For Immediate Release

The Lancet Series on maternal and child nutrition launched in Bangladesh; policy makers urged to take urgent action against malnutrition

02 July 2013, Dhaka: The authors of a recently published series of papers on maternal and child nutrition have urged governments and the private sector to make a concerted effort to address nutrition and food security needs at a time when almost half of all child deaths globally are caused by malnutrition (around 3.1 million deaths annually).

This startling new estimate was published as part of The Lancet Series on Maternal and Child Nutrition, which was launched in Bangladesh on 2 July 2013 by icddr,b, in collaboration with the National Nutrition Services of the Government of Bangladesh and Save the Children International. The Lancet is one of the world’s best-known and most respected medical journals. Led by Dr. Tahmeed Ahmed, scientists with icddr,b’s Centre for Nutrition & Food Security have made important contributions to this landmark series.

Speaking at the event, chief guest Professor (Dr.) A F M Ruhal Haque, MP, Honourable Minister, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MoH&FW), Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh said, “The publication of The Lancet Maternal and Child Nutrition Series 2013 is well-timed and appropriate for the policymakers, and stakeholders working for nutrition to identify research gaps, formulate and construct new interventions to tackle the nutrition problem more efficiently.”

The 2013 Series of papers is a follow-up to The Lancet’s landmark 2008 Series, which helped put nutrition on the global health and development agenda. One of the most significant outcomes of the seminal publication of the 2008 Series was the launch of the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement, a policy framework emphasising the importance of a child’s first 1000 days in nutrition, which provides a platform enabling leaders to pledge to intensify efforts to improve nutrition.

The 2013 Series was initially launched in London in June of this year, with similar events planned in more than a dozen countries around the world. Today’s event was not only intended to be a major nutrition advocacy platform for Bangladesh, but also to catalyse sustained efforts to improve public health nutrition. The Series outlines how the persistent burden of malnutrition can be tackled, presenting the best evidence and latest developments in the field. It also features new data and policy recommendations on global nutrition.
Nutrition is crucial to both individual and national development. The authors of the Series emphasise that the post-2015 sustainable development agenda must put addressing all forms of malnutrition at the top of its goals, and now is the crucial window of opportunity to scale-up nutrition. The authors also comment that with national and international momentum to address human nutrition and related food security and health needs is at optimum level and collaboration amongst the many stakeholders is necessary to seize this opportunity.

Although Bangladesh has made significant achievements in several areas including child and maternal mortality, reduction in blindness through vitamin A supplementation, immunisation, child malnutrition still remains high. More than 40 percent of under-five children are stunted – suffering from chronic malnutrition – and fall prey to infectious illnesses and impaired mental development. The authors expect that The Lancet series will help policymakers, programme implementers and academia to further improve the situation in the country.

The latest Series re-evaluates the problems of maternal and child nutrition, and also looks at the growing number of overweight and obese women and children, reporting on the consequences in low-income and middle-income countries. This Series also assesses the national progress in nutrition programmes and international efforts towards preceding recommendations. The authors have emphasised that political leaders and policy makers need to prioritise investment in nutrition, focusing investment on the nutrition-specific interventions supported by the best evidence, as identified in the second series paper, and maximising the nutrition-sensitivity of national development processes, as outlined in the third Series paper.

Authored by the Maternal and Child Nutrition Study Group – a renowned set of global health and development academics and practitioners – the Series consists of four papers and a Call to Action commentary from the authors. The first paper examines the prevalence and consequences of nutritional conditions during the life course from adolescence (for girls) through pregnancy to childhood and discusses the implications for adult health. The second paper covers the evidence supporting nutrition-specific interventions and the health outcomes and cost of increasing their population coverage. Dr. Tahmeed Ahmed, director of icddr,b’s Centre for Food Security & Nutrition, who is also a member of the Lancet Nutrition Interventions Review Group, is an author of the second paper. The third paper examines nutrition-sensitive interventions and approaches and their potential to improve nutrition. The fourth paper discusses the features of an enabling environment that are needed to provide support for nutrition programmes, and how they can be favourably influenced.

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Note to the Editor

Professor (Dr.) A F M Ruhal Haque, MP, Honorable Minister, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MoH&FW), Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh was the chief guest at the launching ceremony. Also present were special guests National Professor M R Khan; Md. Aminul Haque Bhuyan, Director, Institute of Nutrition and Food Science, University of Dhaka; and Mr. M M Neazuddin, Secretary, MoH&FW. John D Clemens, MD, Executive Director of icddr,b delivered the welcome speech. Presentations on the series were made by Professor Robert E Black, Director, Institute of International Program, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, USA and Dr. Tahmeed Ahmed, Director, Centre for Nutrition and Food Security. Mr. Michael McGrath, Save the Children International Country Director also spoke during the programme. The open discussion was chaired by Professor (Dr.) Md. Ekhlasur Rahman, Director, IPHN & Line Director, NNS, Directorate-General Health Services, Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh. Professor (Dr.) Khandhaker Md. Shefyetullah DG Health Services chaired the event.