

## REPORT

# Support to the families affected by ongoing lockdown amid COVID-19 pandemic in Bangladesh

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## Introduction

Bangladesh is now in the 17<sup>th</sup> position in terms of COVID positive cases detected so far (22 June) with 115,786 confirmed cases and 1502 deaths [WHO, Bangladesh Situation Report #17]. Since March 8, when first three COVID-19 cases were detected among three expatriate workers who returned Bangladesh, the confirmed cases rose steadily. But since April 5, both the number of positive cases and death from COVID-19 started to increase exponentially, rising from 54 new cases on 7 April to 497 new cases on 26<sup>th</sup> April. From April 26 to June 26, the number of detected cases shows a steep increase, from 5416 cases to 130,474 cases. Though the rate of testing has now increased compared to the early stages, there is nothing to be complacent about since the overall the scenario is deteriorating rapidly pointing to a grim reality which none of us are ready yet to embrace with. At present, a maximum of 15000 tests are being conducted each day. The number of deaths per day has increased from 5 per day on April 26 to 40 per day on June 26, showing an alarming exponential increase. While the number of confirmed cases for per million populations is 861, number of test conducted for per million populations is only 4561. At present Bangladesh lies in a stage of community transmission, meaning both the numbers of infected and death are going to see a sharp increase. In terms of Covid-19 virus infection, the gender distribution among the infected persons is 68% male and 32% female. The highest affected age group is between 21-50 years (54%), followed by those over 50 years of age (25%). The young children below 10 years are also affected (3%). This shows that the pandemic has taken a heavy toll on that part of the population which is actively employed and constitutes of the bread winners of the families (below 50 years) which projects a grim economic prospect for the country in the coming days.

About 55 out of 64 districts are now grappling with COVID-19 cases in varied proportion. However, Dhaka—the capital city, being a highly densely populated area, topped in terms of highest number of confirmed cases, followed by Narayanganj and Gazipur.

As a preventive measure, the government declared general closure of educational institutions, government and non-government offices on 25 March, 2020 declaring it “General Holiday” without officially calling it Lockdown. Movement of all the transports was suspended. As a result, people became unable to move from one area to the other. The unofficial lockdown was extended several times which ended at last on May 5.

In the first phase of the Lockdown/General holidays, local markets were kept open for a short period of time in the day. As a result, farmers were compelled to sell their crops within this short span of time, often at a price that did not even cover their production costs. Perishable vegetables could not be stored. Though crops like garlic and onion could be stored for some time, but that was not a viable option for the farmers as they badly needed the money. Farmers keeping cows were unable to buy fodders. All the news related to the hardships of the farmers began to surface in the daily newspapers from the last week of March. The daily wage earners had no work as the factories were shut down. Even the domestic helps in the cities were not allowed to come to the houses where they used to work.

As a result of this prolonged lockdown, poor families having pregnant or postpartum women, Dai Mas, weavers, day laborers, etc. were the worst affected ones. As the whole economy almost came to a standstill, these poor people hardly had any resort where they could turn to. UBINIG began to receive pleas for support from the impoverished people in its constituencies.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, UBINIG has been monitoring the situation of the overall country as well as in its constituencies. There was a need for health protection and food support for the families who have lost their sources of income due to the economic gridlock. Unlike other natural disasters, the impact of Covid-19 is going to be felt for a longer period. So UBINIG felt the social responsibility of responding to the needs of the community members with whom they have been working closely for a long time.

*The highest affected age group is 21-50 years (54%). The pandemic has taken a heavy toll on that part of the population which is actively employed and constitutes of the bread winners of the families*

## **UBINIG support to lockdown affected families**

UBINIG decided to extend support to the poor people living in the areas of its different centers across the country. Therefore, UBINIG approached its long standing partner Primate's World Relief and Development Fund (PWRDF) for providing financial assistance to respond to the needs of the affected people.

An urgent meeting was held in this regard on May 30 where it was decided to stand beside these worst-affected people. UBINIG's request to Primate's World Relief and Development Fund (PWRDF) for financial assistance was accepted. It was decided that these support materials should be handed within June 2020. A body of five-member central committee was formed [see Annex 1] with a view to monitoring, supervising and coordinating different functions of the whole support program. A detailed work plan was also devised mentioning the specific responsibility of each member of this central committee.

It was difficult to implement the plan as the movement of the transports was suspended and no movement was possible from Dhaka to the centers as well as from the centers to the villages. So a decentralized system was devised while central monitoring and supervising was also ensured simultaneously through on-line WhatsApp group call and phone call. At each center, separate support committee was formed to distribute the support materials among the affected people. At the village level, Nayakrishi leading farmers formed committees at the village level for identifying the needy families and for ensuring proper distribution by maintaining health guidelines particularly the physical distancing principle. At the meeting of the central management committee, 7 groups of vulnerable population were considered eligible for this support program.

