



COVID-19: SITUATION REPORT

20 APRIL 2020



27M

programme
participants oriented
on COVID-19



100,000+

workers on the
ground covering 64
districts



876,000

items of
protective wear
distributed



1.4M

hygiene products
distributed



186,074

families received cash
support

Make empathy go viral: Urgent appeal

BRAC has provided 186,074 families with cash support, including ultra-poor households, those living in remote *haor* areas and host communities in Cox's Bazar district, and indigenous communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

We have also launched a fundraising appeal to scale up the effort and increase the coverage. Details are available at: <https://www.brac.net/covid19/donate/>



BRAC has reached **186,704** out of a targeted
200,000 families with cash support



FROM THE FRONTLINE



I am overseeing 61 *polli shomaj* (women-led democratic institutions) in Cumilla in eastern Bangladesh. I gathered three members from each *polli shomaj*, and went door-to-door in the community with critical information when the pandemic was declared. I distributed leaflets and masks, and helped to construct hand-washing stations in different areas of Cumilla city.

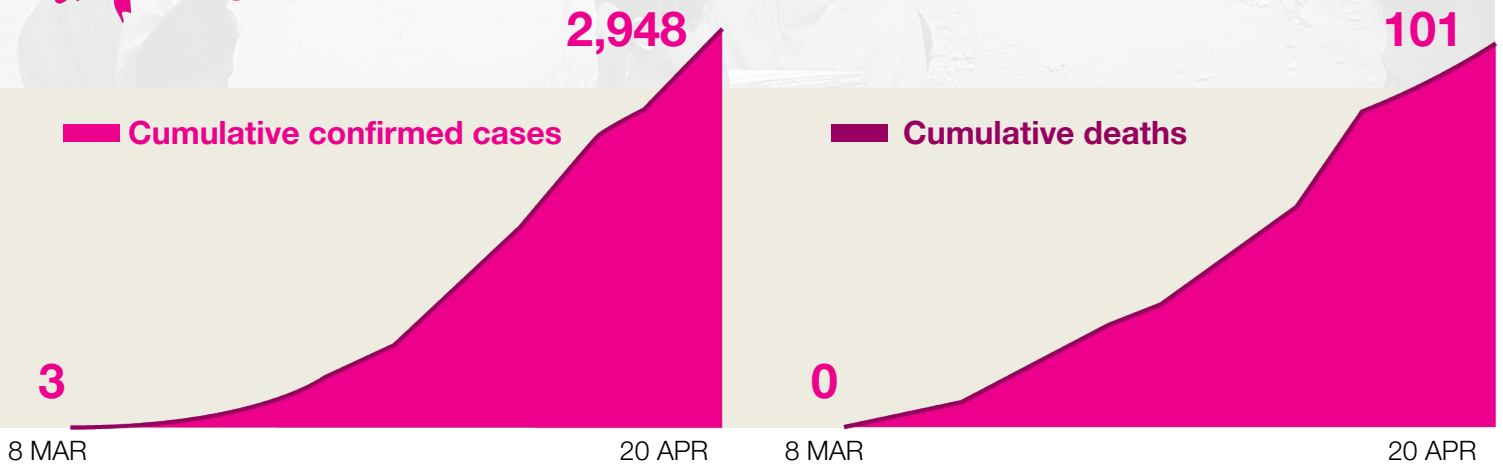
I also oriented 20 local theatre groups on COVID-19. These groups communicated with more than 10,000 people in the region. I maintained communication over the phone with our participants after the lockdown was announced. I also helped to connect almost 1,500 ultra-poor households with local government representatives, so they can receive essential supplies.

I was trained by BRAC on the protection and prevention of COVID-19 and also received the required protective wear. I feel equipped and proud to be working with my colleagues at the frontline to fight this pandemic.

Masud Rana is a programme organiser for BRAC's community empowerment programme.

