

A brief Report on
Situation of and MATI's fight against
COVID-19 Pandemic in Bangladesh



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1. Introduction:

The COVID-19 (coronavirus disease) is an ongoing global pandemic caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2). The outbreak was first identified in Wuhan, Hubei, China, in December 2019, and was declared as a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on 11 March 2020. The disease has been spread very rapidly throughout the world, attacked hundreds of thousands of peoples, and caused death of thousands of people. Globally, as of 2:00am CEST, 9 Apr 2020, there have been 1,356,780 confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 79,385 deaths, reported to WHO. It has been emerged as a catastrophe that the world has ever seen after the 2nd World War.

The coronavirus pandemic was confirmed to have spread to Bangladesh on March 2020. The Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) was first reported three known cases on 7 March 2020. In Bangladesh, from Mar 9 to 2:00am CEST, 9 Apr 2020, there have been 218 confirmed cases of COVID-19 with 20 deaths.

It is totally uncertain how much impacts are going to be in place on the life and livelihoods of the people of Bangladesh especially on the poor peoples. But, it is terrible to imagine what will happen if the virus is widespread in the rural area of the country where peoples have almost no awareness and less opportunity or capacity to adopt safety measures, maintain social distancing, staying at home and so on.

In such a situation, along with other government and non-government agencies, MATI Bangladesh has been working in raising peoples' awareness, increasing people's resilience & capacity to combat the catastrophe.

2. Background:

Coronavirus (CoV) is a large family of viruses that can range from common cold coughs to fatal diseases, such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV), Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-CoV) and COVID-19 (COVID-19). Among the many species of coronavirus, 3 species cause disease in the human body, among which SARS-CoV-2 is one. Coronaviruses are zoonotic, meaning they can transmit from animal to human.

The SARS-CoV-2 coronary virus causing COVID-19 is a new species that has not been seen in the human body before. It is an enveloped, positive-sense, single-strand RNA virus.

On December 25, the World Health Organization (WHO) was issued several warnings of atypical pneumonia in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. Later in the first week of January this year, Chinese authorities confirmed that they had detected a new virus and that the virus was a new type of coronavirus. This new virus was temporarily renamed "2019-nCoV".

The virus is currently renamed as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 or SARS-CoV-2. The disease caused by the virus is named Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19).

The outbreak of the disease was declared as Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) on January 1, 2021, and the World Health Organization (COVID-19) was announced as Pandemic on March 8, 2021.

The pandemic has led to severe global socioeconomic disruption, the postponement or cancellation of sporting, religious, and cultural events, and widespread fears of supply shortages which have spurred panic buying. Schools and universities have closed either on a

nationwide or local basis in more than 160 countries, affecting more than 1.5 billion students. Misinformation and conspiracy theories about the virus have spread online and there have been incidents of xenophobia and racism against Chinese and other East and Southeast Asian people and, as the virus spread, more recently towards those of European descent. [1]

3. Corona virus Situation in Bangladesh:

The coronavirus pandemic 2019–20 was confirmed to have spread to Bangladesh on March 2020. The Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) was first reported three known cases on 7 March 2020. In Bangladesh, from Mar 9 to 2:00am CEST, 9 Apr 2020, there have been 218 confirmed cases of COVID-19 with 20 deaths.

The abovementioned figure may indicate that the COVID-19 is not a severe case in Bangladesh yet. But, it is worthy to mention that Bangladesh has severe shortage of testing kits and the testing facility is centralized only into IEDCR at Dhaka. Therefore, the figures mentioned above may not show the real picture at all. Most importantly, in the meantime social transmission of the disease has already occurred almost throughout the country. Therefore, it is totally unpredictable, how much severe would be the situation in coming days, but there is no good news expected ahead.

However, on 22 March, Bangladesh declared a 10-day lock down effective from March 26 to April 4 banning all passenger travel via water, rail, and domestic air routes. Considering the situation, the lockdown has been extended upto 11 April 2020 and then extended upto 15 April once again.

In order to ensure the effectiveness of the lockdown the government deployed the armed forces, including police and army, to ensure that people maintain social distancing and quarantine to prevent spread of the deadly COVID-19.

But, in fact, hundreds of thousands of peoples have travelled to the rural areas from the urban area just after the declaration of lock down. At the same time, another hundreds of thousands of Bangladeshis who used to work in different countries (especially Italy, China, Middle-east etc.) throughout the world have come back to the country under such panic situation.

