



SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE AND PRODUCTION LINKED TO IMPROVED NUTRITION STATUS, RESILIENCE, AND GENDER EQUITY

COVID-19 ASSESSMENT BRIEF

SAPLING OVERVIEW

The USAID-funded Sustainable Agriculture and Production Linked to Improved Nutrition Status, Resilience and Gender Equity (SAPLING), Resilience Food Security Activity has engaged over 57,000 households in Bandarban District of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) region of Bangladesh since October 2015. SAPLING focuses on improving gender-equitable food security, nutrition, and resilience of vulnerable households.

COVID-19 CONTEXT

To mitigate a rise in COVID-19 cases, the Government of Bangladesh instituted a nationwide COVID-19 lockdown from March 26-May 30, 2020, which persisted through mid-July in two of SAPLING's sub-districts.

There was another nationwide lockdown from April 5-August 10, 2021. During this time, transportation in SAPLING working areas was extremely limited, markets and smaller shops were closed or their hours heavily restricted, and day labor opportunities were significantly reduced.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND METHODS

To quantify impacts on participants and assess a six-month change in impact, SAPLING conducted two representative surveys of participant households in September-October 2020 and June-July 2021.

The survey results provide up-to-date information on impact and status of recovery. The time lapse allowed us to see continued impacts of COVID-19 and mitigation efforts on the SAPLING participant population in the last fiscal year of the project.

To more fully understand the compounding impacts on participant households, the second survey included additional questions on food security and perceived stress.



KEY RESULTS

In September-October 2020, 97% of households reported being impacted and in June-July 2021, 99% reported being impacted. In both surveys less than 1% of households had a member who had been sick with COVID-19.

Nearly all participants reported their livelihoods and income continue to be impacted. This was 98% in September/October 2020, and 99% in June/July 2021

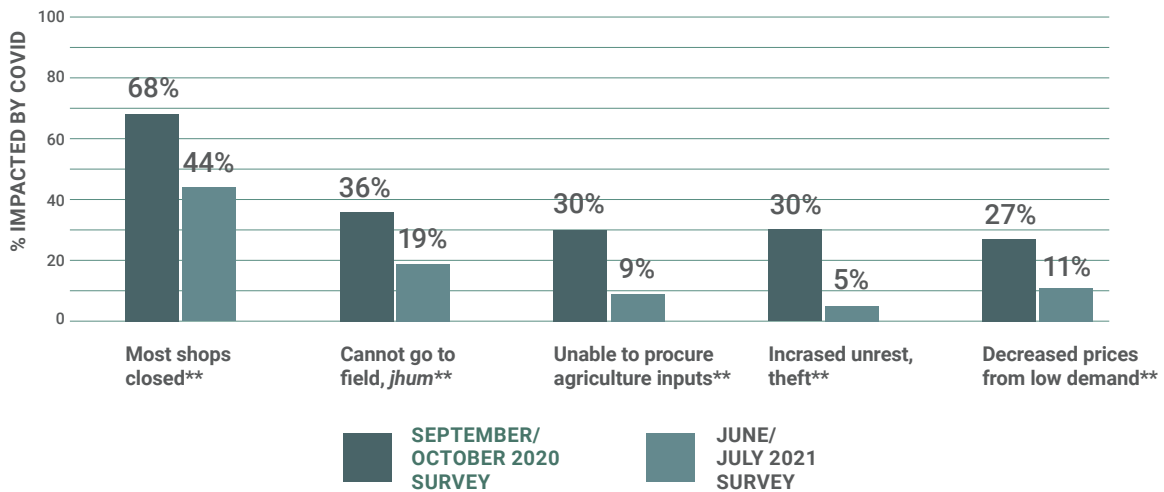
Mental health has been negatively impacted by the pandemic, with 71% of participants experiencing moderate perceived stress in June/July 2021

A shift in how households generate income has happened over the six months between surveys.

