



# COVID-19 Induced Food Insecurity in Small Cities

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# COVID-19 and Bangladesh

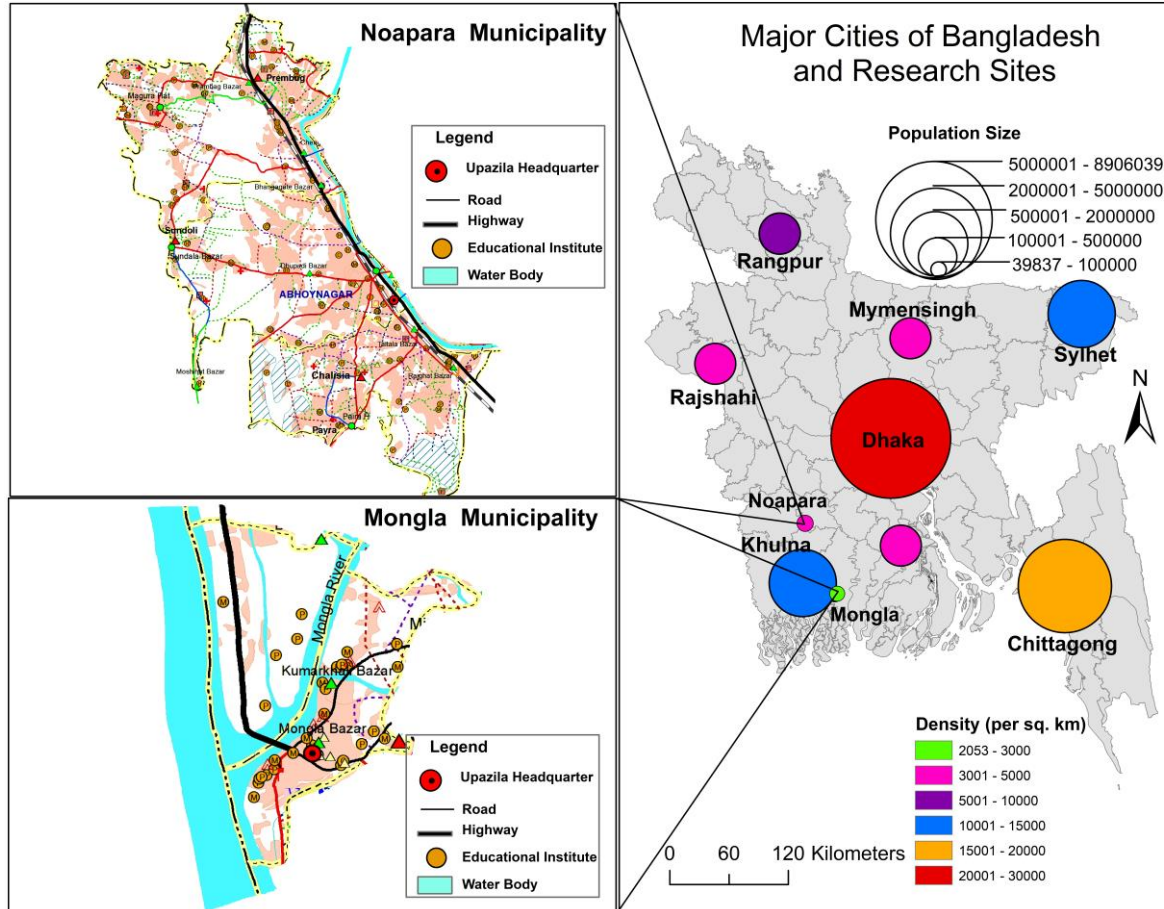
- ❑ First case identified 07 March 2020
- ❑ 'General holiday with restrictions on movement' (lockdown) effective from 26 March and was relaxed on 31 May
- ❑ Total cases: Total cases: 1,572,278; Deaths: 27,918 (Nov 13, 2021)
- ❑ We explored how residents in smaller cities were coping with the food, social and economic disruptions associated with COVID-19

# Why Regional/Small Cities

- ❑ “off-the map cities”
- ❑ Majority of the World’s city dwellers live here
- ❑ Also, home to some of the most vulnerable urban populations
- ❑ The lack of attention given to smaller cities is a self-imposed limitation on our understanding of the urban