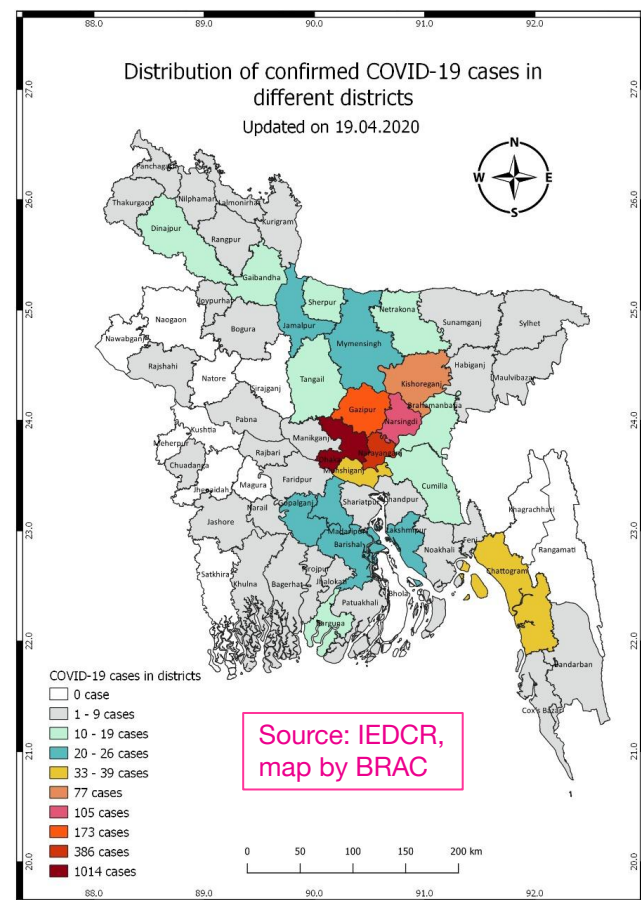


COVID-19 timeline in Bangladesh



Situation overview

- **There are 2,285,210 confirmed cases of COVID-19 globally.** 155,124 lives have been claimed across 213 countries, areas or territories (updated: 20 April 2020, 06:00 GMT+6, [World Health Organisation](#)).
- **There has been a spike in reported cases in Bangladesh;** there are currently 2,948 confirmed cases as of 20 April 2020. 492 of these cases were identified in the last 24 hours. The government's Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) have confirmed 101 deaths to date. 10 of the deaths were reported in the last 24 hours.
- **Bangladesh has reported 2,000 cases faster than many of the worst-hit countries.** It only took 40 days to reach this figure, which was much faster than many other countries.
- **Dhaka division has the highest number of coronavirus infections, accounting for 76% of all cases in the country.** 44% of all new cases are in Dhaka district and 31% of new cases are from Narayanganj district.
- **The Government of Bangladesh will provide two months' basic salary** as incentive and up to BDT 1 million worth of insurance coverage for health workers, administration and police staff who are on the frontline.
- **The Prime Minister of Bangladesh instructed the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief** to send food aid to the callers of the government's three hotline numbers.
- **Workers of ready-made garments factories continued protests.** [370 factories failed to pay their workers](#) by the 16 April deadline set by the Department of Investigations for Factories and Establishments. The department has also [launched a telemedicine service for workers](#) to raise awareness on the virus and limit the outbreak.
- **There are 98 factories working actively to manufacture Personal Protective Wear even amidst the lockdown.** These factories are situated in Savar-Ashulia, Gazipur, Narsingdi, Narayanganj, Mymensingh and Khulna. Local police chief of Gazipur expressed her concern over the working conditions of these factories.
- **A large gathering at an Islamic preacher's funeral in Brahmanbaria** violated the government's lockdown directives and resulted in quarantine orders for the people of eight villages in the region and deployment of additional police. Regular gathering at markets is seen in most urban areas.





BRAC's overall response to COVID-19

BRAC's immediate short-term focus is prevention, through community engagement, behaviour change and mass campaigning. This has included creating a world-standard course on COVID-19, using it to train staff and volunteers, equipping them with personal protective equipment and then sending them to millions of households armed with information and sanitation products.

In parallel, we are strengthening systems, through providing information, volunteers and resources to government and civil society organisations. This has included supplying doctors to IEDCR's dedicated public hotlines, supplying field support teams at the community level, providing insights to a2i (a key wing within the ICT ministry) on where communication gaps exist, and sourcing equipment for under-resourced hospitals.

This week we have three major developments in such partnerships. 1. A community support team which includes a BRAC health care worker at the ward level has started working in case detection and verification. 2. A pharmacy surveillance pilot has started to get additional community data to identify hotspots. 3. Kerala stylet kiosks are in place in Dhaka and Narayanganj by BRAC for additional sample collection.

While the economy is in shutdown, BRAC is focusing on ensuring short-term relief to low-income earners and those living in poverty in cities and rural villages. Treating it as a humanitarian crisis, BRAC so far has completed disbursement of BDT 300 million and is running an appeal to mobilise additional funds. Public-private partnerships have also been created, as well as mobilising funding from institutional partners.

