

COVID-19 Traditional Market Report

- In Brief -

Issue 1: January 2021, Dhaka, Bangladesh

The monthly Traditional Market Report (TMR) tracks the behaviors and daily decisions being made by vendors and consumers in Bonolota wet market and Islambagh City Corporation wet market in Dhaka. In addition to summarizing perceptions on COVID-19 and the hazard it poses to market actors in these two traditional and popular markets, the TMR tracks prices of selected nutritious foods over time. The report provides a baseline assessment of accepted indicators that help determine the resilience of market systems across both markets as market actors cope with business and food security choices under COVID-19.

The assessment is based on a panel of vendors (n=30) and consumers (n=30) from Bonolota and Islambagh City Corporation wet market who will be followed up on monthly basis via phone interviews through December 2021; these results are based on data gathered in January 2021.

Insights from vendor perspective:

- 97% of vendors stated that the pandemic had an immediate impact on their business.
- 97% of vendors reported a decrease in the number of customers in the last 9 months; 50% of vendors sell to more than 50 customers on a typical day.
- 60% of vendors found it “not difficult at all” to follow new COVID-19 rules in the market.
- 10% of vendors shared resources with other vendors (including hand washing facilities and sanitizer).
- 73% of vendors were aware of business support (information, awareness) being offered by market authorities due to COVID-19, none of the vendors have used any business strategy to increase the number of customers and sales during the last month.
- 47% of vendors from these two markets have borrowed money from relatives, friends, and banks due to COVID-19.
- 83% of vendors aim to continue with their business even if COVID-19 continues.

Insights from consumer perspective:

- 80% of consumers interviewed said their household has been financially impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic (loss/reduction of income).
- 70% of consumers considered most of their regular vendors trustworthy; reasons were knowing the vendors well, the freshness/quality of products, proximity to home, and cleanliness of the food stall.
- None of the consumers have been asked for feedback by vendors and/or market officials in the last 9 months.

Food Prices:

- While food prices for all vegetables, pulses, eggs, and dairy have increased between Dec20-Jan21 (red amaranth +45%; green papaya +37%; lentils +2%; chickpeas +1%; eggs +5%; yoghurt +5%); prices decreased for fish (-3%) and remained generally stable over the last half year.

COVID-19 Traditional Market Report

Dhaka, Bangladesh

January 2021

Background on COVID19 situation in the country

While the weekly incidence of Bangladesh's national COVID-19 cases has been significantly decreasing since December 2020, a significant increase can be observed since the end of February 2021 (Figure 1).

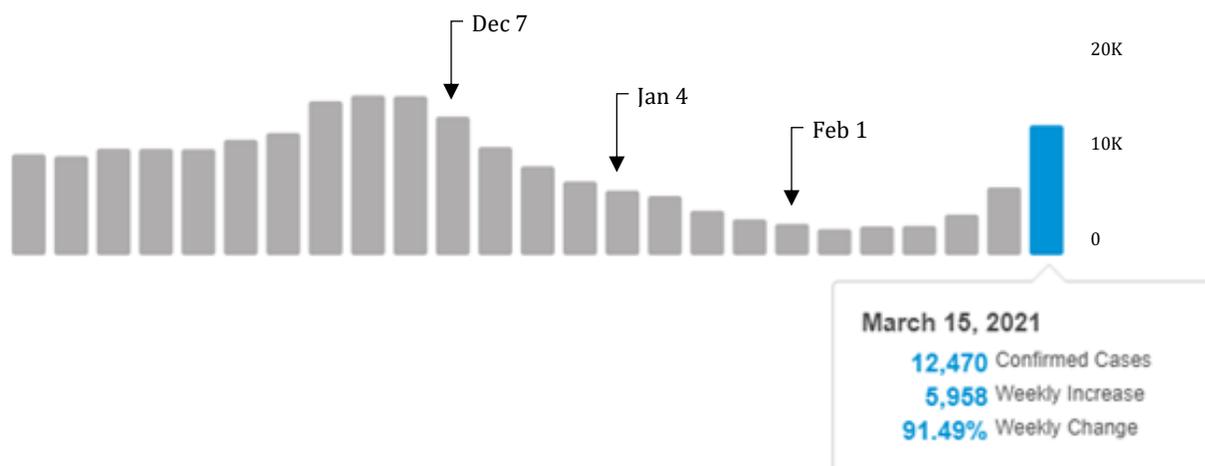


Figure 1. Confirmed COVID-19 cases in Bangladesh, weekly (WHO, 25th March 2021).

Between 3rd January and 25th March 2021, [580,808 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 8,763 deaths](#) have been reported by the Directorate General of Health Services, under the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare of Bangladesh. As of 25th March 2021, the daily rate of confirmed cases was 3,587. Alarming confirmed cases increased by 91% between 8th and 15th of March (Figure 1). On 7th February 2021 Bangladesh launched a nationwide COVID-19 vaccination campaign to immunize 80% of its 170 million people. The government has created a web portal called [Surokkha](#), to simplify the registration for the vaccination. By 25th of March 2021, about 3% (5 million) of the population received at least one of the two doses of the vaccine.

