



কোভিড-১৯ লার্নিং, এভিডেন্স
অ্যান্ড রিসার্চ প্রোগ্রাম



Covid-19 Learning, Evidence
and Research Programme

Research Project Summary

Chronicles of hard times in Bangladesh: Durdin-er Diaries

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Expected project outcome

There is evidence that the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in some households becoming newly poor in Bangladesh and some of them are recovering because of support from various forms of social assistance and industries opening. This study will provide an opportunity to understand the kinds of governance channels people whose livelihoods and incomes were severely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic navigated to meet their economic, health, education, and security related needs. We anticipate it will provide policy-relevant findings, particularly in relation to how far formal and informal actors supported these households that are experiencing multiple forms of shocks because of the pandemic. Additionally, the study will identify the strategies these households used to bounce back.

Setting the scene

This project sets out to explore the trajectories of recovery, coping strategies, and lived experience of governance of people whose livelihoods and incomes have been severely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic in Bangladesh – those we term the ‘new poor’¹. Whilst we know something of how households respond to sudden changes in income or unexpected expenditure, the Covid-19 context is different as these changes – or shocks – were experienced collectively by many groups at the same time, and triggered substantial social change, including patterns of migration.

¹ For the purpose of this study, we are identifying the new poor as the people and households that (a) had relatively low but secure and stable incomes prior to the pandemic and were routinely above the poverty-line and (b) saw significant income reductions as a result of social and economic impacts of Covid-19 are now struggling to recover.

Existing evidence suggests that responses to collective shocks are different in nature to 'idiosyncratic' shocks that affect only one household or a limited geography or group. This is particularly the case where informal social protection mechanisms at community level, and sources of income such as remittances, are also disrupted or put under great pressure; likely to be the case as a result of the pandemic.

Methodological approach

The governance diaries approach is a qualitative panel study that identifies lived experiences of governance, public authority, and service provision, and how that plays out over time and in relation to unfolding events or processes – both the life events of the participants involved but also wider events and trends (such as pandemic effects). The approach is based on understanding particular experiences in depth and what explains them, rather than providing widely generalisable findings, so can be undertaken with a relatively small group of participants.

How it works?

The same households are interviewed in a structured way throughout the research period, typically on a monthly basis and public authorities in the areas are interviewed every three-four months. Different research tools are used alongside these open-ended interviews to vary the engagements with researchers and explore specific aspects – for example life histories, institution mapping, or asking participants to respond to hypothetical vignettes or scenarios. Researchers also undertake ethnographic observations during their visits and engagements with participants.

Our research question (and sub questions)

How are the new poor meeting or attempting to meet their governance needs in the context of Covid-19?

- How are they coping with and recovering from sudden changes in income?
- How are their governance needs and interaction with different governance actors and institutions/units changing?
- What patterns of mutual aid and community resilience have emerged, and how are they changing over time?
- How are their engagements with public and private services and sources of support changing (including with digitised public services)?
- How are the impacts of the collective shocks on the new poor and the responses to them different in urban, peri-urban and rural areas?
- How are people's responses and abilities to recover from Covid-induced shock gendered, and with what effects?

Research activities

We will focus on households that **(a)** had relatively low incomes but was stable and secure prior to the pandemic or were relatively wealthy within the low income group and **(b)** saw significant income reductions as a result of social and economic impacts of Covid-19 (which we term the 'new poor').

We will explore the experiences of this group contrasting urban, peri-urban and rural sites in the same division. This will allow reflections on the differences in availability and practices of meeting governance needs and other assistance in the three different sites, and explore their relations with local officials, NGOs, private sector

actors, and informal actors to identify the difference in the governance between these sites.

We will also place a particular focus on women's experiences, both as migrating individuals and where they are heads of households.

The study will start with approximately 16 households in each location (i.e. 48 households as an initial group). We expect some attrition or partial participation, and therefore for at least 30 households to fully participate over the 9-month fieldwork period.

Triangulation: In the urban, peri-urban and rural locations, we will also identify 5 or 6 other participants that play a role in meeting governance needs, providing community leadership, or service provision – for example government officials, informal intermediaries between people and authorities, relevant private sector actors, local politicians, and service-providing NGOs. We will engage with this group every three-four month. Including them will allow some triangulation of household-level findings and allow the different perspectives on the same issues to surface. It should also reveal how the views and experiences of those in positions of authority or with service provision responsibility align or not with those of households.

Stakeholder engagement activities

- **Officials from the Ministry of Social Welfare and Ministry of Local Government as well as FCDO Governance team and civil society actors invited to final dissemination event last quarter of CLEAR**
- **Regular engagement with local government representatives and local administration as well as CSO officials in Khulna through key informant interviews and validation**
- **CLEAR grantees and other academic institutions through CLEAR learning events and collaboration on outputs.**

Primary CLEAR theme: Service delivery, accountability, and governance

Secondary CLEAR themes: Poverty and vulnerability, Protection of rights, Innovations