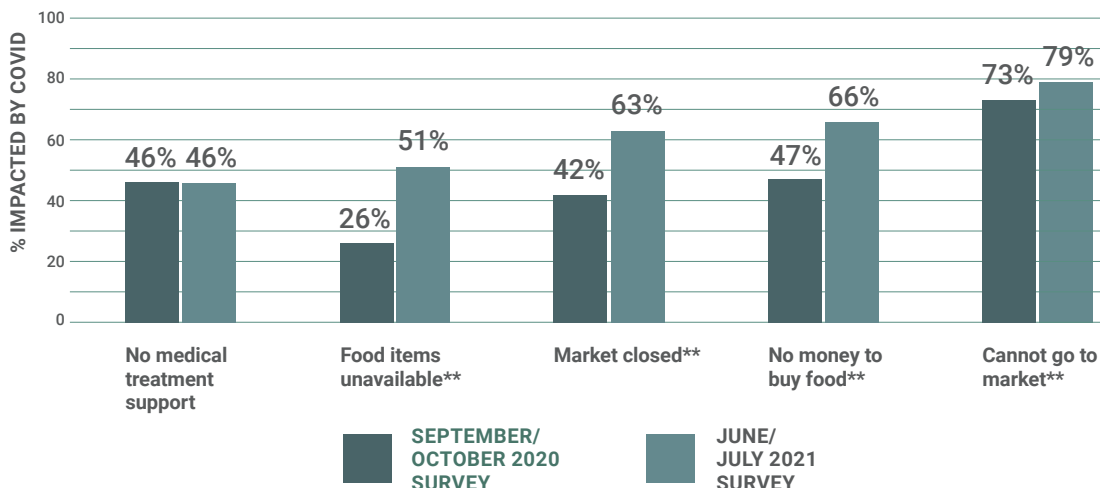
- *Jhum* and paddy farming reduced
- Agriculture day work and unskilled day labor increase
- Poultry/livestock rearing and non-paddy farming increased
- Vegetable cultivation remained the same
- More houses also report multiple sources of income. These income generating trends vary by sub-district

Most participants face increased debt, decreased savings, and limited funds for medical expenses in the midst of a health crisis

PROBLEMS HOUSEHOLDS EXPERIENCED: DECREASE AFTER SIX MONTHS

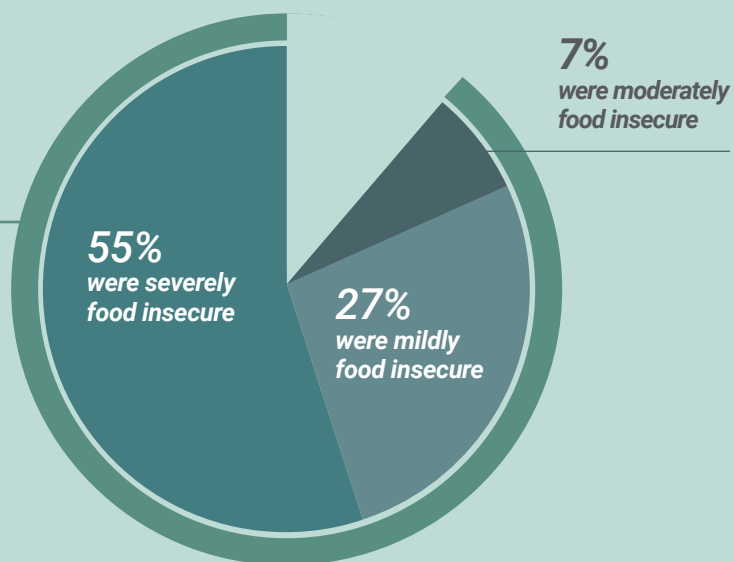


PROBLEMS HOUSEHOLDS EXPERIENCED: NO CHANGE OR INCREASE AFTER SIX MONTHS



At the time of the June/July-2021 survey

89% of households were food insecure



ACCESS TO FOOD IN JUNE/JULY 2021

- Nearly all surveyed participants report needing food aid
- Half said food items were unavailable, two-thirds reported no money to buy food and closed markets
- Three-quarters said they could not go to the market
- Four staples – coarse rice, oil, pulses, and potatoes - have become more accessible over the six-month period, but have risen in cost