These are:

1. Pregnant women
2. Postpartum mother and child
3. Traditional birth attendants or Dai Mas

4. The handloom weavers
5. School students
6. Ready-made garment workers
7. Informal sector workers

### **Activities of the support distribution**

Given the current onslaught of the Covid-19 pandemic, it was very hard to conduct the support program ensuring the health safety measures as it was of prime importance both for the support providers and support recipients to keep themselves safe from the highly contagious virus. During other natural crises, the issue of health safety while conducting support program was hardly cared about. But it is otherwise with the highly communicable Covid-19 pandemic. The members of the support distribution committee had to face challenges in creating the list of eligible support recipients as it was hard to reach villages as well as to deliver the support materials to the recipients in time amid the lockdown. UBINIG central management committee was very careful about the health safety of each and every staff engaged in the support operation amid this pandemic from the very first day of its outbreak. So the central management committee decided to form support distribution committee in different areas of UBINIG centers comprising of Nayakrishi farmers, weavers, and Dai Mas (Traditional birth attendants). These committees were given the tasks of enlisting eligible support recipients in their own working areas, participating in support distribution among them till the end of the support program and helping the central committee with necessary information and/or suggestions.

About 41 farmers, Dai Mas and center staff formed the center-based committee in 4 UBINIG centers and 12 members of the women's network and readymade garment workers' representatives helped in the support distribution process. They were engaged in enlisting of the recipients, selecting the food items, supervising the transportation of the support items to the distribution areas and distributing the support items maintaining the health safety measures etc. The names, addresses and contact number of each and every recipient were collected.

### **Principles followed in buying and/or collecting support materials**

Considering the plight of the poor people who were hit the hardest because of the lockdown, UBINIG central management committee took the initiative to stand beside them with support materials containing foods and health protection items. Apart from ensuring the proper enlisting of affected people and the distribution of support materials among them, UBINIG central management committee also chalked out a plan and took necessary initiative so that farmers could be benefitted from the sale of the agricultural products produced by them as well.

The principles followed to ensure the proper collection, procurement and distribution of support materials were:

- a) All UBINIG centers must buy food products directly from the Nayakrishi farmers of the respective areas. Proper documentation of all the necessary information regarding the name of the farmers, addresses, villages, name of the food items to be bought from them, was ensured.
- b) All the necessary information including name, address, etc. of all the eligible recipients of the support materials were documented in advance so that the support program could be conducted efficiently and speedily.
- c) Support materials had to be distributed following the physical distance guidelines of maintaining three feet distance from each other. The bag of support materials for each recipient had to be kept on a clean ground at a distance of 3 feet from the recipient. When the name of the respective recipient would be announced, s/he would come forward and pick up the bag of support materials from the specific place of the ground. No signature on the master-roll sheet was taken as it would involve direct contact with the recipients as well as it would consume time.

*Three principals were followed for distribution:*

- 1. Food items must be bought from affected farmers*
- 2. Support distribution timing should be made as short as possible*
- 3. Social distancing must be maintained at the time of distribution*

## **Recipients of the Support**

Information of the recipients of the support materials like number of villages, type of the support recipients, number of the farmers who took seeds, and number and type of the farmers from whom the food items of the support materials were bought was documented.

Information related to the people who were involved in the process of distribution of the support materials was also documented.

The main distribution (80%) was to the community in the areas of UBINIG centers in 5 districts, followed by remote areas where UBINIG worked before and still has contacts with the local community (10%) and women's networks (8.6%). However, there were 119 indirect beneficiaries in the entire distribution process, who were benefitted by being involved with the support program at various stages. For example, farmers whose vegetables, rice etc. were bought for the support program and the village people who helped in the distribution and in turn were given allowances for their work. So the total beneficiaries were a total of 1275 families, and indirect beneficiaries were about 9% of it. These are shown in Tables 1 and 2 below:

**Table 1: Total recipients of the UBINIG support**

Areas	# Districts	# Villages/ Mohallas	# Families
<b>UBINIG Centers</b>	5	85	930
<b>Remote Areas</b>	3	15	113
<b>Women Network</b>	10	59	100
<b>Garment Workers</b>	1	5	13
<b>Total</b>	19	164	1,156

[See the Map in Annex 1]

**Table 2: Direct and indirect beneficiaries of the support**

Areas	Direct beneficiaries	Indirect beneficiaries	Total
<b>UBINIG Centers</b>	930	57	987
<b>Remote Areas</b>	113	34	147
<b>Women Network</b>	100	20	120
<b>Garment Workers</b>	13	8	21
<b>Total</b>	1,156	119	1,275

Different categories of people were affected by the lockdown during April, 2020. UBINIG, however, wanted to address the needs of the most affected ones in its own working areas.

**Table 3: Categories of recipients as affected by lockdown**

Sl.No.	Categories	UBINIG centers	Remote areas	Women Network	Garment organization	Total
<b>A. Rural poor and farmer and farm workers</b>						
1.	Farmers	81				81
2.	Rural poor	10	10			20
3.	Agriculture worker	32		11		43
4.	Milk seller			7		7
5.	Fisher			9		9
<b>Sub-Total</b>		123	10	27		160 (13%)
<b>B. Dai ma and pregnant/lactating women</b>						
6.	Dai ma	156	61			217
7.	Pregnant Women	107	7			114
8.	Lactating	85	35			120

