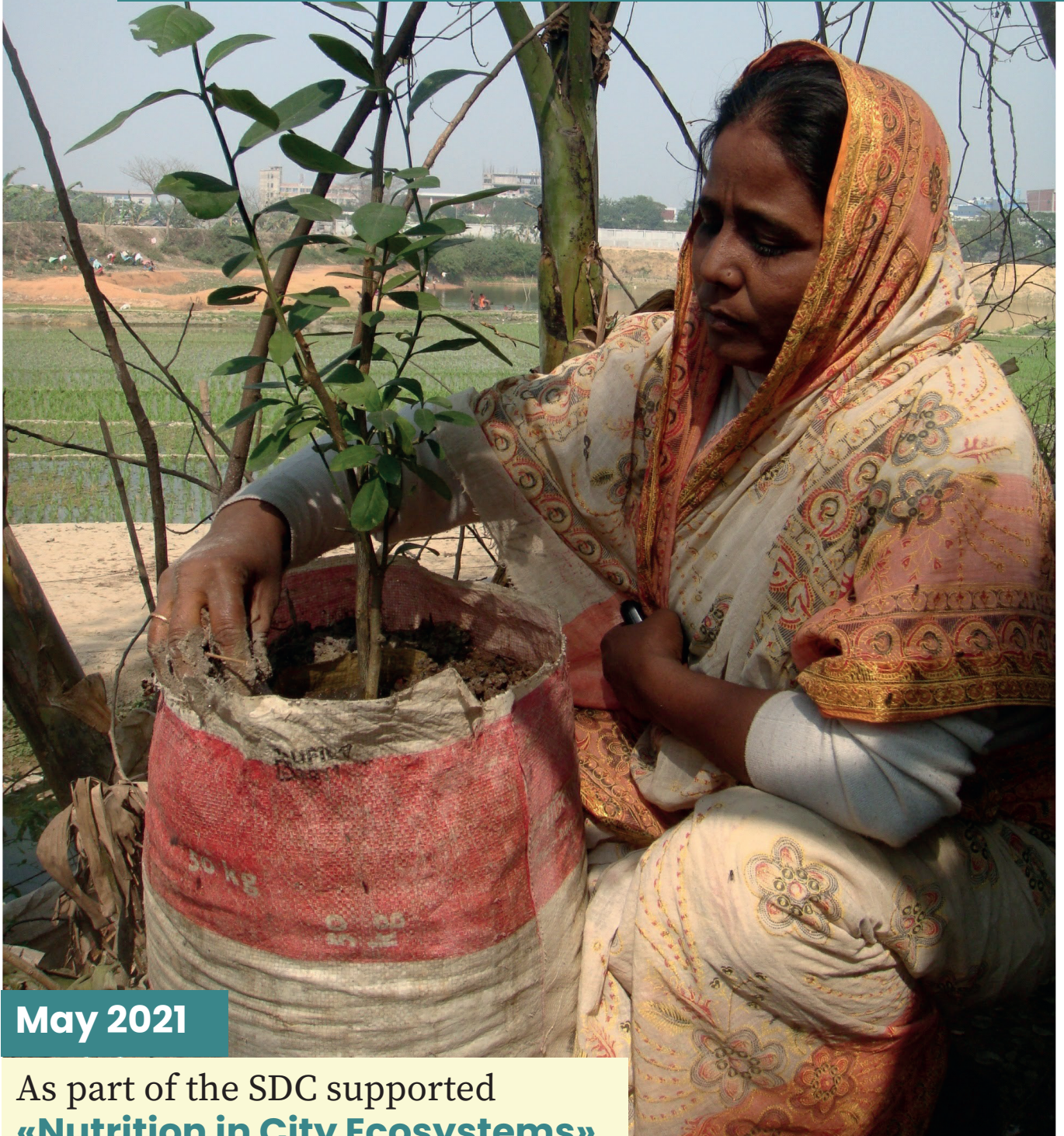


City Overview on *Food and Nutrition of:*

1

Dinajpur City, Bangladesh




May 2021

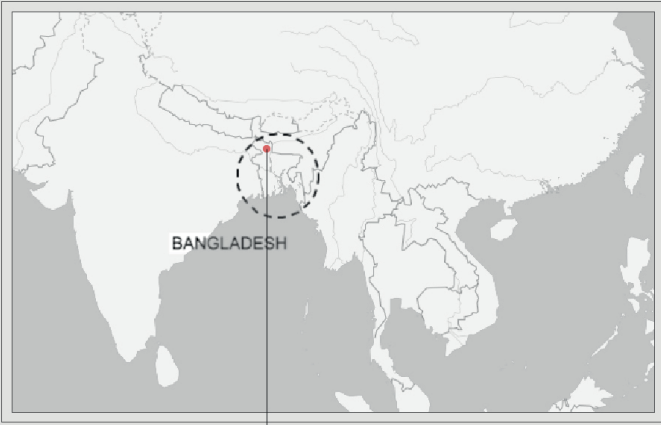
As part of the SDC supported
«**Nutrition in City Ecosystems**»
(NICE) project

Woman planting a lemon tree in
an urban garden, Dinajpur City



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Dinajpur District



Dinajpur City-region

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Dinajpur City is the largest unit in its district (known in Bangla as a Zila). Dinajpur District forms part of the Rangpur Division, one of eight in Bangladesh. The local climate is tropical. Average daily temperatures for much of the year are around 30°C, and about 16°C from November to February.

