

3. Bangladesh's Report

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Visit to Japanese Hospital (Nerima Hikarigaoka Hospital)

Among the several places we visited according to the Asian Young Dietitian Network (AYDN) program schedule, the first was Nerima Hikarigaoka Hospital. Upon entering the hospital, I felt very inspired by the dedication of the staff and their use of innovative technology. I realized that it is a place where health and well-being are not just aspirations but a reality enjoyed by all.

The doctor-dietitian-staff coordination, teamwork, and understanding were praiseworthy. The insightful presentation on elderly nutrition and care for aspiration pneumonia was very helpful. The practical strategies shared were invaluable. We are eager to absorb and utilize this knowledge in our own country. The personalized, balanced, and varied meal support with calorie and nutrient information shows patient-centric care. The vegetables grown in the nutrition room were also very inspiring. These practices encourage healthy eating habits and ensure everyone receives the necessary nourishment.

We carry the knowledge and inspiration gained at Nerima Hikarigaoka Hospital with us and are committed to applying and sharing this in our own country.



Fig 1. The vegetables are grown in the nutrition room

Visit to elementary school for school lunch (Funabori Elementary School)

Funabori Elementary School lunch program combines responsibility, sustainability, and healthy eating habits. The balanced, nutritious (which also provides a portion of RDA), delicious, free-of-cost,

varied meals are praiseworthy. Their emphasis on fresh, local food ingredients and some school-grown vegetables is notable. The target for preventing food waste is a sign of meticulous planning and portion control. The student volunteers serving their peers fostered a sense of community and teamwork. The dietitian's engagement in cooking and nutrition education classes empowered children to make healthy choices beyond the lunchroom, shaping positive habits for life.

In Bangladesh, since 2010 Government with WFP has been investing in the National School Feeding program in Government primary schools. By 2022, more than 3 million children in 104 sub-districts had been reached with fortified biscuits and in the same location hot meals. The Government is planning to include seasonal fruits, eggs, bun, and milk to increase diversity. Bangladesh Government is a member of the Global School Meals Coalition.

Finally, as a young dietitian, I left Funabori school with a heart full of inspiration and actionable ideas which I will share and try to establish in my country.

Kick-off meeting of AYDN

Bangladesh emerged as an independent and sovereign country on 16th December 1971. According to the 2022 Bangladeshi census, its population size is 169,828,921. The age structure of Bangladesh is 0-14 yrs: 26.45%, 15-64 yrs: 67.72%, >64 yrs: 5.83%.

Bangladeshi food is a celebration of deliciousness, diversity, and spice. Influenced by the country's geography and religion, it revolves around the iconic saying, "Fish and Rice make a Bengali." It has 260 freshwater and 475 marine fish species alongside a year-round bounty of fruits and vegetables. Winter adds another layer of delight with its array of delicious sweet cakes (pitha). Its everyday ingredients are- rice, fish, pulses, vegetables - and its magic-making seasonings like salt, turmeric, chili, garlic, ginger, hot spices (gorom moshla), and the unique five-spice blend (panch phoron). There are many traditional dishes in Bangladesh. Among them, the two mentioned dishes, Panta Ilish and Soft Khichuri/Vuna Khichuri capture the essence of Bangladeshi cuisine. Panta –Ilish: Soaked rice forms the base, infused with the delicate Hilsha fish fry and mashed vegetables. A touch of salt, onion, green chili, and fried red chili adds a vibrant spark, making every bite delightful. This dish has its roots in tradition. Bengalis celebrate the first day of their calendar with this dish.

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Fig 2. Bangladesh's traditional dish: Panta Ilish

Soft Khichuri/Vuna Khichuri: Beyond its role as complementary feeding for babies, this Khichuri is a popular choice for rainy days or a special occasional meal. Rice and pulses are cooked together with vegetables, while egg, meat, fish, or organ meat like liver can add depth and protein. The taste is enhanced by the flavors of salt, chili powder, turmeric, cumin, coriander, and a blend of hot spices, ensuring a warm and satisfying experience. While Bangladeshi cuisine has incredible flavor and diversity, it's crucial to acknowledge the underlying nutritional challenges faced by the country. These challenges are often most acute among women of reproductive age and young children.

Alarming Rates of Nutritional Issues:

- Anemia: 37% of women aged 15-49 suffer from anemia (1), this translates to immense health risks for both them and their children.
- Food Insecurity: 24% experienced food insecurity on average in August 2023 (2).
- Childhood Anemia: The situation is concerning for younger children, with 43% of those aged 6-59 months experiencing anemia (1).
- Diet-Related Non-Communicable Diseases: Bangladesh had 13.14 million diabetes cases in 2021 (3).

Government Initiatives:

The government of Bangladesh is actively addressing these challenges through policies and programs like:

- National Strategy on Prevention and Control of Micronutrient Deficiencies (2015-2024): This strategy focuses on improving access to diverse and micronutrient-rich foods.
- National Nutrition Policy and National Nutrition Services

Across various Asian countries, food habits are intricately woven with culture, history, geography, weather, and religion. Rice, noodles, bread, fish, meat, and vegetables are the main food items. Countries geographically close to each other often share a love for similar spices and seasonings. However, there lies a complex picture of malnutrition: under-nutrition, over-nutrition, and micronutrient deficiencies. The prevalence of diet-related non-communicable diseases is also increasing in this region. The types of malnutrition and their prevalence differ significantly across and within countries. Socio-economic conditions, lifestyle choices, and dietary habits are potential causes behind this scenario. While shared food habits paint a unifying picture, the region's battle against malnutrition demands an understanding of its diverse forms and underlying causes.

AYDN envisions a future where young dietitians from across Asia are not only connected but also empowered to make a difference in the field of Dietetics and Nutrition. AYDN will foster friendship and knowledge exchange through conferences, workshops, and online platforms creating a supportive network for young professionals. AYDN will participate in collaborative research to address regional challenges and contribute to global knowledge.

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