	Mother				
<b>Sub-Total</b>		348	103		451 (39%)
<b>C. Non-farm workers</b>					
<b>9.</b>	Cobbler			7	7
<b>10.</b>	Hotel worker			10	10
<b>11.</b>	Domestic worker			11	11
<b>12.</b>	Tailor			7	7
<b>13.</b>	Rickshaw puller			11	11
<b>14.</b>	Beggar			9	9
<b>15.</b>	Hawker			9	9
<b>Sub-Total</b>				64	64 (5%)
<b>D. Formal sector workers</b>					
<b>16</b>	Garment worker			13	13
<b>17</b>	Weaver Worker	269			269
<b>Sub-Total</b>		269		13	346 (29%)
<b>E. Artisans</b>					
<b>18.</b>	Potter	20			20
<b>19</b>	Handicraft	10			10
<b>Sub-Total</b>		30			30 (2%)
<b>F. Others</b>					
<b>20</b>	Housewife	34			34
<b>21</b>	Widow	8			8
<b>22.</b>	Disabled	11	9		20
<b>23</b>	Ill persons	12			12
<b>24</b>	Student	83			83
<b>25</b>	Spiritual women	12			12
<b>Sub-Total</b>		160	9		169 (14%)
	<b>Total</b>	<b>930</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1,156 (102%)</b>

As per the plan, the highest support was Dai mas and the mothers (39%) followed by formal readymade garment industry and third important group was a mix of (14%), who are often ignored as particular category. They included disability, chronically ill persons, women who used to sing spiritual earn their livelihood from the local people, including the farmers, (13%), lost their jobs and were misery.

The garment and domestic Many garment workers did not 4 months. Due to Lockdown, they village as well as they feared that the factory owners should open while they were in Dhaka, they did Domestic workers were not where they used to work because apartment buildings. Some got who were part-time workers were

Workers who work in different who have borne the brunt of the Covid-19 pandemic induced economic gridlock. These informal sector workers at the district level were reached through the women’s network in Magura, Dinajpur, Rangpur, Lalmonirhat, Khulna, Sirajganj, Barisal, Chittagong, Naogaon, and Gaibandha. The families chosen were the ones which have only one wage earner in it who used to migrate in other districts as agricultural labourer but now became unable to move because of the lockdown. There were also rickshaw pullers, van drivers, small shop owners etc. among numerous others in this category of informal sector workers.

UBINIG was aware of the fact that this food support was not going to solve their problem of hunger and economic uncertainty which are surely going to reverberate for a long period of time in the coming days, but it was necessary to sustain their lives at that time of urgent need for all these people.

## Support Items

The support items given were of three categories: 1. Health protective products 2. Seeds for the farmers 3. Food items. Since it was an emergency public health situation, therefore, people needed to be provided

*Recipients included a. Dai mas and the lactating and pregnant mothers (39%) b. Formal sector workers (29%) in readymade garment industry and the handloom weaving; c. A mix of different marginal people (14%), including persons with physical disability, chronically ill persons, students and poor spiritual women; d. Rural poor people, including the farmers, fishers, agricultural workers (13%), who lost their jobs and were passing their days in utmost misery.*

number of recipients of the lactating and pregnant sector workers (29%) in the handloom weaving. The different marginal people they do not fall under any persons with physical students and even some poor folk songs in the villages and community. The rural poor fishers, agricultural workers passing their days in utmost

workers work in Dhaka city. receive their salaries in the last could not go back to their they might lose their job lest the factory anytime soon. But not have any food support. allowed to enter the houses of lockdown policy of monthly payments but those in uncertain conditions.

informal sectors are the ones who have borne the brunt of the Covid-19 pandemic induced economic gridlock. These informal sector workers at the district level were reached through the women’s network in Magura, Dinajpur, Rangpur, Lalmonirhat, Khulna, Sirajganj, Barisal, Chittagong, Naogaon, and Gaibandha. The families chosen were the ones which have only one wage earner in it who used to migrate in other districts as agricultural labourer but now became unable to move because of the lockdown. There were also rickshaw pullers, van drivers, small shop owners etc. among numerous others in this category of informal sector workers.

with health protective products such as masks, soaps for hand washing and washing powder for maintaining personal hygiene.

The items given as health support for preventing COVID-19 infection were as follows:

Table 4: Health protective products distributed to the families

Areas	Mask (Pcs)		Soap (Pcs)		Washing Powder (Kg)		Total Families
	Total	Per family	Total	Per family	Total	Per family	
<b>UBINIG Centers</b>	1860	2	930	1	465	0.500	930
<b>Remote Areas</b>	226	2	113	1	56.5	0.500	113
<b>Women Network</b>	200	2	100	1	50	0.500	100
<b>Garment Workers</b>	26	2	13	1	6.5	0.500	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>2312</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1156</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>578</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1156</b>

The health protective products were given to all those who came into contact with the support recipients and distributors. The total number of support recipients was 1156 families and 170 masks were given to a total of 85 people (42 masks for 21 persons involved in distribution, 8 masks for 4 van pullers, 8 masks for 4 CNG-driven auto-rickshaw drivers, 16 masks for 8 battery-driven auto-rickshaw drivers, 4 masks for 2 boatmen, 2 masks for a horse-driven carriage driver, and 90 masks for 45 village based support distribution committee members).

Farmers, who were planning to cultivate Aman rice for the next season, could not go out in the market or to their fellow farmers to collect the Aman paddy seeds. In the UBINIG center areas, these seeds were given to Nayakrishi farmers as well as other small scale farmers who usually cultivate other local rice varieties. Some flood resistant rice varieties are - Bhawaila Digha, Pakri, Hidi, Mota Mota, Kartik Shail, Dhaldigha.

