

CORONAKOTHA

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Community feedback bulletin on Covid-19 pandemic

People are struggling with disrupted livelihoods and reduce income



The price people in Kurigram could achieve for their livestock or chickens had dropped because of the flood but that they had no choice but to accept the lower price

Community feedback suggests that farmers, fishermen and people with livestock businesses are concerned about their future livelihood. Although the government has allocated BDT 200,000,000 for agricultural grants (*krishi pronodona*), people say that they are not confident enough to take loans at the current time and want to know whether they will be able to return to their previous business situation. Small and medium business owners who sell processed foods (such as dry cake, chanachur, muri vaja and chal vaja) say that their income has decreased because education institutions – whose students were their main customers – have been closed for the last few months. Feedback also highlighted that some factories had already closed due to lack of business while others were operating on a smaller scale. Community feedback from auto-rickshaw drivers suggests that their income had reduced from a daily average of BDT 500-600 before the pandemic to BDT 200-300 now. Drivers said that they were getting fewer passengers, even after the relaxation of lockdown, and that their lower income made it difficult to meet their daily basic expenses. On top of that, they noted that the prices of daily commodities had increased due to the pandemic, making the scenario even worse for them.

Community feedback from Kurigram suggests that people who have been struggling with the impact of Covid-19 have been further affected by the recent floods. People said that, as they were not able to earn sufficiently during and after the lockdown, they had already spent all their savings. They explained that, after the flooding, they had been left with no option but to borrow from local money lenders or sell their assets, mostly cattle. They also said that the price they could achieve for their livestock or chickens had dropped because of the flood but that they had no choice but to accept the lower price. Feedback also suggests that the price of commodities such as vegetables had increased because of the combination of the pandemic and the floods, with some people mentioning that they were not able to afford three meals a day and were concerned about nutrition for their children.



Fake test reports are making people worried and mean that they avoid testing

People from Gaibandha and Thakurgaon said that they were concerned about fake coronavirus test certificates given by doctors and hospitals. Feedback suggests that cynicism has increased regarding Covid-19 testing because of these fake test reports. People said that they did not want to get tested while some also said that they did not believe the government-provided statistics about the number of coronavirus cases presented in the regular briefings and had therefore stopped watching the briefings.

People are not happy about social distancing being enforced in mosques but not in markets or on public transport

Some people from Thakurgaon, Lalmonirhat and Panchagarh shared that they often could not participate in prayers at mosques, because social distancing rules meant that fewer people could be accommodated inside the mosque. They reflected that social distancing was not being enforced in the same with at local markets or on public transport. People noted that there was often very little space between different people while they used local vehicles to move from one place to another and that no-one was enforcing distancing among those using public transport. People said that they wanted to know why they had to maintain social distancing inside the mosques while it was not enforced in other public places.



Concerns and feedback from marginalised communities

Transgender community

Lack of income further deteriorating the already low standard of living of transgender people



Transgender people required cash and other relief support to pay house rent or meet daily needs

Feedback from the transgender community suggests that they are worried about their livelihood. People said that, during the lockdown, they were compelled to stay at home and could not earn any money. They noted that, even after the lockdown had been eased, they were earning considerably less than normal because people who used to give them money were themselves facing financial difficulties or were donating less. Some working transgender people said that they had lost their jobs during the Covid-19 situation. They shared that it was difficult for transgender people to obtain employment and they were therefore anxious about their future as they didn't know whether they would be able to get a job even if the situation became more normal. Feedback suggests that, because of both their immediate financial difficulties and uncertainty about the future, transgender people were feeling mentally stressed and required cash and other relief support as they were not able to pay their house rent or meet their daily needs. Members of the transgender community from Tangail and Faridpur said that the government were providing a monthly allowance of BDT 600, but felt that this was not enough and urged the government to increase their allowance, as they felt that the situation now was even tougher than before.

Transgender people are concerned about treatment, health and hygiene issues

Feedback from the transgender community suggests that they are worried about the lack of treatment facilities for them. They wanted to know where they could go to obtain proper health services if they were infected by Covid-19. People reflected that, given that the general population were struggling to get proper treatment, they were even more anxious about getting treatment for themselves, particularly given the discrimination that they face from society in many aspects of their lives.

Feedback also suggests that transgender people are concerned about maintaining social distance as they live in the ghetto (a slum area where transgender people live)

where 20-25 people share a single room. They wanted to know how they could sanitise their bathrooms and toilets, which are used by many people. They also wanted to know what they could do when meeting with their intimate partners and what kind of safety measures should be followed to save themselves from being infected by coronavirus. Transgender people also said that they were worried about their family members who go outside to earn money and wanted to know how they could prevent them from getting infected.