Dinajpur City has a population of about **300,000** (2021) living on **24.5 km²**¹. The local language is Bangla. Santals and Oroa form major ethnic communities. In 2011, about 80% of the population was Muslim, 15% Hindu and 5% others².

Health and hygiene

Up-to-date data on health are lacking at city level. However, a local Sanitary Inspector and a Deputy Program Manager gave us the following estimates³:

Malnutrition	Diabetes	Hypertension	Obesity
30-40%	+/- 50%	+/- 50%	15-20%
of women and children	of the population > 40 years	of the population > 40 years	of children

Water, Sanitation, Hygiene ('WASH') in Dinajpur City³

- **There are 500 tube wells**
- **There is no water treatment plant**
- **85% of the population has access to sanitary latrines**
- **Refuse is dumped at landfill sites**
- **Some decomposed waste is used as organic fertilizer**



Vegetable trader with cabbage, cauliflower, potato, tomato, country bean and chillis, Dinajpur City

From farm to fork

Production

Local people often describe Dinajpur agriculture as “paddy piled up high, sheds full of cows, ponds brimming with fish”. **Large quantities of food consumed in Dinajpur City comes from the surrounding area.** This includes pulses, vegetables, chicken, fish, processed food and milk. Katharivog is the main local rice variety, considered one of the best in Bangladesh. Other crops include wheat, maize, potato, aubergine and tomato. Dinajpur lychees are also considered the best in Bangladesh. Local farmers grow mangoes, bananas and other seasonal fruits too. For field crops, farmers typically use a boro rice/fallow/t.aman rice rotation³.

About 1,250 farmers grow crops in the actual city area.

Approximately 85% of them are men. They grow rice on about 300 hectares (ha), with another 150 ha of maize and vegetables. Farm sizes range from about 0.02 to 1 ha. Total annual production is some 2,200 metric tonnes of rice, 1,500 of maize and 1,200 of vegetables³.

Neighbouring districts tend to supply particular crops. Tomatoes typically come from Bogra and Chapinawabgani, carrots and lemons from Pabna, while Jashor farmers supply aubergine and cauliflowers. Imported sugar, spices, onions, exotic fruits and powdered milk come via Dhaka or the port of Chittagong³.

Processing

In 2013 Dinajpur sub-district had 495 food processors.

Roughly one-third of these were in urban areas, the rest in the countryside. The great majority operated with either fuel or power, but hand processing was still widely represented. The output is almost entirely for local consumption⁴.



Street winter food: rice flour oil cake and steamed rice cake, Dinajpur City

Purchase and consumption

Dinajpur City has informal and formal markets and supermarkets. These include the following “Bazars”: Bahadur (wholesale/retail), Pulhat (primary/retail), Rail Bazar Hat (wholesale), and, for retail only, New Town, Ramnagar and Chalk. Market sizes vary. Bahadur Bazar covers 50 ha, Pulhat has 40 ha of roofed facilities and a further 40 ha in the open air⁵.

People in Dinajpur usually eat at home. Some working people and travelers eat in restaurants. Students and some office employees also eat in canteens or fast food outlets³.

Transport

In Dinajpur City, food distributors use motorized and non-motorized vehicles (e.g. bicycles), as well as rail and water transport. **Rickshaws, easy-bike and small pickups ensure short-distance transportation.** Costs are low. Dinajpur City has about 160 km of roads, almost entirely paved³.

“Paddy piled up high,
sheds full of cows,
ponds brimming with
fish”

Women, youth and other vulnerable groups in the city–region food systems

Employment and training

Women are mostly involved at the **post-harvest stage: sorting, grading, cleaning and preserving**. According to the Metropolitan Agricultural Officer, women and young people are also **engaged in kitchen and rooftop gardening**.

The Department of Youth Development, the Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service Organisation (RDRS) and the Eco-Social Development Organisation (ESDO) highlight how greater access to training and assets could improve the position of women and young people involved in the food value chain. Training and assets include: technical knowledge and market information, business planning, finance, mechanization, storage facilities, quality inputs, and the supply of new varieties³.