Table 5: Farmers seed support

Areas	Paddy Seed (Kg)		Total families
	Total	Average	
<b>UBINIG Centers</b>	634	7.8	81
<b>Total</b>	<b>634</b>	<b>7.8</b>	<b>81</b>

It was very pleasant to notice that most Nayakrishi farmers had their own collection of seeds or they could collect from the Seed Wealth Centers when necessary and could exchange seeds among themselves. Yet there were some poor farmers who needed the seed support. Here are some examples in Natore and Tangail as to the role of Nayakrishi Seed Wealth Centers.

**Natore:** A total of 228 kg of crop seeds of Aman rice was distributed among 23 farmers in Natore district. These Aman crop seeds included the local rice varieties of Pakri, Hidi, Mota Mota, Kartikshail and Dhaldigha. Of these 228 kg rice seeds, 61 kg rice seeds were collected from the Nayakrishi Seed Wealth

Center of UBINIG Ishwardi center and the rest 167 kg rice seeds were collected from Nayakrishi Seed Huts in the villages. Besides, each of these 23 farmers was also given 10 kg of rice, 1 mask, 1 soap and 500 gm detergent washing powder as support.

Aman paddy seeds were given to the farmers of the Baraigram village of the Natore district who were hit hard by the pandemic and subsequent economic gridlock. The varieties of the paddy seeds included Pakri, Hidi, Motamota, Kartikshail, and Dhal Digha.

'We can survive eating only one meal a day but it is not possible to leave our land uncultivated.' Kibria, a Nayakrishi farmer

*Last year farmers could not gather the Aman seeds due to the sudden hailstorms and norwesters. Affected farmers then thought that they would collect the seeds from the farmers of the adjacent areas in the coming season. But all has changed since the Covid-19 pandemic entered the scene. So these farmers were at total loss as all the markets and local shops were closed. They could not sell their crops; moreover, many of them were starving for want of foods. The season for Aman paddy cultivation began this year in such a grim situation. Left with no foods for themselves, let alone Aman seeds for cultivation, these poor farmers were in utmost deplorable condition.*

#### **Tangail:**

Crop seeds were also distributed among 58 farmers of 6 villages in the Delduar upazila. As these farmers experience flash flood every year in their cultivable lands just after the harvest of Boro paddies, they cannot cultivate anything on those lands due to excessive water. So having discussed the matter with the local support distribution committee and members of the local seed hut, it was decided to distribute Bhawaila Digha paddy seeds—a variety of Aman rice among these farmers so that they can sow these seeds right after completing the Boro harvest.

According to this plan, the seeds of Bhawaila Dhiga paddy were collected from a low-lying village named Goaria where farmers usually cultivate this rice variety on a regular basis. As the flash flood has recently become a regular phenomenon in some villages of the Delduar upazila and for this reason no other crops can be cultivated in the low-lying cultivable lands, it was decided to distribute Bhawaila Digha paddy seeds among the Nayakrishi farmers of these areas. In selecting the Nayakrishi farmers eligible to get the crop seeds support, suggestions were taken from the members of the seed hut as they know better and, therefore, would make the best use of the Bhawaila Digha seeds. These members of the seed hut would also follow up the cases of each seed recipient farmer as well as regeneration and recollection process of the given seeds.

*Women in remote areas said, "We cannot get oil for our hair because the shops do not have the supply due to the lockdown. We need oil for our hair badly. We do not need oil for cooking".*

Forty families were given coconut oil in addition to rice, vegetables, spices and sweet items.

**Table 6: Distributed food items**

Areas	Rice (kg)	Vegetables/lentils (kg)	Oil/spices (kg)	Sweet items (kg)	Total families
<b>UBINIG Centers</b>	3636	2723.5	-	904.5	849
<b>Remote areas</b>	611	395	40	144.5	113
<b>Women Network</b>	500	150	200	100	100
<b>Garment Workers</b>	65	39	-	19.5	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>4812</b>	<b>3307.5</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>1168.5</b>	<b>1075</b>

### **Purchase from Farmers**

One of the important principles followed in this support distribution was to buy from the farmers who were not able to sell the perishable vegetables and other agricultural products due to the suspense of the movement of transport and short duration of the markets.

*About 7 tons of food products, which were worth of approximately Tk. 196,689 (3065 CAD), were bought from 57 Nayakrishi farmers, which, simultaneously, also generated an income for them. If those food items were bought from the market, the money would have been spent on the market, benefitting only a few big farmers or shop owners. Also buying paddy and processing by poor women provided employment for a week.*

**Table 7: Purchase of food items from farmers**

Sl. No	Name of Item	Unit (Kg)	Amount (Taka)	No. of Farmer
<i>Paddy and Rice</i>				
1	Paddy (Katak)	2720	68,000/=	9
2	Rice (Pazam, Hidi, Kartik Shail, Ganzia)	1494	63,393/=	7
<i>Vegetable</i>				
3	Sweet Pumpkin, Puishak, Kathua Data, Okra, French Bean, Bitter Gourd, Yard long Bean, Patal	2109.5	38222/=	30
<i>Milk</i>				
4	Cow Milk	70	4,200=-	6
<i>Farmers Support</i>				
5	Paddy Seeds (Bhawaila Digha, Pakri, Hidi, Mota Mota, Kartik Shail, Dhaldigha)	634	22,874/=	5
<b>Total</b>		<b>7027.5 (7 tons)</b>	<b>196,689/=</b>	<b>57</b>

### **Support amid the emergency situation of COVID-19**

In May, the distribution was made, but at that time there was country-wide lockdown along with the suspense on the movement of transport. Most of the activities had to be carried out by telephones, online-group calls, and by using special local transports that were allowed. So in most cases the activities were conducted in a decentralized manner with the help of the local committees.

