Nurses are the major point of contact with the patients. They play a crucial role in maintaining the quality of healthcare as well as ensuring technical and management aspects of the hospitals. In Bangladesh, the doctor to nurse ratio is 3:1 whereas the ideal situation should be 1:3.

Market Assessments by RTM-Katalyst, identified the demand-supply gap of skilled nurses a major constraint for market development of private sector health. These initial studies led to the framing of this intervention. Consequently, RTM-Katalyst started the required policy advocacy initiatives. The project team worked with MoHFW for the development of policy guidelines for 4-year B.Sc. Nursing and simultaneously assisted interested private sector institutions (AIUB, SUB, IMC) for offering B.Sc. Nursing and addressing the image issues of nursing profession. RTM facilitated DU in the development and approval of curriculum, exam module, and university ordinance for introduction of international standard B.Sc. Nursing course.

In April’07 the GoB approved a Policy Guideline for offering B.Sc. Nursing course. In this policy the Private Universities were not included although they were more interested to start the course. RTM continued working with MoHFW to revise the policy to make it more ‘private sector friendly’ and in December’08 a revised policy was approved, where the Private Universities are allowed to offer B.Sc. Nursing course provided that they have an agreement with a 100 bedded hospital.

RTM organized image building campaigns and advocacy programs with MoHFW, SUB, AIUB, ASSH and The Daily Star to increase the social acceptability of nursing profession. International Nurses’ Day was observed and articles on nursing were published in various leading news media.

To accomplish these tasks RTM organized a number of dissemination workshops, roundtables and orientations with partners and associates.

**Scenario: Before and After**

**Before:**
- Only diploma and post-basic Nursing course available in the country and GoB accredited B.Sc. Nursing course not available
- Policy guideline to permit institutions for offering B.Sc. Nursing course not in existence
- Limited initiative to uplift the economic and social status of nurses
- Every year private hospitals recruit a huge number of nurses from neighboring countries

**After:**
- 4 year B.Sc. Nursing course is available in the country
- Private Universities are permitted to offer B.Sc. Nursing course
- 4 public and 1 armed forces medical college are offering B.Sc. Nursing course
- 7 private medical colleges are offering B.Sc. Nursing course
- Curriculum, ordinance and examination module for B.Sc. Nursing course are available
- A clear policy guideline is in place for offering B.Sc. Nursing in private sector
- By 2011, approximately 310 Nursing students will graduate.
- Professional recognition of nursing has significantly increased
- Nursing day is celebrated by private organizations in addition to GoB
- Locally graduated nurses will reduce the dependence on foreign recruits.
Key Impacts

• Beginning in the 2007-08 session, 4 public, i.e. DMCH (Dhaka), MMCH (Mymensing), RMCH (Rajshahi), CMCH (Chittagong) and 4 private medical colleges, Kumudini (Mirzapur), SUB (Dhanmondi), IMC (Gazipura), Moulana Bhashani (Uttara) started offering B.Sc. Nursing course.

• In 2009-10 another 3 private medical colleges, JRRMC, (Sylhet), North East (Sylhet), Sahabuddin (Gulshan) joined the league. The Armed Forces Medical Institute also started offering B.Sc. Nursing course.

• There are now a total student capacity of 400 in public, 205 in private and 25 in armed forces medical college for B.Sc. Nursing course.

• A number of additional private institutions are in the pipeline of approval process, namely TMSS, JIMC, ASSH, Delta and Sikdar. Furthermore, a number of other private institutions have applied for permission to start B.Sc. Nursing course e.g. East West (Tongi), Prime (Rangpur), City University (Banani).

• More and more private organizations are approaching RTM for establishing an international standard B.Sc. Nursing institute, e.g. Grameen Kalyan of Grameen Bank – a pioneer organization of microcredit, Ayesha Memorial Hospital, Sajeda Foundation etc.

• Social acceptance for Nursing as a profession has risen; B.Sc. Nurses are now eligible for Public Service employment (BCS); Initiatives are taken by GoB to upgrade the status of diploma nurses to second class.

• A lead private hospital has taken initiatives on nurses’ award; similarly, some pharmaceuticals have plans to introduce nurses’ award.

Studies and Assessments

• Policy advocacy for certification of nurses’ and paramedics’ skill development programs

• Market assessment on nurses’ and paramedics’ skill training

• Rapid assessment on health workforce profiling

• Need Assessment on Current and Future Demand for nurses in the country

The Way Forward

Although different initiatives have been taken to expedite the process of getting the permission for offering B.Sc. Nursing course, there is a significant concern over the lengthy time requirement for this approval. RTM-Katalyst assisted a number of institutes in this process. But capacity building is necessary among the stakeholders so that a self-sustaining mechanism is available in the market for institutionalizing this certification procedure.

With systems for B.Sc. Nursing education in place, specific plans and programs for strengthening the course are required. There is an acute shortage of qualified teachers for B.Sc. Nursing course. Currently doctors are taking classes in the relevant disciplines. RTM-Katalyst realizes that there is a strong need for teachers training, also, short trainings can also be designed for the existing teachers who are doctors.

A recent Rapid Assessment Study on Profiling of Health workforce by RTM-Katalyst identified that most of the students enrolled in B.Sc. Nursing belong to lower middle and lower income families. But the tuition fees for B.Sc. Nursing in private institutions range between TK.1.3 and 2.5 lacs over 4 years. Since it is hard for students to afford this fee, private medical colleges have made contractual arrangements with students based on which the students, after graduation, will work in these hospitals for 3 to 5 years to repay the education expenses. Different scholarships and cost sharing options need to be streamlined further to encourage more students enrolling into the course. Banks and financial institutions can extend loans to students. Similarly, pharmaceutical companies, private hospitals, mobile operators and other large private sector players can come forward to assist these students.

Last but not the least, to uplift the status of nurses more innovative and motivational initiatives are required. In this context, private sector institutions offering B.Sc. Nursing and the employers of nurses can play a major role.