Bangladesh

FOOD SECURITY MONITORING

January 2023

Remote Household Food Security Survey Brief

Bangladesh:
IN NUMBERS

More than one in ten households are currently food insecure

13%
OF PEOPLE ARE FOOD INSECURE (rCARI)[1]

Food insecurity increased, and it largely depends on the seasonality for the poor population

53%
RESORTING TO COPING STRATEGIES
Livelihood-based coping strategies [2]

28% purchased food on credit

53% had debts

15% spent their savings

13% received assistance

Food security varies across the divisions and population

23%
of low-income households were moderately food insecure, and 10% of these households had no iron-rich food intake.

68%
of the households were significantly affected by food prices, with a significant increase in most food commodities compared to last year.

1. *Remote Consolidated Approach for Reporting Indicators of Food Insecurity (CARI). The remote comprehensive food security index (rCARI) is an aggregated food security index used to report on a population's comprehensive food security. The indicators used to calculate this are: (i) food consumption scores, (ii) livelihood coping mechanisms, (iii) income sources, and (iv) income changes due to the shock .*
2. *The Livelihood Coping Strategies Index (LCSI) builds on the understanding of the behaviours vulnerable households engage in to meet their immediate food security needs in times of crisis or shock.*

In Brief

Food security situation started worsening. More than one in ten households (13%) was moderately food insecure, which is an inclining trend compared to the last month. The global food crisis, high national inflation rates, high food prices for several key commodities, and high fuel and fertilizer prices continued to impact the food security and well-being of households over a long period. Comparatively, 5 percent higher households reported relying on coping all over the country than in December. Approximately 53 percent reported restoring to livelihood-based coping, which was 48 percent in December. Returning to reliance on coping was mostly due to some cold waves, constrained livelihood opportunities for reduced pressure in seasonal rice and vegetable cultivation, debt, and debt recovery.
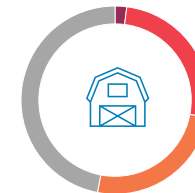
Food security varied in divisions with an increasing trend mostly. Despite improvement over time, households in almost all the divisions showed an inclining trend of food insecurity. Mostly for poor households, their livelihood depends significantly on seasonal opportunities. The low-income households experienced the highest hardship in putting food on the table, which varied across divisions but remained a constant phenomenon over time.

The survey revealed that 22 percent were food insecure in low-income households, compared to 7 percent in medium-income households and less than 1 percent in high-income households. Barishal Division was the highest having the most food insecure population.

High food prices remained the most significant and constant worry. Some 68 percent of households said the rise in food prices was their deepest concern and significantly affected their well-being. In comparison, 21 percent of households worried about health expenditure increases, and 19 percent mentioned the burden of debt or loans to cope with food insecurity. Most of the major food commodity prices kept rising.
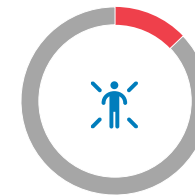
More Households relied on coping strategies to keep food on the table. More than half of the households applied livelihood-based coping strategies such as borrowing money, selling productive assets, or going into debt to buy food. On average, the percentage was 1 percent higher than in the previous months, which is 2-3 percent in some divisions. Households continued relying both on food-based and livelihood-based coping strategies. Some 26 percent of households applied food-based coping, which was 41 percent in the low-income group, the highest among different income groups.

