



COVID-19: SITUATION REPORT

7 MAY 2020



38M

programme participants oriented on COVID-19



100,000+

workers on the ground covering 64 districts



876,000

items of protective wear distributed



1.5M

hygiene products distributed



287,969

families received cash support

Make empathy go viral: Urgent appeal

BRAC has provided 287,969 families with cash support, including households living in ultra-poverty, those living in remote *haor* areas (wetlands) and *char* (riverine islands) areas, host communities in Cox's Bazar district, and indigenous communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and northern districts in Bangladesh.

Much more is needed, though. Stand beside a family today: <https://www.brac.net/covid19/donate/>



BRAC has reached **287,969** out of a targeted **300,000** families with cash support



FROM THE FRONTLINE

Working with police to raise awareness

When the pandemic began, my colleagues and I left our offices and raised awareness in our communities. We went from door-to-door, shops, markets, mosques and schools.

We walked on roads and fields, with leaflets and messages on how to stay safe from the virus. I distributed masks and soaps from my own initiative and with the support of a few people.

A sub-inspector of the police was really surprised to see me spraying disinfectant in one of the police camps. He appreciated our efforts and joined us by taking the sprayer on his shoulders.

People were amused at our activities in the beginning, but as the virus spread, they appreciated our work.

Suborna Zhumur Morong is the branch manager of BRAC's ultra-poor graduation programme, in Sanandabari, Jamalpur of north-central Bangladesh.





COVID-19 timeline in Bangladesh

12,424

Cumulative confirmed cases

3

8 MAR

7 MAY

Cumulative deaths

199

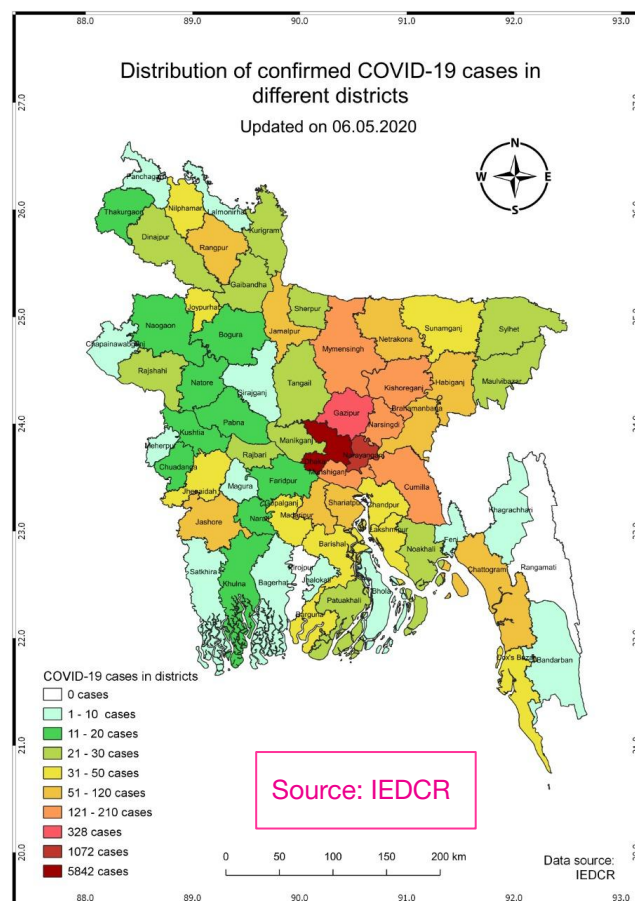
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8 MAR