Sex worker community

Sex workers are in search of alternative livelihoods as they are left with no income to meet their basic needs



Sex workers were worried that they would not get the same level of help from society as other vulnerable groups, because of their profession

Feedback from the sex worker community in Dhaka, Chattogram, Sylhet, Mymensingh, and Tangail suggests that relief support that had been available from government, NGOs and private sources at the beginning of the lockdown has now stopped. Sex workers reflected that their client numbers had not increased after the lockdown was eased, said that they were now concerned about having enough food to survive and wanted to know whether they would get any food support. They also said that they were worried that they would not get the same level of help from society as other vulnerable groups, because of their profession. Sex workers said that they were concerned about whether they would be able to restart their work, even if the Covid-19 situation eased, and were therefore seeking information regarding alternative livelihoods from organisations working to support them. Feedback suggests that sex workers were no longer interested in receiving condoms (which are provided for free by some organisations): they said that, currently, they were not concerned about their sexual health and were ready to work without condoms so that they could earn some money.

Violence against the sex worker community has increased

Feedback suggests that street based sex workers are facing increased numbers of physical assaults by the police, local people and brokers. Some people said that, if any sex worker tried to work or was looking for a client, they were being restricted by the police and local people. In some cases, people said that they had been beaten. Some female sex workers with a so-called 'broker husband' (someone who provides living space and shelter in return for some commission) said that, since these 'broker husbands' were not currently receiving any commission, they were abusing them.

Many sex workers have become homeless

Sex workers living in Dhaka slums said that they often lost their living space because they did not have money to pay rent. Earlier, homeless sex workers could go to drop-in centres or temporary shelters to take a shower, rest and food after their work. People said that, because of Covid-19, these centres were temporarily closed because of the difficulty of maintaining social distancing in the limited space. People wanted to know when the authorities would reopen these centres for them.

Sex worker community concerned about Covid-19 tests

Feedback from sex workers suggests that recent reports about Regent hospital issuing fake coronavirus test results had made them worried about whether they should go for testing if they developed any Covid-19 symptoms. People said that they felt the cost of Covid-19 testing was high and were also concerned about the cost of traveling to the health centers to get a test. Some sex workers said that they had given samples for testing two months ago, but had still not got the result. They wanted to know where they could obtain a free Covid-19 test within a short time.

People living with HIV

People living with HIV are concerned about general treatment in hospitals



Community feedback from different areas of Dhaka, Chattogram, Sylhet, Khulna, Rajshahi and Rangpur indicates that people living with HIV are concerned about the uncertainty of getting proper treatment from hospitals. They said that they had seen on social media, newspapers and television that some hospitals were not admitting general patients while some others were not providing proper treatment to those who were admitted. People living with HIV wanted to know how to obtain treatment from home if needed, because they were worried about the treatment facilities available at the hospitals. People also said they were concerned that their local government hospitals were providing treatment for Covid-19 patients and that they had no choice but to go there for any kind of general or HIV treatment, making them worried about becoming infected by the coronavirus while receiving services at government hospitals.

People living with HIV from Rajshahi and Rangpur said that they were worried about getting antiretroviral therapy. People said that they used to get these medicines regularly from government hospitals but that, due to Covid-19, those hospitals were busy providing treatment only to Covid-19 patients and they were therefore not able to get the essential treatment they needed.

This bulletin has been produced by BBC Media Action and the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society, on behalf of Shongjog – the national platform for community engagement and accountability. Insights in this edition have been drawn from feedback collected by volunteers, hotlines, phone interviews, face to face communication and meetings. Feedback analysed was collected by Eco-Social Development Organisation (Thakurgaon, Lalmonirhat, Panchagarh and Nilphamari), Mahideb Jubo Somaj Kallayan Somity (Kurigram), SKS foundation (Gaibandha), Swanirbhar Mohila Unnayan Shamity, Bandhu Social Welfare Society, Light House, the network of PLHIV in Bangladesh and the Ashar Alo Society.

BBC Media Action (in cooperation with Translators without Borders) is also producing the regular *What Matters?* bulletin, which analyses community feedback and concerns in Cox's Bazar, related to Covid-19 in the context of the Rohingya emergency. These bulletins can be found on the [Shongjog website](#).

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