A little less than half of the households are using coping strategies

53%
RESORTING TO LIVELIHOOD-BASED COPING STRATEGIES*
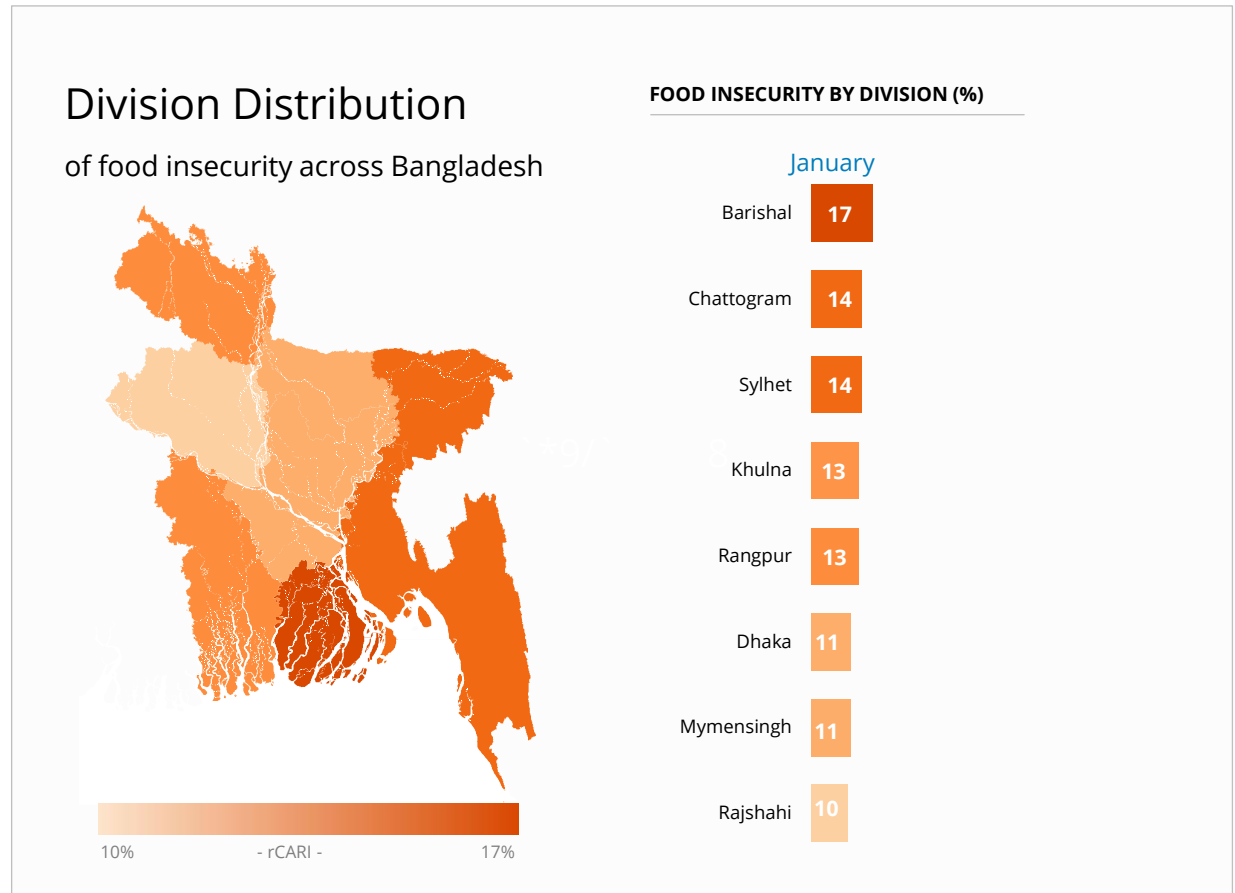
13%
FOOD INSECURE (rCARI)

The Livelihood Coping Strategies Index (LCSI) builds on the understanding of the behaviours vulnerable households engage in to meet their immediate food security needs in times of crisis or shock.

Findings

Food insecurity increased with more than one in ten households surveyed (13%). All these households were at moderate levels of food insecurity, and there were no severely food insecure households in January, followed by December. **However, most divisions showed an increased trend in food-insecure households.** On average, households in almost all the divisions showed negative change compared to December. Four out of eight divisions had a 3 percent increase which is high. Sylhet recovered quickly over the last seven months, the hardest hit by frequent devastating floods. Sylhet and Chattogram divisions had a positive change amidst the cold wave at the end of December and early January. **Different households coped differently to put food on the table**. The Barishal division had a baseline food insecurity of 30 percent in July, a middle position among the divisions with the highest low-income households. Almost 26 percent of those low-income households had food insecurity in January, double the average. On the contrary, the households in Sylhet progressed faster with a high negative coping as the households struggled to recover from the worst floods in June-July 2022. A detailed disaggregated survey will be significant in investigating the root causes of the food insecurity situation in different geographic location.