7 MAY

Situation overview

- Globally, there are 3,634,172 confirmed cases of COVID-19. 251,446 lives have been claimed across 215 countries, areas or territories (updated: 7 May 2020, 06:00 GMT+6, World Health Organization).
- Bangladesh has 12,425 reported cases as of 7 May 2020. 706 of these cases were identified in the last 24 hours. The disease has caused 199 deaths in the country, 13 of which were reported in the last 24 hours.
- The Government of Bangladesh is preparing to combat the economic fallout caused by the lockdown through [18 stimulus packs worth BDT 956.19 billion](#) (USD 11.25 billion). From this, BDT 777.5 billion (USD 9.148 billion) will be lent to small to medium businesses through banks, under the supervision of the ministry of finance and the central bank.
- Bangladesh government cleared the path to [open a virtual courtroom](#) within the next week. Due to the lockdown all courts have been closed for nearly two months. This move will avert further increases piling up of backlog cases in Bangladesh.
- Six Bangladeshi pharmaceutical companies are to produce [Remdesivir](#) for treating COVID-19 patients. The drug was seen to improve recovery and reduce hospital stays by 31% in the USA.
- More than 95% of the annual harvest of *boro* paddy (a special type of rice grown on residual water) has been [completed](#) in the *haor* (wetlands) areas, despite the shortage of agricultural labourers amidst the pandemic and the threat of forecasted flash floods. The agriculture minister stated that farmers will complete the rest within this week. **A BRAC report on the *haor* harvest in 2020 reveals that the yield of rice may increase in the northeastern region this year despite the decreased cultivation of land.**
- New facilities are feeling the pressure of testing demands. **1,000 people [queued for COVID-19 tests](#)** outside of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University on 1 May. The facility's current testing capacity is 270 each day.
- The government has lifted [restrictions on gatherings for prayers at mosques](#), raising concerns among health experts. Mosques have been instructed to follow a set of health guidelines.
- The Economist listed Bangladesh as the 9th strongest economy according to their report on the financial strength of 66 emerging economies in the wake of the pandemic. The vulnerability of selected economies were looked at across four potential sources of peril - public debt as percentage of GDP, foreign debt (both public and private), cost of borrowing and reserve cover.





BRAC's overall response to COVID-19

BRAC's immediate short-term focus was 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 includes supporting community support teams which include a BRAC healthcare worker at the ward level to support case detection and verification, setting up sample collection booths, running a pharmacy surveillance pilot to get additional community data to identify hotspots, and developing testing kiosks for additional sample collection.

After the recent 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 has done emergency cash transfers to 300,000 households. Public-private partnerships have also been created, as well as mobilising funding from institutional and individual funders.

As we realise that the economic impacts of the pandemic will be protracted, we are beginning to focus on livelihoods, developing a mid to long-term strategy for economic revitalisation of those living in extreme poverty. 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

- **Experts are finding it difficult to predict the course of the pandemic.** The number of cases per day in Bangladesh has increased after expanding testing facilities, but experts fear numbers may be much higher. It will not be possible to predict when the transmission will peak until testing is accessible and available for all.
- **Projection using a classical SIR (Susceptible-Infectious-Removed [recovered + death]) model predicts that the pandemic in Bangladesh is likely to peak in mid-May, taking the infection rate much higher at the end of the month.** The projection indicates that cases may start declining at the end of June, but the virus is unlikely to be eliminated anytime soon.
- **Shops, stores, religious congregations opening before the Eid-ul-Fitr holiday** need to observe the highest possible safety precautions to reduce chance of community transmission.
- **Members of law enforcement continue to test positive for COVID-19.** A total of 1,190 members of the police have tested positive. 576 of them are from Dhaka Metropolitan Police.
- **School dropouts are expected to rise, especially at the primary level.** The Primary Education Stipend Project and school feeding programme have been halted for months. These programmes enable children of families living in poverty to stay in school.
- **Public and private universities students are facing semester delays due to the lack of facilities and internet availability among students.** University Grants Commission (UGC) has provided guidance to private universities to ensure education for students online. The education minister requested university authorities to prioritise meeting their suggestions.
- **The fear and stigma associated with COVID-19 plays a detrimental role in reducing the spread of the infection** according to a study by BRAC University Institute of Governance and Development, University of Sussex, and University of Liberal Arts (ULAB). The study suggested immediate steps to improve awareness.
- **96 RMG workers were tested positive** for Covid 19 according to a report by Bangladesh Garment Shramik Sanghati (BGSS). 47 refugees in the Rohingya camp are quarantined.
- **While BRAC is supporting with sample collection for to speed up testing,** the presence of PCR labs outside Dhaka is insignificant compared to the need, resulting in a big backlog of tests causing significant delay in results.

