

Dear colleagues, partners and friends,

Bangladesh crossed 100 days with Corona this week. The number of confirmed cases have plateaued to a range of 3300 to 4000 this week but so did the testing. Surprisingly, there still has not been any decisions on how red zones will be implemented in Dhaka.

Firstly, an update on testing; some positive news after all the controversy over testing kits; Albeit delayed but the government is [planning](#) to introduce multiple COVID-19 test methods from July, including antigen, nucleic acid, and antibody 'dry and wet' tests - which provides results in less time. The Directorate General of Health Services plans to import 100,000 to 200,000 kits at a time. Efforts to expand testing facilities at the sub-district level are underway. 3,000 medical technologists and technicians are being recruited. Again, the question remains how quickly this will be done as time continues to be of essence. There was a major scandal this week [about a testing fraud by](#) an authorised private sector provider JKG health care. Questions have been raised about how this no name organization was given authorization to test in the first place.

A coordination cell to prevent COVID-19 transmission [has been formed](#). The cell will monitor and coordinate the virus preventive activities of all the agencies and departments under the division, ensure coordination between the activities of the agencies of the division and other departments of the government and monitor all the civic services being provided by city corporations in red zones, involving volunteers, public representatives, imams, NGO representatives and eminent personalities.

The work of the community support team implemented by BRAC with support from FAO, UNFPA and World Bank in various wards of Dhaka is set to start very soon. Further coordination with DNCC was established this week.

The spread:

The pressure on health care facilities are growing outside Dhaka now. There are increasing reports of people dying with covid like symptoms outside Dhaka. There are also increasing accusations of not getting critical medical care from the patients. In Khulna last week, One Mr. Mujahidul Islam's family was refused treatment in 6 hospitals before he passed away due to lack of oxygen. He was not suffering from Covid 19. In Khulna the numbers have exploded from 150 to 1000 last week. The rising tension is causing people to take law into their own hands. A clinic owner [was beaten to death on June 17th](#) after the public accused him of wrong treatment. 3 more [red zones were announced](#) in Khulna which went under lockdown from June 25th.

Our key focus at BRAC, that we have invested most heavily in, has been community-level awareness, ownership, testing, and wearing of masks.

How are the slum dwellers in Dhaka?

There are surprisingly low numbers of people who are going to hospitals or reporting within the slums. BRAC's informal survey through its community organizers found 290 patients with covid 19 like symptoms in around 300 slums we work in. Neither there are reports of them going for testing, nor there is widespread report of hospitalizations. But no one seems to be sure how wide the spread is. [Newspaper reports say that the impact of the disease on the low income population seems to be mild](#). But this is based on anecdotal observation and no formal

study. Universities may look into this area closely. The population mostly work in open spaces outside and are from a relatively younger age group. Those may play out as factors as well.

Some persisting challenges;

- [Gaps in data](#) continue to cause issues. Inaccurate data released by the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) continues to create confusion. Many initiatives to contain the virus are being delayed due to such data constraints. IEDCR temporarily has not published [infection data for Dhaka city](#) since June 16. As they are the only source of data in Bangladesh, Dhaka is now in a blackout in terms of COVID-19 data.
- The government is yet to ensure safe management of [COVID-19 waste](#), resulting in infection risks and environmental hazards. Experts fear that the COVID-19 situation might worsen due to poor waste management. BRAC's climate change programme and Social Innovation Lab are working on a project in this regard.
- Reports continue about people abandoning family members due to fears of them being infected by the virus. [Authorities are supporting people affected](#) and taking legal action against the perpetrators.

Looking at the economy, experts [suggest](#) that Bangladesh should delay its graduation from a least developed country (LDC) to a developing country. Bangladesh will lose preferential trade benefits that are likely to have a negative impact on employment and local investments during this time of economic disruption, experts warned at a virtual discussion organised by the UN. 12 million people have been pushed into the category of the "new poor". The official graduation is scheduled for 2024, with a three-year grace period for preparation. More in feature in the attached report.

In other news:

China has said Bangladesh will get priority in terms of cooperation and support if they can successfully develop a [COVID-19 vaccine](#). Bangladesh has also been selected for human trial for the second phase of the chinese vaccine trial. A team of [Chinese medical experts](#) attribute the spread primarily to a lack of awareness about social distancing and hygiene practices amongst the public.

50,000 people have [left](#) Dhaka, or have shifted their families to their village homes, because of unemployment and pay cuts. Many are leaving without the certainty of income back in their villages. BRAC spoke to Al-Jazeera about this trend this week [here](#).

In terms of how the pandemic is affecting more vulnerable groups, some notable developments this week include;

- An [urgent appeal](#) to the government and policymakers was released by a number of leading rights organisations. Organisations fear the virus has worsened conditions for women who were already challenged by prevalent gender inequalities.
- 13,494 women and children were survivors of violence in May 2020, according to a [survey](#) by Manusher Jonno Foundation. 4,160 people admitted to have faced abuse for the first time in their life. Findings show a sharp rise in incidents of violence, with access

to support services limited by the lockdown. Family courts, which deal with such cases, are still not under the new virtual court system.

- Rohingya children are facing increased risks of violence, trafficking, child marriage and child marriage, due to the socio-economic conditions caused by COVID-19, [according](#) to Educo, an global NGO dedicated to child rights.

BRAC also released the results of its own study on how the pandemic is affecting students in Bangladesh, see more on that in the feature in the attached report.

From next week, while the letter will come out every week, the extended report will come out fortnightly instead of weekly.

If you would like to see any particular issue covered, please let us know at: covid19response@brac.net.

Please see details on the current situation and our work in the [situation report](#).

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BRAC