Moreover, despite the appeal to stay at home huge people are still going out either due to lack of consciousness or in search of their livelihoods because more than 60 million peoples of the country lives from hands to mouth for whom it is very much difficult to survive without earning even for few days.

In such a situation, it really unpredictable what is the real situation and how much people have practically been carrying the corona virus that would be visible within some few days ahead.

According to the recommendation of World Health Organization as well as success case of China, maintaining social distance has said to be the most important technique to combat the spread of corona virus. But, very unfortunately, it is also very difficult to maintain for the country like Bangladesh having the highest population density in the world while the urban area having much more density especially in the capital Dhaka – home to some 18 million

¹https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2019%E2%80%9320_coronavirus_pandemic

people and a city with no less than 23,334 people living per square kilometre. The situation is worst in the slum areas where for example, there is one toilet for every 10 families and even don't have a regular water supply in the toilet.

In such a situation, it is quite unpredictable what country is going to experience in near future in terms of outbreaks of the pandemic. But, it is much easier to predict that the country is going to experience severe economic crisis in near future. Different global and regional reports are forecasting of the global economic recession due to outbreak of corona virus. The country will loss huge GDP as two most sectors, i.e. the readymade garments and external remittance will experience severe impacts. The impacts on more than 60 millions of poor peoples of the country will be immense.

The government has declared a package of 5000 crore only for the garments sector. So, it is good that the labour force of the garment sector might have secured income during the crisis period. But, the peoples living on the informal sector will have a very uncertain life.

4. The sufferings of the effected people:

It is totally uncertain how much impacts are going to be in place on the life and livelihoods of the poor people of Bangladesh. But it is terrible to imagine what will happen if the virus is widespread in the rural area of the country where peoples have almost no awareness and less opportunity or capacity to practice or maintain hygiene, social distancing etc. Along with other government and non-government agencies Mati Bangladesh has been working in raising peoples' awareness.

Considering the situation, the situation the government has also declared total lockdown and deployed military forces along with the police force to ensure that the people remain at home. At this moment peoples are staying home with very few exceptions. The exceptions are not always the case that peoples are coming out to enjoy, but the cases being published in the media reported that despite prohibition again and again, the peoples specially van, rickshaw, auto pullers, small shop owner, small traders are coming out because they are starving at home. Usually, they live from hands to mouth. Therefore, if they can't go out even for a single day, they are bound to starve in most of the cases.

Therefore, if the lockdown continues for more than one week or beyond that it is definitely going to bring huge sufferings for the peoples in general and more than 60 million poor people in particular. Generally speaking, earning of none is secured except the government employees. It would be terrible for the poor and extreme poor peoples who usually live from hands to mouth. If they don't have any income, they will not be able even to manage their food let alone other necessities.

Few Case Studies expressing the Situations:

1. *Ms. Shokhina is a women of about 38 years old. She is the mother of one of MATI's SSP (Student Support Program) student. She works as a maid servant in few houses in Mymensingh town. She lives in a small rented house with her only daughter. Seven years ago she got divorced by her husband. For the last 15 days due to*

lockdown for coronavirus, she could not go to work. "I earn only three to four thousand taka a month. So, I don't have any savings to purchase food and other necessary things. I don't know when I can go to work again and earn money to live". Shokhina said with a tensed face. She even doesn't know whether her masters would engage her in works again.

2. Ms. Laily Megum, lives in Azmotpur village under sadar upazila of Mymensingh district. She is a target people of Organic Agriculture project of MATI. Her Husband's name is Nazmul. Laily has 3 daughters and one son.

Laily Begum's husband Nazmul is a construction worker live hands to mouth working in different construction sites of Mymensingh town on daily basis. But, for last 15 days Nazmul is locked down at home. Nazmul said "the government shut down all public and private offices since March 25 due to the outbreak of Coronavirus. At the same time, all ongoing construction work has been stopped as well. So, we don't have any income for las 15 days. Therefore, we couldn't buy even sufficient foods for the family. We will definitely have to starve if the deadlock continue for next few days" he added taking a deep breth.

He also said "I heard that many govt. is distributing food for the poor. But, unfortunately, no one in our village has received any kind of relief yet". Lialy said, "We have almost spent all the little money we had saved for our future. We badly need support, otherwise we will not survive".

