Introduction

Following the introduction of movement restrictions at the end of March 2020 to limit the spread of COVID-19, mobile phone surveys were launched to monitor the impact of these restrictions on the food security situation and livelihoods of households in and adjacent to the refugee camps of Cox's Bazar. While universal assistance has continued in the camps, self-reliance activities in the refugee camps and livelihood activities in the host communities were temporarily reprogrammed to limit movement and adhere to social distancing measures. This report gathers findings from the phone surveys conducted in the refugee camps and host communities, mainly focusing on the household food security situation, market access, livelihood disruptions and COVID-19 awareness and related concerns.

Figure: Survey coverage map

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REFUGEE CAMP</th>
<th>HOST COMMUNITY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Hrs 306</td>
<td>Total Hrs 312</td>
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1 Households with an acceptable diet generally consume staples and vegetables every day, frequently accompanied by oil and pulses, and occasionally meat, fish and dairy.
Income and livelihoods disruption

During the lockdown period, livelihood activities and incomes of the respondent households have been significantly impacted. The provision of food and nutrition assistance to all refugee households continues at pre-COVID-19 scale and the impact of the lockdown in terms of income for refugees is mainly driven by the suspension and temporary reprogramming of Self-Reliance activities. The third Refugee influx Emergency Vulnerability Assessment (REVA 2019) conducted in December 2019 found that 49% of refugee households had some source of income (excluding assistance), even if low in monetary terms. From the current survey, all those who were previously engaged in some form of income activities have been affected by the lockdown. These effects, however, are likely to be moderate for refugees due to assistance provision. Of those households whose income had been affected, about 39% mentioned a loss of about BDT1001-2000 during the last one week prior to the survey while another 31% mentioned that the income loss was BDT2001-3000 and 25% mentioned that the income loss was under BDT1000.

In the host community, due to the decreasing livelihood opportunities, the economic impact of the current crisis is expected to be particularly damaging. Before the crisis, in the communities adjacent to the camps, around 90% had reported having at least an income source, though temporary in nature, with an average household income of BDT 13,228 per month (REVA 2019). The current survey found

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2 According to the REVA 2019 assessment findings, the average amount that a refugee household earned was 3553 BDT per month. For 70% of the refugee households, income sources were temporary in nature.
that the negative impact of COVID-19 and the lockdown measures on host community household’s incomes has been very high; seven out of ten respondent households reported that their income had been negatively impacted in early April, while during the second half of April almost all respondents mentioned that their household incomes had been impacted. In terms of income loss, respondents of host communities reported an average of BDT2100 per week. A higher proportion of host community households (15%) experienced weekly income losses of more than BDT3000, compared to 5% of refugee households.

Food security implications

Food markets

With the restrictions on the movement of goods and people, the price of key food commodities (rice, lentils, oil, vegetables) started to increase towards the end of March, fueled by supply chain disruptions amidst heightened demand from households and for relief efforts. The sudden increase in demand saw price increases ranging from 20% – 50% for different food items including rice, lentils, red chili, and garlic, among others (WFP Market Monitor, April 2020). The increased prices of key staples affected consumers’ purchasing power, with a drop of 80% in the average terms-of-trade between daily wage earned and retail price of rice.

Household food consumption

In terms of household food consumption, the survey findings show that among refugee households, nearly seven out of ten families had access to an acceptable diet in the week prior to the survey. Furthermore, continued universal assistance for refugee households, coupled with the increased nutritional value of the food basket\(^3\) plausibly accounts for these positive food consumption outcomes.

Among host community households, the results show a different picture with only four out of ten households reporting an acceptable diet. Before the crisis, nearly eight out of ten host community households had an adequate diet\(^4\). The current survey results indicate that reduced purchasing power and the negative effects of lost income have seriously affected the quantity and quality of households’ diets. These findings further corroborate responses on food availability at household level. During the first three weeks of the lockdown, nearly seven out of ten respondents mentioned not having enough food to eat. This trend continued through early

\(^3\) Due to Covid-19, temporary changes on how refugees receive assistance were introduced in April. The assistance was switched from electronic value vouchers to electronic commodity vouchers. With commodity vouchers, rather than shopping and choosing their items as with value vouchers, households receive a fixed, pre-packaged basket of commodities based on family size. To compensate for the lack of choice, and in consideration of reduced income generating opportunities, the nutritional value of the food basket was increased with the introduction of chickpeas, salt, potatoes and additional yellow split peas.

\(^4\) REVA 2019. When comparing current findings to past surveys, it’s important to note that phone surveys are subject to two forms of biases: sampling (only those with phones) and social desirability bias (due to lack of face-to-face interaction). Nevertheless, current results are indicative of the context, and efforts were made to minimize the biases.
May, with a similar proportion of respondents (65%) still not having adequate food consumption at household level. Main reasons mentioned for food inadequacy included lack of money to buy food (77%) and inability to access markets (9%).

In terms of food stocks, almost a month after the crisis started, about eight out of ten households had indicated that their food stocks would last a week or less. While most households continued not having enough food to eat throughout the crisis, a relatively higher proportion of households (46%) had improved food stocks compared to early days of the lockdown where only 22% had stocks that would last for two weeks or more. Plausibly bulk purchases for Ramadan and increased humanitarian efforts can account for the improved food stocks.

**Food sources and access to markets**

Most host community households continue to rely on markets or grocery shops for food (60%), The second main source of food was assistance from humanitarian agencies and government (27%), which was stepped up following the lockdown.

Despite markets being the main source of food, most of the host community respondents mentioned movement restrictions due to COVID-19 as the main reason for not accessing markets (36%). Other reasons include general concerns/fears of going outside (16%), security concerns (9%) and closure of markets (5%). Of those interviewed, 72% said they experienced more constrained access to...
markets during the first few weeks of the lockdown compared to those interviewed towards the end of April/early May (52%), after several weeks into the lockdown measures (graph below).

COVID-19 concerns and awareness

Respondents were also asked about their awareness on COVID-19. Findings reveal that 98% and 94% of respondents in the refugee camps and host communities respectively knew about COVID-19 and its effects.

When asked what their main concern during the COVID-19 situation is, for both communities the main concern was restrictions on movement/travel. Furthermore, while a shortage of food was a high concern among refugees (38% of respondents mentioned it), it appears not to be among the top concerns within the host community (only approximately 10% of respondents mentioned it). Livelihood disruption was also mentioned by one out of five respondents in the refugee camps while getting sick from COVID-19 was only mentioned by 12% of the refugee respondents. In the host community, the second biggest concern mentioned was shortage of medicines.
When asked about where respondents have received information regarding COVID-19, refugees mentioned tom-toms, NGOs and neighbours as being the main sources of information. In the host community, neighbours, tom-toms and mobile phones were the most common sources mentioned.

Respondents in the refugee camps were also asked how they are observing social distancing. More than half of the respondents (55%) indicated that most of the time people stay indoors, while others avoid overcrowded spaces (41%). Only 4% said they do not observe any social distancing.

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