Amidst an extremely fluid situation, BRAC is focusing on remaining adaptive and agile, and keeping pace with changing needs, particularly the needs of the people in the most vulnerable situations. We are also undertaking rapid needs assessment and evidence generation for mid to long-term response.



Emerging risks and challenges

- **The rate of testing remains comparatively low, with only 154 tests per million**, although the government continues to expand testing facilities.
- As more and more doctors are getting infected and upajilla hospitals are getting locked down, treatment for non Covi19 illnesses are getting greatly hampered.
- **Informal workers, including many brick kiln workers, have returned to their villages from other highly vulnerable zones in the country.** Local administrations are preparing schools and other institutions as self-quarantine facilities for them. They are often not limiting their movements and not observing home quarantine guidelines.
- **Implementation of ten large government power and infrastructure projects, worth an estimated BDT 3,060 billion, are halted** because of the absence of foreign and local workers.
- **The government has asked doctors who are aged 50+ only to provide telemedicine services.** This is expected to create a vacuum of specialists in hospitals, resulting in disruption of treatment of both COVID-19 and other general patients. Absence of telemedicine infrastructure and standards can keep these doctors fully out of services.
- **As of 20 April, 301 sub-districts of 38 districts are under lockdown.** This makes it difficult and costly for general patients to seek medical care or other public services. Six government hospitals and four clinics were closed due to medical staff being infected. As a result, there is a growing tendency to seek medical suggestions from local unqualified doctors and pharmacists.

- **Early flash floods may hamper this year's Boro rice harvest** (a special type of rice cultivation on residual or stored water in low-lying wetland regions). It has been announced to farmers in the *haor* (wetland) regions that rice should be harvested before the floods. However, due to lockdowns, farmers are in severe shortage of labourers who usually migrate to *haors* from northern parts of Bangladesh during harvest. The initiative by Chattagram district administration to ferry labourers to the Haor region may still fall short. The festivities of the harvest may also violate social distancing measures. BRAC will be reinforcing awareness messages to farmers in the *haor* areas.
- **693 incidents of violence were reported since the shutdown** (26 March to 16 April) across 54 districts in Bangladesh through BRAC's community empowerment programme. Family conflicts have been the primary reason for many of the cases. A number of these incidents have been directly linked to the social and economic consequences of the lockdown.



Orientation, safety and safeguarding of staff and communities

- **12 COVID-19 testing kiosks are now ready to operate in Dhaka and Narayanganj.** These walk-in kiosks were set up by BRAC in partnership with the Government of Bangladesh following the South Korean testing and tracing model. BRAC has acquired the necessary protective equipment and trained staff for sample collection.
- **27 million programme participants** across the country have been oriented on COVID-19. Among them 16,103,554 were women and 10,892,554 were men.
- **1.4 million** hygiene products have been distributed to staff and communities.
- **133,509 BRAC staff** have been oriented on COVID-19 through BRAC's online orientation sessions with healthcare experts and training modules.



Strengthening of systems

- **BRAC is working with local partners in Chittagong Hill Tracts,** to coordinate cash distribution among 5,000 families of indigenous communities in the most marginalized areas.
- **BRAC and bKash are working together to speed up the process of new account registration and cash transfer** for those in need. The mobile money platform minimises direct contact with participants, overcomes barriers in accessing banks and allows recipients to save the money in their mobile wallets. The government's cash transfer initiatives are also prioritising electronic transfers over direct handovers.



Partnerships

- **Australian Government's Department for Foreign Affairs (DFAT) and BRAC are in their third phase of partnership.** This phase aims to reduce the risks of COVID-19 through food assistance and enable a better assessment of the situation in Bangladesh.
- **Global Affairs Canada (GAC) and UNHCR** are providing support for the COVID-19 response in Cox's Bazar, for both the Rohingya and host communities, through the BRAC's humanitarian crisis management programme. UNICEF is also providing support, with a particular focus on ensuring children's learning and wellbeing.



Snapshot: How are the livelihoods of people in vulnerable situations affected by COVID-19?

A rapid response survey to understand how the economic crisis induced by COVID-19 is impacting those who are vulnerable and living in poverty was conducted by the Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC) and BRAC Institute for Governance and Development (BIGD), Brac University. Respondent telephone databases from earlier surveys on those living in urban slums and rural poverty were utilised. The research, conducted from 4 April to 12 April, is intended to support better policy responses and design of support programmes for people who are vulnerable. There will be repeat surveys done to track the impact of COVID-19 on poverty.

