



COVID-19 in Bangladesh

SITUATION BRIEF

September 6, 2021



Bangladesh is beginning to recover from its deadliest wave yet. Daily cases have fallen below 4,000, lockdowns have lifted and the national mass vaccination drive is back in full swing.



COMMUNITY FORT FOR RESISTING COVID-19

BRAC, with the support of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), is continuing the Community Fort for Resisting COVID-19 (CFRC) community-level behaviour change initiative. Here is a snapshot of recent progress:

KEY NUMBERS

35,053 of BRAC's frontline workers and volunteers across Bangladesh have distributed **13 million** masks free of cost:

- **5 million** masks distributed through BRAC's community health workers and other frontline staff during regular household visits
- **4 million** masks distributed in COVID-19 hotspots such as water ferry terminals, cattle markets and other crowded places
- **4 million** masks distributed to community groups, including 180,000 by 14 local NGO partners, under the CSO Alliance.

BRAC's community health workers have conducted over **1 million** door-to-door surveillance visits to screen potentially infected individuals and support them to connect to free telemedicine services for home quarantine and case management support.

- **185,805** people screened and **105,958** suspected cases identified at the community level
- **75,320** suspected cases (71%) connected with free telemedicine services





Disease progression based on field data

KEY TRENDS

Bangladesh witnessed a surge in infection rates in May 2021, particularly in the border districts, due to the introduction of the Delta variant. In response, BRAC deployed its community health workers, hotspot mobilisers and community mobilisers in 35 high-risk districts, prioritising the border districts with land ports, from early June 2021.

The following figure (Fig. 1) illustrates the week-wise positive rates of the top ten districts with high infection rates, based on the data collected from district civil surgeons' offices. Infection rates in most districts went down within six weeks, coinciding with CFRC activities. A sharp decline in cases was seen in districts such as Satkhira, Natore, Bagerhat and Jessore, where CFRC mask distribution efforts were more comprehensive.

