



FAO requires
USD 10.45 million



to assist
320 000 people



1.3 million people facing acute food insecurity at crisis and worse levels*



855 000 Rohingya refugees in Cox’s Bazar



2 623 confirmed cases of COVID-19, as of 30 June 2020



377 411 people in Cox’s Bazar live under the poverty line, with an additional 400 000 people across the district estimated to be poor or vulnerable



25–48% reduction in prices of vegetables sold by farmers due to lower demand and COVID-19 movement restrictions

*Source: Global Report on Food Crises 2020

Impact of COVID-19 on food security and agriculture

Cox’s Bazar is a poor and vulnerable district in southeastern Bangladesh, with a total Bangladeshi population of 2.65 million people. It also hosts the largest refugee population in the world, with 855 000 Rohingya residing in 34 makeshift camps. Overcrowded and marked by poor hygienic and sanitary conditions, there is a high risk of the rapid spread of disease within the camps. On 23 March 2020, the first confirmed case of COVID-19 was identified in Cox’s Bazar and the number of cases has since continued to increase rapidly.

The magnitude of the pandemic’s impact varies across different segments of society. Due to COVID-19 related movement restrictions, thousands of people in Cox’s Bazar are at risk of losing their jobs, livelihoods and subsequently their incomes. A rapid assessment conducted by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in 2020 observed that COVID-19 has disrupted programmes in upstream (i.e. input supply and production), midstream (processing, marketing and logistics), and downstream (retail and consumption) segments of the agricultural value chain. The study also identified that necessary health-related movement restrictions to contain the spread of the virus ultimately limited or obstructed access to inputs, markets and services, labour and transport, farm machinery, financial capital, and digital services. Further, it has caused income shocks, and reduced food demand. Poorer households in particular are purchasing much less and risk being forced to adopt extreme coping strategies to sustain their food consumption.

The suspension and temporary reprogramming of livelihood activities due to the quarantine has negatively impacted the



income of refugees. Humanitarian assistance to refugee households has continued at the scale prior to COVID-19; however, this assistance has been redesigned as households no longer have access to markets due to COVID-19 related movement restrictions. Previously provided with electronic value vouchers, refugees now receive electronic commodity vouchers through which they can acquire a fixed, pre-packaged basket of commodities based on household size. To compensate for the reduction in income-generating opportunities, chickpeas, potatoes, salt and yellow split peas have been added to the food basket to increase its nutritional value.

The pandemic has also particularly affected the livelihoods and food security of the most vulnerable host community members, particularly those working in agriculture and related informal sectors. Containment measures and other restrictions on business activities have led to the temporary rising of food prices and falling of incomes with an impact on food consumption and nutritional status. As their purchasing power decreases, households will be more likely to buy grains and other staple crops at a low cost in place of nutritious food like meat and fresh products, which are significantly more expensive. Household income levels

have been impacted by livelihood disruptions with families generally losing between BDT 1 000 (USD 11.7) to BDT 3 000 (USD 35.22) a week. The economic impact of the current crisis is expected to be particularly damaging in the host communities due to decreasing livelihood opportunities.

Furthermore, Cox's Bazar is traditionally a marine fisheries center. About 18 percent of the population in the district is engaged in the fisheries sector. With the outbreak of COVID-19, the number of customers and therefore sales in the fish market have dropped almost immediately. The price of fish has since continued to decrease as fisherfolk sell their fish for a very little profit margin or no profit at all. Marine fishing, which constitutes 95 percent of the fishing activities in the district, will follow a declining trend of supply and demand in local markets. Presently, the export of marine fish has completely halted due to the closing of seaports and associated activities. The COVID-19 outbreak has also drastically affected the livestock sub-sector in Cox's Bazar. Broiler chickens are not selling well, resulting in a lower price of chicken and increased debt for poultry farm owners. Simultaneously, poultry hatcheries are facing challenges with selling their day-old chicks.

Likely evolution of the impacts of COVID-19 on food security

Food and agricultural commodity supply and value chains to be most impacted if essential health-related restrictions continue. Transportation and market interactions have been restricted due to quarantine measures and physical distancing. Planting and harvesting may both be disrupted due to a lack of seed/fertilizer and seasonal labour, respectively. As farmers progress towards the next planting season (farming of winter crops), they may be discouraged to cultivate if they are unable to obtain quality inputs and timely services. This is likely to lead to food supply shortages.

Livestock and fisheries sectors to face challenges. COVID-19 transport restrictions may result in a scarcity of feed for livestock and fish. Additionally, inadequate possibilities for households to sell their animals may limit their capacity to purchase required feed and/or medicine. It is thus likely that the farming of livestock

and fish will further decrease in Cox's Bazar, creating a shortage of fish and chicken on the local markets. With restaurants closed, the number of buyers of meat, eggs, and milk has already significantly reduced.

Social tensions and conflict to worsen. The COVID-19 pandemic may also have a negative impact on the social stability between refugees and host communities, creating the conditions for unrest, particularly with soaring unemployment and limited access to food.

Existing vulnerabilities to deepen. Vulnerable refugee and host community households may be forced to resort to negative coping strategies, which will have a lasting impact on their lives and livelihoods, including a reduction in the number of meals, increased school drop-out rate, decreased means to cover health expenditures, gender-based violence, selling of productive assets, etc.