Since the 17th of March 2020, educational institutions have been closed nationwide. Furthermore, the Bangladesh government has adopted the "No Mask, No Service" policy at all offices in the country since October 2020 and introduced a fine of 500-1000 BDT (US\$ 6 - 12) as a punishment for not wearing masks in public places to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. Beginning 30th of March 2021, the Bangladesh government has announced the reopening of schools and colleges and the opening of public and private offices. While the police played an active role regarding public awareness and monitoring compliance to rules at the earlier stages of the pandemic, the police involvement decreased as well as the commitment by the public to follow COVID-19 rules.. Masks are being bought and kept in pockets or bags until they are needed for receiving any services from the banks or government offices.



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Since the start of the vaccination program, the seriousness of following the COVID-19 rules in the population seemed to have decreased further.

Market characteristics and changes due to COVID-19

Bonolota wet market and **Islambagh City Corporation wet market** are both located in Old Dhaka under the Dhaka South City Corporation (Figure 2). Both wet markets are large-scale markets that sell a wide range of products including poultry, fish, meat, eggs, vegetables, fruits, grains, legumes and other food and non-food items. Most of the vendors selling in the markets are male.

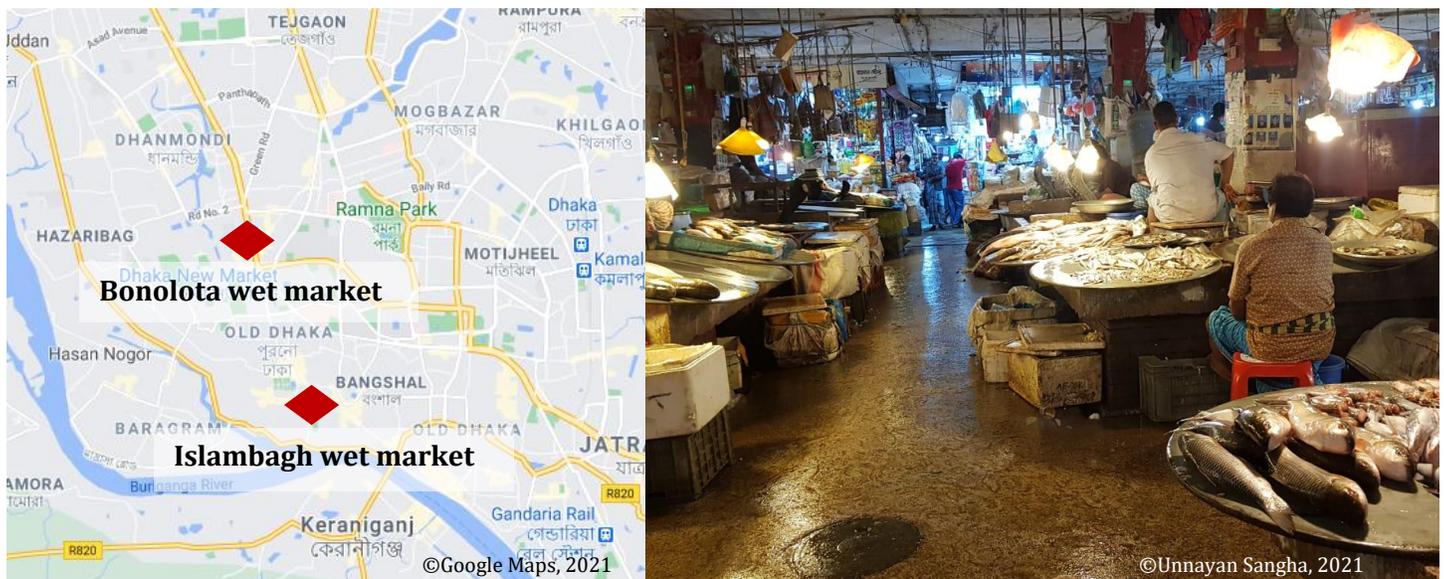


Figure 2. Location of Bonolota and Islambagh City Cooperation wet market in Dhaka, Bangladesh (left); Bonolota wet market, Dhaka, Bangladesh (right).

Bonolota wet market, Dhaka

The Bonolota wet market is the smaller market of the two wet markets assessed in this survey. The market has over 100 vendors and approximately 1,000-1,200 consumers visit the market daily.

Islambagh City Corporation wet market, Dhaka

The Islambagh City Corporation wet market is one of the largest markets in Old Dhaka. The market has separated food sections, one for fish, livestock, and poultry, a second for cereals, pulses, and vegetables, and a third section for eggs and edible oil. In total about 200 vendors operate in the market and on average, approximately 2,500 consumers visit the market daily.



