A COMPREHENSIVE DATA DASHBOARD TO TRANSFORM BANGLADESH'S FOOD SYSTEMS

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KEY MESSAGES

- To successfully execute Bangladesh's National Pathway for the Sustainable, Equitable and Resilient Food Systems Transformation, it is conducive for all actors in the food system to have consistent and easy-to-access data for informed decision-making. To meet this need, the Government of Bangladesh and the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) in collaboration with the Columbia Climate School, FAO, different ministries including Prime Minister's Office, Ministry of Planning, Ministry of Agriculture, and other relevant ministries, departments, agencies, development partners, academia, and private sector developed the Bangladesh Food Systems Dashboard (BDFSD) integrating national and subnational level data.

- To effectively serve and support the policymakers, researchers, program personnel, the private sector, and the general public, it is essential to provide reliable, current, and actionable data on food systems. The user-friendly BDFSD is designed to provide data to facilitate targeted interventions and activities at national, divisional, and district levels. This tool will assist decision-makers in identifying gaps and pinpointing areas that require improvement.

- To ensure the long-term sustainability, relevance, and effectiveness of the BDFSD as a supportive tool behind Bangladesh's journey to a transformed food system, allocating government resources towards its maintenance and regular updating will be crucial.

BANGLADESH NEEDS CONSISTENT AND EASY-TO-ACCESS DATA TO GUIDE ALL ACTORS IN ITS FOOD SYSTEM

The UN Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) held in 2021 identified the pressing need to transform global and national food systems. Aligned with the Government of Bangladesh's emphasis on research, importance of data, mechanization as well as modernization in agriculture to ensure nutrition security for the country's population, the Summit emphasised the need for consistent and actionable data for national, divisional, district and lower administrative levels. Following the UNFSS, the Government of Bangladesh launched a National Pathway Document for Sustainable Food Systems Transformation[1].

To guide stakeholders in food systems along the pathway, reliable sub-national data is needed. For instance, to inform decisions about where to allocate resources, to monitor and evaluate progress, and to improve accountability. Data must be collated from across the food system – producers, suppliers, marketers, consumers (with a special focus on youth and adolescents), and the environment.

To address this need for comprehensive and easy-to-access food systems data, GAIN – under the leadership of the Food Planning and Monitoring Unit (FPMU), Ministry of Food in the Government of Bangladesh – has launched a Food Systems Dashboard for Bangladesh[2].

1   extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://summitdialogues.org/wpcontent/uploads/2021/09/UNFSSPathwayDocument_Bangladesh.pdf
2   https://www.foodsystemsdashboard.org/countries/bgd/subnational-data/indicators/admin-1

WHAT IS THE FOOD SYSTEMS DASHBOARD?

Based on the model of the Global Food Systems Dashboard (**Box A**), the Bangladesh Food Systems Dashboard (BDFSD) provides an up-to-date overview of food systems data and trends in Bangladesh, being the only platform that shares all government authenticated food systems data in one place. The BDFSD digs into the data across various administrative levels to supplement national averages, making it a powerful tool for locally-led evidence-based decision making.

On top of national data, it shares information from all 8 divisions and 64 districts of Bangladesh. GAIN is also working with 8 relevant ministries and initiated the urban food systems data exploration with 4 City Corporations of Dhaka Division (Dhaka North, Dhaka South, Narayanganj, and Gazipur) to collate data for the dashboard and works to continuously ensure its relevance and usefulness according to the needs of these stakeholders. Besides, it has involved 18 ministries and government departments, private sector and academia under different group settings while collecting the data. **Figures 1** and **2** provide some snapshots of the type of data visualisations the BDFSD shares.

BOX A: The Global Food Systems Dashboard (FSD)

The FSD – available at this link: **https://www.foodsystemsdashboard.org/** is a unique resource that offers a comprehensive view of food systems across the globe by consolidating data from multiple sources for hundreds of indicators and providing analysis and guidance on how to use this data. The FSD was launched in 2020 as a joint initiative between GAIN, Johns Hopkins University (whose role has since been assumed by the Columbia Climate School), and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization and supported by many partners.

> The Dashboard has the potential to **halve the time** required to gather the relevant data, helping public agencies and private entities to grasp the three **Ds** more rapidly: **Describe**, **Diagnose**, and then **Decide**.
>
> **Lawrence Haddad** – Executive Director, GAIN

Designed for policymakers, non-governmental organizations, researchers, businesses, civil society leaders, and other stakeholders, the FSD facilitates the timely visualization of national food systems. It helps in understanding interconnections across multiple sectors, making comparisons between countries, identifying key challenges, and prioritizing actions.

With a primary focus on food value chains including production, storage, processing, marketing etc., the dashboard also provides critical data on outcomes including (mal)nutrition, food (in)security and drivers of food systems like socioeconomic status, environment etc. Disaggregated information will help all actors, particularly those involved in government policy, to take decisions that are best suited for their communities.