- **Violence and discrimination against women during the crisis has increased.** 57% of respondents in a BRAC study reported that disappointment over no earnings and staying at home for a longer period of time is causing increased incidences of violence, especially domestic violence.
- **Incidents of harassment to the medical professionals or their families are increasing,** according to a report by the Centre for Genocide Studies. Similarly, the number of protests against hunger and lack of relief have increased dramatically from various citizen groups, from transportation workers to common villagers.
- **A group of young students from home and abroad published a report that suggests that as many as 386 people have died with symptoms similar to COVID-19 in Bangladesh** between 8 March and 30 April, of which 64% received no medical treatment. This large number of deaths outside the institution represents a higher risk of community infection.



Orientation, safety and safeguarding of staff and communities

- **BRAC's 50,000 community health workers have identified 561 suspected cases** of COVID-19 which they have referred to local authorities for testing.
- **20 doctors, including nine women doctors, recruited by BRAC are supporting the national COVID-19 tele-consultation hotline.** These doctors have answered 44,280 calls.
- **3.8 million programme participants** have been oriented on COVID-19 across Bangladesh.
- **19,636 people**, including 5,540 women, were provided counselling on the risks of travelling during the ongoing pandemic crisis by BRAC's migration programme in Bangladesh.
- **1.5 million units of hygiene products**, such as disinfectants, hand sanitisers, liquid and bathing soap, have been distributed to staff and communities.
- **876,000 protective wear** items such as face masks, hand gloves, surgical caps, coverall and safety glasses were distributed.
- **134,188 BRAC staff and volunteers** have been oriented on COVID-19 through BRAC's online orientation sessions with healthcare experts and training modules.



Strengthening of systems

- **13 kiosks for sample collection from suspected COVID-19 patients have been set up in Dhaka and Narayanganj districts.** All kiosks are fully functional, with the capacity to collect 30 to 40 samples per hour. BRAC will set up 100 walk-in kiosks across 19 risky regions to support the government's initiative of scaling up testing.
- **BRAC is supporting health institutions to meet the demand of equipment, protective wear and hygiene products.** So far, 10 non-invasive ventilators, 10 patient monitors, 60 coveralls, 2,500 masks, 1,500 gloves, and 400 sanitisers have been provided to Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College and Hospital and National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases.
- **BRAC aims to reach 79% of households through bKash (mobile money wallet) during the third phase of emergency cash support that is currently ongoing.** 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.
- **BRAC has contributed to the development of Bangladesh's Country Preparedness and Response Plan to combat COVID-19**, along with the Directorate General of Health Services, Directorate General of Family Planning, a2i and UN agencies. BRAC is directly involved in three pillars of the plan: Ensuring surveillance and laboratory support, contact tracing and point of entry screening; risk communication; and community engagement.





