

## SHOUHARDO III

# Lessons from COVID-19 Based on the Recurrent Monitoring Survey

## Income, Resilience and Women at Home



With an estimate of 1 in 4 (24.3 % of the total 162 million population) living in poverty, and **12.9 % living in extreme poverty**, Bangladesh has always been vulnerable toward annual flood and cyclones. The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic exacerbated the already existing vulnerabilities of the destitute population.



The COVID-19 pandemic have left many people, especially poor and extreme poor people (PEP), without any income source. At the onset of the pandemic, **SHOUHARDO III** provided extended support to **healthcare facilities** by supplying disinfectants and installing handwashing stations, spread awareness messages among participants and **provided livelihood support through electronic cash transfers** to households severely impacted by the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.



SHOUHARDO III conducted a biweekly check-in with **425 participants** from June to October 2020 to track the emerging impacts of COVID-19 crisis, especially on income level, coping strategy and role of women at home, through Recurrent Monitoring Survey (RMS), and complemented by qualitative interviews and focused group discussions (FGD). These findings were important factors in evaluating the status quo of the participants' lives and redesign the program activities according to their requirements.

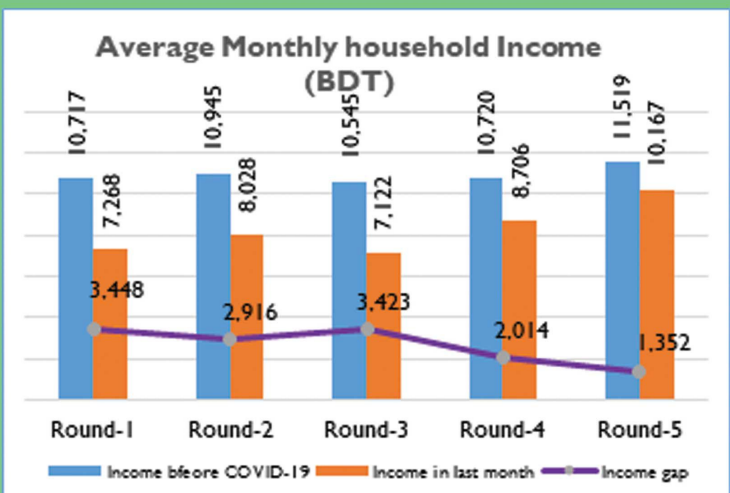
## Findings

The primary impact of the pandemic was on people's **income and employment**. Second was on the **children's education**. Most of the children stayed home with no contact with their teachers and could not attend the online classes for due to lack of appropriate devices and facilities.

## Income level impact

In July 2020, Income increased by 10.5 % (BDT 8,023; USD 95.5) from June.

In October 2020, income increased by 16.8 % (BDT 10,167; USD 121) from September.



Lockdown (strict movement restriction in March-May 2020 except essential services) caused a **scarcity of work** in the villages for day laborers and prevented the migratory workers to go to other districts or the capital, Dhaka in search of work. Female respondents informed that their husbands lost their source of income.

**Income has declined** generally due to a lack of opportunity as the employers were experiencing losses.

Many factories remained closed through October 2020, resulting in a lack of work or reduced wage. The adult male FGD group from Sirajganj lamented, **“The wage in the factories was almost about 50% less than the time before the pandemic lockdown.”**



After the lockdown period, came the monsoon seasons in Bangladesh which affected the areas where SHOUHARDO III works.

The flood, along with movement restrictions during lockdown limited migratory workers' ability to travel to find work in other areas. The agricultural day laborers found no work, as the fields were underwater due to flood. There were not enough land to work on. Their only option was to wait for the flood to recede so they could find work.

The female respondents revealed that their husbands have resumed their work after the lockdown. Our survey showed that during the initial months of lockdown (i.e. April and May), 94.6 % of adult men stayed home whereas in October, 94.4 % of adult men went out in search of livelihood.

Many have shifted their usual work from what they were doing pre lockdown time. Before lockdown, main sources of income were farming, tailoring, day-laboring, migratory works, van-pulling, and many other opportunities. These shifted to weaving baskets, fishing and hiring passenger boats in flood-affected areas, trading raw materials for business, road and house construction in flood-damaged areas electrical house wiring and tube well repairs. Some tried homestead gardening to feed the family and cut costs by not buying vegetables and fruits from the market.



## Coping strategy



**When the prime concern is food and shelter, hygiene rarely takes precedence.**

Primary coping strategy was **taking loans** from relatives, neighbors, or finance companies-

- Taken for both the pandemic and flood
- Plans to repay were from business profit, income, saving, mortgaging of agricultural land, selling assets i.e. sewing machine

Selling livestock and poultry, but without profit. An adult women from Jamalpur FGD shared *“To cope with the shortage of money, some of us borrowed money from others (relatives/neighbors). We had to pay this after a period without interest. Some of the people sold their cows, goats, hens, and ducks to support family, but they didn’t get the proper price of the livestock/ poultry. I sold a cow whose price was BDT 50,000 (USD 590) but I got BDT 44,000 (USD 519).”*

People opted for two meals a day (sometimes even once) during the lockdown to save up for the longer run, resumed regular three meals intake after the lockdown.

No coping strategy was found from the highest number of respondents for flood, as they spent most of their savings (cash, dry food) to feed their families during the lockdown.

The communities helped each other during the floods by providing warning through megaphones, helping each other to move livestock and poultry, providing shelter on their raised households, enlist poor people for Government relief and in many other ways.

# Women's workload and its impact

94.6 % of adult men stayed home during the initial months of lockdown.

83 % of men 'helped' in domestic chores. They shared that their husbands shared the household chore responsibility, mainly looking after homestead garden, livestock and poultrys, which decreased the women's workload during the lockdown. Few women respondents shared that men were mostly sleeping or gossiping at a nearby tea stall.



59% of women said their workload remained the same. Upon further probing, participants agreed that it has increased by-

- Frequent cleaning of house premise due to fear of coronavirus surface transmission
- Cooking three times a day to eat freshly cooked and warm meals as instructed by the Government
- Men staying home increased the work as they had demands of tea, or snacks throughout the day outside the main meals



The frequency and types of domestic work done by husbands might not be fully understood by the respondents, i.e. fetching water for cooking might be one but not cooking itself because it is denoted as a women's job; by doing these womanly chores makes them less of a man in the community.



78% of respondents reported not hearing about any violence against women (VAW), which is contradictory to the national scenario.<sup>2</sup> This has thus far met with the most challenge in getting answers. The challenges were:

- Nature of remote interviews, which didn't reveal if the women respondents had enough privacy to speak freely about this or if there were anyone (husband or in-law) present in the room.
- Lack of understanding of different types of VAW.

Many respondents did not consider verbal abuse, dragging or slapping as VAW and denoted them as usual conjugal disputes in their community. The young men from Netrokona FGD shared, ***“Arguments and quarrelling are common in most of the households in our community as there is poverty and increased work pressure...but this does not mean violence.”***

<sup>2</sup> Dhaka Tribune: Study: Gender-based violence in Bangladesh up by 24% amid Covid-19 pandemic <https://www.dhakatribune.com/health/coronavirus/2020/12/01/study-gender-based-violence-on-the-rise-amid-covid-19-pandemic>