As well as providing data that is specific and actionable, the BDFSD also seeks to meet demands for the data to be widely available and accessible, while serving policymakers from all relevant ministries.

Figure 1 Dashboard visualisation showing fish production quantity by district
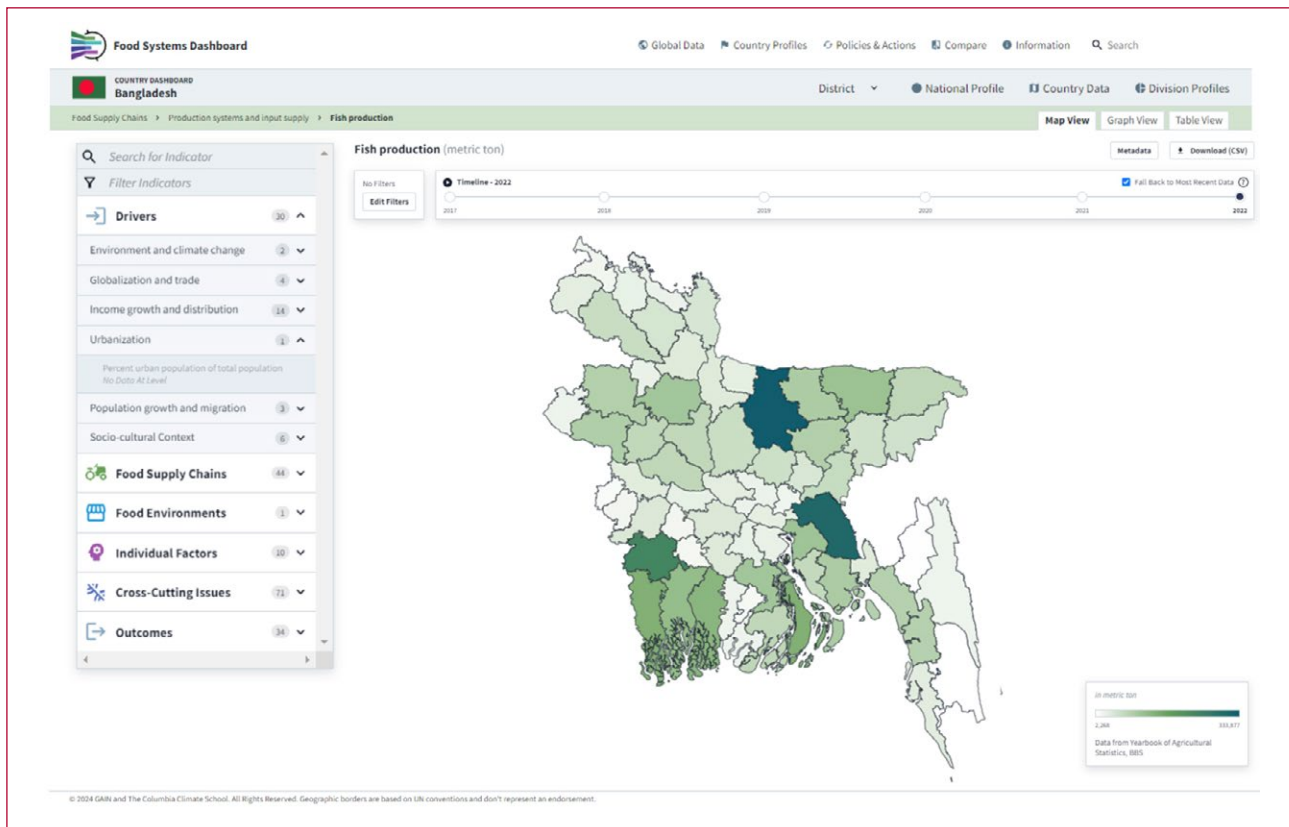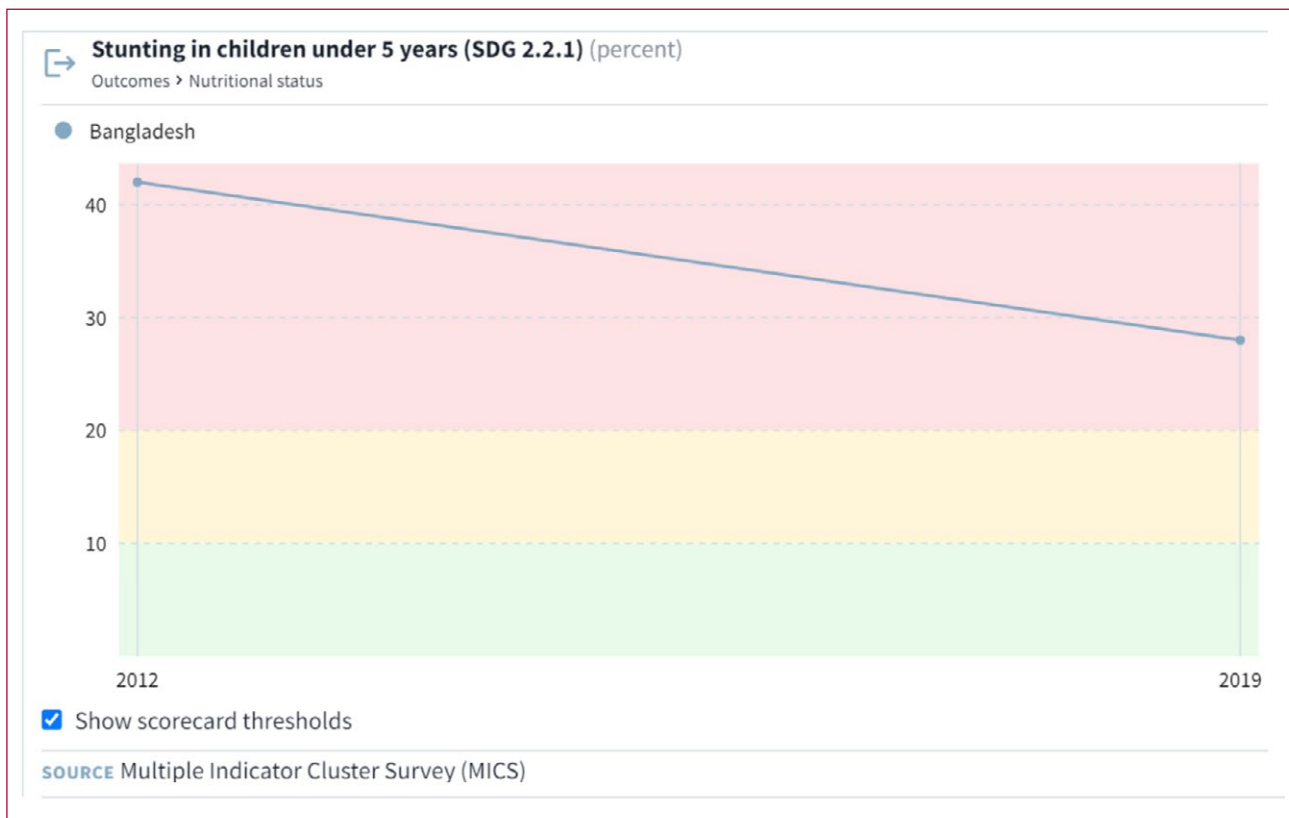

