SAVING LIVES CHANGING LIVES

Cox's Bazar Urban Vulnerability Assessment

Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

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1 Introduction

Cox's Bazar, a district within Chattogram division, predominantly relies on tourism and fishery related businesses. The district remains one of the poorest in Bangladesh and is highly susceptible to recurrent climatic shocks: approximately 33 percent of its population live below the poverty line (BBS 2017). Cox's Bazar municipality, the focus of this study, is one of the upazilas within the district, and the most economically active hubs. It has 12 wards, with a total population of 447,210 (Census 2011, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics) of which 12.24% (around 54,739) lives below poverty line.

Cox's Bazar witnessed its first official case of COVID-19 on 24th March and the first casualty on April 24, 2020. Cox's Bazar was among the pioneering districts who opted for official lockdown from 8th April 2020 as a measure to contain the spread of the disease and restrict communal transmission. Following the lockdown, majority of the households within the municipality experienced substantial disruption on their regular income and livelihood opportunities. Limited to no access to income and livelihoods, insufficient economic capacity to access food and healthcare, poor diets, increasing adoption of negative copings strategies, and discontinuation of formal education remain major challenges.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, a host of evidence has been generated depicting high vulnerability among urban populations relative to rural areas. The fragile urban set up fails in most of cases for the poorer workforce due to its inability to provide these populations with alternatives for livelihood sustenance as opposed to rural areas.

In June 2020, the World Food Programme (WFP) conducted a data collection exercise for the first round of Cox's Bazar Urban Vulnerability Assessment to understand the impacts of the current crisis on the urban populations' livelihoods, food security and overall welfare socio-economic vulnerabilities of the municipal community under the impact of the worldwide pandemic. The exercise was led by WFP's Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping (VAM) team, and remote data collection was supported by WFP's Monitoring and Evaluations (M&E) team. The household contacts were provided by the office of the Mayor of Cox's Bazar Municipality. This report presents the main findings of the assessment.

Broader objectives of the assessment were-

- To assess the impacts of the current crisis on livelihoods and access to food and other essential needs of Cox's Bazar Municipality households.
- Provide evidence to address priority needs and guide targeting of existing and future interventions in Cox's Bazar Municipality.

2 Methodolody

2.1 Research design

This activity was designed as a rapid assessment of the welfare outcomes of the urban population in Cox's Bazar Municipality, particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The household survey collected information through remote phone interviews on basic household demographics, livelihoods, food consumption and expenditure patterns, coping mechanisms, assistance received and access to health care. The questionnaire was designed to focus on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis and subsequent lockdowns on the aforementioned dynamics in comparison to usual circumstances.

2.2 Sampling

A representative sample of 500 households in Cox's Bazar Municipality had been targeted. In order to ensure the sample is well-distributed across all 12 wards within the municipality, the target sample was assigned based on the probability proportional to size using the Census (2011) population of each ward. However, the sample is not stratified at the ward level.

448 out of the initially targeted 500 household interviews were completed (see **Annex 5.1**). The respondents were selected based on two sampling procedures:

- **Convenience sampling:** Due to the current crisis, it was not possible to conduct a full listing of selected primary sampling units (PSU's) to select a random sample of households. The interviews had to be conducted remotely via phone-calls and there was no sampling frame available for the municipality with contact details for the populations. As a starting point, a random list of phone numbers of households from all wards was obtained from the Mayor's office,
- **Snowball sampling:** The list of phone numbers from the Mayor's office did not provide an appropriately distributed sample across all wards. Consequently, a snowballing approach was used to supplement the process where respondents from the original list were requested to provide numbers of family, friends or acquaintances living within Cox's Bazar Municipality, who were then called for the survey.

47 percent of the sample was achieved using the list of numbers from the Mayor's office and 53 percent using the snowballing approach. The sample characteristics were then compared with the sample in urban Cox's Bazar stratum of the Bangladesh Household Income and Expenditure Survey (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2016) to verify population representativeness.

2.3 Data collection

Data was collected through remote phone survey of sample households lasting 20-25 minutes on average. Answers were recorded on an electronic form, with both field monitoring and high-quality data checks in place to ensure quality assurance. For the first phase of the survey, data collectors were provided with numbers obtained from the Mayor's office. Respondents from this list were then leveraged to build the snowball sample for additional respondents in respective wards in the second phase of the survey.