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2020 SURVEY

Participants primarily struggled with the closure of shops and lack of transport

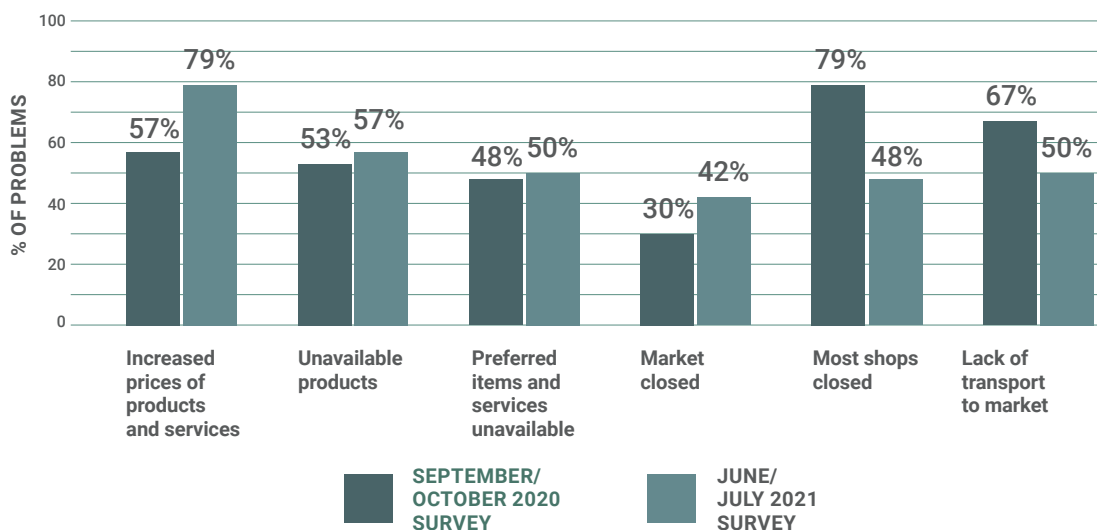
Participants in all sub-districts reported continued inability to access markets and shops

JUNE/JULY 2021 SURVEY

Six months later, inability to go to market, restrictions on movement, increased prices, and unavailable products are the most commonly experienced consequences.

Six months later participants in all sub-districts still reported continued inability to access markets and shops

ACCESS TO MARKETS, PRODUCTS AND SERVICES SIX-MONTH CHANGE



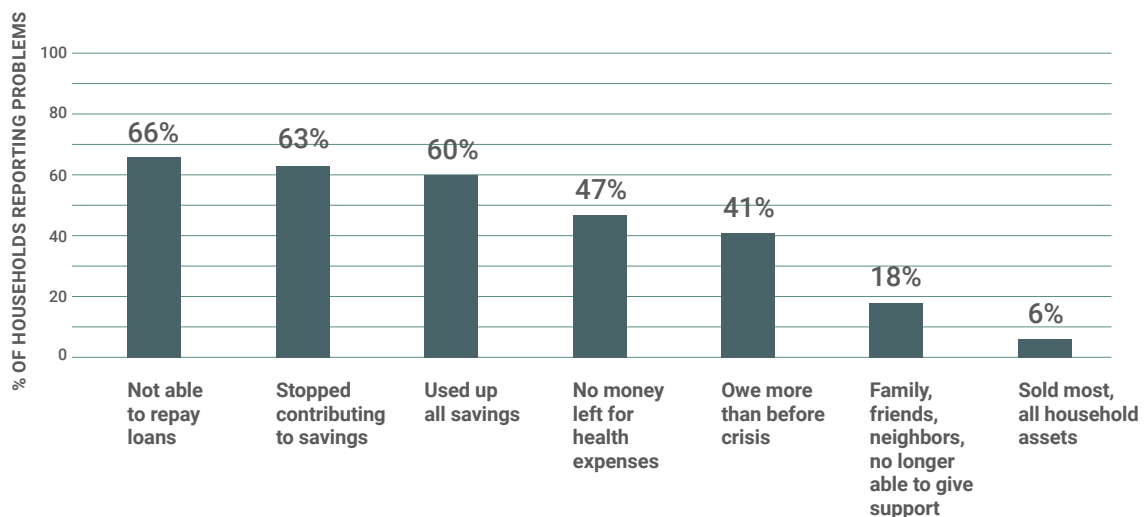
COPING STRATEGIES

- The most commonly reported financial coping strategies in June/July 2021 are borrowing money, purchasing food on credit, and spending savings, and over one-third have reduced health expenditures
- The most severe coping strategies—reducing meal size and number of meals or restricting adult consumption to enable small children to eat—were being practiced by at least 1 in 5 households a minimum of 1-2 days per week in September/October 2020 and June/July-2021 – *indicating at least six months of sustained reduced food intake*

● By June/July 2021



PROLONGED IMPACT OF HOUSEHOLD COPING STRATEGIES OVER SIX MONTHS



LIMITATIONS

The sampling frame was limited to only participants with access to mobile phones and lived in areas that had reliable network access at the time of the survey.

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The two surveys conducted by SAPLING found households were experiencing worsening effects over the six-month period. The protracted COVID-19 crisis and response measures have severely limited access to income and financial resources, food, and healthcare, plunging households into food insecurity and negatively impacting resilient livelihoods and mental health.