Partnerships

- **Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation** has partnered with BRAC to carry out a cash stipend intervention for 11,000 families, primarily in the host communities of Cox's Bazar. This four-week long partnership will also assist BRAC in delivering health services and behavioural change communication to raise awareness on prevention and protection against COVID-19.
- The **VF Fund** through **GlobalGiving** partnered with BRAC to donate towards a cash support initiative to support the COVID-19 affected communities in Bangladesh.
- A portion of **Global Affairs Canada's** ongoing project with BRAC will go into supporting BRAC's COVID-19 response. The funding will be used for providing cash stipends to 15,000 families, raising awareness in communities and procuring safety items (protective wear, hygiene items and medicine) for community health workers and volunteers.
- **Reckitt Benckiser (Bangladesh) Limited** has contributed to BRAC's emergency cash support initiative. BRAC will also distribute 200,000 units of Reckitt Benckiser hygiene products through this partnership.
- **Australian Government's Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade** partnered with **BRAC** to reduce the risks of COVID-19. Under this partnership, BRAC has been providing food and cash assistance to families in vulnerable conditions, raising awareness on protection measures, conducted an assessment of the COVID-19 situation in Bangladesh, and established a distance learning platform for students through live television broadcasts.
- **Global Affairs Canada and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees** are providing support for the COVID-19 response in Cox's Bazar, for both the Rohingya and host communities, through BRAC's humanitarian crisis management programme.
- **UNICEF** is supporting BRAC, with a particular focus on sustaining children's learning and wellbeing.
- **PepsiCo in Bangladesh, along with the global food and beverage company's philanthropic arm, the PepsiCo Foundation, has partnered with BRAC to provide over 1.4 million meals** to support families with low incomes and who are living in ultra-poverty. This initiative is part of PepsiCo's #GiveMealsGiveHope global programme. BRAC will be the on-ground implementation partner, working in close collaboration with local administration and law enforcement authorities.
- **BRAC and Grameenphone launched the Dakkhe Amar Desh (my country is calling me) campaign**, calling upon individuals and businesses to join hands to support those in most need. Grameenphone will provide BDT 1,500 for BRAC's third phase of cash distribution, to support an additional 100,000 families living in poverty. BRAC has now run two phases of the campaign, in which 198,611 families have been provided with BDT 1,500 so far.
- **BRAC has completed multiple stages of food and cash distribution with support from local government partners**, including Dhaka's North and South City Corporations, Sylhet City Corporation, Rajshahi City Corporation, Faridpur Municipality, Savar Municipality and Satkhira Municipality. Coordination with these government bodies has aided speed and effectiveness in reaching families most in need.

Snapshot: How rice farming in Bangladesh's wetland regions changed in 2020

Farmers across Bangladesh's *haor* (wetlands) regions have been racing against time to complete their annual harvest of *boro* rice, a special kind of rice grown on residual waters. 20% of Bangladesh's rice supply is produced in these regions. This is their only major crop for the people in the area and constitutes the most significant portion of their annual earnings.

The pandemic made the 2020 *boro* season even more critical in the wake of economic lockdowns, with the subsequent rise in poverty and concerns over food security.

Rice farmers have been suffering continued low levels of productivity since the devastating flash floods of 2017 and a slump in prices, as well as due to rusting of crops in 2018.

The prevailing situation at the beginning of the 2020 season was looking grim, especially with some of the farmers (particularly those who own higher lands) deciding against paddy cultivation altogether. **As a result, the total land area under *boro* cultivation fell from 417,300 hectares to 411,713 hectares.**

The anxiety increased when it became clear that, due to the lockdowns, less wage labourers from other regions would be able to support the harvesting, as generally happens. This would delay the harvesting time and increase the chance of another washout, as happened in previous years, by heavy rain.

Table 1: *Boro* plantation by variety (in hectare)

	Sunamganj		Kishoreganj		Netrokona		Habiganj	
	2020	2019	2020	2019	2020	2019	2020	2019
BR-28	77,089.0	83,770.0	72,271.0	75,395.0	22,000.0	19,000.0	12,650.0	13,500.0
BR-29	67,791.0	73,754.0	20,649.5	21,576.0	16,000.0	15,000.0	6,200.0	9,000.0
BR-58	15,058.0	12,849.0	-	-	-	-	-	-
Hybrid	41,189.0	35,168.0	-	-	2,000.0	2,500.0	27,450.0	23,500.0
Kalijira	-	-	-	-	300.0	300.0	-	-
Other	19,816.0	18,899.0	10,324.5	9,529.0	865.0	3,500.0	60.0	60.0

However, after harvesting more than 98% of the crops already, the region is looking towards a higher total production—as high as 22% compared to last year.

