

OFFICIAL FEEDBACK FORM

DIALOGUE TITLE	Community level Nutrition Dialogue with floating Manta fisherfolk
DIALOGUE DATE	Wednesday, 10 September 2025 03:30 GMT +06:00
CONVENED BY	Md Ashikur Rahman, YouthNet Global, CSA SUN BD Event announced on behalf of the Convenor by: MD Sohanur Rahman. National Youth Coordinator
EVENT LANGUAGE	Bangla
HOST LOCATION	Laharhat, Bangladesh
GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE	Laharhat, Barishal, Bangladesh
DIALOGUE EVENT PAGE	https://nutritiondialogues.org/dialogue/59891/



The outcomes from Nutrition Dialogues will contribute to developing and identifying the most urgent and powerful ways to improve nutrition for all, with a focus on women and children and young people. Each Dialogue contributes in four distinct ways:

- Published as publicly available PDFs on the Nutrition Dialogues Portal
- Available as public data on the Nutrition Dialogues Portal "Explore Feedback" page
- Available publicly within a .xls file alongside all Feedback Form data for advanced analysis
- Synthesised into reports that cover which nutrition challenges are faced, what actions are urgently needed and how should these be taken forward – particular, in advance of the Nutrition for Growth Summit in Paris, March 2025.

SECTION ONE: PARTICIPATION

TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	20
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PARTICIPATION BY AGE RANGE

3	0-11	3	12-18	5	19-29
9	30-49	0	50-74	0	75+

PARTICIPATION BY GENDER

10	Female	10	Male	0	Other/Prefer not to say
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NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS FROM EACH STAKEHOLDER GROUP

6	Children, Youth Groups and Students	1	Civil Society Organisations (including consumer groups and environmental organisations)
0	Educators and Teachers	0	Faith Leaders/Faith Communities
0	Financial Institutions and Technical Partners	0	Food Producers (including farmers)
0	Healthcare Professionals	0	Indigenous Peoples
0	Information and Technology Providers	0	Large Business and Food Retailers
0	Marketing and Advertising Experts	0	National/Federal Government Officials and Representatives
0	News and Media (e.g. Journalists)	0	Parents and Caregivers
0	Science and Academia	0	Small/Medium Enterprises
0	Sub-National/Local Government Officials and Representatives	0	United Nations
10	Women's Groups	4	Other (please state)

OTHER STAKEHOLDER GROUPS

Fisherfolk community

ADDITIONAL DETAIL ON PARTICIPANT DIVERSITY

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SECTION TWO: FRAMING AND DISCUSSION

FRAMING

The Stakeholder Dialogue was introduced by setting the context of the Manta fisherfolk floating community in Laharhat, Barishal, one of the most marginalized and nutritionally vulnerable groups in the region. The introduction highlighted how this community, living almost entirely on riverboats, depends on fishing as their sole livelihood. However, declining fish stocks due to river pollution and unregulated fishing have placed immense pressure on their food security and nutrition. Local youth leaders opened the session by acknowledging these challenges and situating them within the broader nutritional concerns of Barishal. They emphasized that families here face a high dependency on market-purchased food, which is often unaffordable, while locally available nutritious options are undervalued or overlooked. This creates a double burden of economic hardship and poor dietary diversity. Community anxieties around seasonality were also acknowledged—during lean fishing periods, households are forced to survive on wild leaves or borrowed food, leading to cycles of hunger and malnutrition. The introduction further drew attention to maternal and child health as a pressing concern. Pregnant women often lack adequate healthcare access and nutritious diets, contributing to widespread undernutrition among children. The dialogue also noted that large family sizes, linked to traditional fishing practices, stretch household resources and create inequities in food distribution. Participants were encouraged to openly share their lived experiences. This framing helped surface hidden anxieties around food insecurity, misconceptions about nutrition (such as undervaluing vegetables like tomatoes), and the community's dependence on unstable fishing yields. By grounding the dialogue in these local realities, the event created space for collaborative reflection on both immediate needs and longer-term solutions.

DISCUSSION

Our discussion focused on the nutritional challenges of the Manta fisherfolk community and how to find sustainable, community-driven solutions. Open-ended questions included: How does declining fish availability affect household diets? What foods are accessible but underutilized for nutrition? How do seasonality and river pollution shape food security? What barriers exist for maternal and child nutrition? What alternative livelihoods or practices (such as floating gardens or small-scale poultry) could strengthen nutrition and resilience?

