

India: Tummies filled and bodies strengthened

Some funds raised through the 30 Hour Famine will go to India, to improve the nutrition and survival of children less than three years of age. Programs like this have already been successful in neighboring Bangladesh, where World Vision helped mothers work together to improve the health of their children.

Amidst the cries of a few babies, eight mothers sit on mats in a rural village in northern Bangladesh. With babes in arms, the mothers listen attentively to Shakhin Parvin as she explains how they can keep their children healthy. Some of the infants quietly snack on biscuits, while others fall asleep under the morning sun.

With a chalkboard behind her and printed diagrams in hand, Shakhin explains the importance of breastfeeding in the early years of an infant's development. Today's lesson is just one component of a 12-day training session for World Vision's Positive Deviance (PD) Hearth program.

The program helps combat child malnutrition by making mothers aware of the signs of malnutrition, teaching them to prepare well-balanced and nutritious meals for their children and educating them about proper hygiene practices.



Preparing the food

"My daughter is suffering from malnutrition," says Kabita Begum, one of the mothers participating in the program. "That's why I got involved with the program, so that she can have enough nutrition." Her one-year-old daughter was malnourished when the training began.

Today, the group is preparing a dish called kichuri, one of the nutritious meals they have learned to make. As Shakhin watches, Kabita and other mothers begin slicing vegetables. The simple, yet highly nutritious meal is a stew made of leafy vegetables, pumpkin, potatoes, tomatoes, lentils, eggs and rice. It's a meal the children look forward to eating.

"She is very interested to take this food," Kabita says of her little girl's reaction to the meal. "She likes this. If she is not fed it, she cries."

Learning from others

Curiosity led Kabita to discover the nutrition program. She saw neighbouring mothers gathering for an earlier session near her home. After learning more about the program, Kabita enrolled. She admits that she didn't know much about malnutrition but recognized that her firstborn child wasn't well.

"She was weak, she could not eat," she recalls, adding that Maksuda's legs were swollen and she couldn't walk. "But now she is regaining the strength." After just a few days in the program, the little girl is starting to walk again.

Thanks to funding from the 30 Hour Famine, World Vision will be implementing a similar program at the Singhbhum community development program in India. Like the mothers in Bangladesh, these women will be taught good nutrition and hygiene habits, so they can continue to raise healthy children on their own.

Shakhin comments on the wisdom of this approach. "If World Vision gives them food, they'll be dependent on World Vision," she says. "They'll wait for the food if they give them the rice to eat. Now the women are practicing on their own, they are learning."

Eat nothing. Do something.

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