



Date: 20 April 2020

Subject: CGIAR's Support Towards the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh on Mitigating COVID-19's Impacts on Food Systems

Dear Sir,

Coronavirus (COVID-19) has created a major health and economic crisis globally. While the Government of Bangladesh's response in implementing timely, appropriate measures to contain the spread and mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 has been commendable, this situation presents substantial risks to Bangladesh's food systems—with important implications for national food, nutrition, and economic security. The Government of Bangladesh has recognized these challenges, and has responded with measures to exempt essential agricultural activities during the boro season from closure. In particular, we are encouraged that essential inputs continue to be provided through ongoing agricultural business trade and that appropriate farm machinery is being used for timely harvesting. Similarly, the announcement of financial support for seed purchase and requisition of wheat and rice are expected to mitigate this crisis.

Despite strong efforts to address COVID-19's impacts, farmers, traders, extension officers, and agricultural businesses are facing unprecedented challenges. Initial rapid analyses by the CGIAR Centers that work to support agricultural development in Bangladesh identify emerging concerns:

- Notable reductions in the availability of perishable foods, including vegetables, fruits, and fish, which are crucial for health and nutrition;
- Farmers are beginning to face challenges in selling perishable goods at reasonable prices.
- Social distancing measures appear to be slowing ongoing horticultural and boro crop harvests; delays in maize harvests loom as a near-term concern.
- Despite measures to control the price of staple foods such as rice, consumers—particularly in urban areas—are encountering inflated food prices, with some crucial commodities becoming unaffordable, especially for the poor.
- While trucks are permitted to transport agricultural inputs and produce, informal and courier transport services that play a key role in input supply and food distribution are suffering.
- The livestock, poultry, and aquaculture sectors are suffering as the supply of essential feeds and veterinary services has been disrupted and are experiencing unprecedented shocks.
- Reduced food and labour demand by food processors, supermarkets, eateries, restaurants, and hotels is, in turn, impacting hundreds of thousands in the service industry.

The CGIAR centres—including the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT), International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), WorldFish, and the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI)—have all collaborated with the Government of Bangladesh for decades. Working together, we remain committed to supporting the Government of Bangladesh in mitigating the risks to food systems during and after the COVID-19 pandemic by conducting crucial research, collecting and analysing data, developing food and nutrition security response strategies, and advising on appropriate policies, with emphasis on mitigating the impacts of shocks on the most vulnerable.¹ Examples of how the One CGIAR can assist the Government of Bangladesh include:

- Evidence-based advising on appropriate policies and technologies to support rabi season crop harvests, processing and food supply, in addition to kharif-I and II planting;

¹ Please refer to Appendix I, which details the major research themes and activities undertaken by the CGIAR centers in Bangladesh in response to COVID-19 to date.



- Crowdsourcing data and information on the supply of, and demand for, crucial agricultural inputs, with emphasis on fertilizers, fuel, pesticides, and veterinary products;
- Policy and economic advising on how to maintain the smooth flow of trade, including how to make full use of the international market as a vital tool to secure food supply and demand;
- Advising relief efforts, particularly on the types of food which foods to be included in household food aid distribution programmes to assure nutritious and safe diets and longevity of food storage;
- Providing technical advice and supporting logistical operations to maintain safe food supply chains;
- Monitoring food, labour, input and feed supply and prices;
- Advising on issues related to wet markets and the livestock-wildlife interface, including how to mitigate future zoonotic disease outbreaks and supporting 'One Health' approaches;
- Measuring the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on small- and medium-sized agribusinesses, while providing advice and support on how to overcome business disruptions;
- Analyzing methods to mitigate the risk changes on Bangladesh's trajectory of poverty reduction; and
- Technical and logistical support towards initiatives working to increase resilience and mitigate of social disruption by increasing local food productivity.

CGIAR's collective strengths lie in our decades of partnership with the Government of Bangladesh, detailed knowledge of the country's food systems, and our ability to draw on insights and support from our international networks. In particular, we suggest the following priority actions to avert further risks to Bangladesh's food systems:

- Enhanced permissions for transportation to assure the flow of food from rural to urban areas; similarly, to assure the flow of crucial inputs to farmers through market systems. Key among these are guaranteeing the supply of horticultural, fish and livestock products—in addition to the staple foods, rice and wheat—to provide diverse, nutritious and safe diets for all.
- Measures to reduce shocks to financial and logistics systems associated with agriculture, including actions to (a) minimize impacts on farmers' incomes from high inputs and labour costs and lower than normal farmgate prices, (b) support the private sector in its crucial role in providing affordable inputs to farmers, and (c) support the flow of remittances and cash flows to rural areas, and (d) expand access to finance options for farmers in need of capital to assure production.
- Options to support citizens reliant on income from farm labour. As seen in the response to the social distancing challenges currently affecting boro harvest, scale-appropriate farm mechanization options will also become increasingly important to assure timely operations.
- Increased social safety net measures will be required to support both rural and urban poor consumers, in addition to actions to assure that the rural poor and vulnerable do not suffer.
- Action plans to support Bangladesh's food systems in response to international trade restrictions. In particular, even partial closure of ports may result in high prices and limited stocks of pulses, edible oils, wheat, and crucial feed supplies (particularly maize and soybean). Similarly, although current national stocks appear to be initially sufficient, prolonged suspension of international trade could undermine the future supply of key inputs (particularly phosphorous and potassium fertilizers, vaccinations, pesticides, and fuel) at reasonable prices.
- Establish intelligence monitoring systems to provide timely data informing policy decisions, which can help address problems before they evolve into serious crises. To this end, systems are needed that (a) assure complete and even distribution of messages to all levels of government on how they may support agricultural production and food and nutrition security efforts, (b) monitor farmers' access to inputs and input prices, (c) comprehensive monitoring of staple foods, horticultural, fish and livestock prices, (d) pest and disease monitoring, and (e) adequate yield monitoring and production forecasting.



