



## News from A4NH

### FOCUS: Bangladesh

#### COVID-19's Impact on Women's Empowerment and Diet Diversity in Southern Bangladesh

The COVID-19 pandemic and measures taken to avert its spread and impact have impacted people's lives and livelihoods around the world. In Bangladesh, since the start of the pandemic, protein consumption and expenditures on protein food items have declined, particularly among low-income groups. Such changes may contribute to loss of household purchasing power and negatively affect women's empowerment within their households.

To understand the impacts, A4NH researchers at Wageningen University & Research (WUR), in cooperation with Abt Associates, are conducting a telephone survey in a study titled, "*COVID-19 related changes in the relation between women's empowerment in the household and women's diet diversity in southern Bangladesh.*" The study investigates how and to what extent women's income earning abilities, decision-making power with regard to food purchases and use of income, and diet diversity, as well as the relationship between women's income earning abilities and decision-making power, and between their decision-making power and diet diversity, changed over the last 12 months, during the pandemic and through the implementation of several measures to reduce its spread and impact.

The study is being conducted in Patuakhali and Faridpur districts, involving 900 adult women between 18 and 49 years of age who participated in the individual survey conducted in October and November 2019 by the Feed the Future Bangladesh Nutrition Activity (BNA), implemented by Abt Associates, and funded by the US Agency for International Development. Data collection on the new survey is

completed and preliminary analysis is ongoing, with a draft report due in February 2021.

#### Food Systems for Healthier Diets MSc Research Grant Scheme

A4NH's Food Systems for Healthier Diets (FSHD) flagship aims to contribute to laying foundations for in-depth, action-oriented food systems research by building a strong collaboration with national partners. WUR, which leads FSHD, seeks to promote co-learning with national partners through youth engagement at Bangladeshi universities in FSHD research with its competitive small research grants. The grants support five master's research projects on topics related to food systems, focusing on the aspects of the changing market-led food environment in Bangladesh and how the environment influences consumers' food preferences, which, in turn, affects the health of their diets. This activity is conducted in partnership with renowned health research organization [icddr, b](#). The major academic institutions participating were the Institute of Nutrition and Food Science of University of Dhaka; Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University; and Bangladesh Agricultural University. Due to the COVID-19 lockdown, the submission process was delayed just as technical feedback on the proposals was being provided to the students by WUR and icddr,b personnel.

#### Webinar on joint country assessments of COVID-19 induced impacts

In response to macro-level modelling and scenario assessments of COVID-19 impacts, a Dutch Community of Practice was established to share available knowledge on the impact of the pandemic on

the food systems of selected countries: Kenya, Mali, Ethiopia and Bangladesh. The rapid country assessments focus on in-country knowledge, perception, priorities and options to respond. This sets the context for identifying the possible role of coordinated Dutch contributions to short-term responses.

On July 08, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), WUR and the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) organized a webinar with expert panels from the rapid country assessments to provide a reliable account of the impact of COVID-19 on Bangladesh, and to corroborate and validate the initial findings of the review of the secondary data and information inventory. Twenty-three experts participated in the webinar, where data was aggregated and summarized, commonalities and differences (or conflicting messages) were assessed, data gaps were identified, and priority actions mentioned in the available reports were recorded. The initial findings were reviewed by a panel of experts representing different fields of expertise, sectors and stakeholder groups in the food system. These rapid assessments synthesize available information for use by practitioners and policymakers.

### **Symposium: The Role of Gender in the South Asian Food System**

The roles of men and women in formal and informal aspects of food production and consumption have been shifting, and governments have begun to recognize women as farmers, traders, and household heads in their own right, rather than providing informal assistance exclusively to men.

To address this, UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) organized a symposium on 23-24 February, bringing together researchers from across a broad spectrum of fields within food systems and gender to discuss how to carry out impactful food systems research in a gender-sensitive way. The symposium provided a manageable but still very broad set of thematic parameters – the context of South Asian food systems – to have a productive dialogue with implications

beyond food systems research, policy, and programming. To foster this dialogue, the diversity of symposium participants was intentional, to introduce experts from fields within food systems, traditionally unfamiliar with gendered challenges, to experts from the field of gender.

### **Workshop: Successful Case Studies on Nutrition-Sensitive Value Chains and Private Sector Engagement in South Asian Food Systems**

SAPLING is a multi-stakeholder platform facilitating evidence-based policy support and promotion of healthy diets. It aims to operate as an exclusive regional mechanism to develop consensus across South Asia, to collate evidence and bring greater visibility to nutrition issues, and to promote action by engaging with policy making processes and leadership at the national level. SAPLING is administered by BRAC, with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

As part of SAPLING's first position paper, a development and situation analysis, a workshop was organized in March to disseminate selected cases studies related to Nutrition Sensitive Value Chains and Private Sector Engagement in the South Asian Food System. Cases were selected based on evidence base, scalability, sustainability, partnership with relevant stakeholders, including the government and social impact in the South Asian food system.