WEEKLY PROGRESSION OF TEN DISTRICTS WITH HIGH POSITIVITY RATES

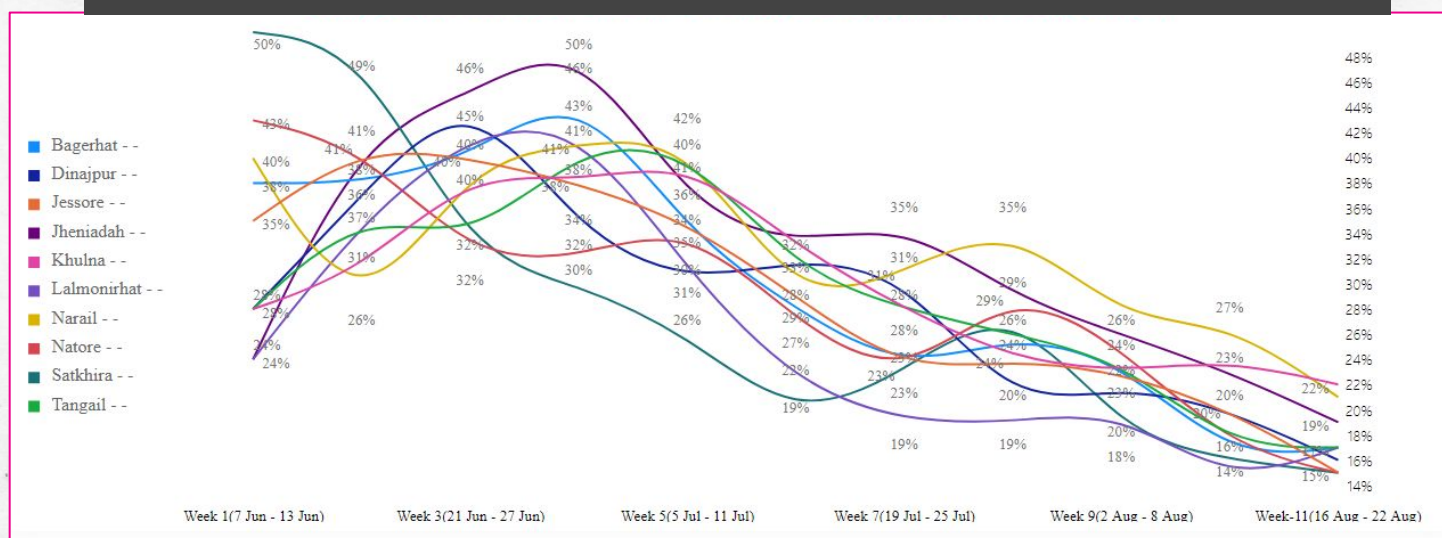


Fig. 1

A nationwide lockdown was imposed by the Government of Bangladesh between 1-14 July, but this was followed by a pause between 15-22 July for *Eid-ul-Azha* (one of the largest religious festivals in Bangladesh), where people were seen ignoring precautions, particularly in seasonal cattle markets, shopping malls and on public transport. The positivity rate increased again in most of the districts the week after Eid, with the government re-imposing a lockdown from 23 July - 5 August.

Within 11 weeks of the CFRC intervention, infection rates fell below 20% in eight out of the top ten districts. Decline in infection rates was higher in districts where free mask distribution activities were more comprehensive.

Among all divisions, infection rates in Khulna, Rajshahi and Rangpur decreased notably over the past few weeks. BRAC has continued intensive interventions in those areas.

Some districts went on early lockdown as case rates started surging in early June 2021. We can assume that both the Government of Bangladesh's measures and CFRC have contributed to bringing down the positivity rate in the western and northern parts of Bangladesh.

Comparing positivity rates in terms of a seven-day moving average in 17 CFRC priority districts (where free masks are distributed extensively) and the 18 other CFRC districts shows promising early results. In early June, the average positivity rate was significantly higher (19%) in the 17 priority districts compared to the other 18 districts (9%). This gap decreased over time, with the moving average approximately 4% lower in the 17 districts in mid-July, and decreasing simultaneously in both the intervention wings.

SEVEN DAYS' MOVING AVERAGE BY DATE



Fig. 2

The epicentre drifted from the northern and southern districts to the central and eastern districts from early July. The heat map in Fig. 3 shows that the situation worsened in Dhaka, Chittagong and Barisal during July. Overall, though, infection rates have been declining.