SECTION THREE: DIALOGUE OUTCOMES

CHALLENGES

During our Stakeholder Dialogue, participants highlighted several interconnected nutrition challenges shaped by their local context, livelihoods, and access to resources. A primary concern raised was the decline in fish availability, which has been a cornerstone of both nutrition and income for many households. Reduced fish stocks in local rivers have not only limited a vital source of protein and essential micronutrients but also created economic pressures, forcing families to seek alternative food sources often beyond their financial reach.

This ties directly into the dependence on market purchases, as many households can no longer rely on self-produced food. Market dependence exposes families to fluctuating prices, particularly during seasonal shortages or post-disaster periods, making it difficult to maintain consistent, balanced diets. Participants noted that even when markets offer diverse foods, affordability remains a significant barrier, with families prioritizing quantity over nutritional quality to stretch limited resources.

Another challenge emphasized was limited nutritional knowledge. While participants are aware of high-value, expensive foods, many remain unaware of the nutritional potential of locally available, affordable options such as seasonal vegetables, legumes, and small fish species. This knowledge gap contributes to dietary patterns that are both monotonous and insufficient in micronutrients, heightening the risk of malnutrition, particularly among children and pregnant women.

Household size and food distribution practices further exacerbate nutrition vulnerabilities. Families with multiple children often focus resources on supporting fishing activities rather than ensuring equitable access to nutritious meals. In many cases, children and women receive smaller or lower-quality portions, contributing to undernutrition.

Finally, maternal and child health emerged as a critical concern.

URGENT ACTIONS

Participants of the dialogue identified several urgent actions to address the pressing nutrition and livelihood challenges faced by their community. A primary recommendation was the restoration of fish resources. Participants emphasized the need to prevent river pollution and regulate fishing practices to revive local fish populations, recognizing that sustainable access to fish is central to both food security and economic stability for fishing-dependent families. They suggested that community-led monitoring, awareness campaigns on environmental protection, and collaboration with local authorities could help implement these measures effectively.

Another priority was improving educational access. Participants proposed establishing schools or learning centers to provide basic education alongside nutrition awareness programs. They highlighted that integrating practical knowledge on local nutritious foods and healthy dietary practices into school curricula and community sessions could help families make informed food choices, particularly for children and women.

Participants also stressed the importance of promoting integrated livelihoods. Diversifying income sources through floating seedbeds, small-scale agriculture, and animal husbandry such as poultry, ducks, and cattle was seen as a strategy to reduce dependence on fish alone. Several participants shared personal experiences illustrating the fragility of their current income sources, emphasizing that training, access to inputs, and technical support would be necessary to implement these livelihood interventions sustainably.

Health and family planning awareness was identified as another critical area. Participants recommended organizing sessions on maternal health, child nutrition, and family planning to improve household well-being and ensure equitable food distribution. They suggested collaboration with local health workers and NGOs to deliver these sessions regularly, making information accessible.

AREAS OF DIVERGENCE

During the dialogue, participants generally shared a common concern over declining nutrition and livelihood security, but notable divergences emerged regarding priorities, approaches, and perceptions of feasibility. One area of divergence was the emphasis on immediate versus long-term solutions. Some participants, particularly those most affected by declining fish stocks, prioritized urgent measures such as river restoration, pollution control, and market support to stabilize income and food availability. Others highlighted the importance of longer-term strategies, such as education, nutrition awareness, and integrated livelihood programs, arguing that without building knowledge and skills, short-term interventions might have limited lasting impact.

Differences also arose around the role of traditional practices versus new interventions. Certain community members expressed a strong desire to preserve traditional fishing methods and cultural practices, fearing that modern livelihood strategies like floating seedbeds or small-scale animal husbandry could disrupt their way of life or require skills they lacked. Conversely, other participants were more open to adopting diversified livelihoods and innovations to reduce dependency on a declining resource base, emphasizing the potential for increased income and better nutrition outcomes.

Opinions diverged on health and family planning interventions as well. Some participants, particularly older men, were hesitant about introducing family planning or maternal health programs, citing cultural or religious concerns. In contrast, women and younger community members were more supportive, stressing the necessity of these programs to improve household nutrition, maternal and child health, and equitable food distribution.

OVERALL SUMMARY

The community-based nutrition dialogue with the Manta fisherfolk floating community in Barishal offered a rare glimpse into the daily realities of one of the region's most marginalized groups. Organized by local youth leaders, the dialogue sought to uncover pressing food security and nutrition challenges while exploring practical, locally driven solutions. The event was not only an information-gathering exercise but also a space where participants could share their struggles, aspirations, and knowledge in their own words.

Twenty participants attended, equally divided between men and women, ranging from young children to adults in their late forties. Their occupations reflected the community's heavy reliance on fishing, supplemented by household work and informal trading. Despite the small gathering, the atmosphere was intimate, open, and deeply human—participants spoke candidly about their lives, their struggles, and their hopes for the future.