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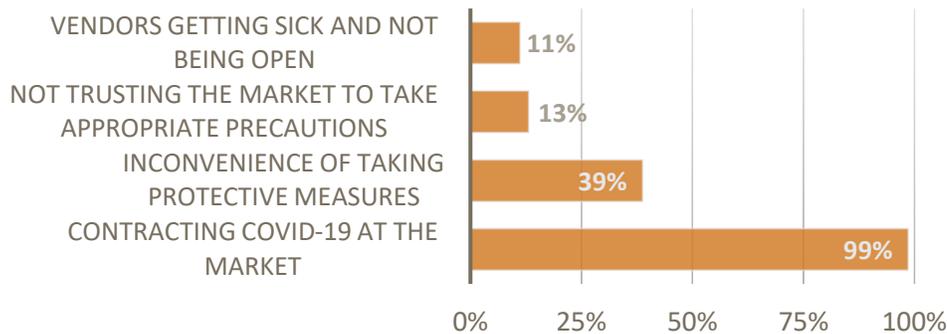
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Bi-Weekly Consumer and Vendor Survey Results under COVID-19

In addition to the assessment of resilience, a rapid COVID-19-assessment of approximately 40 consumers and 40 vendors from each market started in September 2020 and has been repeated every two weeks. Results below are from both markets and for all rounds between September and December 2020.

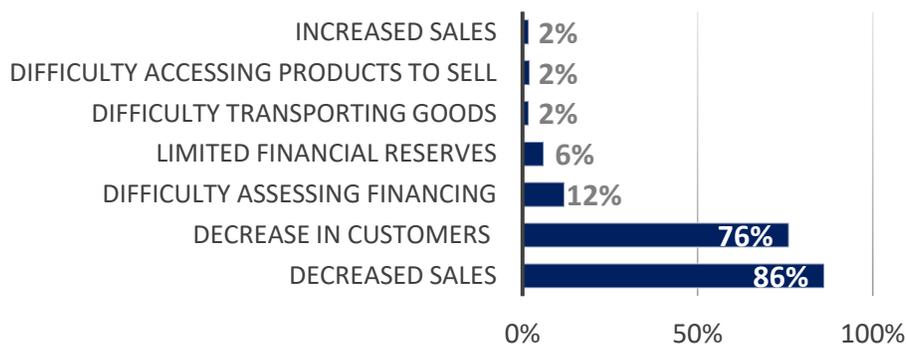
Consumers: Greatest concerns when shopping at the market in the last 2 weeks



Based on the rapid assessment, 38% of consumers reported concerns when shopping in the market in the last two weeks. Those with concerns identified the following issues: (1) fear of contracting COVID-19 (99%), (2) the inconvenience of taking protective measures (39%) and (3) not trusting the market to take appropriate protective measures

(13%). One third of consumers (29%) had observed changes in the markets due to COVID-19, mostly stating the set-up of washing facilities or hand sanitizer (73%), the thorough cleaning of markets with disinfectant (42%), and the mandate to all consumers (14%) and vendors to wear face masks (7%).

Vendors: Immediate impact on business due to COVID-19



Almost all vendors (97%) interviewed in the bi-weekly assessments stated that the pandemic had an immediate impact on their business. Most vendors stated that they experience decreased sales (86%) and customers (76%), while 12% had difficulty to access financing, and limited financial reserves (6%).

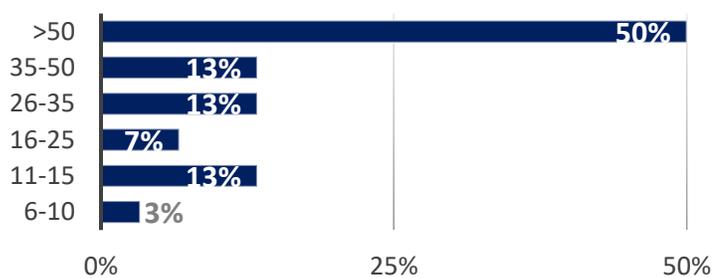
Market Resilience under COVID-19

Data for this assessment round (1) were collected between 7th – 21st of January 2021 from 30 vendors and 30 consumers in both Bonolota wet market and Islambagh City Corporation wet market. Food prices for this report have been assessed between 15th of November 2020 and 3rd of February 2021.

