasive negative attitudes towards disabilities in Bangladesh.
- **15 workshops for networking, coordination and accountability were implemented for nearly 1000 participants**, 47% of which were female. Participants included 153 maternal and child health service workers and 96 disability and rehabilitation workers. To establish local networks and improve referral, **maps of available services** in five districts of Bangladesh were created with contributions from local agencies. Maps included directories and contact details for all maternal and child health, ambulance, disability, and rehabilitation services available in the region. Over 2500 maps were distributed and were also available online.
- The education team ran 425 “Awareness and Service Days”, which were used to raise awareness about disability and maternal and childhood health among community members. The events acted as educational tools for people in the community. **Over 58,000 community members took part in the 425 events**, massively exceeding targets.
- The project **worked with five large healthcare educational institutes to help them incorporate topics related to disability, maternal health, and child health into the curricula.** To facilitate the integration of the new curriculum, the project created a guide for instructors.
- **Two project conferences with 288 total participants** were organized to promote mainstreaming of disability into maternal and child health programs among care providers, policy makers and other stakeholders.
- **Three policy forums were organized with over 200 participants** including those from Ministry of Health and Family Planning, the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, and UNICEF. The forums set out to bring together the decision makers from the government and non-governmental sectors

to create a policy environment that incorporated disability support into maternal and child health programs. All participating parties, including the government, were supportive of this concept.

Conclusion

Despite a challenging political climate leading to changes in the project's planned activities, the Interprofessional Project On Disability, Maternal and Child Health (IPODMCH) in Bangladesh exceeded many of its targets. Targets exceeded include the number of implemented activities, the total number of participants, the number of participating organizations and the polled level of satisfaction. For example, IPODMCH intended to train 40 educators over the entire course of the project but 73 were trained. Likewise, the goal for "Awareness and Service Days" was outreach to 12,000 people but over 58,000 people were reached. The project had a substantial impact on improving the health and wellbeing of mothers, children, and people with disabilities in Bangladesh, and aiding Bangladesh in working towards meeting the MDGs of reduced child mortality and improved maternal health.

Partners

Implementing partners: Centre for the Rehabilitation of Paralyzed (CRP) Bangladesh, Bangladesh Health Professionals Institute (BHPI), CRP Nursing and Midwifery Institute.

Local/community collaborators: Minister of Women's and Children's Affairs, Government of Bangladesh Global Autism Public Health Bangladesh, many local maternal and childhood health service providers, The National Institute for Population Research and Training (NIPORT), CRP Nursing College, Gonoshasthaya Kendra, RH-Step, BRAC, Marie Stopes, Smiling Sun Franchise, Handicap International, Plan International, Save the Children Bangladesh, Children with Disabilities and Development, University of Dhaka, Urban Primary Health Care Project – synergy and collaboration with 700+ different agencies and Organizations.

International collaborators: UNICEF, World Health Organization (WHO).

Sources and Project Resources

1. IPODMCH Final Report, December 2014*
2. IPODMCH full project details*
3. IPODMCH website archive*
4. Training program**
 - a. Module 1: Introduction to Interprofessional Collaboration in Disability, Maternal and Child Health
 - b. Module 2: Saving Lives – Preventing Disability: Disability and Maternal and Child Health
 - c. Module 3: Inclusive Interprofessional Approach to MCHD
 - d. Module 4: Promoting Rights – Right to Safe Motherhood and Right to Health for All

*used to generate this report

**no files available