Division Distribution
of food insecurity across Bangladesh

10%   - rCARI -   17%

FOOD INSECURITY BY DIVISION (%)

January

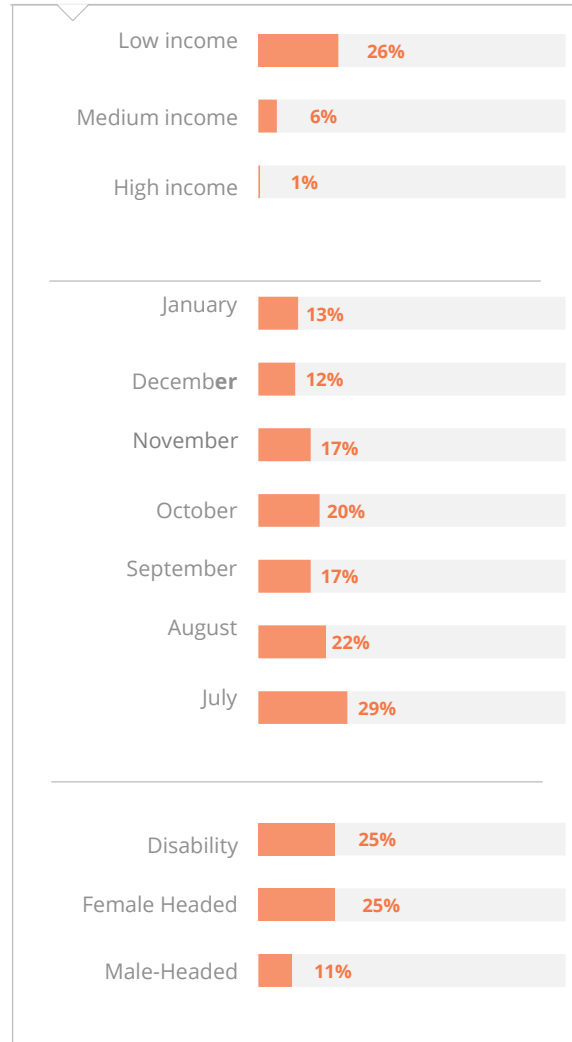| Barishal | 17 |
Chattogram	14
Sylhet	14
Khulna	13
Rangpur	13
Dhaka	11
Mymensingh	11
Rajshahi	10

Low-income group was the hardest hit.

There is a large gap in different sections of the population. On the seventh row since July, the mVAM survey revealed that the low-income group has always been very vulnerable to shocks. Seasonality in labour market, disasters, price hikes, and loss of income have a multiplier effect on the household's food security and well-being. Household's struggled double the burden of debts and increased expenditures. Many households reported borrowing money to put the minimum food on the table. For the skilled and nonskilled daily labourers, underemployment and unemployment are huge issues as they remain idle with no alternative income sources. Poor households highly relied on different coping strategies; selling productive household assets, buying food on credit and borrowing cash were found to be very common. Except for Sylhet (1.5%), there were no food-secure households in the low-income category in any divisions. **Households with disability and Female-headed households were more food insecure than households without.** Households with disabled people reported being overburdened with health expenses and income loss of other earning members due to caregiving time at home. Female-headed households experienced difficulties putting food on the table due to less skill and readiness to work, unavailability of time after caregiving the kids, social stigma, safety concerns, etc. This has been a common picture all over the rounds of surveys since July.

FOOD INSECURITY BY HOUSEHOLD CHARACTERISTICS (%)

