

# COVID-19 Monitoring Survey in Poor and Slum Areas of Dhaka and Chittagong

Bangladesh Food security and coping strategies as of Round 2

SEPTEMBER 2 - OCTOBER 11, 2020



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To track the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on labor markets and household coping strategies, a rapid phone survey was implemented on a representative sample of households living in poor and slum areas of Dhaka and Chittagong City Corporations (CCs). This brief, the fourth in the series, summarizes results from the first and second rounds of the rapid phone survey, conducted from June 10 to July 10, 2020, and from September 2 to October 11, 2020 (see annex 1 for details of the survey design). Ninety-four percent of respondents interviewed in the first survey round were reached in the second round. This brief focuses on how food security and coping strategies evolved between the two rounds.<sup>1</sup>

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## Main messages

**Respondents in poor and slum areas of Dhaka and Chittagong CCs reported that key food items were available in markets.** Ninety-nine percent of respondents indicated that key food products – rice, lentil, eggs, and fish – were available during the week preceding the interview conducted between September 2 and October 11, 2020.<sup>1</sup>

**Self-reported measures of food security have improved substantially, linked to the employment gains seen between the two survey rounds.** In June 2020, 50 percent of households reported that at least one member had eaten smaller or fewer meals in the preceding two weeks due to lack of food. In September/October, this share fell to 23 percent. The percentage of households having at least one member going to bed hungry declined from 22 to 8 percent between the first and second survey rounds. A larger reduction in food insecurity reports in Chittagong is consistent with the faster recovery in employment levels observed in that city.<sup>2</sup> Respondents who started work between the two rounds were 30 percent more likely to become food secure.<sup>3</sup> Receipts

of assistance are limited and did not change between rounds, highlighting the centrality of labor outcomes for recovery.

**Improvements are also seen in respondents' expected ability to obtain cash in an emergency situation.** About 75 percent of respondents affirmed that, in case of an emergency that would require paying BDT 25,000 in cash,<sup>4</sup> they would be able to obtain those resources. This figure is 6 percentage points higher than in June. Half of the respondents indicate that they could obtain the emergency funds from friends without interest and 25 percent from friends with some interest payment. This signifies reliance on social networks rather than formal sources for coping.

**Ability to pay rent has increased, but 4 in 10 tenants were unable to pay their rent.** Around 76 percent of respondents rented their place of residence in round 2. Between the two rounds, the share of tenants unable to pay their rent declined from 57 to 43 percent. About 17 percent of tenants reported eviction or threats of eviction (compared with 20 percent in June).

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<sup>1</sup> The previous briefs can be downloaded [here](#).

<sup>2</sup> More details about the employment changes between rounds can be found [here](#).

<sup>3</sup> Estimate from a multinomial logit regression where the base outcome is no change in the food security situation between rounds 1 and 2. The regression controls for location, gender, and age. In this analysis, food secure refers to

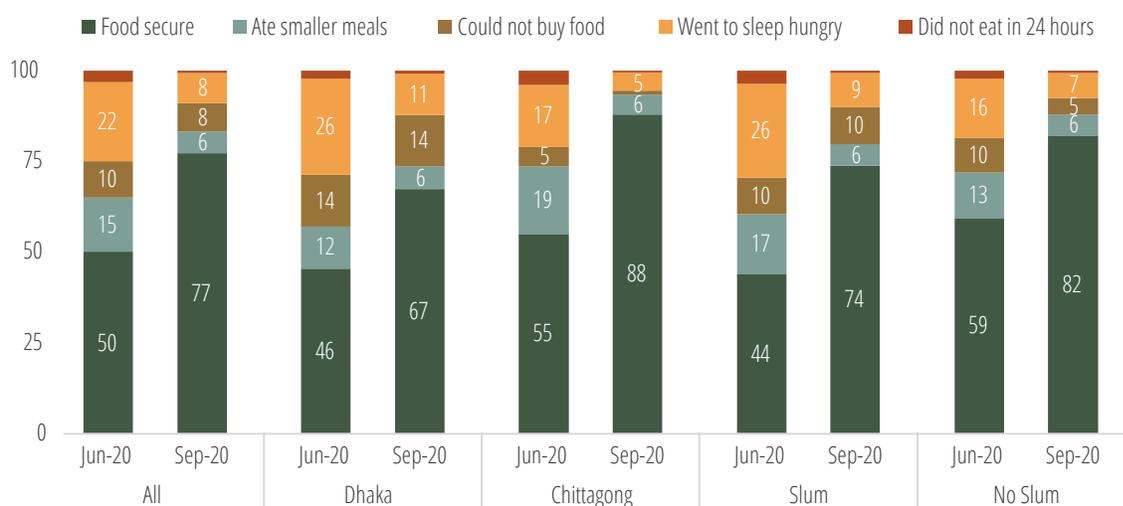
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those households who report not having to eat a smaller meal or fewer meals in a day because there was not enough food in last two weeks.