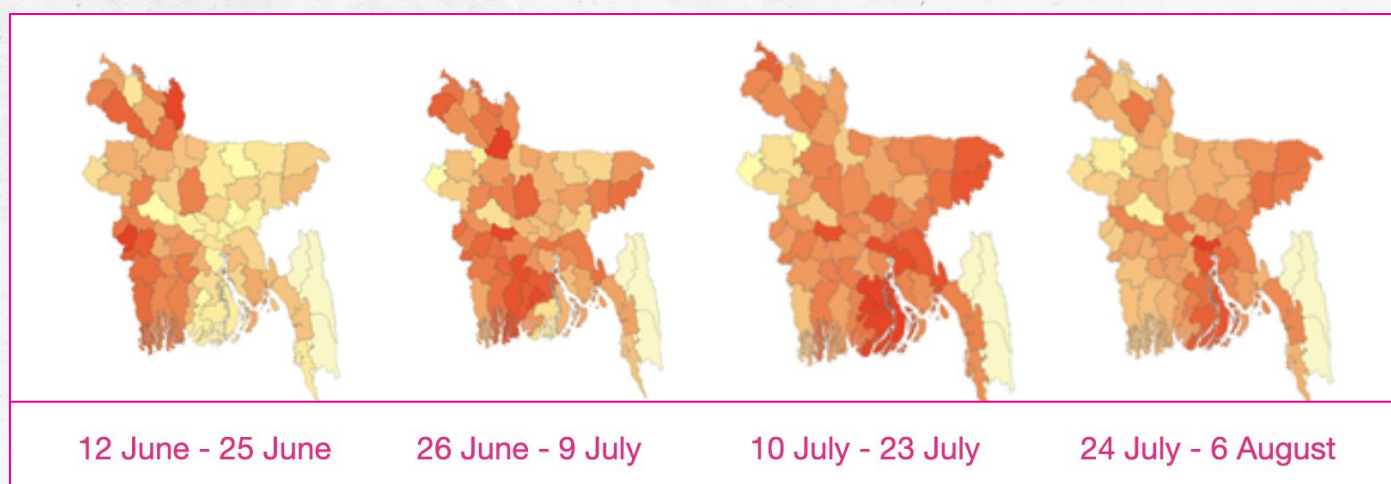


Fig. 3

Stories from the ground

"I earn my daily bread by doing sewing work. I don't earn enough to own a smartphone. When the pandemic began, I was puzzled - I did not know where to access accurate information."

I heard announcements in my neighbourhood saying that BRAC is managing a vaccine centre in our ward councillor's office. The registration process was being conducted in a way that did not require me to go through any procedure online. I could simply take a copy of my National Identity Card to the centre.

I was skeptical about it, and I heard there would be a lot of people in the queue, so I went to the centre and stood in line early in the morning. When I reached the registration desk, one of the BRAC volunteers asked for a copy of my NID and I was sent to the female vaccination room. The rest was very straightforward - I went to the assigned room and got my first dose. They gave me a vaccine card and asked me to keep it safe for my second dose, which is to be administered in a month. I cannot help but think that if this initiative hadn't been taken, being someone with neither a smartphone or a computer, I could not have gotten vaccinated."



Sahida Khatun, vaccine recipient
(Ward 38 resident, Dhaka North City Corporation)



Promotion

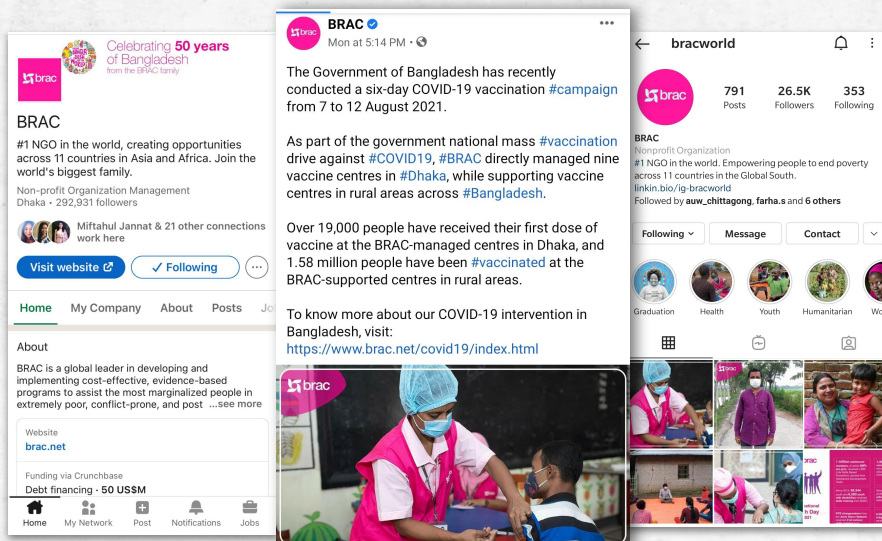


Campaigns on local cable networks reached **30 million people**, and **6 million people** were reached through different community radio shows. **Three thematic reports** on the [vaccination drive](#), [reinforcement of mask-wearing](#) and [awareness building](#) have been published in over **50 newspapers**. CFRC activities were featured by the [Dhaka Tribune](#) through a series of **photo stories**. **10 talk shows** were hosted on Channel 24, Jamuna TV and Ekattor TV, and **five live special reports** were broadcasted by Jamuna TV. One TV commercial was broadcasted in Somoy TV for 10 consecutive days.



259 posts have been shared on social media, **reaching over 10 million people**. Of this, **59 posts** were dedicated to the mass national vaccination drive.

Subscribe to BRAC's [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#) channels for social media updates.