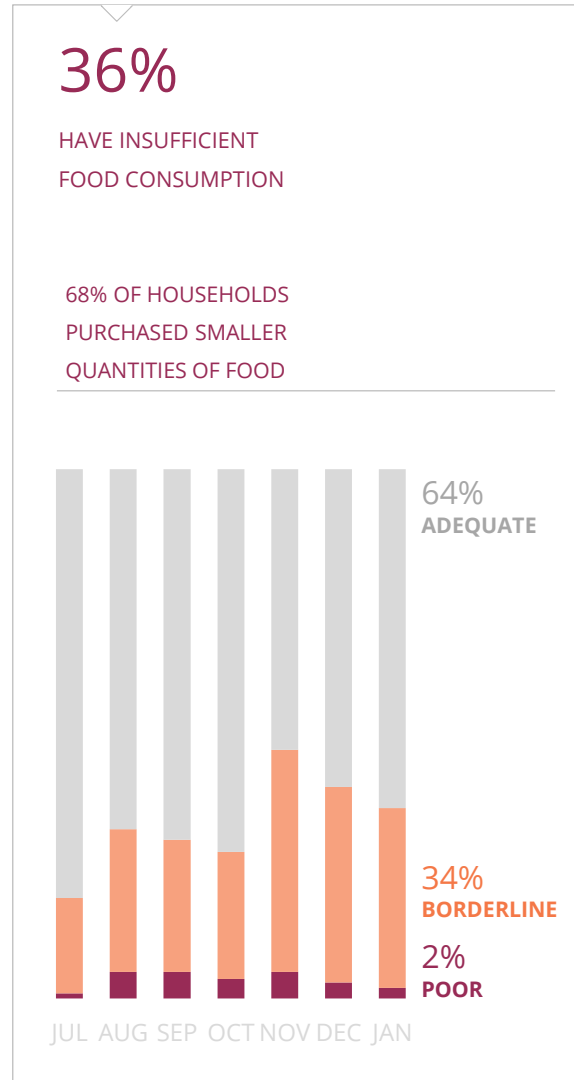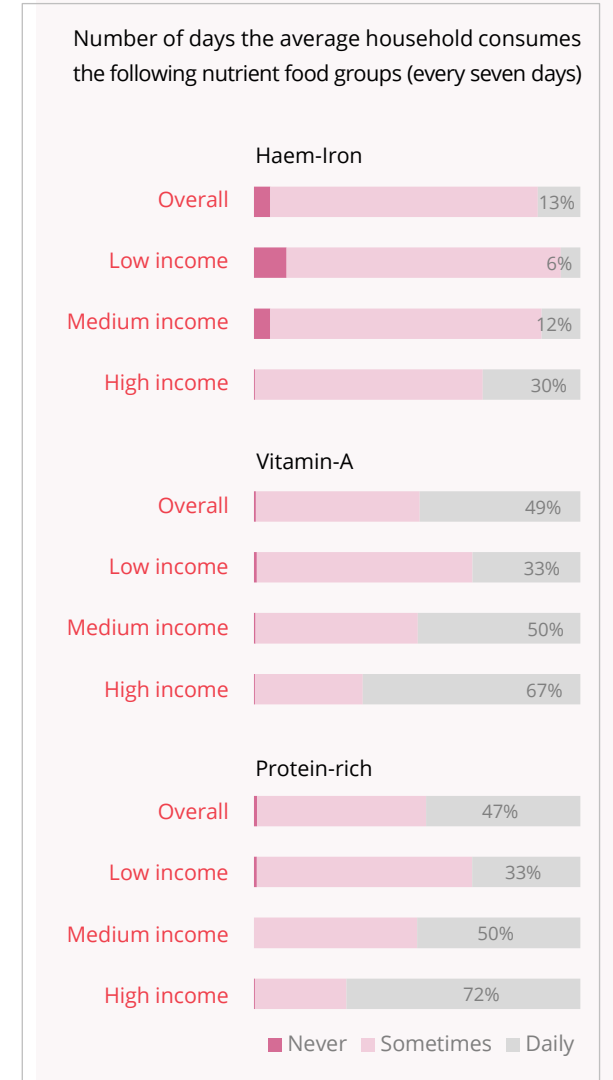|	
Low income	26%
Medium income	6%
High income	1%
January	13%
December	12%
November	17%
October	20%
September	17%
August	22%
July	29%
Disability	25%
Female Headed	25%
Male-Headed	11%

More than three in ten households could not afford to meet adequate diets.

Only 14 percent reported having their own source of food production. The rest (86%) entirely depended on buying food from the market. Only 1 percent reported buying bulks from the market. In January, an average of 64 percent of households in eight divisions had an acceptable diet, which was somewhat 4 percent higher than in December. In the low-income households, more than half in seven days, ate protein and vegetables less than five days and reported having fruits and dairy less than one day. **Households with disability and low-income groups were eating less diverse diets than average** – on average more than one-third (38 %) were facing insufficient food consumption. On average, 9 percent reported having members with a disability, the percent in low-income groups. **The consumption of micronutrient-rich food did not improve over the last seven months.** Only 13 percent of households had iron-rich food in their regular diet; 82 percent had it sometimes, and 5 percent had no iron-rich food on their plates in their last seven days recall. Low-income households barely afford to put nutritious food on their plate. Less than four in ten households had an insufficient diet with lower protein, Iron, and vitamin-A, compromising the quality and quantity of food. Most of their calorie intake came from rice.
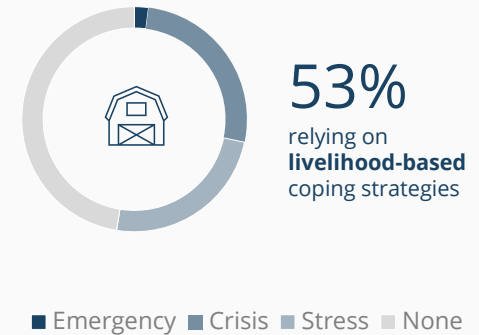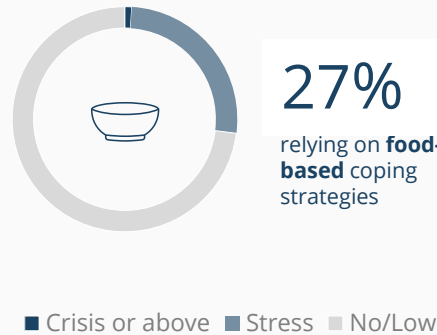
FOOD CONSUMPTION GROUP

