

# Nutrition education can reduce stunting faster

*Suggest experts on success in last 25 years*

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Nutrition education should be integrated into social safety net programmes in the country to reduce faster the number of stunted children below the age of five, who were 36 percent in 2014, dropped from 59 percent in 1990.

Experts from Washington-based global food policy think-tank International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) made the suggestion while announcing a new global initiative, Compact2025, at a press confer-

ence at a city hotel yesterday.

Bangladesh will be one of the focal countries of the initiative aimed to end hunger and undernutrition by 2025, said IFPRI Director General Shenggen Fan.

The government spends 12 percent of its annual expenditures on safety net programmes through cash transfer, food-aided programmes, and mixed-transfer modalities.

"We studied for two years and found out that if nutrition education is made a part of

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these programmes, the number of stunted children can be reduced faster," said Akhter Ahmed, chief of party of Bangladesh Policy Research and Strategy Support Programme, IFPRI.

Physical stunting -- too short for one's age -- is a key indicator of undernutrition.

Compact2025 is going to be formally launched on November 18 this year coinciding with the 40-year celebration of IFPRI in Washington DC, USA.

Along with Fan and Akhter, Teunis van Rheenen, the head of the IFPRI's Partnership Development, explained some of the activities to be rolled under Comapct2025.

When IFPRI celebrates its 40th anniversary, 800 million people in the world will still suffer from hunger and a billion people from nutrient deficiencies, Fan said.

Citing that 28 million people have less than the minimum daily diet of 1,800 kilo calories in Bangladesh, Akhter said, "We need to diversify our rice-centric diet. It's not healthy to have 77 percent of your daily calorie intake from rice only."

He appreciated a recent move of the agriculture ministry to link agriculture with nutrition through women empowerment.

Fan called for shifting

public sector support from the production of less-nutrient food to those more nutritious. He put emphasis on providing support to fishery, dairy products, vegetables, etc.

According to IFPRI, it is possible to end hunger and undernutrition by 2025 by adapting successful strategies employed in countries such as Brazil, China, Thailand and Vietnam.

China and Vietnam -- both agriculture-based societies where smallholders dominate -- have successfully adapted agriculture-led strategies. Vietnam has reduced hunger from 45 percent in 1990-1992 to 13 percent in 2012-14 and China has reduced the number of stunted children from 32 percent in 1990 to 8 percent in 2010.

Brazil has employed social protection-led strategies and targeted nutrition intervention to eliminate hunger and reduce child stunting from 19 percent in 1989 to 7 percent in 2007.

Thailand has adapted agriculture-led as well as social protection-led strategies and targeted nutrition intervention to rapidly reduce hunger and undernutrition. It has reduced hunger from 36 percent in 1990 to about 7 percent in 2012-14 and reduced child stunting from 25 percent in 1987 to 16 percent in 2012.