However, there were issues which needed to be cautious against for preventing the spread of the virus. Masks distribution and use of masks during the whole distribution process were given priority for health safety. Here are some responses related to masks that the support distributors experienced during the support program:

#### **Importance of Masks & soaps**

- Some recipients could not understand why soaps have been given to them with other support items. Some also could not understand the necessity of wearing masks.
- Many support recipients came without wearing masks. When asked, they said they could not afford masks. Besides, they were not fully aware of the necessity of wearing masks.
- However, school students said that hands should be washed for 20 seconds to ensure proper disinfection. They also said that they had heard masks should be worn as it helps one keep safe from contracting the virus.

*Many garment workers were going to work covering their face with scarves as they did not have the money to buy masks. They were happy when they received soaps, soap powder and masks.*

- As the recipients could not afford the money for buying masks, soaps, etc. they were happy to find these items among other support materials.
- Most of the recipients, till May, did not receive any support from the government or any NGO. They were in dire need of foods and health safety items.

### Conducting the support programs while maintaining safe physical distance (Social distancing)

- Ensuring safe physical distance was given the top priority while distributing support materials. When the support materials were transported in CNG-driven auto-rickshaws, two UBINIG workers were sent along with it. They all wore face masks and hand gloves. The driver of the vehicle was also given a mask. The support recipients were told beforehand that they did not need to come earlier as they would be informed as soon as the support items would reach the village so that they did not have to wait too long in a place with fellow support recipients. They did not need to register their names in the master-roll as well so that the support distributing program could be completed quickly while maintaining safe physical distance. Safety measures were also taken while packaging the support materials. Each UBINIG worker who was involved in the packaging process wore mask and hand gloves and safe physical distance was maintained strictly throughout the course of the packaging process.
- Members of the village committee were informed as soon as the support materials reached the village so that the support recipients did not have to wait for a long time. During distribution, the support materials were placed on a table and the support recipients stood in the queue within the circles drawn three feet apart to ensure safe physical distance. When the name of a support recipient was announced, he/she came and took the bag of the support materials from the table.
- Some support recipients were not aware of the need for maintaining safe physical distance. They were explained the necessity of maintaining safe physical distance amid the pandemic.
- Support materials were sent at the houses of the pregnant women and postpartum mothers who were listed among the support recipients. Apart from the listed support recipients, the support materials were also distributed among 64 women who were either widows or elderly persons.

*Sofura, a Dai Ma, was surprised as the relief materials were not handed to them directly and no photo was taken, rather the relief materials were kept on a table from where they were told to collect them. She was told that for maintaining proper physical distance, relief materials were not handed to them directly.*

- In the remote areas like Chilmari, a Char area in the mid of the river Brahmaputra, boats are the only means of communication. People mostly walk on foot. Support materials were brought to the bank of the river by using horse-drawn carriage while members of the support distribution committee walked on foot there. Then they crossed the river along with the support materials on boat and reached the village. After reaching the village, support materials were distributed by maintaining safe physical distance.

## Distributing supports among non-listed recipients

In each area new names of recipients had to be included because of the demand that was difficult to avoid. Here are the examples in different areas:

**Tangail:** At first it was planned to distribute support materials among 200 recipients among whom there were pregnant women, postpartum mothers, weavers, Dai Mas, and day labourers. Besides, it was also planned to distribute crop seeds among 120 farmers. As soon as the support materials reached the village, people living in the adjacent areas came to the UBINIG center of Tangail. Many of them came with their elderly parents or small children and pleaded for the support materials saying, 'Please give us some rice at least.'

*Many weavers and their helpers, mostly women, live in Nolshodha and Pathrail villages. These women used to do the design works for the Sarees. They used to bring the Sarees from the traders to their houses once those were woven and do the design works. This used to be the sole means of livelihood for hundreds of women which came to a halt since the start of the pandemic.*

Though these destitute people came from different nearby villages, most of them came from the village Bishnupur, Nolshodha, Pathrail, and Gopalpur, since these villages are mostly inhabited by weaver families who have fallen victim to the Covid-19 induced economic stalemate.

Since UBINIG Tangail center is located in an area which is mainly inhabited by weavers who have been hit hard by the pandemic and subsequent lockdown, these weavers turned to UBINIG Tangail center as their last resort. UBINIG Tangail center contacted UBINIG Dhaka office and informed about these impoverished weavers.

Upon discussion between UBINIG central management committee and UBINIG Tangail center, it was decided to distribute supports among such 221 weavers and helpers working in various stages of the weaving process. For this purpose, support fund was managed by curtailing the crop seeds support intended for the farmers to some extent. The residual from the allocated fund for conveyance allowance was also used in this purpose. Besides, some items of the support materials were bought at a lower price than estimated. It came out that, if the quantity of support materials could be curtailed a little bit, then it would be possible to distribute these items among some 221 weavers, people

working in various processes of weaving and potters of this area. So, the support materials were distributed in a manner so that maximum possible number of people could be brought under the support facilities.