36%

HAVE INSUFFICIENT
FOOD CONSUMPTION

68% OF HOUSEHOLDS
PURCHASED SMALLER
QUANTITIES OF FOOD

64% **ADEQUATE**

34% **BORDERLINE**

2% **POOR**

JUL AUG SEP OCT NOV DEC JAN

OCTOBER FOOD CONSUMPTION - NUTRITION

Number of days the average household consumes the following nutrient food groups (every seven days)

Haem-Iron

Overall	13%
Low income	6%
Medium income	12%
High income	30%

Vitamin-A

Overall	49%
Low income	33%
Medium income	50%
High income	67%

Protein-rich

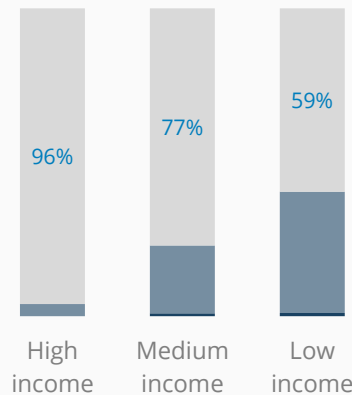| Overall | 47% |
Low income	33%
Medium income	50%
High income	72%

■ Never ■ Sometimes ■ Daily

* The "Food consumption score" (FCS) is a score calculated using the frequency of consumption of different food groups consumed by a household during the 7 days before the survey. There are standard weights for each of the food groups that comprise the food consumption score.

Portions of households adopting coping strategies had increased, including emergency coping.
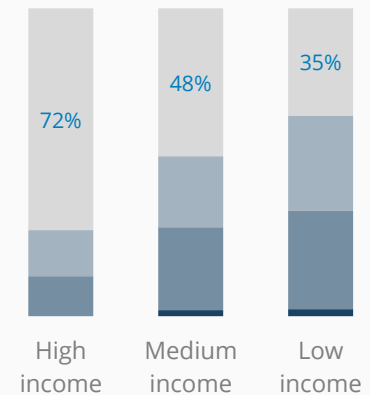
Almost three in ten households relied on food-based coping strategies. Households had struggled to meet the required diets and compromised by eating less preferred food, limiting portions, or sacrificing adults' meals so children could eat. Reliance on negative coping strategies had increased due to slow debt recovery and increased food prices and expenditures, even though agricultural and non-agricultural activities resumed after the lean season. Some cold waves hampered daily employment opportunities but were not captured in detail by this survey. **Reliance on negative coping strategies had been the common observation in the low-income group.** Only 13 percent of surveyed households reported receiving assistance. It is alarming that 2 percent of households in both low and middle-income groups relied on emergency coping, which includes selling lands and residences and migrating to other places to look for earnings. Many low-income households relied on stress, crisis, and emergency coping, the most vulnerable to future shocks. **Income instability made a big difference in both food-based and livelihood-based coping strategies.** Low-income households were turning to food-based (41%) and more to livelihood-based (65%) coping strategies to meet food and basic needs for their well-being compared to other households. In Rangpur, 5 percent of low-income households relied on emergency coping.

