



MYANMAR

IMPROVEMENTS IN THE LIVES OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN: PROJECTS FROM THE FIELD



The Livelihoods and Food Security Fund: Improving nutrition in Myanmar by transforming and empowering lives

Malnutrition in Myanmar

In Myanmar, child stunting has significantly declined from around 50% in the 1990s to 29% in 2016¹. Recent projections indicate that the country will come close to meeting both the government's own target and the internationally agreed World Health Assembly target for stunting by 2025. However, an estimated 1.3 million children under five are stunted, with high social and economic costs, which disproportionately affects the poorest households. The most recent data confirms stark nutrition inequalities with stunting in Chin, Ayeyarwady and Rakhine States as high as 40%, 38% and 35% respectively². Acute undernutrition, or wasting, is associated with weakened immunity and increased risk of death and affects 7% of children under five. Micronutrient deficiencies also give cause for concern: 58% of children under five and 46% of women of reproductive age are anaemic. At the same time, the national prevalence of obesity among adolescents has risen five-fold from 2000 to 2016.

LIFT (2009-2023)

The Livelihoods and Food Security Fund (LIFT) is a multi-donor initiative supporting poor, rural people in Myanmar (covering Delta, Dry Zone, Rakhine and Uplands areas) to reach their full economic potential and resilience, through improved nutrition, income diversification and skills development. Since inception 15 donors have supported the programme with around EUR 430 million, with EU contributing around EUR 117 million by the end of 2019³. The multi-sectoral programme addresses the basic, underlying and immediate causes of malnutrition. The anticipated results of LIFT include not only improved nutrition of women, men and children⁴, but also increased incomes and resilience of rural households, and improved policies and effective public expenditure for pro-poor rural development. The programme prioritises the first 1 000 days of life and addresses access and availability of diverse

diets, knowledge on infant and young child feeding practices, hygiene and sanitation practices, access to health services, and income and food security. Due to ongoing conflict and instability, the imperative is to engage in conflict-sensitive and humanitarian-development-peace nexus programming, and in recent years LIFT has strengthened its focus on ensuring the inclusion of especially vulnerable populations living in areas controlled by non-government entities. In 2020 LIFT's rapid response to COVID-19 reinforced national efforts by pivoting existing resources towards frontline interventions that reached more than 2.3 million people between March and October. This included a significant component of humanitarian and livelihood focused support for vulnerable migrants in Myanmar – both internal and international.

Tangible results in the lives of women and children

LIFT has supported an innovative maternal and child cash transfer (MCCT) programme incorporating social and behaviour change communication interventions. Final project evaluations of these programmes have confirmed impressive results in nutrition, thereby reinforcing the government's policy and budgetary commitments to investing in human capital⁵. From 2016 to 2019, the prevalence of stunting for children aged 6-23 months has been reduced by 4%, and for children aged 2-5 years by 5.4%; while the prevalence of wasting has been reduced by 2.8%. This initiative has also provided an important learning platform for government as seen by the move to national funding and delivery of MCCT programmes. In response to the COVID-19 crisis, the Department of Social Welfare in Myanmar delivered a top up cash transfer to all women registered on the MCCT programme. To date, LIFT has reached over 11.6 million people or 2.6 million families across 75% of Myanmar's townships.



Outcomes	2018	2019
Knowledge of infant and young child feeding (IYCF)	16%	78%
Exclusive breastfeeding	43%	73%
Children's diet ⁶	16%	31%
Handwashing ⁷	66%	81%

Realising human potential

Good nutrition is a fundamental human right and provides the foundation for healthy individuals and societies. By partnering with national stakeholders LIFT has effectively demonstrated that efforts to improve the nutrition of women and children with a multi-sectoral approach can be a productive investment to unleash the realisation of human potential. The Government's Multi-Sectoral National Plan of Action on Nutrition was endorsed in November 2018 and has served to effectively engage key actors and stakeholders across multiple sectors to further the development of sub-national planning with convergence across interventions and services. A transformative approach to enhanced gender equality has also been central to LIFT's strategy, whether via interventions fostering equitable access to and control over land and natural resources, or support to vocational training and livelihood opportunities for youth in camps for internally displaced people.

Tackling climate and environmental challenges

Myanmar's location and physical diversity means climate change takes many forms: in the dry zone, temperatures increase and droughts become more prevalent, while the coastal zone remains at constant risk of intensifying cyclones. With its adapted area-specific approach LIFT explicitly supports community efforts to adapt to climate change and to build resilience. A 2019 study confirmed that exposure to shocks and stresses (including droughts, floods and price related shocks) had heightened the vulnerability of households and eroded progress in child nutrition⁸. However, the study concluded that as a result of activities ensuring improved access for the poorest households to financial services and the promotion of climate smart agricultural livelihoods, *'LIFT support appears to significantly have dampened the negative impact on incomes of exposure to shock and stresses.'*

- 1 Myanmar Demographic Health Survey 2016.
- 2 Myanmar Micronutrient and Food Consumption Survey 2019.
- 3 LIFT (2020) Annual Report for 2019
- 4 Nutrition has been an explicit part of the LIFT strategy since 2014
- 5 Results taken from randomised control trial (conducted by Innovations for Poverty Action) as part of LIFT's *'Legacy Project'* (January 2016 – April 2019).
- 6 Percentage of children age 6-23 months receiving a minimum acceptable diet
- 7 Refers to percentage of households where appropriate hand washing behaviour is practiced
- 8 Ling A and Travis C. Aline Impact LTD (2019) Strengthening Resilience in Rural Myanmar.

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Photo: A women labourer transplants rice in a demonstration plot near Mezali Kone village in Myanmar. ©IFAD / Irshad Khan



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