The productivity of the two main varieties, BR-28 and BR29, increased by 25% and 26% respectively.

Table 3: *Boro* yield by variety (in metric tonnes/hectare)

	Sunamganj		Kishoreganj		Netrokona		Habiganj	
	2020	2019	2020	2019	2020	2019	2020	2019
BR-28	5.30	4.50	4.35	4.10	6.00	4.00	5.50	4.20
BR-29	5.50	5.00	4.35	4.10	7.00	4.67	6.53	4.75
BR-58	5.20	5.00	-	-	-	-	-	-
Hybrid HYV	7.50	7.00	-	-	7.50	3.00	7.50	7.00
Kalijira	-	-	-	-	5.00	4.00	-	-
Other	4.50	4.25	4.35	4.10	6.00	4.00	4.60	4.25

We conducted a rapid assessment to explore how the harvest season unfolded in four *haor* districts, through staff in BRAC's programme support unit, integrated development programme and seed and agro enterprise.

What was the secret behind the rise in productivity?

- **Excellent weather conditions throughout the season were the primary reason.** The water receded by September in most of the *haor*, giving the farmers plenty of time to prepare the seedbed and paddy fields. Mild weather and no prolonged cold waves supported the high yield.
- **Close supervision by the local administration to reduce sales of counterfeit seeds and fertilisers helped farmers to access quality inputs.** Such surveillance has increased the demand for quality inputs such as BRAC Seed. BRAC Seed and Agro posted the following sales figures in 2019/2020:

Table 3: BRAC Seed sales in Sunamganj (metric tonnes)

Variety	2020	2019
BR-28	20	14
BR-29	25	9
BR-58	4	1
Hybrid HYV	15	12

- **Large scale farmers, who own around 30-35% cultivable land in the *haor* regions, leased most of their land to smaller farmers, to play it safe after experiencing low productivity for three consecutive years. Smallholder farmers took better care of the fields as leaseholders than as hired labour.** NGOs such as BRAC trained most of these smallholder farmers on *boro* cultivation at the beginning of the season. In Netrokona, the 17,000 farmers who received training from BRAC's integrated development programme (through the Agricultural Advisor Committee) each had a piece of land (mostly leasehold) to cultivate. As a result, more trained farmers could use their training.

How was the labour shortage dealt with?

- **The number of wage-labourers available to harvest the paddy was lower than usual due to the current lockdown, but the shortfall was offset** by people who returned to their villages from towns during the lockdown. Locals, who would otherwise have been engaged in non-agricultural sectors, were also free because of the lockdown and able to contribute.
- **Compared to last year, harvester machines were used more extensively.** Mostly suitable for higher lands, the government heavily subsidised these machines. Political leaders, including the Members of the Parliament, played a role in ensuring timely delivery of the machines.
- **Special initiatives to enable the movement of labourers from other regions** were taken by district and *upazila* (sub-district) administrations and the agriculture department.
- **Most *upazila* (sub-district) administration provided emergency support such as food and rice, to lure more labourers.** Going a step forward, the UNO (local government representative) of Mithamoin *upazila* in Mymensingh, northeastern Bangladesh, arranged *iftar* (the meal to break daylong fasting) for 2,000 labourers every day to support the labourers to work.

Table 4: Harvesting by method (%)

Method	Sunamganj		Kishoreganj		Netrokona		Habiganj	
	2020	2019	2020	2019	2020	2019	2020	2019
Wage labour	60.00	65.00	47.00	64.00	35.00	61.00	59.00	70.00
Harvester	22.00	20.00	27.00	15.00	15.00	5.00	25.00	15.00
Barter labour	10.00	8.00	6.00	3.00	5.90	2.00	9.00	10.00
Farmer (self)	8.00	7.00	20.00	18.00	42.00	30.09	7.00	5.00
Others	0.003	-	0.022	-	2.10	1.91	-	-

What steps were taken to avoid the spread of COVID19 among migrant labourers?