27% relying on **food-based** coping strategies

■ Crisis or above ■ Stress ■ No/Low

53% relying on **livelihood-based** coping strategies

■ Emergency ■ Crisis ■ Stress ■ None

BY INCOME GROUPS

96% — High income
77% — Medium income
59% — Low income

BY INCOME GROUPS

72% — High income
48% — Medium income
35% — Low income

* Reduced food-based coping strategies (rCSI) scores are used as a proxy variable for food insecurity. The rCSI is based on the frequency and severity of coping mechanisms for households reporting food consumption problems and assesses the stress level of households due to a food shortage. A high score indicates a higher stress level, and a lower score means that the household is less stressed..
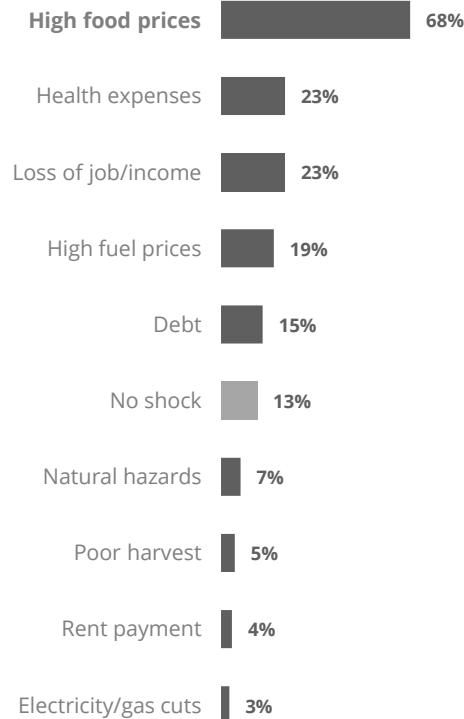
High food prices affected most households, although food inflation reduced (7.91%).

Almost seven in ten households have been hit by high food prices in the last six months. This shock continues as prices for key commodities spiked over a year from 2021, especially after the global food crises. The major food commodities are rice, wheat, soybean oil, sugar, eggs, potatoes, and red lentils, major food items of regular diet in the country at all levels of income group. The global export import crisis impacted the wheat price to rise again by 71 percent yearly. The non-food inflation rate had slightly decreased to 9.96 percent [1] on December [2]. The next most reported shocks were health expenditures and loss of income or employment.
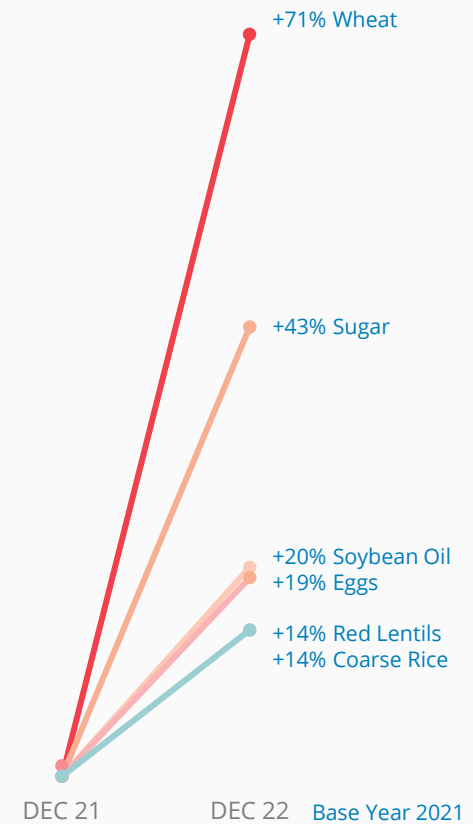

High food prices stand out as the biggest shock

% HOUSEHOLDS AFFECTED BY SHOCKS

High food prices	**68%**
Health expenses	23%
Loss of job/income	23%
High fuel prices	19%
Debt	15%
No shock	13%
Natural hazards	7%
Poor harvest	5%
Rent payment	4%
Electricity/gas cuts	3%