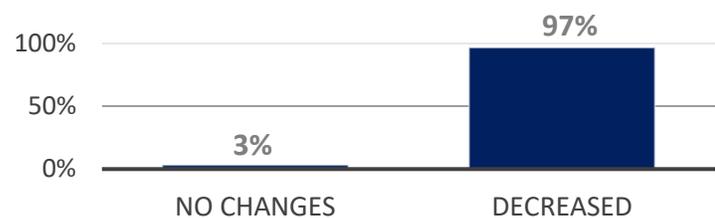
Connectivity

Connectivity includes not only the extent of connections vendors or other market actors might have but also the relationships between connected actors. Too many or too few connections can hamper the capacity to generate or sustain the growth of the market system. In this panel, half of the 30 vendors interviewed reported over 50 customers on a typical day. The number of suppliers seemed mixed. While 30% of vendors reported only 1 supplier for their business, 27% mentioned 2-3 suppliers and

Vendors: Number of customers on a typical day



Vendors: Change in number of customers on a typical day, last 9 months

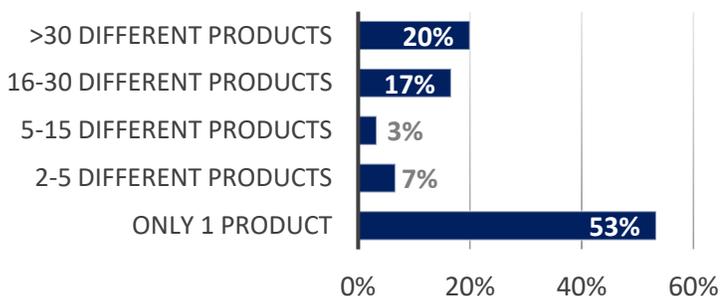


27% over 7 suppliers. Those vendors selling meat, fish, dairy, and eggs seem to rely on fewer suppliers. Vendors selling vegetables and packaged foods stated a higher number of suppliers. Almost all vendors (97%) reported experiencing a decrease in the number of customers in the last 9 months, i.e., the time since COVID-19 has been present in the area. Only 3% of vendors reported a change in suppliers last month.

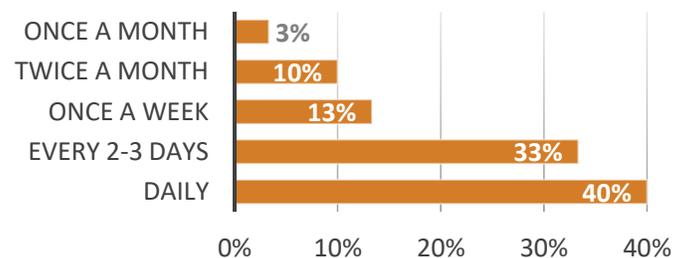
Diversity

Diversity has multiple dimensions, including (1) the amount of variation in a system (including the frequency and purpose of visiting the markets from consumer perspective) and (2) the balance between different types (e.g., types of products, firm sizes, marketing channels, or end markets) or (3) market system composition, (i.e., how aspects of a market system are related to each other). More than half (51%) of the vendors sold only 1 product, while 20% of

Vendors: Number of different products sold



Consumers: Frequency of visiting the market



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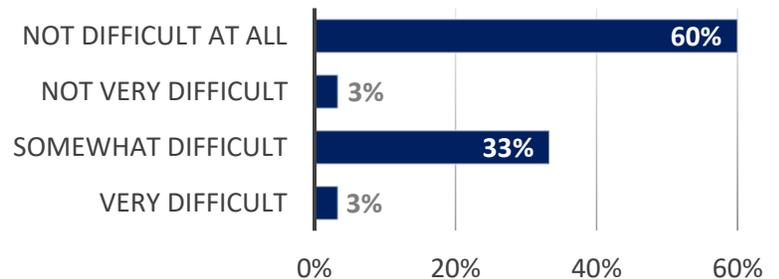


the vendors sold over 30, and 17% sold between 16-30 different products in their businesses. This difference was mainly related to the types of food sold. All vendors selling poultry, meat and fish reported to sell only one product. None of the vendors reported changing the commodities sold in their business in the last month. A large share of interviewed consumers went shopping in the market daily (40%) or every 2-3 days (33%). About 97% of the consumers said the purpose for visiting the market has been to buy foods or other goods for themselves or the own family.

Equity and fairness

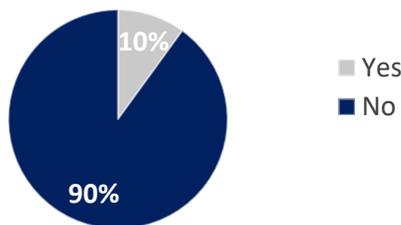
From a systems perspective, **equity and fairness** refers to the level or degree of equality and fairness inherent in formal and informal rules and laws. In our assessment we asked the panel of vendors how difficult it was for them to follow the new rules and regulations put in place due to COVID-19. The analysis revealed that most vendors found it not difficult at all (60%) or not very difficult (3%) to follow new rules including basic hygiene, social distancing, and implementing the "No mask, no service" policy in the market space. However, one third of vendors had somewhat difficulties following new rules.