# Liveable Regional Cities of Bangladesh Project

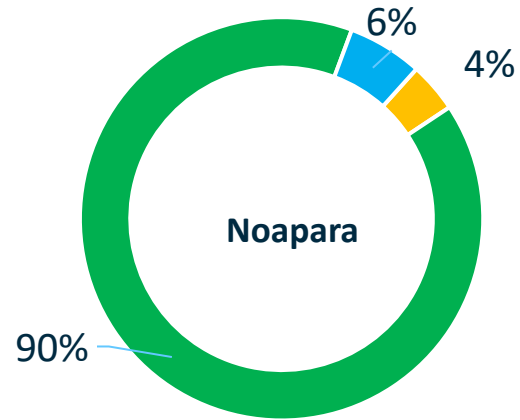
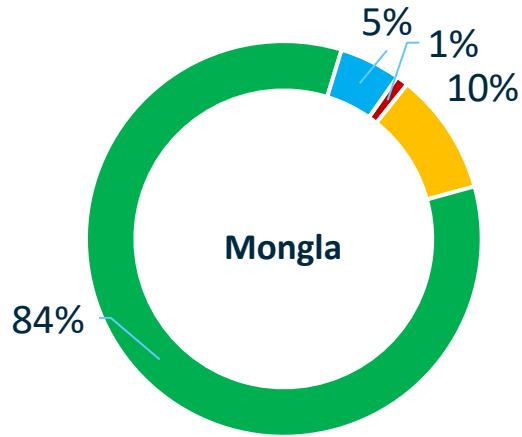
## Fieldwork Sept – Oct 2019



### Methods

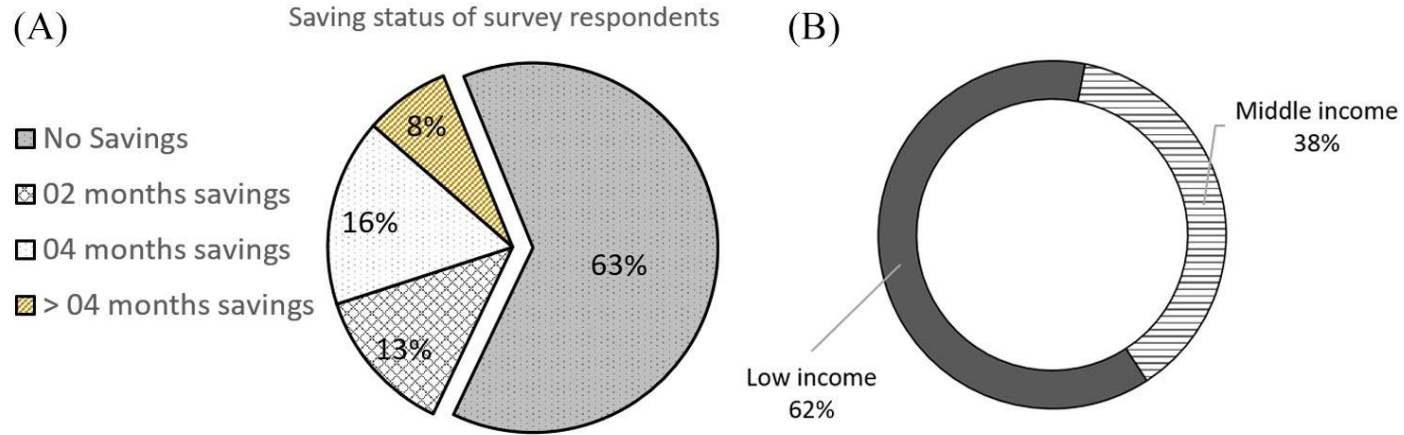
- 201 Surveys
- 2 Story telling workshops and street theatres
- Photography
- 40 Semi structured interviews
- 4 Focus group discussions

# Pre-COVID Meal Consumption



■ One meal   ■ Two meals   ■ Three meals   ■ > Three meals

# Saving Status of Survey Respondents from Mongla and Noapara



**FIGURE 2**

**A) Saving status of survey respondents in September 2019 (n=201)**

**B) Distribution of respondents with no savings (n=127)**

# Rapid Assessment Project

## COVID-19 Lockdown induced food insecurity in small cities

### ☐ Telephone interviews

- May 2020 *during lockdown*  
8 residents
- June *after lockdown*  
4 Government officials, NGOs
- July *Red Zone, new lockdown*  
18 interviews