2.4 Scope and limitations

Due to the ongoing crisis and subsequent lockdowns, teams were not able to conduct field work. As a result, a full listing of the target sampling area could not be conducted. The team had to rely on a sampling frame of phone numbers, which was only available through the Mayor's office. This list of contacts, in combination with a snowballing approach, was used in an attempt to achieve a well-distributed and representative sample, however methodological limitations of these approaches remain.

As an extension of the same mobility constraints, data collection via phone surveys limited the length of the survey and the details to which the team was able to capture indicators on household welfare dynamics.

3 Key Findings

3.1 Demographics

Most of the municipal households interviewed were male headed (**Table 1**). Male to female ratio in the municipal community was found to be 100:116. Nine out of ten households were characterized by high dependency ratio (more than 2 non-earning members against each earning member).

Majority of households were composed of four to seven members. A significantly higher proportion of small families (one to three members) was found among female heads (21 percent vs. 8 percent) (**Figure 1**). On the other hand, male headed households had a significantly higher proportion of large families (15 percent vs. 4 percent).

The presence of vulnerable members within the household was comparable for both male and female heads, with relative differences in proportion of infants and adolescent (**Figure 2**).

Table 1: Population demographics for Cox's Bazar Sadar

Demograph	Cox's Bazar Municipality				
Gender of	Female	16%			
household head	Male	84%			
Household size		5.6			
Household	1-3 members	10%			
size category	4-7 members	77%			
	8+ members	13%			
Presence of disabled HH member 2%					
Household with adolescents (5-15 22% years)					
At least 1 HH me ill	10%				
Presence of chil of age	dren under-5 years	11%			
Elderly (60+ yea	4%				
High dependency ratio 93%					







Figure 2: Household composition by gender of head

Educational attainment, beyond primary school, is skewed in favor of male-headed households (Figure 3). The proportion of female heads reduce dramatically towards higher education levels. About 69 percent of female heads have education below or equivalent to primary levels compared to 47 percent of the male counterparts.

Figure 3: Level of Education of household heads



3.2 Local economy and livelihoods

Structure of the economy 3.2.1

Cox's Bazar Municipality is the urban center of the district, and unsurprisingly is effectively an entirely nonagricultural economy (97 percent) with trade and services composing almost 70 percent of the local economy, followed by industrial and manufacturing jobs such as in construction and miscellaneous non-agricultural labor (Figure 4).

Fish traders and laborers in fishing also constitute a fair share of the major income sources. Agriculture in the form of crop production constitute less than 1 percent of this economy. Jobs prevalent within the sectors are largely low-skilled, with 43 percent of primary income earners engaged as services and sales workers in petty trade, street vending, small businesses, shop keeping and hotel work. 15 percent of these primary income earners are skilled own-account workers like masons and carpenters and an additional 13 percent are engaged in elementary occupations, mostly as non-agricultural day laborers and construction workers (Figure 5).



Figure 4: Sectoral shares- primary income sources



Figure 5: Jobs within main sectors



3.2.2 Employment types and income levels

Income sources are categorized first into wage and non-wage jobs, as per the standard classification following formats used by International Labor Organization (ILO) recommended for generating labor indicators. For further contextualization, these wage and non-wage activities have been disaggregated into 4 kinds of activities: (i) businessmen or traders; (ii) non-wage self-employed workers (such as barbers, carpenters, repairmen, drivers who own their vehicles etc.); (iii) daily or weekly wage labor (non-agricultural day laborers, fishing laborers etc.); and (iv) monthly salaried wage work¹.

Non-wage workers, i.e. businessmen, traders and other self-employed individuals constitute a marginally higher share of this population as opposed to wage workers, both monthly and daily/weekly workers. However, income levels within wage based and non-wage-based workers vary depending on the type of employment. Businessmen and traders clearly have the highest income levels under usual circumstances, followed by daily or weekly wage laborers. Other selfemployed individuals (non-business) and monthly salaried workers,



comparatively have much lower income levels on average (**Figure 6**). These trends are driven by the low skill levels prevalent across the region – small businesses, petty trade and daily labor earnings are less dependent on specific or technical skill levels of workers, as opposed to formal monthly salaried jobs or self-employed work in services. The latter categories generate income in proportion to skill levels and these income levels are further demonstrative of the pervasive lack of technical or specialized skills within the population.

3.3 Impacts of COVID-19 on livelihoods and income

3.3.1 Disruption of livelihood activities

The first COVID-19 case in Bangladesh was identified on 7 March 2020, marking the week in which the crisis had tangibly started manifesting in the country. The Government lockdowns was subsequently announced and

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