- Raise awareness of comprehensive guidelines for COVID-19-free food production, harvest, post-harvest, distribution and marketing practices. Such 'safe food' efforts also highlight the need for a new research and agricultural technology agenda that investigates methods to increase input resource use efficiency and reduce the dependency of farm, fish, and livestock systems on external inputs, associated with volatile and restricted markets.

We reiterate our partnership and offer of assistance – both in general as our organizational mandates are to support the Government of Bangladesh in ensuring food and nutrition security for all – and also in this time of crisis and need. We look forward to hearing from you and having further discussions as to how we may be of assistance.

Sincerely,

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Appendix I: Ongoing research and activities to respond to the COVID-19 crisis and its effect on food systems in Bangladesh

International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI):

- Telephone Surveys: IFPRI plans to resurvey 2,700 households from two surveys conducted in 2019—(1) the BBS/IFPRI/WFP Urban Socioeconomic Assessment Survey (USAS), which is nationally representative of low-income urban areas, and (2) IFPRI's Bangladesh Integrated Household Survey (BIHS), which is nationally representative of rural Bangladesh—to assess the economic and food security impacts of COVID-19. The survey will ask households about food purchase patterns, food and nutrition security, changes in income sources and levels, and assistance received.
- Boro Paddy Procurement Study: Upon request from the Ministry of Agriculture, IFPRI conducted a study in early 2020 to assess how paddy is procured from farmers and to develop policy options for purchasing paddy directly from farmers. In view of the Government of Bangladesh's announcement on 12 April to increase boro paddy procurement this year, IFPRI will provide policy options to the Ministry of Agriculture in April 2020 that have potential to guide reforms of the procurement system to more effectively reach small and marginal farmers, who are particularly hard-hit amid COVID-19.
- Advising on social protection approaches: IFPRI is advising on opportunities for revamping Bangladesh's social protection system to mitigate the impacts of shocks on the most needy in the immediate, short-, medium-, and long-term. For example, although Bangladesh has an expansive social protection system, there has been limited urban coverage to date. To this end, IFPRI, together with the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) and the UN World Food Programme (WFP), conducted the USAS to generate evidence on the status of food security and nutrition of the urban poor and, in turn, guide the design of an urban social protection program. Since the Honorable Prime Minister announced the expansion of the social protection budget to increase coverage on 5 April, this timely evidence may guide policy options for designing a well-targeted, evidence-based urban safety net program in the mid-to-long-term, which could provide much-needed assistance by many who are directly impacted by COVID-19.

International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT):

- Repetitive telephone surveys of (a) agricultural input companies and dealers to examine implications of transport restrictions, with emphasis on courier services in particular, (b) farmers to assess labor price changes, labor deficits or restrictions, (c) farm machinery service providers and machinery companies with emphasis on harvesting, land preparation, and crop establishment equipment to understand implications of the current crisis and develop policy suggestions, (c) feed mills to better understand and plan to mitigate disruptions to feed supply, procurement, processing and sales.
- Studies of fertilizer supply, nutrient demand and the potential implications of import restrictions (with emphasis on secondary and micronutrients) at a national level on productivity of rice, wheat and maize.
- CIMMYT is engaging national extension services (DAE and AIS), in addition to the private sector (e.g., Grameen Phone) in discussions on scaling-up use of existing and new digital extension tools that can be used to reach farmers with crucial farm management advisories despite social distancing.
- Research into methods that can be used to assure safe supply chain handling for wheat, pulse, and maize value chains, with emphasis on links to the feed and poultry industry in the latter.
- CIMMYT is providing studies and blogs, op-eds, and working on papers on COVID implications for agriculture, with emphasis on scale-appropriate mechanization, [biodiversity and zoonosis transmission risks](#), the development of more circular economies for agricultural production, and ecological intensification alternatives to overly input dependent farming systems. These include [global participation](#) in policy making bodies involved in agricultural response planning to COVID-19, and [leveraging CIMMYT's expertise in scaling](#) to respond to COVID-19.

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International Rice Research Institute (IRRI):

- Conducting rapid surveys to understand the impact of COVID-19 on different actors of the rice value chain (input dealers, farmers, processors, traders, and consumers) in Bangladesh.
- Collecting information about rice availability and rice prices in markets in Bangladesh.
- Global monitoring of prices and international trade of rice.
- Scenario analysis of impact of COVID-19 on global rice supply, rice prices and food security.
- IRRI is publishing policy briefs, op-ed, blogs, newspaper articles, working papers, and country briefs to share information about the impact of COVID-19 on the rice sector.

WorldFish:

- Weekly phone survey of actors in fish supply chains (feed mills, feed sellers, hatcheries, farms, fishers, processors, traders, retailers), eliciting information on volumes and prices of fish and inputs for fish production.
- Modification of bi-laterally funded projects at donor's request to address (a) access to finance for farmers and households, (b) private sector advisory and support, and (c) efforts to build more resilient market systems given COVID-19 risks.
- Development of concept notes and white papers highlighting policy and development actions needed to protect the aquacultural and fisheries sector from excessive disruption.
- Research into methods that can be used to assure safe supply chain handling for aquacultural and fisheries products.
- A [dedicated page on COVID-19](#) on the WorldFish website, featuring global and national impacts on and responses in the overall fisheries sector.