Who was surveyed?

- 5,471 households, with an average family size of 4.58
- 51% from urban areas and 49% from rural areas
- 49.1% were below the lower poverty line, 15.5% below the upper poverty line and 35.3% were people living in urban areas who were not living in poverty in February 2020

Highlights from findings: Indicators of vulnerability

- **Income drop:** All households experienced a sharp decrease - the average income drop was 71%. The highest decrease was 93% for cooks and workers in restaurants, and the lowest decrease was 54% for agricultural workers.
- **Economic inactivity:** 71% in urban areas and 55% in rural areas are now economically inactive.
- **Reduced consumption:** 29% drop in consumption for those living in poverty, and 35% drop for those who are vulnerable but living above the poverty line.
- **Low nutritional intake:** 41% of the poor and 35% of the vulnerable non-poor reported reducing consumption to cope.

Five policy messages:

- COVID-19 has had an impact on both groups - those living in poverty and the 'new poor', i.e., those newly pushed into poverty
- New poor are those who used to be 40% above the poverty line, but have now dropped below.
- Food insecurity has started with a decline in nutrition. This is set to intensify by the end of April.
- As impact is broad-based, immediate safety nets have to go beyond targeting and prioritise self-targeting vehicles such as open market sales (OMS)
- In the medium-term, a BDT 5,600 crore immediate one-month food security support package is needed for those living in poverty, which will need to be supplemented by an additional package for the new poor.

See the [full report here](#).



71% households experienced a sharp income drop.



71% in urban, and 55% in rural areas are now economically inactive.



29% drop in consumption for those living in poverty, and 35% for those who are vulnerable but living above the poverty line.



25% drop in food consumption for those living in lower poverty line.



Snapshot: How is COVID-19 impacting Bangladesh's micro, small and medium enterprises?

The economic shutdown has hit micro, medium and small enterprises particularly hard. A telephone survey with 184 enterprise owners (current and former participants of BRAC's skill development programme) was conducted to gain an understanding of the existing condition of the market in Bangladesh.

20.1% of the respondents were women, 77.2% were men and 2.7% were transgender people. 24.5% of the respondents were from rural areas and 75.5% of the respondents were from semi-urban and urban areas.

While the results of this survey are in no way representative of the entire population, because of the limited sample size, the analysis provides some insight into the immediate and long-term needs of these businesses.

Key findings included:

- **Income:** The average monthly income was approximately BDT 33,726 (USD 398) before the lockdown. After the lockdown, none had any income at all.
- **Savings:** Less than 6% of the respondents had some savings. 77.8% did not have any savings that they can use now.
- **Employees:** Only 7.6% of the respondents' employees are still working. More than 77% are on leave or have been laid off.
- **Rent and utility payments:** 52% of the respondents still have to pay rent and other utilities during the lockdown.
- **Ongoing loans:** 41.8% currently have loans from banks and other financial institutions, which they still have to repay.
- **Support received:** 98% have not received any external support.
- **Support channels available:** Most enterprise owners can receive payments through digital platforms, provided that agents are available for providing support.

In the long term, 68.5% said they will need loans to support their businesses. Many were unsure about the kind of additional support they will require.

A more holistic approach is needed in the future. Along with loan support, other types of support will need to be provided, eg, psychological support, support in rebuilding businesses - strengthening the value chain, providing technical upgradation training to enterprise owners to increase productivity, diversification of their portfolio and placement of experienced/skilled employees in the enterprises.



No respondents had income after lockdown



77.8% do not have any savings



77% of their employees have been laid off or sent on leave



52% still have to pay rent and other utility bills



41.8% currently have loan repayments from banks and other financial institutions



98% have not received any sort of support



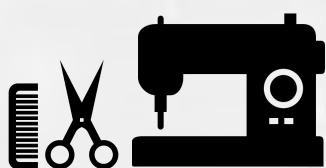
Snapshot: How is COVID-19 impacting Bangladesh's transgender community?

The transgender community is one of the most vulnerable communities in Bangladesh. A rapid assessment was conducted with 132 transgender learners and graduates of BRAC's skills development programme to understand the economic impact of COVID-19 on their livelihoods. The survey was conducted over telephone, covering 49 districts of the country between 13 to 14 April.

This assessment is by no means representative of the situation of the overall transgender community, but may be useful in planning interventions.

