

City Overview on *Food and Nutrition of:*

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Rangpur City, Bangladesh



May 2021

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

Transporting winter vegetables to the city market, Rangpur City



NUTRITION *in*
CITY ECOSYSTEMS



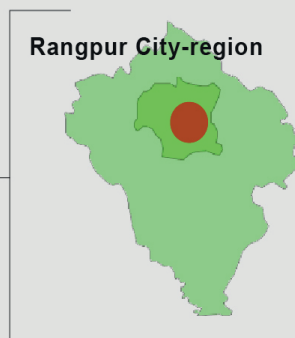
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Rangpur District



Rangpur City-region

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Rangpur City, situated on the banks of the Ghaghat River, is the governmental and commercial hub of Rangpur District (known in Bangla as Zila). The **local climate is one of high humidity with plenty of rainfall**. Temperatures range from about 10°C in January to around 30°C in the hottest season (early April to July)¹.

Rangpur City has a **population of nearly 800,000** (2021) living on 205.76 km². The population is growing at an annual average rate of 1.82%². The local language is Bangla (Rangpuri dialect). In Rangpur District nearly 90% of the population is Muslim. Of the remaining 10%, nearly all are Hindu, along with a small number of Christian and other religions¹.

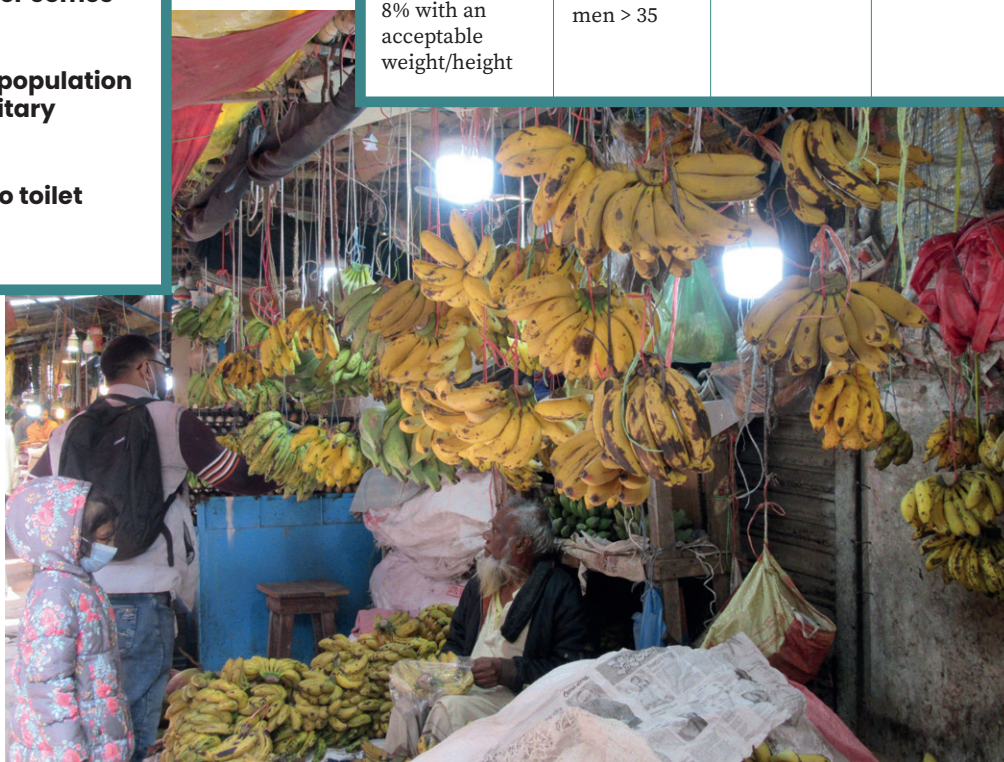
Health and hygiene

Up-to-date data on health are lacking at city level. However, the Bangladesh Demographic Health Survey of 2017–2018 gave us the following estimates of the Rangpur Division⁴:

Malnutrition in children < 5 years	Diabetes	Hypertension	Obesity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 55% receive a diet below minimum nutritional levels • Over 70% are small for their age • Over 80% are underweight, with fewer than 8% with an acceptable weight/height 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2% of women aged 18-34 • Over 2.5% of men aged 18-34 • Nearly 8% of women > 35 • Over 8% of men > 35 	Nearly 32% of adult women	5% of adult women

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

- **Most drinking water comes from tube wells**
- **Nearly 60% of the population has access to sanitary latrines**
- **Over 15.5% have no toilet facilities**



Fruit shop selling bananas, Rangpur City

From farm to fork

Production

Annual food production in Rangpur City totals 80,003 metric tons. Most of the food consumed comes from the surrounding area, with about **35-40% produced on land in the city-region** itself. The main crops are wheat, potato, rice (largely boro) and maize. Local people farm cattle, buffalo, goat, chicken, and fish. Farmers grow a wide range of fruits, including mangoes, blackberries, jackfruit, bananas, coconut, oranges, litchi, dates, guava, wood apples, and palms. Exports include paddy rice, potatoes, wheat, jute, ginger, tobacco, mangoes, and vegetables³.

Within Rangpur City, fruits are grown on one hectare of land while four hectares is managed for organic food production. Among both producers and consumers, awareness of local organic produce and biodiversity is, however, currently low. There is no certification for organic food, neither is there an official separate market or much availability in the region³.

Neighbouring districts supply about half of Rangpur City's rice, as well as fresh foods such as fruit and vegetables, chicken, and milk. Imported sugar, pulses, onions, spices, and processed milk products (powdered and condensed) come via Dhaka or the port of Chittagong³.

Although the economy of Rangpur City is largely based on non-farm activities, **76% of families in Rangpur District are dependent on agriculture.** Most farms in Rangpur City are medium-sized, averaging less than a hectare. The soil is mainly alluvial. The extended scope for gardening is 5,000-6,000 hectares. The vast majority of the 35,000 farmers of Rangpur City are male³.

Average household budget allocation for food: 40-45% in the district (2021)³

Transport

In Rangpur City, food distributors use motorized and non-motorized vehicles (e.g. bicycles) with large buyers often hiring rental vehicles. **Rangpur City has about 1,400 kilometres of roads and rail transport is also available.** For short-distance transportation, buyers use vehicles such as an easy-bike, pick-up van, or rickshaw².



Woman with dog in Rangpur City

Processing

Rangpur City has a number of small and medium food-processing plants, both industrialized and manual. In 2011 Rangpur sub-district had **440 food manufacturing establishments.** Roughly 75% 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 consumption⁵. Examples of processing plants include Northern Foods Limited Bangladesh, Rangpur Dairy & Food Products Limited and Rangpur Oil Power Plant³.

Purchase and consumption

Most people in Rangpur City obtain their food from local sources. Wet markets supply fresh meats and grocery items. Consumers also purchase food from mobile food and roadside sellers. Social safety net programmes support the distribution of food to vulnerable people via local storage depots.

People in Rangpur usually eat at home. Meals often consist of curries made from various meats or vegetables and dal. **Festive occasions call for rich foods such as biryani and pulao alongside roast chicken and kebabs, with traditional sweets and desserts.** Some working people and travelers eat in restaurants. Students and some office employees also eat in canteens or fast-food outlets. Online food delivery services are beginning to impact how city dwellers access and consume food³.

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

Employment and training

Women in agriculture are mostly engaged at the **post-harvest stage** and young people, especially the educated, are **lacking interest in agriculture overall**. They are often more interested in pursuing non-farming employment in business and IT. They are sometimes engaged as freelancers and entrepreneurs, perhaps involved in small businesses such as mobile phone repair services³.

For them to engage in food production and commerce, women and young people require access to a range of skills and support, including: **technical knowledge and market information, business planning, finance, mechanization, storage facilities, and quality inputs**³.

Access to support, assets and loans

Although working women have some control over their income, the majority of families in Rangpur City have a **male head who controls decisions regarding the use and selling of resources**.