Vendors: Difficulty following COVID-19 rules



Cooperation

Vendors: Shared resources with other vendors



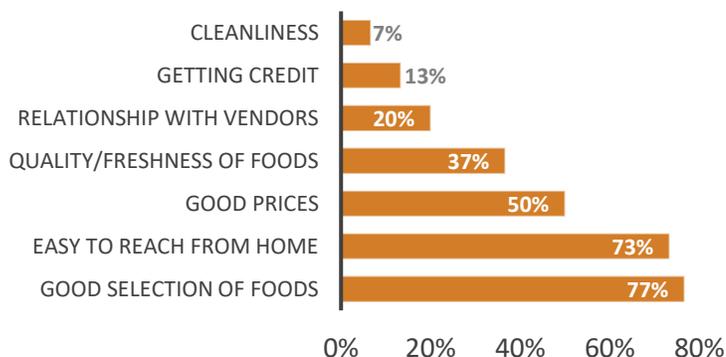
Cooperation refers to market actors collaborating to achieve a common purpose or function. Cooperation is neither good nor bad and the contribution of cooperation depends on the purpose. Here cooperation was measured asking vendors if they have started sharing resources with other businesses due to COVID-19. Most vendors (90%) stated that they did not share resources with other businesses. However, those that shared resources (n=3) mainly shared hand washing facilities (100%) and sanitizers (33%) with other vendors.

Competition

Competition is defined as rivalry between two or more entities. Like cooperation, competition can be negative or

positive. Its contribution to system resilience capacities depends on how and why the entities are competing. Competition in this assessment has been measured based on changing vendors practices based on what they had seen at competitors. None of the vendors in this panel reported that they changed their own business practices based on competitors. Almost 90% of consumers (n=26) reported they did most of their food shopping at the market. Reasons for buying food at the market were due to the good selection of foods offered in the markets (77%), easy access from home (73%), good prices (50%), and

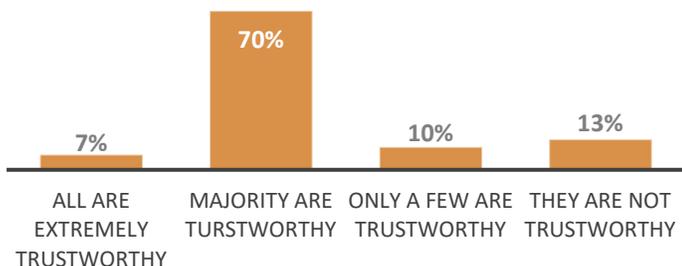
Consumers: Reasons for buying at the market



food quality/freshness (37%).

Most consumers (70%) said they consider the majority of their regular vendors trustworthy while 13% said vendors are not trustworthy or only a few are trustworthy (10%). For those consumers that describe the vendors as majorly

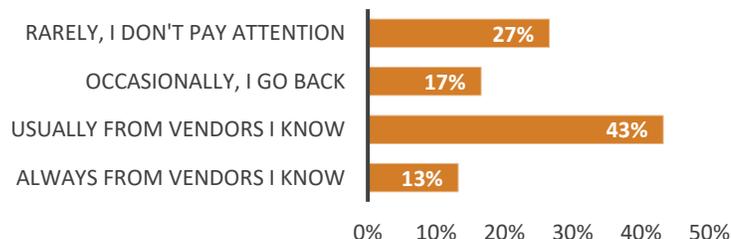
Consumers: Level of trust for the vendors they buy food from



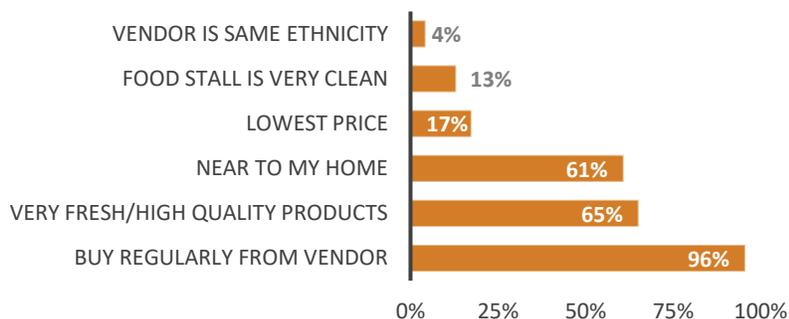
or extremely trustworthy (n=23) the reasons

included knowing the vendors well/buying regularly from

Consumer: Frequency of going to the same vendor when buying at the market



Consumers: Reasons for good level of trust (n=23)



the same vendors (96%), the freshness/quality of products (65%) or proximity to home (61%). Besides product freshness/quality also the cleanliness of the food stall (13%) was mentioned as reason for a good level of trust for vendors. The overall high level of trust might also be reflected in terms of vendor loyalty. Over 40% of consumers usually visited the same known vendors, and 13% always visited the same vendors. About one fourth went back rarely or did not pay attention (27%).