Anticipatory actions and response

Many of FAO's activities in Cox's Bazar are implemented within the framework of the Safe Access to Fuel and Energy Plus Livelihoods (SAFE Plus) project, designed by FAO in partnership with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the World Food Programme (WFP). This three-year, multi-sectoral, multi-partner project addresses the food security, livelihood, and cooking fuel needs of both refugee and host communities, and focuses on reducing negative environmental impacts through land and forest rehabilitation.

FAO plays an important role in Cox's Bazar by linking international emergency response actors with local institutions. Moreover, the Organization is working with the Department of Agricultural Extension, Forest Department, Department of Livestock Services, Department of Fisheries, the Office of the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner and the Office of the Deputy Commissioner to ensure that government priorities on environmental degradation and the livelihoods of host communities are taken into consideration within the Joint Response Plan for 2020 as well as the Government's development plans. FAO is also involved in the development of knowledge management products (lessons learned, best practices, etc.) with all Food Security Sector partners in Cox's Bazar.

Moreover, FAO is monitoring the impact of COVID-19 on the agri-food system while improving food security data collection and analysis. This will enable humanitarian actors to respond more effectively in order to maintain food production. Further, post-production activities, such as harvesting, storage, small-scale food processing and conservation, will be scaled up to enable poor farmers to take advantage of the up-coming planting seasons. FAO is linking producers to markets to keep food supply chains functional and conducting awareness raising to ensure key actors maintaining these food supply chains are not at risk of COVID-19 transmission. Further, as co-lead of the Food Security Sector in Cox's Bazar, FAO is working to strengthen the coordination of Food Security Sector partners in their preparedness and humanitarian response to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on the food security and livelihoods of vulnerable and affected populations.

Within the framework of FAO's Corporate COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme, the following actions have been identified to meet the urgent short-term needs of the most vulnerable food-insecure populations and protect their assets. It also represents FAO's contribution to the United Nations Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19.

1) Ensuring availability of and sustaining access to food for the most food-insecure populations

- Provide 25 000 farmers with quality inputs, as well as technical support and assistance on good agricultural practices, to sustain quality food production and market chains. In-kind input support will include the provision of seeds (fish and crop), feed (fish and livestock), day-old chicks and fertilizers.
- Provide 5 000 farmers, particularly those producing rice and other arable crops, with agricultural inputs and extend the geographic focus for farm mechanization.
- Provide unconditional cash transfers to 5 000 vulnerable smallholder farmers, who are particularly exposed to the impacts of COVID-19 and economic shocks.
- Implement cash for work as part of a cash-based programme to support 500 households, mainly refugees, in conducting land/forest rehabilitation activities. Protective equipment will be provided on an ad hoc basis and FAO will ensure that beneficiaries receive key information on how to prevent virus transmission. Moreover, rehabilitation activities will adhere to physical distancing requirements, with a limited number of people at any one time.

2) Ensuring continuity of the critical food supply chain

- Support alternative income-generating activities, with a focus on women producers (1 500 households). Households across agricultural sub-sectors will be engaged in locally feasible on- and off-farm income generating activities that will indirectly contribute to agricultural farming and marketing.
- Enhance the food value chain, and strengthen input and output market functions to facilitate supplies to farmers. FAO will support 20 aggregation

centres in modifying their operations in response to COVID-19 and maintaining health and safety measures inside the centres to ensure the continuity of the food supply chain. Additionally, FAO will ensure food safety and quality measures are respected to control the spread of the virus.

- Improve mechanisms for farmer knowledge and skills development on technical and business interventions to increase production, improve market functions, and enhance business interactions.
- Collaborate with the Departments of Agricultural Extension, Livestock Services and Fisheries to strengthen the role of agricultural extension services in Cox's Bazar.

3) Ensuring food supply chain actors are not at risk of virus transmission

- Broadcast a set of programmes to disseminate agricultural messages to farmers' groups about

the impact of COVID-19 and preventive measures through the FM Radio and Bangladesh Betar, in order to enhance their technical capacity and maintain a healthy working environment.

- Develop specific guidance on COVID-19 containment and risk mitigation for ongoing agricultural activities to protect farmers.
- Continue the ongoing development of a Nursery Information Centre web portal. The portal will provide information on all nurseries, specifically their location, stock, nursery category, price of seedlings, etc. It will help to avoid duplications between actors, and will enable partners to select planting materials online, and avoid physical visits, particularly important during the current COVID-19 situation. Major stakeholders include the Government and international organizations, as well as United Nations bodies that are particularly interested in plantation activities.

Funding



FAO requires
USD 10.45 million

- **USD 8.46 million** under the Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19
- **USD 1.99 million** under the Humanitarian Response Plan for 2020

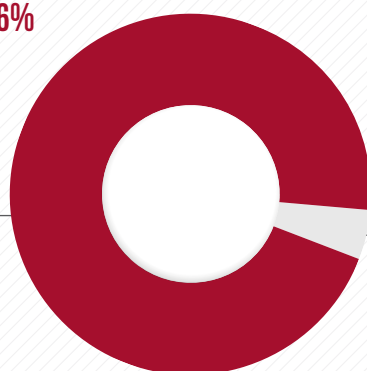


to assist
320 000 people

FUNDING GAP

USD 10 million

95.6%



RECEIVED
USD 454 545

Resource partners

the Governments of Canada, Japan, the Netherlands, Sweden, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America, the European Union and the International Organization for Migration

Coordination and partnerships

- Food Security and Livelihoods Sector partners
- Energy and Environment Technical Working Group partners
- Department of Agricultural Extension
- Department of Fisheries
- Forest Department
- Department of Livestock Services
- Office of the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner
- Office of the Deputy Commissioner

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