The young children of working women are mostly cared for by family members. The Women Affairs Department runs one childcare centre, with a capacity for 80 children³.



Nutrition session with mothers and children in Rangpur City

1 out of 8 people live in the slums of Rangpur City³

Shelter and amenities

The **rate of poverty in Rangpur City is 43% (2021)**⁶ with over 100,000 people living in the 57 slums found throughout the city. WASH (water, sanitation, hygiene) conditions in these informal settlements are poor, with **7–8 households often sharing a single, unsanitary toilet**. Apart from these informal settlements, there are also several more “pockets of poverty” within the city, settled by various marginalised groups. These include the communities of Sadar Hospital and the Hanuman Tola sweepers, as well as Santal and Bihari communities².

Farmers’ Hubs

A Farmers’ Hub (FH) acts as a centralized, commercially viable “one-stop service solutions” provider to smallholders. It brings together people involved in agricultural production, linking farmers with bulk-buyers, processors, and exporters for product-sourcing. It also offers machinery and equipment rental services. An FH contributes to increased efficiency in the agricultural sector by providing a space for the sharing and dissemination of knowledge about modern technologies and the effective use of resources. There are six FHs in and around the city. **The number of FHs rises to 40 in Rangpur District**³.



Duck rearing in Rangpur

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 Programme (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.

The government’s social safety net programme, operating through groups such as the Vulnerable Group Development (VGD), Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF), Open Market Sales (OMS), Food for Work (FFW), and Food for Peace (FFP), provides food to marginalised people at local storage depots.



Government-run TCB to sell selective commodities at city-level, Rangpur City

Shocks to the food systems

The impacts of climate change

The geographical location, low-lying lands, vast plains and expansive delta of Bangladesh, combined with multiple large river systems and a monsoon climate, make this country **highly susceptible to natural disasters**. In Rangpur City, threats come from excessive rains in the monsoon season which can cause mists and floods in low-lying areas, especially at the banks of rivers. Along with flooding, storm surges and a shortage of water during the dry seasons can impact the efficiency of groundwater aquifers, affecting water supply.

Widespread pollution and other forms of environmental degradation create health hazards for producers and consumers of food grown in and around urban centres. Compounding the risks to production systems and food supply from extreme climate events and pollution is the lack of visibility in urban development policies and planning frameworks³.

COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic is a multiplier of vulnerability, compounding threats to food security and nutrition (FSN), while exposing weaknesses in food systems. In Bangladesh, a nationwide survey by international development organisation BRAC found that 93% of respondents have suffered a loss of earnings, with 54% reporting no income in March 2020. The study estimated a **60% increase in extreme poverty** (from 24% to 84%)⁷.

Increased poverty of this magnitude likely pushes many people into food insecurity in the short term. In the long term, attempts to cope with the economic shock will lead to lasting negative repercussions for many: family hardships will force children out of school; people will sell productive assets at low prices; children will lack nutritious food at critical growth stages of their lives.

A study conducted by the FAO revealed that across regions of Bangladesh, Sylhet had the highest prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity (61.6%), followed by **Rangpur (52.7%)**, and Mymensingh (51.7%)⁸.

When Rangpur went into lockdown, non-essential travel was banned and people were required to stay home. Food production and supply have been affected by the consequent **reduction in the labour force**. Many people who are out of work have no income and are struggling to make ends meet. Others have switched jobs, but any improvements in their economic situation are, as yet, reportedly negligible. The **unemployment rate has not yet recovered**, and many businesses are experiencing a drastic fall in revenue³.



Final notes

The Rangpur City Consultation, held on 26th of January 2021 at the Begum Rokeya Auditorium in Rangpur, with government officials, representatives of the civil society, youth, business, press, media and cultural organizations as invitees, gave the following outcomes⁶.

Main issues/priorities

- **Nutrition** – create a organic food hub.
- **Safe Food** – way out of food adulteration.
- **Distribution** – introduce a food kiosk.
- **Supply chain** – promote agri-entrepreneurship and install a Green Food Hub.

