



While Bangladesh has had reactionary responses to the newer waves of COVID-19, it is projected that [the country could face severe consequences](#) if the Delta variant detected in May 2021 spreads. Since the beginning of the health crisis, CGIAR and partners have worked to support a food systems response to the pandemic through informing national policies and improving food security.

ECONOMIC IMPACT OF COVID-19

The impact of COVID-19 on the economy in Bangladesh has been enormous. Agrifood system (AFS) gross domestic product (GDP) is expected to decline due to income losses and supply chain disruptions, with a 40.6 percent share of national GDP losses occurring in the AFS.

Rice, a major staple, remains available to consumers due to above-average harvests in 2020 coupled with significantly increased imports. However, [the price of rice has witnessed a 35 percent year-to-year increase](#). Floods have affected the 2021 rice harvest, causing farmer delays in planting crops. [In the dairy and poultry sectors, large-scale losses were reported](#) during lockdown events in 2020. An estimated 12–15 million liters of milk remained unsold, which caused a daily loss of 570 million Bangladeshi taka (US\$6.7 million). The poultry sector suffered a loss of 115 billion taka (US\$1.35 billion) within just two weeks of lockdown in 2020. These sectors have not fully recovered due to demand contraction and lack of market access for smallholder farmers. In fisheries and aquaculture, the disruption to hatcheries and feed production has created challenges for fish farmers. Large-scale order cancellations have been reported, especially for shrimp production, affecting incomes.

[Poverty is estimated to have reached 30 percent](#), 7 percentage points higher than projected under a non-COVID-19 scenario. As part of the government's COVID-19 response program, the agriculture sector received additional support for the mechanization of farming (more than US\$378 million) and [agricultural lending support of US\\$588 million](#), as well as other subsidies worth US\$1.1 billion.

CGIAR COVID-19 HUB RESEARCH RESPONSE

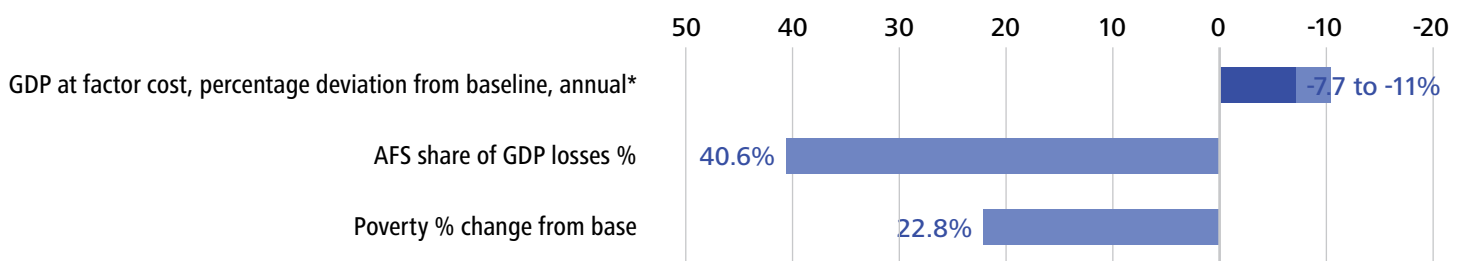
CGIAR COVID-19 Hub work in Bangladesh focuses on digital systems for crop, livestock, and fish health, with the intelligence gathered enabling faster decision-making and intervention by government agencies. Findings will be available in the last quarter of 2021.

The research priorities of the Hub in Bangladesh include setting up a food systems monitoring dashboard, developing a nutrient-secure homestead app, and conducting a feasibility study for digital markets for women. Components of the food systems monitoring dashboard are under development, including a digital disease monitor and hotspot locator, with modules on crop, fish, and livestock disease. The dashboard also includes monitors for weather for crop and fish production, farm stress, satellite data-based planting/harvesting, and floods. The prototype for the nutrient-secure homestead app was completed and will be tested by the Department of Agricultural Extension.

IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES AND INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS

As in other countries, the pandemic resulted in a switch from face-to-face work meetings to virtual meetings. Ministries and other agencies were slow to adapt given connectivity problems, limited

Figure 1: Economic and poverty effects of COVID-19 in Bangladesh 2020/2021



access to technology, and the cost of Internet connections. This led to a steep learning curve for users.

While virtual meetings were initially used for communications and training by the CGIAR COVID-19 Hub country team, the Department of Agriculture recently requested that extension agents undergo face-to-face training, citing a lack of effectiveness due to participants not attending or multitasking during virtual training sessions.

CGIAR COVID-19-RELEVANT WORK IN BANGLADESH

Impact of COVID-19 on value chains

Several studies were launched to analyze [the impacts of COVID-19 on value chains](#) worldwide, including studies of rice in Bangladesh. Findings from these surveys have influenced input into several national policies developed in response to COVID-19, such as recommendations on strengthening fish value chains in Bangladesh.

Ensuring food security during the pandemic

CGIAR scientists in Bangladesh [made creative use of technology and distribution channels to ensure](#) that nutritious orange-fleshed sweet potato reach families during the COVID-19 pandemic. It has become

important in helping households fight hunger and malnutrition. The International Potato Center (CIP) partnered with Gana Unnayan Kendra (GUK), a local NGO, to distribute sweet potato and health protection items among school students and low-income families in the rural Gaibandha district in northern Bangladesh. Four hundred families received 10 kg of biofortified sweet potato, one piece of soap, two masks, and one packet of detergent powder. Each family also received brochures about COVID-19 and safe practices to avoid catching the virus. CGIAR worked with [Parmeeda](#) — a leading online seller of safe and fresh food — to sell sweet potato through [Facebook](#) in urban markets.

Impact of the pandemic on the aquatic food sector

CGIAR scientists assessed the impact of the pandemic on the aquatic food sector. The primary drivers causing stress within the sector include sudden illness, reduced incomes, complications with starting production and input collection, a labor crisis, transportation abstraction, complexity in food supply, a weakened value chain, low consumer demand, rising commodity prices, and pressure from creditors. The study provides insight into policies adopted by policymakers to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on the aquatic food sector and small-scale fisheries.



The CGIAR COVID-19 Hub is led by the CGIAR Research Program on Agriculture for Nutrition and Health. To learn more, visit www.a4nh.cgiar.org/covidhub/

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