### ☐ Desk review



# Impact of the Lockdown

- Loss of employment opportunities
- Income shock across groups especially those without guaranteed income *(e.g. day labourers, informal sector workers, small businesses)*

*“Already two months and I do not know how long this will go on. This lockdown is making us suffer for several months. I have never seen anything like this. In the past, if there was a disaster, we survived with our savings, but this time savings are not helping much”.*

- Resident from Mongla

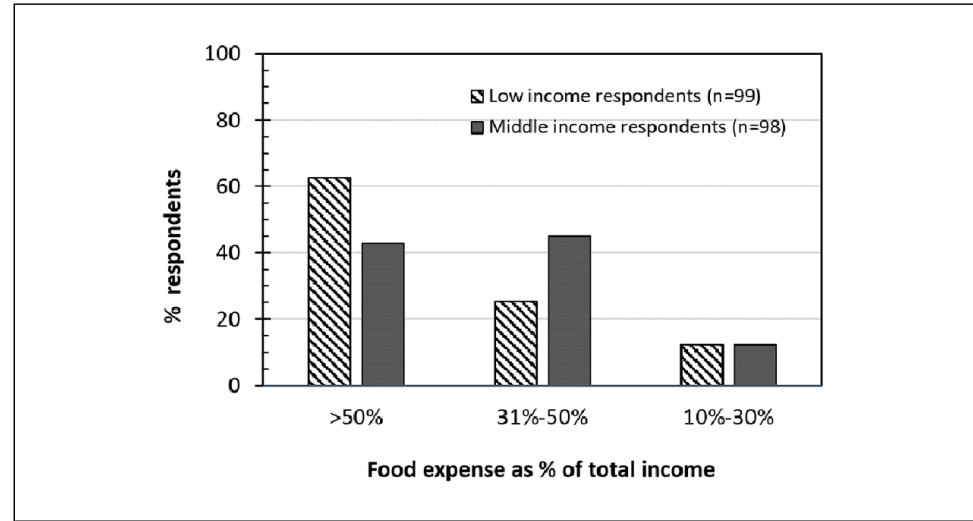
# Response from Local Authorities

- Provided food relief in the first weeks of lockdown
- Relief parcels contained rice, potato, lentils, cooking oil, onions and soap
- Local food markets were replaced with temporary markets with social distancing provisions



# Food Security Outcomes

- Quantity and quality of food consumed by low-income residents were negatively impacted
- Lack of affordability and rumours contributed to lower consumption of animal protein



*Food expense as % of total income in September 2019*

# Food Security Outcomes, continued

- Respondents from Mongla reported price hike of essentials but not in Noapara
- Food affordability as opposed to availability primarily restricted access to food
- Middle-income households without guaranteed income and adequate savings also suffered food insecurity

*“We are not very well-off and come from a middle-class family. We have no income and we cannot even ask for money from others”.*

- Resident from Mongla

# Coping Strategies

- Storing food (rice, lentils, flattened rice, dry goods etc.)
- Skipping meals or curtailing consumption and nutrition
- Increasing share of total expenditure allocated to food
- Accessing food relief
- Taking loans from neighbours, friends or loan sharks



# Small Cities vs Large Cities

## Similarities

- High food insecurity among the low-income households and associated coping strategies
- Price hike of essential items
- The importance of social capital and the lack of coverage of formal social safety nets
- This pandemic essentially exposed the existing inequalities in large and small cities alike

## Differences

- Sourcing of food
- Smaller cities have greater opportunities for practising urban agriculture and rural food producers could sell their products to nearby smaller city markets
- Negative coping strategies such as distress sales of assets
- The greater proximity between the local government and residents in smaller cities enables local governments in these cities to act promptly and decisively.

# Emerging Lessons

- Urban Informality and social safety net programs
- Empowering local governments
- Utilising and building on social capital
- Community based savings schemes
- Multilayering of risks



**ICCCAD**

International Centre for  
Climate Change and  
Development



**SHLC**

Centre for Sustainable,  
Healthy and Learning Cities  
and Neighbourhoods



UK Research  
and Innovation



# Issues we are thinking through

- Who and how many residents in these small cities are not covered by social safety nets
- Debt implications of COVID-19 on the precarious urban residents
- Learning lessons from response to multiple and compounding shocks to build resilience to withstand future disasters
- What are differences between regional smaller cities and large cities