CFRC Partners

Canada



UK Government



Unilever

CSO Alliance



COMMUNITY SUPPORT TEAM DHAKA

The Community Support Team Dhaka (CST Dhaka) project is being implemented by BRAC in collaboration with UNFPA and FAO, with the support of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. The project aims to slow down community transmission in Dhaka North and South City Corporation. Approximately **21 million** people will be directly or indirectly benefited from the project.



KEY NUMBERS

- **1.32 million** free masks distributed by community health workers and Community Support Team ('CST' hereafter) volunteers
- **2,912** people received free telemedicine services, including 2,378 people from Dhaka North City Corporation and 534 people from Dhaka South City Corporation
- **592** people supported with vaccine registration by CST Dhaka staff
- **368** handwashing stations (known as 'Happy Tap') established. CST volunteers have encouraged local communities to take ownership of the stations, and provided initial supplies of soap and hand washing instructions
- **170** community health workers conducted syndromic surveillance on **216,044** households, identified **23,119** symptomatic individuals and **6,145** suspected cases

Stories from the ground

Alek (24) is a vegetable vendor in a bustling wet market in Rayer Bazar, Dhaka. He has to interact with hundreds of buyers flocking into the market daily.

"People used to be careless about wearing masks and maintaining social distance. I've seen change, though. I met BRAC's volunteers who have been regularly visiting the market to spread awareness on ways to keep people safe, and, through them, I learned how important it is to wear masks all the time."



Community Support Team Dhaka Partners



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



SPOTLIGHT: SUPPORTING THE NATIONAL MASS VACCINATION DRIVE

BRAC directly managed **nine centres** in Dhaka and supported over **3,000** centres in rural areas across Bangladesh from 7-12 August 2021 as part of the Government of Bangladesh's national vaccination drive. Over **19,000** people received their first dose at BRAC-managed centres in Dhaka, and **1.58 million** people were vaccinated at BRAC-supported centres in rural areas.



DAKCHE ABAR DESH (BANGLADESH CALLS AGAIN) CAMPAIGN

- The campaign was initiated in 2020, in collaboration with Grameenphone, and has now been restarted to raise funds to provide emergency cash support to people in extreme poverty who have been hit the hardest by lockdowns.
- **BDT 233 million (USD 2.7 million)** have been raised and distributed to **140,583 households**, with each household receiving BDT 1,500 (USD 18).
- The support of Mutual Trust Bank, Eastern Bank, Mercantile Bank, BRAC Bank, Dhaka Bank, Bank Asia, United Commercial Bank, Standard Bank, Exim Bank. along with Climate Bridge Fund staff, is particularly appreciated.



SPOTLIGHT: COX'S BAZAR

Vaccination

A vaccination drive was launched in the Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar, in collaboration with the Government of Bangladesh. The first phase of the campaign was conducted on 10-23 August 2021. A total of **2,093** people from three camps received their vaccinations in BRAC-managed centres. In total, **36,943** people from the Rohingya community have been vaccinated across 34 shelter centres in Ukhiya and Teknaf until 23 August.

Mass awareness-raising activities

During the first two weeks of August, **137,892 people** from **65,908 households** received COVID-19 protection messages. Protective equipment, hygiene items and face masks were distributed and people were directed to testing and health facilities. Additionally, to cope with the secondary effects of the pandemic, a project is underway to support 40,000 households from the host community of Cox's Bazar with cash support of BDT 2,500 (USD 30) per household.

Flooding and landslides

Extreme flooding and landslides took place in Cox's Bazar from **26 June - 5 August 2021**, affecting **46,545 people** from the Rohingya camps and **118,472 people** from the host communities. The Ukhiya and Teknaf sub-districts were hit especially hard. BRAC's response included supporting the repair and renovation of damaged infrastructures, installing devices to increase accessibility to safe drinking water and hygiene facilities, and food packages for families impacted the most. The existing DFAT-supported project 'Humanitarian assistance for Rohingya and host communities in Bangladesh' is scheduled to provide further cash support of **BDT 2,500 (USD 30)** to **6,000 families** most affected by the flooding.