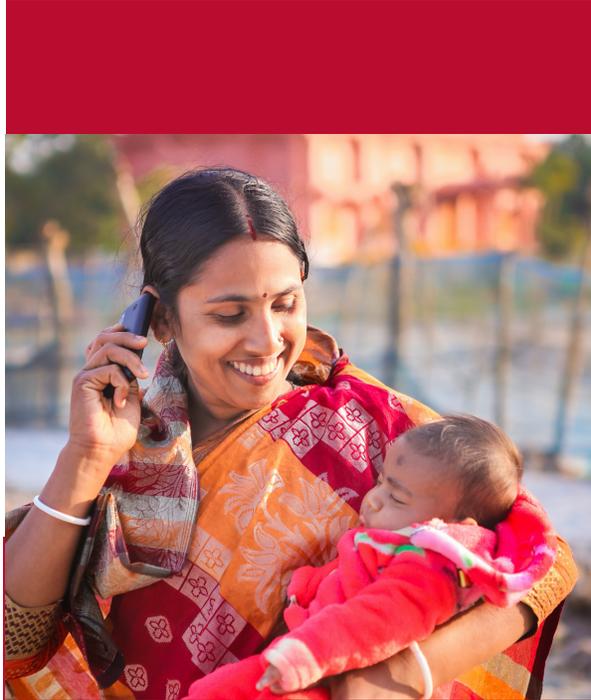




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FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Expanding the effectiveness of nutrition activities through digital tools in Bangladesh



A mother listens to a nutrition message on her phone

Credit: World Vision



A woman listens to a pre-recorded audio message on her bracelet

Credit: World Vision

The USAID Nobo Jatra project, implemented by World Vision, works to improve gender equitable food security, nutrition and resilience for vulnerable populations in south west Bangladesh. Need is great; the project baseline showed 28.6% prevalence of stunting among under-5 children. Nobo Jatra employs multiple digital solutions to most effectively and efficiently build nutrition outcomes.

As part of its interventions, Nobo Jatra provides a 15-month series of cash transfers to 23,600 pregnant and lactating women, in addition to the cash transfers issued under its woman-targeted Ultra Poor Graduation initiative. Cash transfers are sent digitally to e-wallets linked to mobile phones, using Bangladesh's largest mobile money provider, bKash. Compared to distributing physical cash, the digital solution is more efficient and builds longer term financial inclusion for the extreme poor. The project offered financial literacy and mobile money training to participants and their adult family members. Mobile phone saturation in the area is high, but participants without phones use their SIM card at cash-out points to withdraw funds.

Nobo Jatra works closely with the Government of Bangladesh, particularly the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs, which joins monthly monitoring visits to ensure that cash transfers are reaching intended participants and observe the extent to which they are used to purchase nutritious foods or invest in livelihoods. In 2019, the project found that 70% of recipients used the funds primarily for food, indicating a strong connection between the cash transfers, behavior change messages (see below), and nutrition.

In addition to money, Nobo Jatra also sends information to women through their mobile phones. Through an initiative called the Mobile Alliance for Maternal Action (MAMA), Nobo Jatra and partners send twice-weekly audio health messages to pregnant and lactating women, as well as to other adults in their household. During the pandemic, further voice messages were added around Covid-19 awareness and gender-based violence.

The project also sends digital messages to pregnant women without mobile phones or network coverage. These women receive an attractive bracelet with pre-recorded audio messages that are timed with the stage of pregnancy. The bracelets, developed by Grameen Intel Social Business, also alert the wearer to unhealthy air quality, such as when cooking indoors.

Keeping track of qualifying households, down to the level of a woman's stage of pregnancy, requires an effective data management system. Nobo Jatra developed an online management information system (MIS) and used tablets to register households and maintain records. The system is carefully managed with varying levels of access and verification to ensure that data stays secure. Nobo Jatra is synchronizing the data system with the Government of Bangladesh's processes, ensuring that the data can be handed over for ongoing government use when Nobo Jatra phases out.