The challenges shared were stark and vivid. Fishermen described the anxiety of nights spent on the river with little or no catch, returning home to faces full of expectation and disappointment. Md. Razzak, 41, recounted, "I spent the entire night in the river but could not catch any fish. With nothing to sell in the market, my family managed the day by cooking wild taro leaves from the riverbank." These stories illustrated the precarious nature of livelihoods, where even minor environmental changes can translate into hunger and economic hardship.

Women shared their struggles to feed their families on limited resources. Many noted the difficulty of balancing household work with ensuring children receive sufficient nutrition. Several admitted that, despite locally available and affordable foods, they often prioritized expensive or culturally preferred items, underestimating the nutritional value of everyday vegetables or river plants.

The dialogue also revealed broader systemic challenges. Families frequently had many children to support fishing and household activities, yet equitable food distribution remained a problem. Maternal and child health was a recurring concern, with limited access to healthcare and guidance contributing to malnourished children. Participants expressed frustration at the lack of support, highlighting that their vulnerability was compounded by both environmental pressures, such as declining fish stocks, and socio-economic constraints, such as high food prices and lack of livelihood options beyond fishing.

Despite these hardships, the dialogue was infused with hope and practical thinking. Participants identified actionable solutions, including restoring fish populations through pollution control and responsible fishing practices, establishing learning centers for children and nutritional education, and diversifying livelihoods through floating gardens, small-scale agriculture, and poultry or livestock farming. Health and family planning awareness was seen as crucial to improve maternal and child outcomes. These discussions reflected a community deeply aware of its challenges yet eager to explore innovative, context-sensitive strategies to improve well-being.

The dialogue left a lasting impression on both organizers and participants. It highlighted the resilience of the Manta community, whose members, even amid uncertainty and hardship, showed willingness to adapt, learn, and advocate for their future. It became clear that meaningful interventions must combine environmental management, nutritional education, and livelihood support, all while respecting traditional ways of life. The event underscored the importance of listening to lived experiences as a foundation for any programmatic or policy action, revealing that real change is most sustainable when driven by those who experience the challenges firsthand.

In conclusion, The Manta community dialogue highlighted that effectively addressing malnutrition and food insecurity requires empathy, community participation, and respect for local knowledge, showing that practical, empowering solutions must integrate nutrition, health, and livelihoods with the lived realities of daily life.

SECTION FOUR: PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT & METHOD

PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT

Our dialogue was designed and conducted with strict adherence to the Principles of Engagement, emphasizing transparency, inclusivity, and respect. Before the event, facilitators reviewed the participant list to identify potential competing interests, including differing organizational mandates, professional backgrounds, and regional priorities, allowing us to anticipate areas of divergence and plan structured discussion opportunities. During the dialogue, participants were asked to disclose any funding or affiliations that could influence contributions, fostering trust and minimizing bias. Facilitators actively managed discussions to ensure equitable participation, summarizing diverse viewpoints, framing questions neutrally, and redirecting conversations toward shared objectives. Participants were encouraged to respect confidentiality, listen actively, and collaborate constructively, creating a safe space for candid exchange.

METHOD AND SETTING

The dialogue was convened using a community-based participatory methodology, emphasizing inclusivity, open discussion, and knowledge sharing. Local youth leaders facilitated structured sessions with prepared guiding questions while allowing for organic storytelling and experience sharing. The setting was informal and community-centered, held on a floating platform within the Manta fisherfolk settlement, fostering comfort and familiarity.

ADVICE FOR OTHER CONVENORS

Ensure inclusivity by engaging participants of all ages, genders, and roles, and create a safe, respectful environment for open dialogue. Prepare guiding questions but allow space for participants to share personal experiences. Anticipate differing perspectives and plan strategies to manage them constructively. Prioritize local knowledge, cultural context, and practical solutions. Transparency, active listening, and empathy are key to fostering trust, meaningful discussion.

FEEDBACK FORM: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We sincerely acknowledge the support of SUNCSN and CSA4SUN Bangladesh for their guidance and collaboration throughout the dialogue process. Our appreciation also goes to the Youth Leaders for Nutrition Program and their dedicated Youth Coordinator, Sohanur Rahman, for their active participation and coordination. We are grateful to Save the Children in Bangladesh for their invaluable support and to YouthNet Global for providing logistical and technical assistance that ensured the smooth execution

ATTACHMENTS

- **Report**
https://nutritiondialogues.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Nutrition_Dialogue_Report_Barishal-Final.pdf