Prices of commodities continued to increase

% PRICE INCREASE YEAR-ON-YEAR*

+71% Wheat

+43% Sugar

+20% Soybean Oil
+19% Eggs

+14% Red Lentils
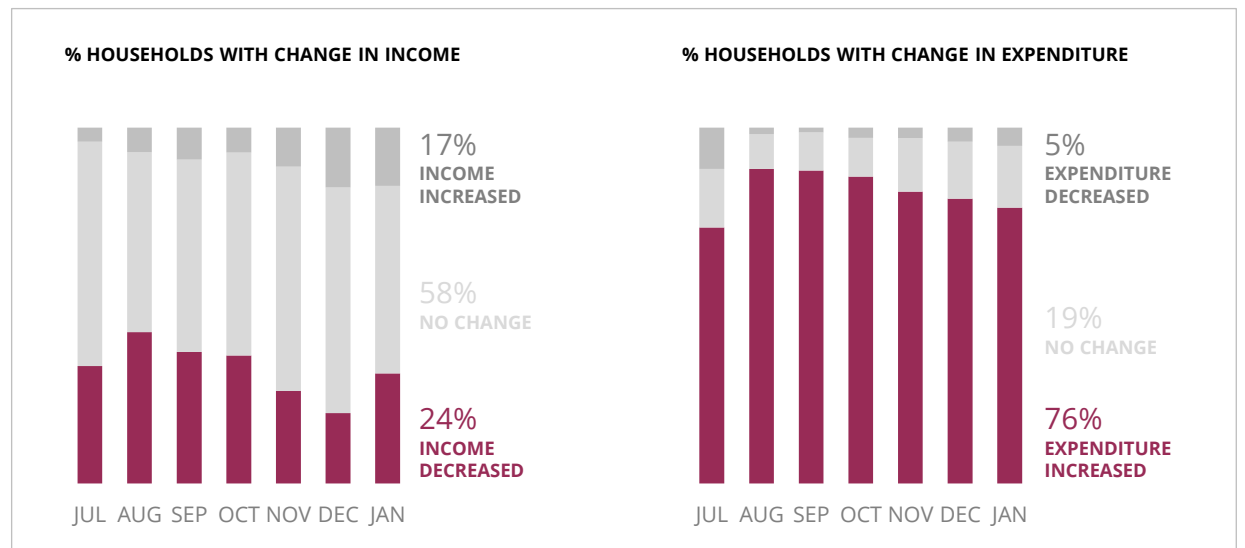+14% Coarse Rice

DEC 21   DEC 22   Base Year 2021

1 Consumer Price Index, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics December 2022. A CPI is an index to measure the monthly change in prices paid by consumers.
2 December inflation rate was compared as the survey took place in the first week of December, and the households recall period was seven days to thirty days.

Households had difficulties with loss of income while expenditures kept rising.

A sharp increase in the households' reporting income loss with increased expenditures. A 24 percent Households reported decreased income in January, which was 17 percent in December. The end of December and early January was a critical time when income loss occurred due to some cold waves in the country and also less agricultural work as Aman rice had already been harvested and vegetable crop cultivation was over. Many daily labourers also reported severe labour market competition with low wages. While expenditure increase was a common concern for all income groups households, loss of income was largely reported by the low-income group. More importantly, the global food crisis created price volatility in most food groups, which continued rising. On the contrary, a 22 percent high-income group, including rich farmers, reported an increase in income amidst fuel and fertilizer cost rise.

More than seven in ten households reported an expenditure increase. In most divisions, most households reported expenditure increases, especially for food, health, and education. On average, 21 percent of households struggled with health issues, with higher treatment expenditures, loss of income due to death and sickness of the earning members, and debts to recover the expenditures.

% HOUSEHOLDS WITH CHANGE IN INCOME

17%
INCOME INCREASED

58%
NO CHANGE

24%
INCOME DECREASED

JUL AUG SEP OCT NOV DEC JAN

% HOUSEHOLDS WITH CHANGE IN EXPENDITURE

5%
EXPENDITURE DECREASED

19%
NO CHANGE

76%
EXPENDITURE INCREASED

JUL AUG SEP OCT NOV DEC JAN

Background and Methodology

The remote food security monitoring system (mVAM) in Bangladesh was launched in July 2022 and collects data via telephone interviews from households across the country. Data was collected from 1,200 respondents across eight divisions since July; thus, the report is entirely based on these surveyed households. The data precision is +-8 percent, with a 95 percent confidence level at the divisional level. The mVAM survey was launched to provide near real-time analytics on food security and essential needs analysis across the country. It allows regular assessment of the impact of shocks, including the developing global food crises, the COVID-19 pandemic, floods and cold waves.

Bangladesh's situation comes in the midst of a global food crisis which has generated a wave of upheaval in markets and which risks exacerbating the situation even further. Globally, **More than 900,000 people worldwide are fighting to survive in famine-like conditions** in 2023. Learn more here.

Other Resources

Q1 MARKET MONITOR 2023

A regular summary of changes in the market, with a focus on recent developments

COUNTRY BRIEFS 2023

A monthly **overview** of WFP's activities in Bangladesh, including situational and operational updates

World Food Programme

Bangladesh