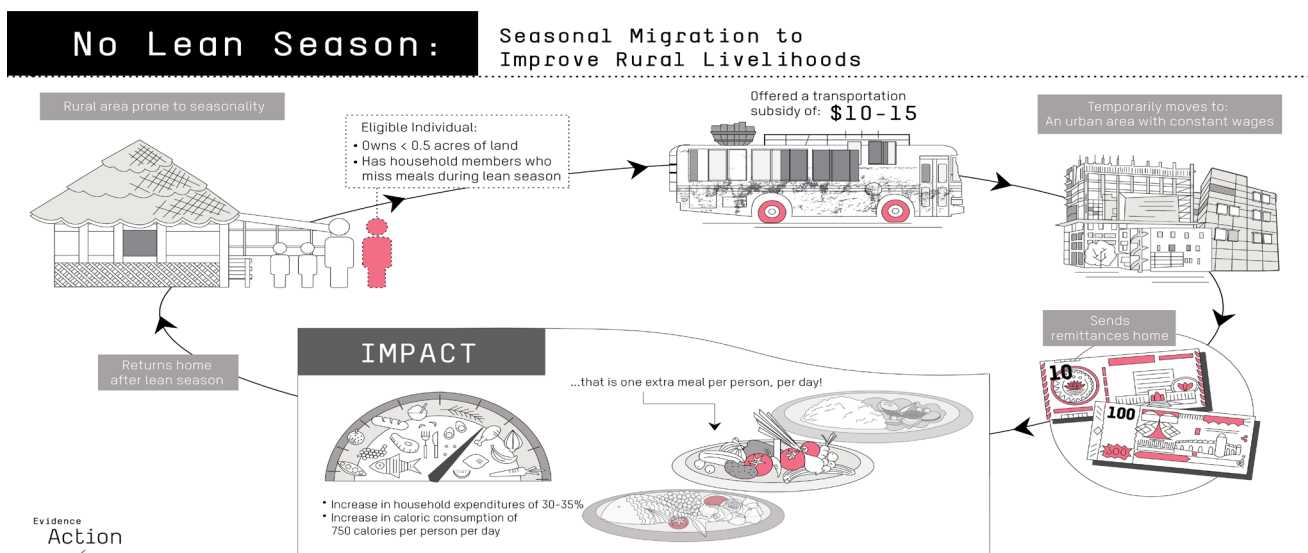


No Lean Season: Reducing Seasonal Poverty

Seasonal hunger often occurs between planting and harvest in agrarian economies. During this time, rural families, particularly the landless poor who supply agricultural labor, experience extreme poverty and even hunger as their food stock dwindles and the demand for their labor falls. The challenge is global in scale, affecting 300 million of the world's rural poor, and has consequences that transcend the lean season.

A new program, “No Lean Season” addresses seasonal poverty by offering a migration subsidy to participating households, covering the cost of a round-trip bus fare to nearby urban areas that do not experience the same seasonal fluctuations in job opportunities. Several rigorous trials designed at Yale University¹ show that migration subsidies:

- Increase migration in the same season: In Bangladesh, households receiving a migration subsidy were 61% more likely to migrate than comparable households.
- Increase consumption: Migrant households registered higher household expenditures and an increase in over 700 calories consumed per day — an amount equivalent to an extra meal per person/per day during the lean season.
- Increase migration in subsequent seasons: Households that received a migration subsidy were more likely to continue sending out a temporary migrant one and three years later, indicating that they experienced benefits from migration and built a link to future employment opportunities at the destination.



Evidence Action is working with RDRS, an NGO in Bangladesh, to bring the program to scale there by 2018, directly benefiting more than 300,000 households each year. A pilot is underway in Indonesia, adapting and testing No Lean Season in that country.

We are looking for additional sites to deliver this simple yet impactful solution. No Lean Season can improve livelihoods in rural areas where:

1. **There is a lean season:** There are seasonal fluctuations in consumption and hunger due to agricultural crop cycles. Predictable periods of hunger indicate that existing coping and smoothing mechanisms are not adequate.
2. **Spending money on migration is risky:** There is a large population of extreme or landless poor living close to subsistence for whom it is too risky to migrate as failing to find profitable work may have disastrous consequences.
3. **Jobs are waiting:** Cities in the region are less susceptible to agricultural cycles, and offer regular employment opportunities for low-skilled, temporary workers. Ideal target areas are at least 4-8 hours away from cities so travel cost imposes a burden.

An existing pattern of seasonal migration, even if limited to a set of villages or type of household, may be a good indicator, as it shows that transportation and remittance networks exist and employment opportunities may be readily available.

¹ Econometrica, 82(5): 1671-1748, September 2014. <http://faculty.som.yale.edu/mushfiqmobarak/papers/migration.pdf>