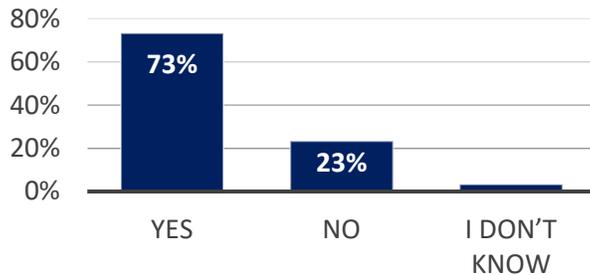
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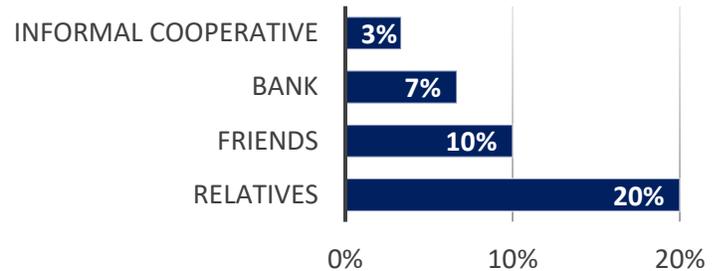
Business strategy

Business practices are oriented toward generating value for customers. They can be investments in understanding customers, in building customer relationships, in tracking customer retention and growth, in investing in staff and firm capacity, and in merit-based hiring.

Vendors: Aware of support offered by market due to COVID-19



Vendors: Source of borrowed money due to COVID-19 (n=14)



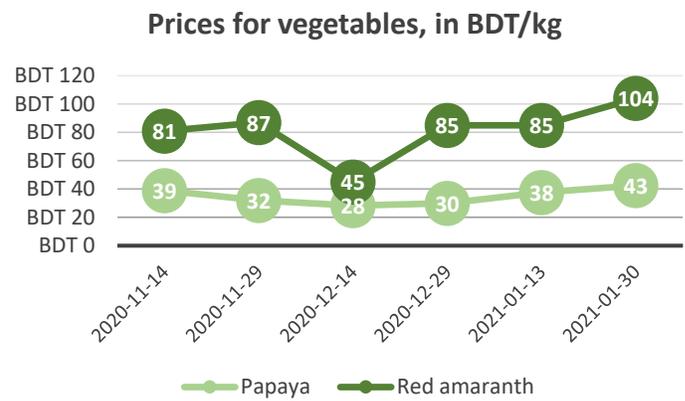
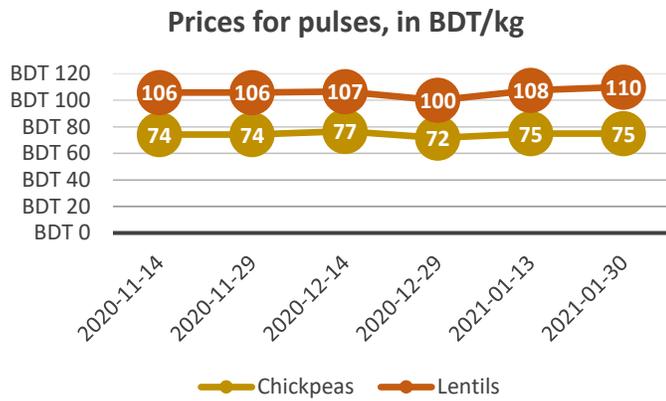
While 73% of vendors were aware of business support that the market offered due to COVID-19 (including information, awareness and sometimes provision of masks), none of the vendors have used any business training to increase the number of customers and sales during the last month.

Almost half (47%) of the vendors reported borrowing money to pay for any unexpected expenses due to COVID-19. The sources for this money were diverse; vendors relied on relatives, friends, banks and informal cooperatives.

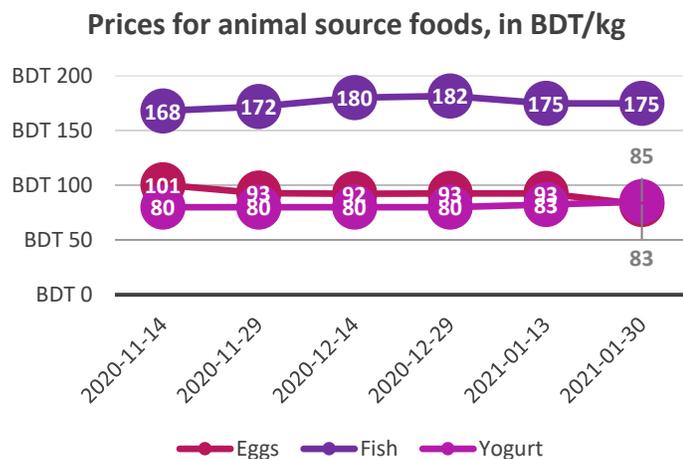
None of the consumers have been asked by market officials or vendors to provide feedback in the last 9 months.