3. Mr. Gafur has a family of 4 members, mother, wife and one son. He lives on the income from a tea stall at Mymensingh town. From the tea stall he has a daily income of BDT 350 on an average by which he used to manage his family expenditures. It becomes very difficult to manage family expenditure if his tea stall remains closed even for single day.

But, very unfortunately, for last 15 days Mr. Gafur doesn't have any income because of the enforced lockdown to combat coronavirus pandemic. Few days ago he got some foods from the local government which is not enough to manage their foods even twice a day.

4. Mr. Jahangir is a day laborer working as a floating laborer in Mymensingh town. He has a family of 6 members having 3 sons, one daughter and wife. He earns on an average BDT.400 per day on the day in which he get work. His elder daughter also earns BDT.1000 per month working as maidservant. They are two earning members in the family and live from hands to mouth with this money.

But, it is a matter of great misfortune that neither he nor his daughter has any income for last 15 days due to lockdown of corona virus. They have fallen into situation of starvation due to having no income. They even didn't get any support from the government or any other agency. They managed their food by borrowing some money from a neighbor. They have been suffering a lot due to lack of income.

These are the common scenario of poor people not only in Mymensingh city& rural area but also for the whole country. The above case studies represent the situation regarding food scarcity only. But, the situation of health, education along with other social aspects will also be worsening if the lockdown continues for longer time.

Such situation is not only for the people of lower income but also the middle-class families who are suffering from hopelessness a lot. Due to shut down of offices & business centers for uncertain time many people are losing jobs or declared job without pay that has thrown the peoples into immense uncertainty and sufferings. If the situation remains for longer time in the country at least 60 million of poor people as well as hundreds of thousands of middle-class people will be thrown into immense misery. The poor people supposed to get at least some food support from the government but the lower-middleclass and even middle class would face more difficulties.

5. Rationale of the Relief & Rehabilitation works:

However, it is certain that the people of Bangladesh especially the poor people are going to experience immense sufferings due to effect of corona virus outbreak though the magnitude of the sufferings is not imaginable yet. If the catastrophe exists for longer time the sufferings will know no bound. If the peoples who live from hands to mouth can't go out for longer time they will definitely have to starve. Regardless of the direct infection by Corona all people will have huge economic loss. Although the government has stated its readiness to feed the effected poor people but the capacity of the government is too limited to support all the effected people let alone the poor management capacity and so on.

Bangladesh has long experience of facing severe natural disasters like flood, cyclone etc. But, none of the disasters affected the whole country and all the people at a time. It is obvious that the effects of corona virus are wide-spreading over almost every people of the country irrespective of profession, class, location etc.

Considering the aforesaid situation and sufferings of the people it is necessary to assist the affected people so that they can and survive first with their basic needs such as food. And then financial support will be highly needed for standing up again for earning their own livelihood.

6. What MATI is doing to combat COVID-19

6.1 Increase awareness & capacity of staff to combat COVID-19

Since emergence of COVID-19 in the world especially in Bangladesh MATI has kept its staff alert, trained and update with new information those came from WHO and GoB for ensuring safety of both staff and the target peoples. MATI ensured safety practices viz. hand sanitizing, wearing mask, maintaining social distance etc. by the staffs at all offices of the organization.



Figure 1: Staff training on COVID-19

6.2 Raise awareness of MATI's Target People on COVID-19

The trained staffs of MATI Bangladesh disseminated the messages on the safety measures for COVID-19 to almost its entire target people both at rural level and urban slums at Mymensingh town. For this MATI arranged 10 community training sessions with participation of around 250 peoples in the villages and urban slum areas and then the participants of the sessions disseminated the messages in their respective communities approximately to 5000 peoples.



Figure 2: Awareness raising of community people on COVID-19

6.3 Raise awareness for mass people on COVID-19

Beyond the target people, MATI tried to raise awareness of mass people in following two ways:

a. Online campaign:

The information on COVID-19 given by the WHO and the respective authorities of the GoB were disseminated regularly by opening new pages in social media sites and the website of MATI for raising awareness of the mass people.