Shelter and amenities

A city consultation has confirmed that **42% of the population lives in poverty and deprivation**. Many people live in the 69 slums spread across the city and these informal settlements make up 35% of habitation in Dinajpur City¹. Women and young people make up more than half of the population in these slums³.

WASH (water, sanitation, hygiene) conditions in these informal settlements are poor, with limited access to toilets (one toilet for 8–9 households) and weak drainage systems. A government social safety net programme provides food to vulnerable people via a local storage depot³.

Access to support, assets and loans

Women and young people often have **less autonomy** when it comes to accessing loans and other resources. The male head of a family commonly has charge of any assets, and may even control the income earned by the women of the household⁵.

Another factor hampering access to assets is the **Law of Inheritance under Shariah Law** (Muslim Law), where females and young people inherit less (and, in some cases, nothing) in comparison to men⁶.

In light of these obstacles, the city consultation has called for the provision of increased access to finance for women and young people in order to leverage capacity-building¹, although **there are currently some ways to retrieve access**.

At the local level, there are several programs involving training and financial aid: the Department of Youth Development arranges training for young people in animal husbandry, poultry, fisheries and other agricultural affairs. It also offers short-term (6–12 months) employment opportunities with a monthly salary ranging from 4 to 8 thousand taka (40–80 euro). They can also apply for a loan of taka 50,000–100,000 (approximately 500–1000 euros). Some government-owned banks, such as the Sonali Bank, RAKUB, or the Karmasangsthan Bank for employment generation, also offer loans. Additionally, some local service providers offer young people in the community access to resources such as agro-machinery, agent banking, and agro-inputs shops³.

The Women Affairs Department trains women between the ages of 16 and 45 in skills that are useful for a range of occupations, from the clothing industry to working in computers.

Under the Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) policy, **widowed, divorced, and/or elderly women are provided with 30 kg of food grains per month** for a period of two years³.



Tomato growing fields,
Dinajpur City

Policies, governance, advocacy for food and nutrition

Policy framework

Bangladesh has a unitary and parliamentary form of government. No separate agricultural policy exists at the city-region level. The Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) under the Ministry of Agriculture is the largest public-extension-service provider; its network extends across the whole country. DAE keeps farmers and other stakeholders updated about modern agricultural trends and methods, adding value to public life by contributing to increased farm production, the improvement of livelihoods, and ensuring food and nutritional security.

Promoting nutrition

The National Dietary Guidelines of Bangladesh 2015 and the National Nutrition Services (NNS) under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) are the sources of communication materials for promoting food- and nutrition-related data. National Nutrition Services (NNS) is one of the Operation Plans (OP) of the Health Population and Nutrition Sector Development Program (HPNSDP) of the MoHFW. In addition, a project –‘Meeting the Undernutrition Challenge (MUCH)’– has been jointly implemented by the FAO and the Government of Bangladesh³.

National policies

Supply-related policies:

Both the **National Agriculture Extension Policy (2015)** and the **National Agriculture Policy (2018)** aim to create an enabling environment for sustainable agriculture growth, reducing poverty and ensuring food security through increased crop production and employment opportunities. There are no specific policies regarding family farming, nor agroecological or organic production.

Demand-related policies:

The **National Nutrition Policy (2015)**, the **National Food and Nutrition Security Policy (NFNSP)** for 2020-2030, and the **Bangladesh National Plan of Action for Nutrition (NPAN2)** for 2016–2025, aim to establish nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions to improve the nutritional status of all citizens and reduce all forms of malnutrition. The intention is to use multi-sectoral strategies focusing particularly on children, adolescent girls, and pregnant and breast-feeding women.

Lack of gender & equality in local governance

During consultation on the city of Dinajpur, stakeholders raised the issue of the **existing mismatch between policies and field activities**. In a policy dating back to 1977 (Section 126 (e) of the Pourashava Ordinance), the city authority is mandated “to adopt such measures as may be described for the promotion of the welfare of backward classes, families of the persons serving in the armed forces, and women and children”. However, in the local government act (2009) which describes the activities (governance) of the Pourashava, **the promotion of women and children is called an “optional” activity and there is no mention of marginalised communities**. The central government initiatives ensure the city has a health and immunisation program, but a special focus on gender and equality is lacking¹.



City consultation for NICE,
January 28th 2021,
Dinajpur City

Shocks to the food systems

The impacts of climate change

Climate change has the potential to affect food production and the importation of food supplies into the city. **The region is vulnerable to mists and cold weather, and heavy rains during the monsoon season can cause flooding in low-lying areas, especially near river banks³.**

COVID-19

The outbreak of coronavirus has severely disrupted food value chains, affecting Bangladeshi farmers in both crop and non-crop agriculture. The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) has learnt that **nearly all farmers (95%) sold boro paddy to traders in the immediate months after the outbreak**, despite the price being relatively low at this time. The reason for this may have been the pressure to pay back loans.