**Pabna:** For distributing supports among the local impoverished people, a list was prepared and was sent to the central management committee of UBINIG in Dhaka for approval. There were 68 Dai Mas, 31 pregnant women and 22 poor farmers in this list who were considered eligible for supports. Support materials were also distributed among 43 families which have either physically challenged, or elderly, or ailing, or widow member in them. Among these 43 families, 42 families were given the support materials and 1 farmer family was given crop seeds.

When the poor people of the localities came to know about distributing support materials among the listed support recipients, they started to come to UBINIG Ishwardi center and sought support materials. UBINIG Ishwardi center then communicated with the central management committee of UBINIG in Dhaka and informed of this matter. Afterwards, it was decided that after distributing supports among the previously listed families, rest of the supports and money will be distributed among the people who were not listed. At last, 43 more families received the support who were not listed previously. All of them were very happy and expressed their gratitude saying that this would help them to celebrate Eid ul-Fitr amid the current economic gridlock.

**Badarkhali, Cox's Bazar:** As per the list, at first support materials were distributed among 145 support recipients who were listed support recipients. Then with the remaining supports, 23 more persons were provided with pulses and 7 more were provided with rice.

**Mirpur, Savar, Dhaka:** At first it was decided to distribute supports among 13 garment-worker families who were listed as eligible support recipients. But since the lockdown has stranded numerous garment-worker families in an economic uncertainty, 8 more garment-worker families were given the support materials. A total of 21 garment worker families in this area could be helped with supports.

## **Role of the Village committees**

The village-based support distribution committees helped the proper disbursement of the health & food materials:

The decision to help the affected people hit hard by the Covid-19 pandemic was taken in such a situation when movement of all the transport was suspended due to a country-wide lockdown. So maintaining health safety for everyone was given the utmost importance when distributing the support materials among the affected people. Keeping this in mind, center based support distribution committees were formed in Tangail, Pabna, Kushtia, and Cox's Bazar to conduct the support distribution activities properly.

A support distribution committee was formed in Tangail consisting of 18 members, of whom 11 were female and 7 were male members. They were weavers, Dai Mas and Nayakrishi farmers. In Pabna committee consisted of 8 members, of whom 4 were female and 4 were male members. They were Dai Mas and Nayakrishi farmers. In Kushtia it consisted of 8 members, of whom 3 were female and 5 were male members. They were Dai Mas and Nayakrishi farmers.

A support distribution committee was formed in Badarkhali, Cox's Bazar consisting of 7 members, of whom 5 were female and 2 were male members. They were school teachers, Dai Mas and Nayakrishi farmers.

#### **Types of occupation of the members of the local support distribution committee**

Though Dai Mas and Nayakrishi farmers were among the members in each locality where support distribution committee was formed, some variation was observed in Badarkhali and Tangail. For example, some weavers were in the committee of Tangail whereas some school teachers were in the committee of Badarkhali, Cox's Bazar along with other members who were Nayakrishi farmers and Dai Mas.

The benefits of forming support distribution committee are as follows:

1. Proper and timely enlisting of support recipients was possible due to the village based support distribution committee.
2. Since food items were bought from the Nayakrishi farmers, due to the formation of the village based support distribution committee and inclusion of Nayakrishi farmers among them as members, it was possible to know which farmer had what food items in his/her hands. As a result, when buying food items for the support materials, it was possible to determine which item should be bought from whom and of what amount. On the other hand, Nayakrishi farmers were also financially benefitted as food items of the supports were bought from them.
3. They helped while packaging the support items.
4. Collecting support items from different farmers, managing the transports to carry those items to the distribution places and helping in distributing the supports.

In Ishwardi, Pabna, those relief recipients who could not come to collect themselves, members of the support distribution committee helped send the materials to those houses. Besides, these members also played an important role in raising the awareness among the support recipients regarding following health guidelines.

Due to the formation of the support distribution committee, both time and money could be saved which would otherwise have not been possible, had the workers from central management committee of Dhaka been deployed in these tasks.

#### **Distribution supports among garment workers and 10 women network organizations in 10 districts:**

A 5-member committee was formed for enlisting eligible support recipients among the garment workers working in Savar. This committee selected 13 such garment workers who were hit by the pandemic and distributed supports among them. Besides, 8 garment workers were given the health safety materials. From enlisting the recipients to distributing the supports among them, all the related tasks were performed properly by the members of this committee.

Ten women network organizations distributed food supports and health safety and health protection materials among 100 women in 10 districts.

#### **Support in other areas of the country where there is no UBINIG center**

Chapainawabganj, Shahzadpur upazila of the Sirajganj district and Chilmari upazila of Kurigram district are the areas where UBINIG has no official presence at present. Nevertheless, UBINIG felt a social responsibility to stand beside the poor and distressed people out there since it operates, though on a small scale, with Dai Ghors and Nayakrishi movement in these areas. Many Dai Mas and farmers are thus involved with UBINIG. When UBINIG decided to extend support towards the poor people living in these areas, these Dai Mas and farmers helped in listing the eligible support recipients from many who needed the support most, packaging the support items and ensuring proper distribution these items among them.

Area wise support distribution activities in these areas are described below:

### **Chapainawabganj**

As UBING has no official presence in Chapainawabganj, the support distribution activities were conducted under the supervision of UBINIG Ishwardi center. When distribution committee was formed in Ishwardi with Dai Mas and farmers, two members of this committee—Dulali Begum, a Dai Ma and Abdul Hannan, a Nayakrishi farmer from Chapainawabganj, were included. UBINIG with cooperation of the committee could provide support to 20 Dai Mas and 3 pregnant women—a total of 23 people. The money was transferred to Dulali Begum along with Masks from Dhaka. According to the guidelines given by the central management committee as to maintaining safe physical distance and maintaining proper hygiene, all the support items were distributed among the support recipients under the on-line supervision of UBINIG Ishwardi center. The recipients confirmed receiving the health protection materials and food items.