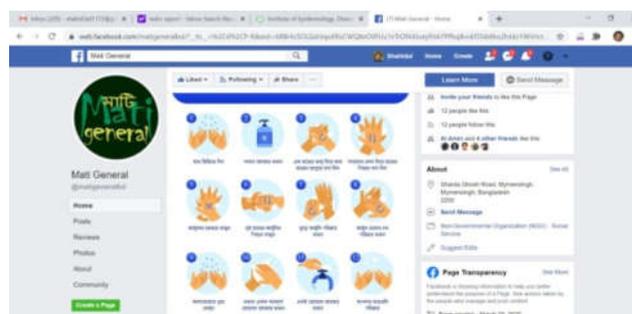


Figure 3: Mati's Facebook page for online campaign on COVID-19

The Social media pages in facebook, linkedin, twitter, youtube and website, links below:

<https://www.facebook.com/matigeneralbd/>
<https://www.linkedin.com/in/mati-general-66ab371a5/>
<https://twitter.com/MatiGeneral/>
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCk6UoSc2bKfoMv9W19uNIPg?view_as=subscriber
<https://www.matibangladesh.org/>

b. Setting banner in public places:

For raising awareness of the mass people MATI set 10 infographic banners in the most busy and important public places of Mymensingh town through which huge number of people got information on COVID-19 and how to combat it.



Figure 4: Info-graphic Banner set in public places of Mymensingh town for the mass people.

6.4 Distribution of Safety materials for COVID-19

The target people of MATI who are mainly extreme poor and poor people, seldom afford to purchase the safety materials like mask and hand sanitizers or soap for keeping them safe from Coronavirus. Therefore, by means of very limited financial capacity, MATI distributed 2000 masks and 2000 soaps to the poor people of its working area.



Figure 5: Safety materials (mask & soap) distributed to beneficiaries of MATI

MATI also distributed 500 masks to the working peoples on the streets such as rickshaw-van-auto pullers, small traders, daily laborers etc. on the streets of Mymensingh town who are bound to come out for work to earn their livelihood.



Figure 6: Safety materials distributed to street working people in Mymensingh town

MATI also set hand washing facilities on the streets in 3 important places of Mymensingh town for the poor street peoples so that they can keep them safe from coronavirus.

6.5 Capacity building of MATI to combat COVID-19

COVID-19 has already declared pandemic by WHO. Although not expected at all, it is predicted that COVID-19 will create havoc worldwide. The country like Bangladesh will suffer a lot to face the catastrophe due to lack of enough capacity.



Therefore, in order to work shoulder to



shoulder with WHO and the GoB in combating COVID-19 MATI has been preparing itself by developing its capacity in emergency response.

MATI has already achieved two certificates one from the WHO and the other one from GoB as follows.

6.6 Emergency Food Support:

Mati always try its level best for standing beside the vulnerable people in any disaster. At corona pandemic, MATI undertaken emergency relief programs among the helpless beneficiaries and also the people in the vicinity of MATI head office who have suddenly lost their job and suffering from food crisis. According to a quick survey Mati has prepared a list of 1,124 families who badly needed the emergency relief. Mati has managed the emergency food packet as quick as possible from Mati's own fund. Each Emergency food packet contained 10 kg of rice, 2 kg potatoes, 1 kg lentil and 0.5 liter oil. Only the women received the relief items from MATI. Mati has distributed emergency food packet to 306 families in 6 urban slum areas namely Sankipara, Binpara, Shaheb quarter, Katakhal, Lichu bagan, and Madrasa quarter of Mymensingh city. Besides, 302 families from 8 villages of Mymensingh district namely Azmotpur, Harguzipar, Uttar Daphnia, Kalikapur, Hatti, Borobiler par, Betkanda, Teker vita and a total of 516 families from 7 villages of Sherpur district received the emergency food support from MATI.



Emergency food support to the COVID-19 effected poor women by MATI



Conclusion:

The Crisis is a turning point in history. The empty streets will fill again, and we will leave our TV screen with relief of less tension. But the world will be different from how we imagined it in what we thought were normal times.

Due to excessive use of our limit of possibility, we in the world, reached unbelievable destination, give the possibility to everyone, with cheaper possibility of gaining imagination of having everything.

The crisis through which we are living can be a turning point in history.

The era of peak globalization is over. An economic system that depends on worldwide production and long supply chains is modified into one that will be less interconnected.

A way of life driven by continuous mobility is shuddering to a stop.

Our lives are going to be more physically constrained.

A more fragmented world is coming into being that in some ways may be more resilient than before.

But nevertheless, we might need to realize that life is interrelated.

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