<sup>4</sup> This amount corresponds to about twice the upper poverty line in Bangladesh. The poverty line measures the cost of a basic food and non-food basket.

## Findings

**Figure 1. Self-reported food insecurity in the two weeks preceding the interview by geographic area and survey round (% of households)**



**Most respondents indicated that key food items were available in the markets.** Ninety-nine percent of respondents indicated that key food products – rice, lentil, eggs, and fish – were available during the week preceding the interview conducted between September 2 and October 11, 2020.

**Across areas, self-reports of food security have improved substantially.<sup>5</sup>** In June 2020, 50 percent of households reported that at least one member had eaten smaller or fewer meals in the preceding two weeks due to lack of food. In September/October, this share fell to 23 percent. The share of households with at least one member going to bed hungry declined from 22 to 8 percent between the first and second survey rounds. In addition, the percentage of households having at least one member not eating for a whole day on at least one day during the past two weeks declined from 3 to 0.5 percent. Overall, 73 percent of those households that had reported some level of food insecurity in June recovered by September/October (Figure 1).

<sup>5</sup> Food security questions were collected following international standards based on self-assessments of current food security status in a recent recall period. The questionnaire focused on capturing moderate hunger (having to consume smaller or fewer meals than usual) and severe hunger (having no food at home, going to sleep hungry, or going days without food). The recall period was two weeks.

**Progress in food security was substantial across all areas, with Chittagong showing the largest gains.** In Chittagong, the percentage of households reporting being food secure<sup>6</sup> increased by 33 percentage points, from 55 to 88 percent, between the two rounds. In Dhaka, the share of food-secure households also increased, but not as much as in Chittagong (from 46 to 67 percent).<sup>7</sup> Slum areas also showed important gains. The share of slum households with some marker of food insecurity fell from 56 to 26 percent.

**Gains in food security are correlated with higher employment between the two rounds.** About 64 percent of adults in households that became food secure between the two rounds gained employment over that period. A regression analysis indicates that respondents who started work between the two rounds were 30 percent more likely to become food secure.<sup>8</sup> The substantial reduction of food insecurity reports in Chittagong is also consistent with the faster recovery in employment levels observed in that area.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> In this analysis, food secure refers to those households who report not having to eat a smaller meal or fewer meals in a day because there was not enough food in the last two weeks.

<sup>7</sup> The differences are statistically significant.

<sup>8</sup> Estimate from a multinomial logit regression where the base outcome is no change in the food security situation between rounds 1 and 2. The regression controls for location, gender, and age.

<sup>9</sup> See labor brief for these results.

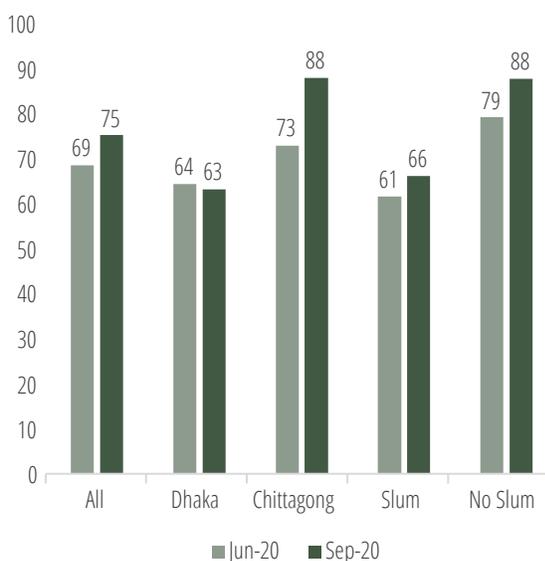
Levels of assistance (cash or in-kind from any source) are limited and did not change between rounds. Less than 1 percent of respondents received any form of assistance in the week preceding the interview. This highlights the centrality of labor outcomes for recovery.