Figure 2 Proportion of stunted under five children

DATA CHALLENGES REMAIN

Data provision brings a host of challenges – some of which the BDFSD can address, others which it must work around. Issues span collection, storage, analysis, dissemination, and usage. Some factors contributing to lack of usage include:

- Untimely/outdated data
- Inconsistent/unreliable data, whereby data sources differ and may contradict each other
- Complex or incomprehensible formatting
- Unwillingness on the part of data generators to share data
- Non-representative or unavailable data

MAKING THE DASHBOARD ACTIONABLE

GAIN will provide training sessions for various stakeholders on its application. All food system stakeholders will also benefit from awareness raising on how the dashboard can support their work. The success of the dashboard as a tool will rely on the following:

- **Ensuring uptake of the dashboard**. Promoting the dashboard is crucial to ensure uptake by policymakers and those using data to inform policymaking. As the BDFSD's use is proven, demand to fill data gaps should emerge, further improving its usefulness to researchers, decision-makers, and other key stakeholders.

- **Coherent coordination among ministries is needed to ensure regular data updates**. The aspirations of the UN Food Systems Summit are reflected in several key national policies, including the National Food and Nutrition Security Policy 2020, the Plan of Action 2021 – 2030, the 8th National Five-Year Plan 2020 – 2025, the Perspective Plan 2021 – 2041, and the 2nd and 3rd Country Investment Plans. Data will be compiled and used in the implementation of each of these. Maintaining the relevant, authenticated data in a unified central platform will encourage and benefit from improved coherence.

- **Allocating sufficient resources to promote sustainability of the dashboard**. For monitoring food systems transformation progress, a sustainable BDFSD is essential. Sustaining the BDFSD requires resource allocation to continuously bring together and upload new data, including data from lower administrative levels like Upazila and city corporation levels. The Government of Bangladesh has committed to promoting use and availability of reliable data, which should go a long way in ensuring government ownership of the dashboard, and thus its sustainability.

With the launch in May 2024 of the BDFSD, food systems stakeholders have a new and potentially powerful tool at their disposal. Like any tool, it must be picked up by its users and it must be appropriate to the task in hand.

We urge stakeholders to participate in the upcoming orientation and training sessions to learn the value of the tool and begin to apply it to help build healthier and more sustainable food systems across Bangladesh.

We urge the visionary Government of Bangladesh to allocate adequate resources for its maintenance and to ensure regular data uploads. Further exploration to optimise dashboard data use, for instance through exploring user friendly technologies, may be a strong opportunity to underpin future evidence-based decision-making.

Better nutrition. For all.