Food prices

Tracking food prices is of great value to any market system to respond quickly to any dynamics in the food system. In this assessment, prices of different nutritious commodities and food groups have been tracked over time. Between December 2020 and January 2021, the food prices for pulses (chickpeas and lentils) increased slightly. Lentil prices increased by 5% to BDT 110.0/kg (~1.3 US\$/kg, end of January), chickpea prices by 1%. Although the weekly retail



food prices collected by the [Trading Corporation of Bangladesh \(TCB\)](#) display slightly lower prices for chickpeas in Dhaka city (BDT 60/kg on 30th of January 2021) and a smaller price fluctuation for lentils between December 2020 and January 2021, the assessments seem comparable. Vegetable prices for this report were assessed from green papaya and red amaranth. Prices for both, green papaya and red amaranth increased by 37% and 45%, respectively, between December 2020 and January 2021. While the percentage increases for vegetables between months seem large, the increases are likely due to seasonality and other constraining factors rather than a tremendous volatility.



For animal source foods (ASF), prices for fresh fish (Rui, locally named as *Nola*), eggs and yoghurt were assessed. While the price for a dozen of eggs decreased by 5% between December 2020 and January 2021 in our assessment, the official statistics did not reveal any change in the price for eggs (sold in pack of 4) between the two months. Food prices for yoghurt also increase by 5% while prices for fish decrease by 3%. Although, our assessment shows some increase (particularly vegetables) in monthly food prices between December and January 2021, looking at the official statistics since

June 2020, the prices for most commodities¹ have remained stable.

¹ Commodities considered under the official statistic included, rice (Miniket) (kg), lentil small grain (kg), chickpeas (Chhola, Manverde) (kg), onion (Desi) (kg), fish (Rui) (kg), powdered milk (Dano) (kg), eggs (pack of 4).



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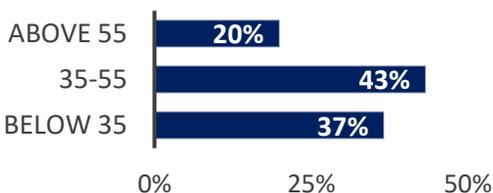


Characteristics of respondent sample

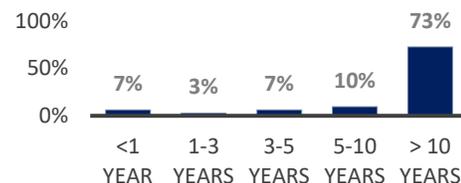
Vendor (n=30)

- All vendors in this panel are male.
- The panel has a diverse age range.
- 13% of the vendors have never attended school; 40% of vendors have primary education, 23% have secondary education, 23% have higher education.
- Most vendors in the panel sold packaged foods, vegetables, meat, poultry, and fish.
- 73% of vendors have been operating in the market for 10 years or longer and 83% of vendors aim to continue with their business even if COVID-19 continues.

Vendors: Age Group



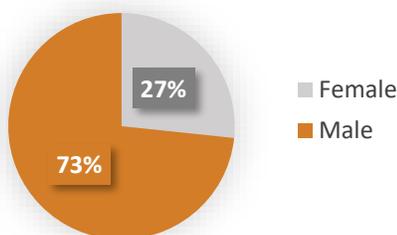
Vendors: Length of being a vendor in the market



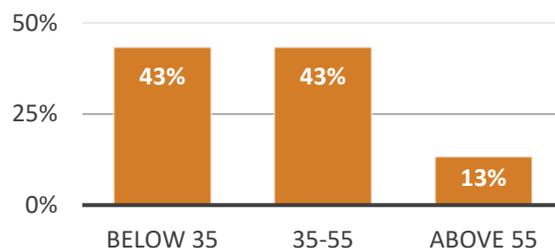
Consumer (n=30)

- 27% of the consumers in this panel are female.
- Most consumers are in the age groups 25-30 and 31-40 years of age.
- 70% of consumers stated to have attended secondary education; 17% have attended primary school.
- On average, consumers lived in households of about four people (including themselves).
- 57% of consumers lived in the Dhaka for over 10 years.
- 80% of consumers have been financially affected by COVID-19; all of those negatively affected reported a loss of income source.

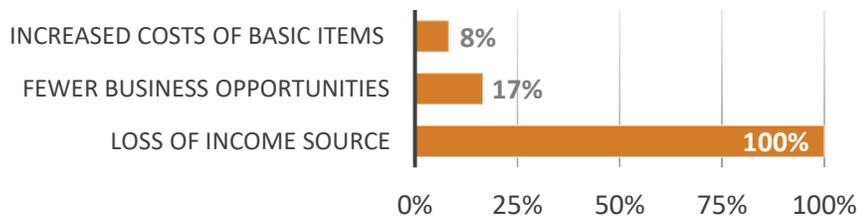
Consumers: Gender



Consumers: Age Group



Consumers: How household has been financially negatively affected by COVID19 (n=24)



Methods assessing market characteristics under COVID-19, resilience and food prices

Insights into **resilience** have been based on interviews of 31 consumers and 30 vendors from two informal markets in Dhaka, who were interviewed between 7th – 21st of January 2021. After data cleaning, market systems resilience was analyzed of 30 consumers and 30 vendors. The panel of vendors and consumers was purposefully selected from Bonolota wet market and Islambagh City Corporation wet market in Dhaka in December 2020 and January 2021 based on the respondent's gender and age profiles, which were previously assessed in the rapid assessments in both markets (see below). The same panel of consumers and vendors are followed up each month via phone interviews, using a structured questionnaire.