Furthermore, a lack of agricultural inputs has led to a corresponding increase in price. Along with this, the pandemic has seen a scarcity of labour at harvest-time with 44% of boro farmers reporting the need to pay higher wages in 2020 than the year before⁷. **Dinajpur City has also experienced a scarcity of labour for harvesting crops in the first lockdown mid-March 2020, next to a lack of farming inputs increasing prices of these too³.**



City street-food stand offering Fuchka and Chotpoti, Dinajpur City

Final notes

The Dinajpur City Consultation, held on 28th of January 2021, with government officials, representatives of the civil society, youth, business, press, media and cultural organizations as invitees, provided the following outcomes¹.

Main issues/priorities

- **Nutrition** – include all urban slums in health and nutrition facilities.
- **Better coordination** – promote among the activities, projects, and institutes that advocate good nutrition, and activate the District Food Committee.
- **Awareness creation** – engage and involve adolescents to understand the meaning of nutrition and make healthy food choices.
- **Supply chain** – promote agri-entrepreneurship (women and men).
- **Production** – ensure safe food production in rural and adjacent urban areas and develop markets.

Drivers for a nutrition vital city

- **Improve the functioning of the District Nutrition Coordination Committee** – in order to monitor nutrition-related actions mandated by the Ministry of Health.
- **Engagement of young people and SMEs** (including e-commerce) – to encourage innovation and shorten nutrition supply chains.
- **Develop urban agriculture, vertical farming, etc.** – rapid urbanisation puts pressure on arable land. Innovative responses to this problem include: urban growing (especially vertical farming), hydroponics, aquaponics, and biofloc technology. These developments create jobs for poor women and vulnerable groups while strengthening the nutrition value chain.
- **Promote capacity-building and access to finance for young people and poor women and girls** – to boost agri-entrepreneurship and make a significant contribution to the supply chain.



Selling vegetables on the market in Dinajpur City

Bottlenecks for a nutrition vital city

- **Lack of coordination** – key stakeholders, especially government officials, need to work together more effectively to enable smooth implementation.
- **Insufficient budget allocation** – the budget required to establish farmers' hubs and better support urban agriculture is currently insufficient. The Deputy Commissioner of Dinajpur may have a key role to play in encouraging local government to create a division dedicated to facilitating and increasing the budget for such activities.
- **Lack of awareness of nutrition** – irrespective of social class and education, people generally have a poor understanding of nutrition.
- **Supply chain obstacles** – intermediaries along the supply chain, such as marketplace leaseholders, transport associations, and syndicates of influential actors, may impede a supply chain through seeking rent rises, degrading standards through the addition of preservatives and other carcinogens, and facilitating a rise in the market price of products.
- **Lack of employment opportunities** – if poor urban women and girls and young people cannot find acceptable employment, they are exposed to greater poverty and may therefore be less able to access suitable nutrition.
- **Lack of access to market and customers** – growers do not have direct access to markets and customers in the city.
- **A parochial/outdated mindset** – there are serious inadequacies in the way we think of project formulation and implementation. A majority of stakeholders are dubious about the operation and outcome of future projects. This mistrust and lack of understanding may jeopardise desired results. We must be prepared to “think out of the box” while gathering, processing and analysing data.
- **Social inequality** – discrimination, injustice and class divisions are still rampant. Vested interests and corruption mar the headway that can be gained by poor, marginalised and vulnerable groups. In one example, savings belonging to women involved in a UN urban poverty project were stolen with the abetment of project staff and local individuals with influence.

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NICE (Nutrition is City Ecosystems) is an SDC co-financed project implemented by a Swiss public-private partnership.

Endorsed by the World Food Programme (WFP), this project aims to connect the supply and demand side of food systems, engage women and your people - including through social business models - and build local governance capacity initially in two secondary cities each in Bangladesh, Kenya and Rwanda. Emphasis is placed on increasing the production and demand for local, agroecological, diverse and affordable foods, and on making food value chains more nutrition-focused so they contribute to better health, multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral collaboration brings together city authorities, local businesses and civil society, creating a dynamic network of city learning hubs for dissemination and scaling-up.

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Limitations

The majority of sources stem from the context assessment and city consultation processes that were arranged during the NICE project inception phase (January-May 2021). These sources are largely qualitative and have been put forward by city leadership, local stakeholders, and consultants to the project.

We acknowledge the efforts of all those that have contributed to this City Overview. The information was consolidated by Sophie van den Berg under the oversight of Dominique Barjolle from ETH-Zürich Group of Sustainable Agroecosystems, Department of Environmental Systems Science. Any views and ideas expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not imply or reflect the opinion of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation or the NICE consortium member institutions. We invite you to share this information freely. The suggested citation is Nutrition in City Ecosystems (NICE) Project City Overview Series (2021).