### **Chilmari, Kurigram**

A four-member support distribution committee comprising of 2 male and 2 female members, was formed in Chilmari, Kurigram with a view to enlisting the eligible support recipients and proper distribution of the support items among them. Nasrin Begum, a Dai Ma and Chakku Mia, a Nayakrishi farmer, of this committee were in charge of supervising the support distribution activities in Chilmari. Apart from these four members, 12 more Dai Mas and local women helped in distributing the materials among the recipients. All these members enlisted the eligible support recipients from two remote Char areas. They also bought rice and different vegetables from Nayakrishi farmers and helped in packaging those items for distributing among the support recipients.

### **Shahjadpur, Sirajganj**

While support distribution activities were being conducted in Tangail, UBINIG central management committee also promptly decided to stand beside the poor Dai Mas and postpartum mothers of river-erosion prone Char area of Shahjadpur. For this purpose, two Nayakrishi farmers—Ansar Ali and Soleman Ali, from the Shahjadpur area were contacted for conducting the enlisting of support recipients, collecting food items, soap and Masks and distributing those items among the recipients. A total of 50 families were selected as eligible support recipients, of which 23 were Dai Mas and 27 were postpartum mothers. According to the guidelines regarding maintaining safe physical distance and proper hygiene, Nayakrishi farmers Ansar Ali and Soleman Ali distributed the support items among these support recipients.

## Acknowledgement

For accomplishing the support distribution program properly, UBINIG would like to express sincere and heartfelt gratitude to all Nayakrishi farmers, Dai Mas, local administration personnel of the respective areas, van pullers, rickshaw pullers, drives of horse-driven carriages and CNG auto-rickshaw drivers.

UBINIG is thankful to the village based support distribution committees and the Dai Mas and farmers involved with these committees as members of each area, without the support of whom, conducting support distribution program would have been difficult.

UBINIG wants to thank those garment workers who helped to enlist the support recipients and distribute support items among the affected garment workers.

UBINIG remembers the help and support that it got from the 10 women organizations network in distributing support items among the affected people in 10 districts of the country.

UBINIG also feels grateful to its kormies (Staff members) working in different centers for their hard and diligent work, to make it possible to accomplish the support program despite various difficulties.

Last but not the least, UBINIG also wants to thank the members of its central management committee whose prompt and timely decision made it possible to pull off the overall the support program despite all odds.

Finally, UBINIG is extremely grateful to Primate's World Relief and Development Fund (PWRDF) for their kind assistance in such a short notice and thus making it possible to stand by the side of the people hard hit by the Lockdown in the COVID-19 pandemic.

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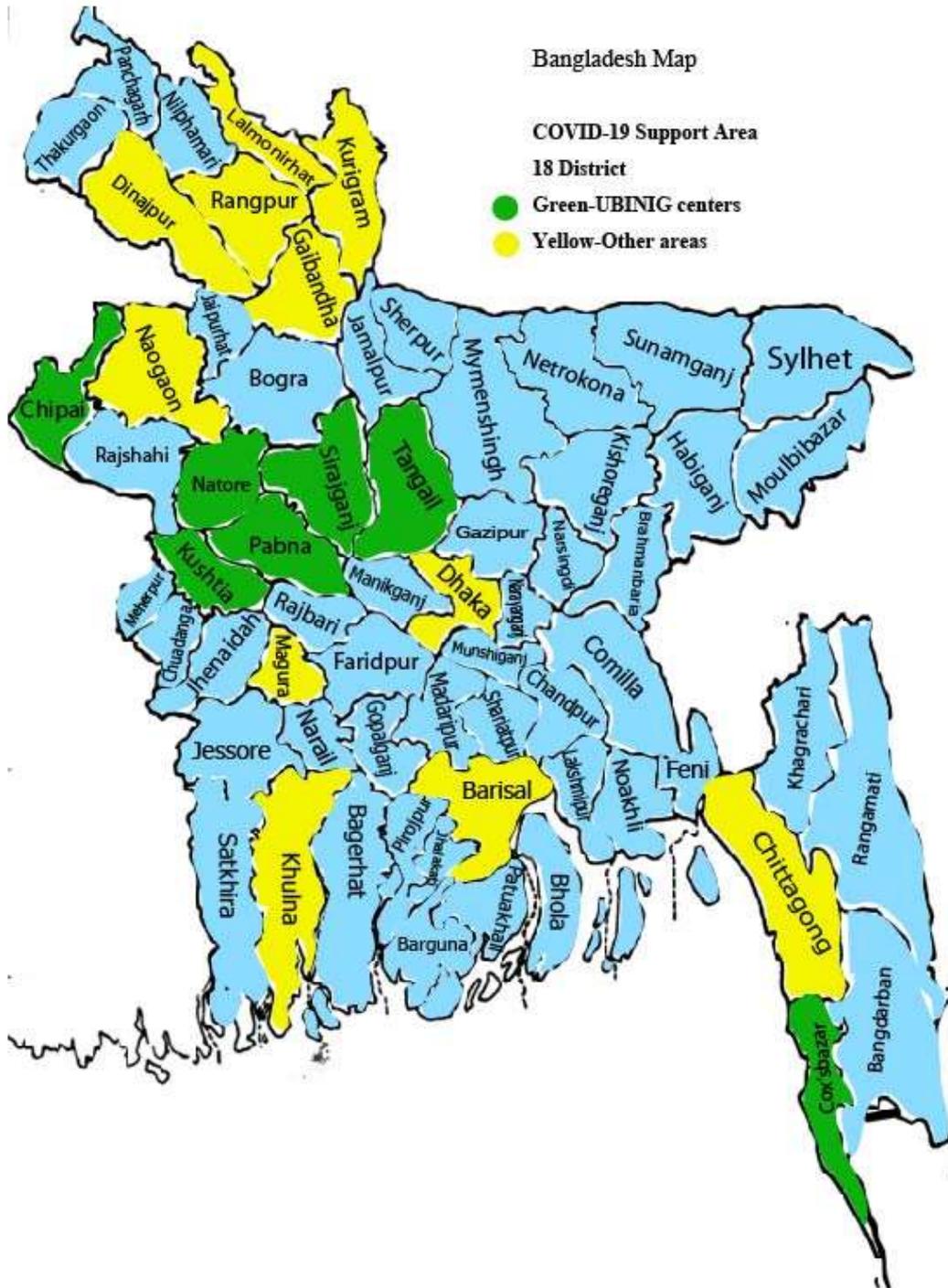
Translation & Editing: Hasanul Hasib

