icddr,b receives Grand Challenges Canada funds for “Saving Brains” of children in Bangladesh

23 October 2013, Dhaka - icddr,b (International Centre for Diarrheal Disease Research, Bangladesh) has received a seed grant of $270,000 from Grand Challenges Canada, funded by the Government of Canada for a bold and creative project aimed at improving the early brain development of children in Bangladesh. The project titled Managing maternal depression and stimulating kids to promote neurodevelopment will use the service of home based community workers of the community health clinics in rural Bangladesh to offer a combined intervention that includes a) Thinking Healthy programme for mothers of children 6 to 12 months old with depressive symptoms and b) psychosocial stimulation for their children.

Almost 60% of children in Bangladesh are at risk of poor development due to low body weight (22%) and under nutrition (41%), poverty, and sub-optimal stimulation due to low parenting knowledge. The mother is usually the key childcare provider and her physical and mental health is a major predictor of child development, particularly in low and middle-income countries.

The Principal Investigator of the project Dr. Fahmida Tofail, a scientist with the Child Development Unit (CDU) under icddr,b’s Centre for Nutrition & Food Security said, “Previous projects have used only one or the other of the interventions (depression treatment and child’s psychosocial stimulation). In this approach, we address the mother and child together to produce an optimal child-friendly environment to maximise the investment.” Under this project icddr,b will be collaborating with the University of the West Indies, and the Institute for Child Health at University College, London UK.

A major focus of icddr,b’s research and humanitarian services have been on the holistic approach on the well being of children - their mental and physical growth in relation to the overall health status of both mother and child. Each year icddr,b’s Dhaka and Matlab Hospitals provide free treatment to more than 130,000 people suffering from various diarrhoeal and respiratory diseases. Almost 60% of the patients are children, many of whom suffer from developmental problems due to malnutrition and other related illnesses. This groundbreaking project will provide valuable insights into cost effective interventions where both mother and child’s mental and physical health is taken into consideration.

Ten projects received funding of $270,000 each from Grand Challenges Canada, with seven projects in developing countries - in Vietnam, Bangladesh, India, Kenya, Zambia and Peru, and three in Canada. “Impoverished brains result in impoverished countries,” said Dr. Peter A. Singer, CEO of Grand Challenges Canada. He added, “These projects illustrate well the success of our search for ‘bold ideas with big impact,’ pioneering new approaches worldwide to maximize the number of kids in low-resource countries who achieve and contribute to their fullest capabilities.”
Note to the Editor

About Grand Challenges Canada

Grand Challenges Canada is dedicated to supporting bold ideas with big impact in global health. We are funded by the Government of Canada through the Development Innovation Fund announced in the 2008 Federal Budget. We fund innovators in low and middle income countries and Canada. Grand Challenges Canada works with the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) and other global health foundations and organizations to find sustainable long-term solutions through integrated innovation - bold ideas which integrate science, technology, social and business innovation. Grand Challenges Canada is hosted at the Sandra Rotman Centre.

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