Key findings included:

- **The per capita income of the respondents has decreased by 88%.** Monthly incomes have drastically fallen from BDT 2,845 (USD 34) to BDT 343 (USD 4). Most of them currently do not have any means of earning other than the trade they are involved in.
- **25% of the respondents do not have any monthly savings.** 56% said they can save less than BDT 300 (USD 3.5) per month now and 13% can save between BDT 300 to 700 (USD 3.5 to USD 8.3). Those who are living in a city think paying rent is their biggest burden in this situation.
- **81% of the respondents said they currently do not have enough food to last one week.** Only 6% of respondents said their food will last up to two weeks. Many are borrowing money or food supplies to fulfil basic needs.
- **66% of the respondents did not receive any relief from the government,** even though most have been contacted.
- **83% of the respondents live in a female-headed household.** The average family has about four members. Among them, an average of 1.5 members have an income.
- **50% of the respondents were engaged in tailoring.** The second most common occupation is employment at a beauty salon. The rest of the respondents are employed in mobile phone repairing, welding and IT support.
- **60% do not own a smartphone.** Half of the respondents do not have a mobile banking account.



No
employment
during lockdown

88% decrease in monthly per capita income after crisis



BDT 2,845

BDT 343



25% of respondents do not have any monthly savings



66% of respondents did not receive any relief.



81% of respondents do not have enough food to last one week.

Shila's* mother screamed for help when she saw Shila in the cow shed trying to commit suicide.

Shila's husband, a migrant worker in Saudi Arabia, had been abusing Shila over the phone multiple times a day for ten days straight. He accused her of emptying their savings.

Shila's husband lost his job in Saudi Arabia three months ago after the outbreak. He worried about the future and planned to start a small business after coming back to Bangladesh. He was furious when he realised that they did not have enough money saved to do so.

26-year-old Shila had never spent the money he sent back on anything, for herself or their son, without his permission. She was devastated by her husband's behaviour.

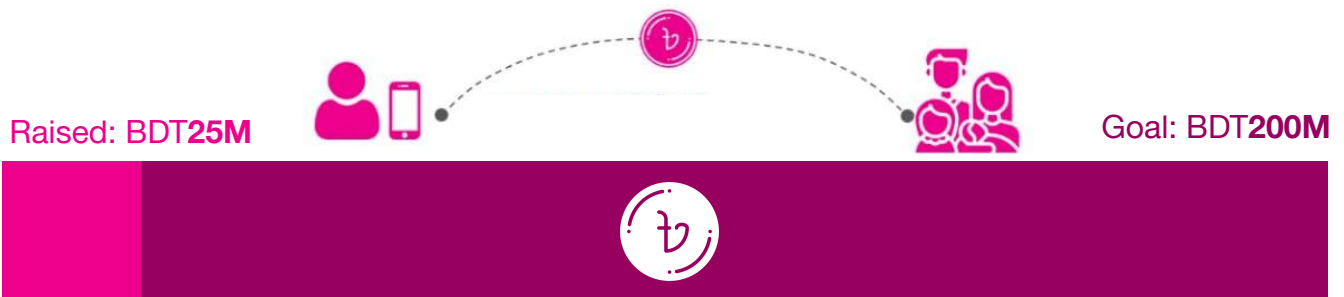
At 11pm on 5 April, Shila attempted to take her life. Her mother screamed for help when she spotted her in the cow shed. Their neighbours rushed in and saved her. She was admitted to the nearby hospital by Rehana, the leader of the local *polli shomaj* (women-led institution).

Shila's condition is improving, but she is now worried about the future of her family.

Shila's incident is one of 693 incidents of violence reported through BRAC's community empowerment programme from 26 March to 16 April 2020. A number of these incidents have been directly linked to the social and economic consequences of the lockdown.

BRAC is committed to ensuring that survivors of violence are not deprived of essential support during this crisis. Staff are frequently following up with survivors, both over the phone and through home visits in serious cases, and referring survivors to BRAC's human rights and legal aid services programme for legal support. 600 polli shomaj leaders, trained in psychosocial first aid support, are providing first aid counselling in their communities. In severe cases, clinical psychologists are connected through tele-counselling.

**Name has been changed to maintain anonymity*



BDT 25 million has been raised through BRAC's appeal to help those in the most vulnerable situations in Bangladesh. Much more is needed.

Support a family today: <https://www.brac.net/covid19/donate/>

Partners



Contact us at covid19response@brac.net