

# What's tr**ENDING** in Asia?

## Surveying success to help the children of Bangladesh

### *The NTD challenge*

Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) shatter the lives of impoverished children and communities around the globe. In fact, approximately two billion people worldwide are infected with an NTD caused by soil transmitted helminths (STH) – intestinal worms such as round worms, whip worms, and hookworms. Over 600 million school-age children are at risk for infection; STH in children impairs cognitive development, leads to iron deficiency anemia, and causes growth impairment. Often affecting those living in adverse social and economic conditions, the effects on physical health, intellectual growth and work productivity of those infected with STH, in turn, can perpetuate poverty.

Bangladesh claims some of the highest STH infection rates in the world. STH are endemic in many provinces throughout the country, affecting all three ecological zones in the country. In 2005, surveys in Bangladesh found a 79.8% prevalence of worm infections, with nearly 20 million Bangladeshi children at risk for STH.

Among the most effective control measures has been the delivery of an annual universal treatment for schoolchildren with safe and effective deworming drugs. Covering an entire district or province's population of children is an extremely economical and efficient approach that focuses on treating all children in schools at once rather than diagnosing and treating individual cases. These annual mass treatments must continue for at least five years in each community to fully interrupt transmission of infection and lead to the potential elimination of STH.

### *Making a difference*

To tackle the STH challenge, the Government of Bangladesh's Ministry of Health established deworming activities through the National Filariasis Elimination and STH Control Program with the support of various partners including the WHO, Children Without Worms (CWW), and Johnson & Johnson. Schools in three districts began piloting deworming programs in 2005 and efforts expanded to achieve full national coverage by 2008. School deworming is now conducted for all children aged five to twelve years old two times per year. While the government's determination to control the STH infections were laudable, in 2012, it still wasn't clear if these activities were truly successful.



Schoolchild taking deworming pill during mass drug administration national deworming event.

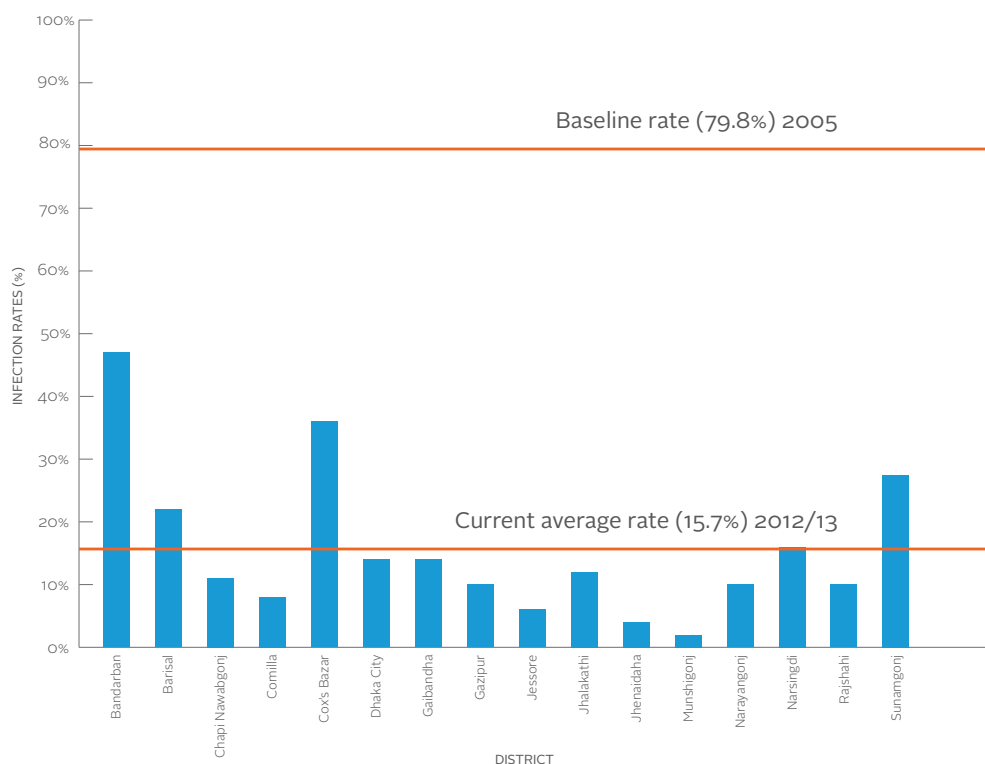
The USAID funded End Neglected Tropical Diseases in Asia (END in Asia) Project, managed by FHI 360, provided the government with the critical funding and technical expertise to complete a series of surveys to verify whether the MDAs are actually succeeding and, as a result, if the government's activities must be

maintained or can be decreased over time. The results are phenomenal: from the 16 districts surveyed, approximately 20.4% of the children tested were infected with one or more STH, with some districts reporting rates as low as 2%. This represents an astonishing reduction in infection rates from the baseline of 79.8%. While some districts still have serious problems and need to continue intensive treatment, other districts can begin to reduce the frequency of treatment and save on critical program resources. According to Dr. Rouseli Haq, Deputy Program Manager of the Filariasis Elimination and STH Control Program, "We were hoping that the government's extensive efforts would show positive results and this survey confirms that we have made important progress. It will also help us plan for future interventions and could possibly help us spend limited resources more efficiently."

## Future opportunities

While carrying out the surveys and treatment campaigns, government staff became aware of the many challenges that still require attention to ensure a well-functioning program. These areas include regular coordination meetings, better monitoring systems, and improved communication to the communities on the importance of mass treatment of STH so that all school-age children can access medication. For example, there are still reports of children not ingesting the dispensed tablets due to fear, rumors, or superstition. In response, the END in Asia Project is currently supporting the government to expand and improve the communications strategy through engaging mass media activities and quality printed materials. Dr. Haq: "The survey has been a wonderful start to this partnership. We look forward to the continuation of support from USAID and END in Asia."

### STH INFECTION RATES, BY DISTRICT



**NOTES:**

Each child only counted once even if multiple infections

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