- **The district administration ran an extensive programme of building awareness** so they maintained social distancing and personal hygiene requirements.
- **BRAC's integrated development programme used a variety of methods to popularise a new harvesting routine to ensure social distancing** developed by the best-known agricultural influencer in the country. 149 hand-washing stations across 31 unions of five *haor* sub-districts were also installed by the programme.
- **The district administration with the support of the community arranged special accommodation inside schools** which are currently closed due to the pandemic, to reduce close contact with the locals. Central accommodation also helped health authorities to closely monitor their health conditions.

What is next?

The district administration is currently doing door-to-door registrations of farmers who would be allowed to sell up to one metric tonne of dried up paddy to the government at BDT 26 (USD 0.31) per kilogram. In the meantime, farmers have sold a portion of unprocessed paddy to intermediaries and rice mills for BDT 12.5 (USD 0.15) per kilogram to repay loans taken to cover the cost of harvesting. BRAC's field level colleagues confirmed that the portion sold to the middleman is not extraordinarily high compared to past practices. The government will start procurement from 10 May 2020, by which time farmers will be completing the semi-processing required to qualify for government purchase.



Snapshot: The effect of COVID-19 on women in Bangladesh

Global reports highlight that women in abusive relationships have been exposed to increased violence because of COVID-19 lockdowns. A rapid assessment has been conducted during 28 March - 9 April 2020 by BRAC's gender justice and diversity programme to understand the gender dimensions of the implications of the pandemic in Bangladesh.

Who was surveyed?

- **557 respondents** from communities
- **Two focus group discussions** were conducted with 30 BRAC field staff

79% of respondents were women and 21% were men from different programmes within BRAC.

Key quantitative findings:

- 57% responded that not earning and staying at home for a longer time is **causing increased incidences of violence**, especially domestic violence.
- 13% of respondents said that they were aware of incidents of **child marriage**. Reasons included fear due to the loss of household incomes and lack of access to schooling.
- 38% of respondents indicated a **lack of food** as one of the causes for violence.
- 90% women responded that their **workload has increased significantly** and they do not have leisure time.
- 85% of respondents were afraid of **potential health impacts**.
- 48% of respondents fear an **uncertain future**.
- 39% were worried about their **children's education**.
- 52% were **frustrated** because of being stuck at home for a long period of time.
- 48% were facing **health problems**.

Key qualitative findings:

- **It is difficult for women to seek help** if they face abuse. Women are more vulnerable due to their lack of mobility from movement restrictions.
- Many parents are thinking of **early marriages** for their daughters, out of the fear that they cannot afford to feed them if the situation continues for a long time. They also feel that it is difficult for relevant authorities to take any action, due to the lockdown, if the girl is underaged.
- **Women working on the frontline are facing opposition** from their families as they continue to work in the current situation. Women are having to lie to their families about going to communities, and are being ostracised by their neighbours and their wider communities.
- **More men are using safety equipment** like masks, gloves and sanitisers.
- Women are worried about the **threat of being infected** because the men in their households continue to go outside.

Support for gender-based violence

As hospitals, medical professionals and law enforcement agencies are overwhelmed with work related to COVID-19 detection and isolation, they are unable to support victims of domestic and sexual abuse.

The national helpline centre (109) for violence against women and children is open to everyone and available 24/7. In April 2020, an average of 8,500 cases were being reported every day. Helpline employees shared that the number of calls has increased rapidly. The issues are most commonly related to physical assault, psychological torture, harassment over phone, etc.

The one-stop crisis centre is operating despite the lockdown, with limited services. The centre is also providing psychosocial counseling via telephone. A sharp decline has been observed in the rate of seeking support and number of support seekers due to fear of infection and transportation problems from district hospitals.

Trends of violence in areas of BRAC's interventions

762 incidences of violence have been recorded through BRAC Community Empowerment Programme in March 2020. Among them, 680 incidences of violence were committed against women and girls, and 83 against men and boys. Types of violence included attempted mental torture, physical torture and suicide.

