



World Food Programme

SAVING
LIVES
CHANGING
LIVES

Urban Food Security

The COVID-19 lockdowns in Bangladesh caused severe price hikes and income loss, leaving slums dwellers even worse off than people living in villages. To support the Government's pandemic response, WFP launched an urban food assistance pilot in Dhaka slums. The programme is currently working in two slums in North Dhaka City Corporation, and leverages the same blockchain technology used in WFP refugee operations in Cox's Bazar. While the programme provides cash transfers to vulnerable households, its main focus is on promoting nutrition and dietary diversity.

Participants are enrolled based on the same criteria as beneficiaries of government social safety net programmes, which the WFP programme complements. Households with more than one eligible participant receive an additional BDT 800 (US\$8) per beneficiary to purchase nutritious food items. They receive an unconditional cash stipend of BDT 3,000 (US\$30) in mobile money through bKash, a popular, countrywide mobile financial service. To track food purchases, WFP issues a card with a QR code to each beneficiary to use at shops participating in the programme. Shopkeepers scan the customer's QR code using an

Android app on their smartphone and this links food purchase data with Building Blocks, a blockchain-based database used to track monthly spending.

In parallel to tracking purchases, WFP conducts behaviour change communication to explain the importance of a diversified diet to enrolled beneficiaries. The programme distributes educational flyers through local shops, followed by individual phone calls and text messages – pilot approaches more adapted to urban settings. This messaging is customized for breastfeeding and pregnant women, households with adolescent children or people with disabilities and the elderly, highlighting their nutrition needs in accordance with their vulnerabilities.

At the end of the month, those who purchase nutritious food from at least five different food groups receive a proportional cashback of up to 25 percent (BDT 750) of their total stipend as an incentive to adopt a more diverse and nutritious diet. Beneficiaries can visit participating shops as many times as they wish within a given month, allowing them to provide their families with a range of fresh produce on a consistent basis.

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Together with improving the food security and nutrition of vulnerable households, the programme has a larger aim of improving food systems through enhanced supply and affordability of healthy foods. WFP is collaborating with FAO for market linkages in the targeted areas. It also works with UNFPA which distributes sanitary pads every month to women and adolescent girls from WFP-targeted households using Building Blocks. This shows how agencies—and ministries—can service shared targeted beneficiaries using the blockchain.

The programme has a dedicated helpline number and helpdesk staff available to ensure beneficiaries can ask questions, and share feedback and concerns, about the programme or the assistance received.

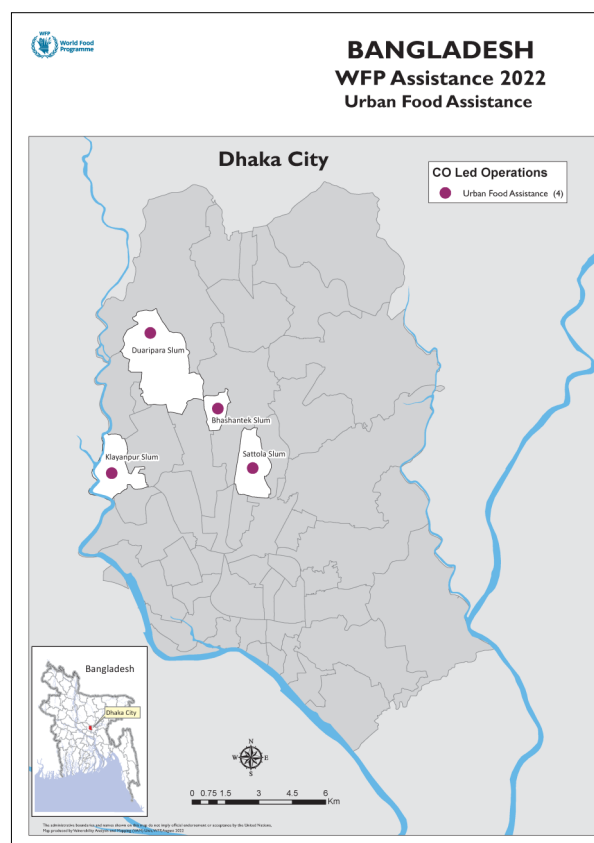
ACHIEVEMENTS

- Post-distribution monitoring and focus groups revealed relative increases in fresh vegetable purchases among participants and decreases in the purchase of starchy foods. Since the start of the project, percentage of households purchasing fruits and vegetables has increased from 50 to 98 percent. Participating households have thus been positively incentivized to consume a wider range of nutritious foods.
- Since 2021, MoWCA has enrolled eligible pregnant and nursing women from the pilot into the national Mother and Child Benefit Programme (MCBP) following WFP advocacy to include this underserved group in government safety net programmes.
- WFP is working with local traders to ensure a stable supply of vegetables and other nutritious food in shops within the targeted areas. To ensure a fresh supply of healthy items in the targeted slums, FAO has increased market linkages between shopkeepers and its vegetable aggregation sites, which bring together smallholder urban farmers, and small to medium-scale commercial producers in the agricultural outskirts of Dhaka.

Pg. 1 photo (WFP/Sayed Asif Mahmud): Urban beneficiary and her family enjoy diverse, nutritious food purchased from their local WFP-connected store.

WFP PLANS

- To collaborate with other UN agencies to improve targeting and expand coverage to support vulnerable urban dwellers affected by the global food crisis and climate-related shocks - using shared platforms, such as Building Blocks or a common beneficiary database
- To expand the programme into new urban slums as part of the third phase of the project, and to start using the cashback approach as part of a small pilot in an actual government safety net in a few slums.
- To conduct an in-depth analysis of the cash-back element, which has been accepted into the WFP Innovation Accelerator, SPRINT, and to better track and understand purchasing patterns among the urban poor.
- To pilot a nutrition-sensitive model for the Government to scale up and replicate in government urban social safety net programmes.



Annual requirement: US\$2.7 million