Drivers for a nutrition vital city

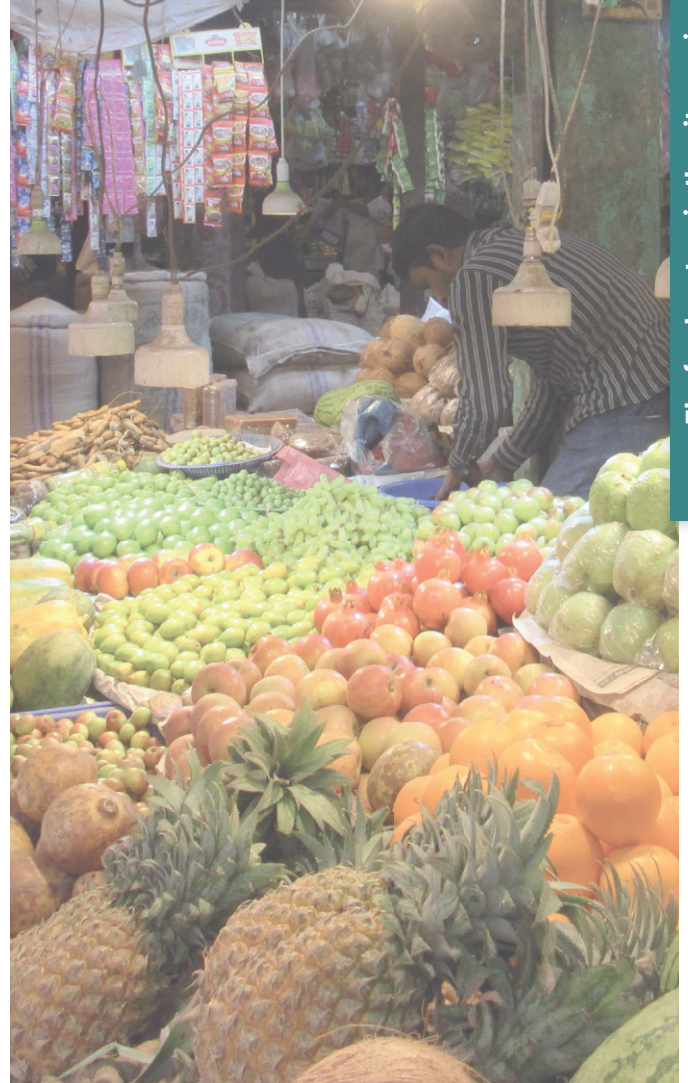
- **Awareness of food safety and nutrition** – among farmers, producers, processors, retailers, and consumers.
- **Stringent legal action** – to change the landscape of food safety.
- **Research on food adulteration** – to discover the root causes.
- **Trusted supply chain** – to boost consumer confidence.
- **Employment creation** – to resolve many issues around food security and nutrition in vulnerable communities.
- **Improve awareness of nutrition.**
- **The engagement of young people and SMEs** (including e-commerce) – to encourage innovation and shorten nutrition supply chains.
- **Develop urban agriculture, vertical farming, etc.** – rapid urbanization 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 (young)women** – to boost agri-entrepreneurship and make a significant contribution to the supply chain.

Bottlenecks for a nutrition vital city

- **Lack of coordination** – key stakeholders, especially government officials, need to work together more effectively to enable smooth implementation.
- **Lack of data on food safety, nutrition, disease and the environment** – although some research is undertaken, development research capacity and knowledge management are not given proper support and attention. The approach is often temporary and conducted on the basis of immediate need.
- **Law-breaking** – ignorance and the lack of an oversight mechanism lead to a disregard of the law and consequent offences.
- **Insufficient budgetary allocation** – the budget required to establish farmers' hubs and better support urban agriculture is currently insufficient (the mayor belongs to the opposition political party). The Deputy Commissioner of Rangpur 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** – in particular for (young) women
- **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. It is important to consider novel approaches to the gathering, processing, and analysing of 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.

Contact

Helen Prytherch PhD, MPH
NICE Project Coordinator
Head of Health Systems Support Unit, Swiss TPH
Email: helen.prytherch@swisstph.ch

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).