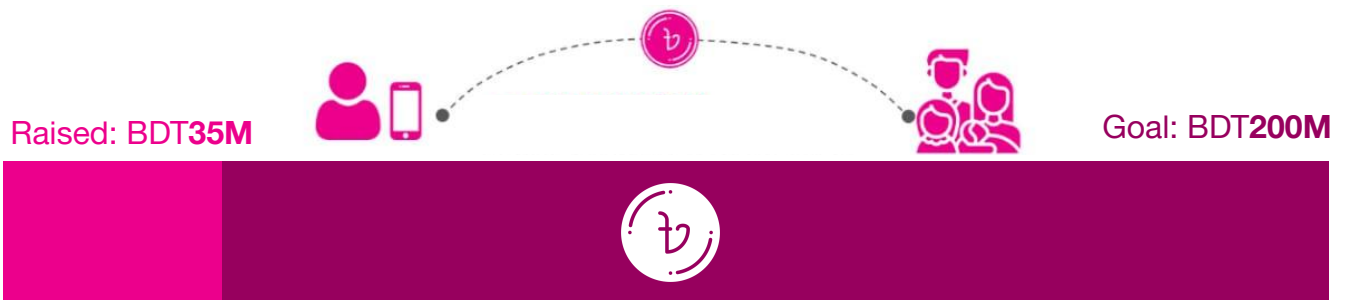
How BRAC is responding

BRAC is committed to ensuring that survivors of violence are not deprived of essential support during the 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.

The BRAC Human Rights and Legal Aid Programme reported different types of violence and other conflict related issues ie, rape, killing, kidnapping, physical torture, torture for dowry money etc. The programme tackled these incidences through its 517 legal aid clinics countrywide. These clinics are a one-stop solution especially for women and girls, to receive legal counselling, alternative dispute resolution, legal coordination and support. The programme provided 9,090 follow-ups through mobile phone and extended 1,462 legal advice between 29 March and 9 April 2020.

Spotlight: Cox's Bazar

- **No COVID-19 positive cases have been reported in the Rohingya camps so far.** As of 6 May, 47 persons are in facility-based quarantine in the camps. 104 people are in institutional quarantine in the camps and 494 people are in home quarantine in the host community.
- **A mobile hospital for primary healthcare services for vulnerable people was launched** on 3 March by the district administration of Cox's Bazar with support from BRAC and other agencies.
- **As the cyclone season approaches, the government and NGO partners are preparing the host community and Rohingya camps to withstand it.** Over 3,000 trained volunteers from the Rohingya and the host community will be the first responders. BRAC has stockpiled emergency items in nearby warehouses for people affected in both the Rohingya and host communities.
- **BRAC's humanitarian response protection team, supported by UN Women, have assisted Rohingya women to produce 6,100 masks.** 1,390 masks were delivered to UNHCR and the second lot of 2,710 will be delivered soon.
- **BRAC's community protection team has provided 30,812 families and 28,000 children in the camps with psychosocial support through telecommunication messages.** Among the children 14,755 were girls and 13,245 were boys. The team also reached out to 2,441 families and 2,339 children in the host community. Among the children, 1,268 were girls and 1,071 were boys.
- **UNHCR, in collaboration with BRAC, have almost completed the construction of a 150-bed isolation centre in Ukhiya.**
- **An alternative approach has been adopted to support the participants of learning centres continue their education.** Children are now studying by using the education materials they have at home through the support of caregivers, parents, Burmese language instructors and Burmese community mobilisers. Caregiver guidelines, key messages, leaflets, posters, banners, audio-visual messages regarding education and prevention of coronavirus were disbursed to 60,768 households of the Rohingya camps.



BRAC's appeal is providing those in the most vulnerable situations in Bangladesh with emergency relief.

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

Partners



Contact us: covid19response@brac.net