**Improvements are also seen in respondents' expected ability to obtain cash to fund an emergency.** About 75 percent of respondents affirmed that in case of an emergency that would require paying BDT 25,000 in cash, they would be able to obtain those resources (Figure 2).<sup>10</sup> This figure is 6 percentage points higher than in June. Half of the respondents indicate that they could obtain the emergency funds from

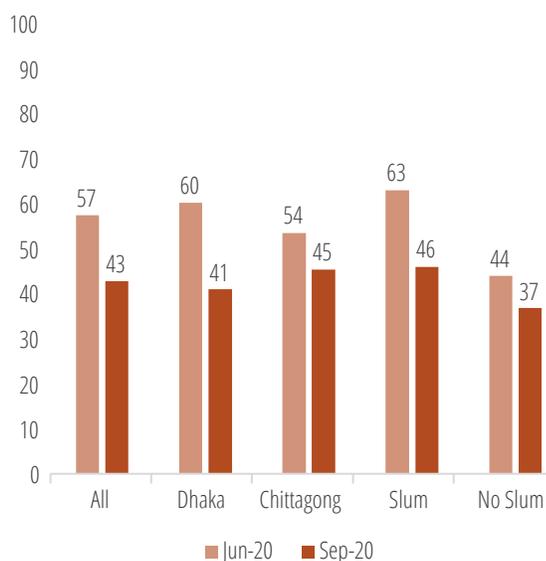
friends without interest and 25 percent from friends with some interest payment.

**Ability to pay rent has increased, but 4 in 10 tenants were unable to pay their rent.** Around 76 percent of respondents rented their place of residence in round 2.<sup>11</sup> Between the two rounds, the percentage of tenants unable to pay their rent declined from 57 to 43 percent. Improvements are seen across areas, with higher gains in Dhaka (Figure 3). Regression analysis indicates that there is not a significant correlation between improved rental payments and employment gains, suggesting that other factors may be at play in explaining the ability to afford rent. About 17 percent of tenants reported eviction or threats of eviction (compared with 20 percent in June).

**Figure 2. Percentage of respondents able to obtain BDT 25,000 in cash in an emergency by geographic area and survey round (%)**



**Figure 3. Tenant households reporting not being able to pay rent or fears of eviction by geographic area and survey round (%)**



<sup>10</sup> The BDT 25,000 amount corresponds to about twice the upper poverty line in Bangladesh. The poverty line measures the cost of a basic food and non-food basket.

<sup>11</sup> This figure is very similar to the one reported in round 1.

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**APPENDIX 1.****Survey  
Details**

The monitoring survey built on baseline surveys conducted before the COVID-19 crisis. The monitoring survey sample for Dhaka is a follow-up of the DIGNITY (Dhaka low Income area GeNder, Inclusion, and poverTY) survey, which was representative of low-income areas and slums of the Dhaka City Corporations and an additional low-income site from the Greater Dhaka Statistical Metropolitan Area, following a two-stage stratification design. The primary sampling units were selected during the first stage using probability proportional to size (PPS), stratified by the poverty headcount ratio estimated using small-area techniques. All the households in the selected enumeration areas were listed during the second stage, from which 20 households were selected for interviewing based on demographic stratification. The second level of stratification was defined as follows: (i) households with both working-age male and female members; (ii) households with only a working-age female; (iii) households with only a working-age male. Households were randomly selected from each stratum with the predetermined ratio of 16:3:1.<sup>12</sup> The DIGNITY survey, administered between July and September 2018, collected

information from 2,376 individuals across 1,302 households.

The monitoring survey in Chittagong is a follow-up of the CITY (Chittagong Low Income Area Inclusion and PoverTY) survey carried out in Chittagong City Corporation following the same sampling strategy as in the DIGNITY survey. Data was collected from 1,289 individuals across 805 households between September and October 2019.

For the monitoring survey, a representative sub-sample of 1,500 households out of a total 2,107 baseline households was targeted. The recontact rate was 1,483 households (99.5 percent). In the first tracking survey, 1,483 out of the 3,665 adults surveyed in baseline were covered. The first tracking survey was conducted between June 10 and July 10, 2020. The second tracking survey aimed to reach all the respondents interviewed in the first tracking survey. The final recontact rate was 94 percent. The main reason for non-response was the inability of interviewers to reach respondents by phone. The number of observations lost due to attrition was 89 respondents. Analysis of selection indicates that missing respondents were more likely to be males and to live in Chittagong. The numbers of observations missing across key categories (area and gender) are too small to affect inferences at that level.

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<sup>12</sup> Kotikula, A.; Hill, R.; Raza, WA (2019). What Works for Working Women? Understanding Female Labor Force Participation in Urban Bangladesh. Report. Washington, DC: World Bank.