Based on the [USAID Market System Resilience Framework](#), market system resilience is defined as “...the ability of people, households, communities, countries, and systems to mitigate, adapt to, and recover from shocks and stresses in a manner that reduces chronic vulnerability and facilitates inclusive growth.” For market systems, resilience further includes the ability to allocate resources, draw on optimal resources, and innovate to solve problems in the face of shocks and stresses. While the USAID framework highlights eight domains to characterize resilience capacities, this rapid assessment includes questions on six of the eight domains (connectivity, diversity, equity and fairness, cooperation, competition, business strategy) with fast and slow indicators.

Besides data on resilience this report uses data assessed through a **rapid assessment** from 562 consumers and 562 vendors from both Bonolota and Islambagh City Corporation wet market. Approximately every two weeks, 40 consumer and 40 vendors are randomly selected and surveyed in each traditional market. Surveys are conducted with complete adherence to global guidelines on COVID-19 prevention and control. Data included in this report (Chapter “Market characteristics and changes due to COVID-19”) have been collected between 1st of September and 15th of December 2020.

For all assessments, combined responses from the vendors and consumers in both markets are used. All data were collected via Open Data Kit (ODK) collect and stored on KoBo Toolbox; data analysis was done using Stata version 14.

Food prices are collected bi-weekly from each market for selected nutritious foods of four different food groups. Prices for this report have been assessed on six different points in time, between the 14th of November 2020 and the 30th of January 2021. The selection of assessed commodities is based on the nutritive value, the availability and cultural acceptance of the food items. All food prices are displayed as average price for both markets and each data assessment point in standard units (kg or dozen) in Bangladeshi Taka (100 BDT \cong 1.18 US\$). For each round and food item, three comparative prices from three different vendors in each market are collected by trained enumerators at similar times and days of the week. The weight of red amaranth, which is sold in the local unit is assessed each time together with the price assessment and average weights for standard units are calculated. Although not all of the assessed commodities might be directly comparable to the official prices of the weekly retail food prices for Dhaka city by the [Trading Corporation of Bangladesh \(TCB\)](#), for each month we take the average price to display monthly changes in price data and to compare the assessed prices to the official statistics to get some comparative results.



Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) COVID-19 Response

The necessary COVID-19 lockdowns have placed a spotlight on the weaknesses of food systems across the world. In the COVID-19 context the single most important thing that can be done for the health and resilience of people and economies is to protect the nutritional status of current and future generations. GAIN has developed the [Keeping Food Markets Working \(KFMW\) program](#) as an emergency response to the COVID-19 crisis, providing rapid support to food system workers, to small and medium enterprises supplying nutritious foods, and to keeping fresh food markets open. While disease control responses to the pandemic are essential, they also disrupt food systems, depress income, and put a strain on social protection programs, which can threaten the nutritional status of the most vulnerable. The KFMW program is focused on mitigating those risks and keeping affordable nutritious foods flowing in African and Asian markets to the people who most need it. The KFMW program consists of five workstreams:

1. Building resilience of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)
2. Maintaining and reinforcing efforts in Large-Scale Food Fortification
3. **Ensuring food markets stay open and are operating safely**
4. Investing in nutrition security for key workers in the food system
5. Supporting effective policymaking and coordination during the pandemic

Through KFMW, EatSafe is working to better understand the rapidly changing situation in traditional food markets from the vendor and consumer perspective under workstream 3.

EatSafe data collection for municipalities

EatSafe: Evidence and Action Towards Safe, Nutritious Food, is a five-year project aiming to enable lasting improvements in the safety of nutritious foods in traditional markets by focusing on the consumer. [EatSafe is made possible by a generous contribution from USAID.](#) The COVID-19 pandemic has plunged the world into an unprecedented global health crisis. Difficult to manage at the best of times, traditional markets are generally crowded with customers and vendors potentially creating ideal conditions for transmission of the virus. When market vendors and other food system workers cannot do their jobs, increased food prices and/or food shortages are likely to result in reducing demand for fresh, nutritious foods and eroding market resilience. Furthermore, real, and perceived risks can undermine consumer trust in the health and safety of food markets.

EatSafe's COVID-19 response is working to track and better understand the rapidly changing situation in traditional food markets from the vendor and consumer perspective. Through bi-weekly market surveys and monthly key informant interviews, EatSafe is assessing the accessibility of safe nutritious food, availability of health and safety information and the resilience of traditional markets. EatSafe will continue to use and disseminate results to help ensure food markets remain open, that safe, nutritious food is available under COVID-19 and to support future programming for safe and resilient nutritious food markets.

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