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Nutrition in the theatre: Learning through joyful experience

The women and children of Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) are suffering from various physical complications due to lack of nutrition and proper understanding about it. The Leadership to Ensure Adequate Nutrition (LEAN) project, Funded by the European Union, works to improve nutrition sensitive awareness and behaviour change at the community level. In this regard, LEAN has been organizing community theatre programme at CHT. Which has brought positive changes in their daily lives, household and community levels.

Theatre has attracted peoples of CHT, especially young students. Every single performance has done in local languages. Contents are humorous and informative. Those performance helped to increase awareness and demand for food diversity, including vegetables, fresh fruit, iron and folic acid supplementation among women, students and their families. It has played a big role in changing the behaviour of community people.

After one such performance on sanitation, a young visitor said, 'My friends and I laughed a lot watching this performance. Provided information will help us to become more aware on sanitation and hygiene.'

After observing the scenario, a local teacher, Mr. Sushil Jibon Chakma exclaimed, 'Though several times we taught hand washing at school, I have

not seen students interact in the way they do here!'. Another villager, Mrs. Hema Rani Chakma who watched the theatre performance said, 'by watching this I have learned a lot about wash, hygiene and sanitation. All those information are new to me. My misconceptions have changed after watching this performance.' Women named Chaya Rani Chakma said, 'I had never heard about anaemia before, I have no knowledge on diversified foods for adolescent girls. This will help me a lot, as I have 2 adolescent daughters.'

Such reaction and feedback from audience, indicate successful outcome and recognition of theatre performance.

In two years of the LEAN project, 259 theatre performances have been shown across CHT, reached approximately 38,850 peoples, with strong awareness messages. After the end of each performance, the performers facilitate interactive sessions with adolescents. Where they can learn in depth on handwashing, sanitation, and nutrition. By learning from sessions, they are spreading awareness in their family and community. Through this, those adolescents build a bridge between the performers and the family.

Though the large performances are currently postponed due to COVID-19 pandemic, many communities eagerly await their return and have kept the lessons learned in the back of their minds.