Photo credit: Tangail, Kushtia, Ishwardi centers & Kurigram committee

# Annexes

## Annex 1

Map of districts covered in food and health support program



## Annex 2

**Table 1: Name and role of members of Covid-19 Central Coordination Committee**

Serial No.	Name	Responsibilities
1.	Golam Rabbi Badal	Documentation
2.	Abdul Zabbar	Coordinating the support program, particularly Kushtia center of UBINIG.
3.	Ali Akbar	Coordinating the support program, particularly Chakaria center of UBINIG. Besides, sending money to different centers and keeping an account of the monetary affairs of the support program.
4.	Nurul Islam	Sending money to different centers of UBINIG for the support program and keeping an account of this program.
5.	Rasheduzzaman	Coordinating the support program performed by the TABINAJ members.
6.	Shima Das Shimu	Monitoring the overall activities of Covid-19 pandemic support program and informing the central management committee if any problem arises during the course of the support program.
7.	Farida Akhter	Overall planning and supervision of the Support program

## Annex 3

As UBINIG truly believes in helping the people and not in publicity at a time of people's distressed condition. So as a principle only few photos were taken, food distribution program only to maintain authenticity and transparency of the support program. Here are some photos taken at different areas of the country where UBINIG conducted the support program:

### Tangail:



Paddies bought from Nayakrishi farmers are being dried up which will be distributed later among the relief recipients. Few women got job to carry out the work and receive wages.



Rice for distributing among the relief recipients is being husked by the local women



Relief items are being packaged in Tangail.



Relief items are being packaged in Tangail.



Hygienic face masks are being packaged for distribution.



Sweet pumpkins have been given among other food items as it is rich in vitamin A.



Auto-rickshaws have been used for transporting the relief materials to the places of relief distribution.



Relief materials have been put in a specific place maintaining a safe physical distance.



Relief materials have been put on a table so that relief recipients can collect those from the table when the name of a specific recipient will be announced.



Relief materials have been put on a table so that relief recipients can collect those from the table when the name of a specific recipient will be announced.

**Kushtia:**



Kushtia: A group of Dai Mas (traditional birth attendant) and poor village women are awaiting relief items distributed by UBINIG in Koya village of Kushtia district.



Covid-19 relief recipients have received the relief items in Nandalalpur Village of Kushtia district.



Covid-19 relief recipients are waiting in a queue maintaining safe physical distance in Motpara village of Kushtia district.



Relief materials are being packaged in Kushtia following hygiene guidelines.

Relief materials are being packaged in Kushtia



**Ishwardi, Pabna:**



Nayakrishi farmers have received paddy seeds as grant along with other relief items.



Nayakrishi female farmers have also received paddy seeds as grant along with other relief

**Women Network:**



Women Network, Gaibandha District: Covid-19 relief recipients are standing in queues maintaining safe physical distance with the relief items.



Women Network, Barishal District: Covid-19 relief recipients are standing in queues maintaining safe physical distance with the relief items.



Women Network, Dinajpur District: Covid-19 relief recipients are standing in queues maintaining safe physical distance with the relief items.



Women Network, Khulna District: Covid-19 relief recipients are standing in queues maintaining safe physical distance with the relief items.



Women Network, Lalmonirhat District: Covid-19 relief recipients have received the relief items.



Women Network, Magura District: Covid-19 relief recipients are standing in queues maintaining safe physical distance with the relief items.



Women Network, Rangpur District: Covid-19 relief recipients are standing in queue maintaining safe physical distance with the relief items.



Women Network, Sirajganj District: Covid-19 relief recipients are standing in queues maintaining safe physical distance with the relief items.



Chilmari, Kurigram: A poor woman is standing on the river bank with the relief items given by UBINIG



Chilmari, Kurigram: Dai Mas working in the Char areas of Chilmari have received the relief items.