

## **Helpdesk Research Report: Urbanisation and Urban Poverty in Bangladesh**

Date: 17.07.09

**Query:** Please conduct a literature review on the key issues relating to urbanisation and urban poverty in Bangladesh. Please include books, journal articles, web-based resources and other grey literature since 2000. Please include literature where Bangladesh is the sole or significant part of the analysis.

**Enquirer:** DFID Bangladesh

1. **Overview**
2. **General trends**
3. **Rural bias in Bangladesh's poverty agenda**
4. **The heterogeneity of urban areas and urban livelihoods**
5. **Land rights, security of tenure and eviction**
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### **1. Overview**

Urbanisation is one of the major challenges facing Bangladesh. The capital city Dhaka is the fastest growing mega-city in the world, with an estimated 300,000 to 400,000 new migrants, mostly poor, arriving in the city annually (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics). These migrants make an important contribution to the economic development of the city but also add significant pressure to its already overstretched infrastructure. According to a 2007 World Bank report (see below), Dhaka is characterised by 'large slums, poor housing, excessively high land prices, traffic congestion, water shortages, poor sanitation and drainage, irregular electric supply, unplanned construction, increasing air pollution and poor urban governance which results in growing problems of law and order' (p. xiii).

Whilst the literature on urbanisation and urban poverty in Bangladesh is predominantly focussed on Dhaka, some literature does exist that relates to other cities (see IFPRI 2003). This is important to note since it is clear that there is considerable variation between the urban areas of Bangladesh and that cities other than Dhaka often suffer from even higher levels of urban poverty than the capital. A 2000 Asian Development Bank report suggests that programmes should be focussed in areas other than Dhaka and Chittagong, and a number of studies emphasise the importance of recognising differences in urban communities both between and within cities.

One major theme emerging from the literature is that of access to housing and security of tenure. This is a key issue for the urban poor of Bangladesh. Often they are forced to settle in informal settlements on marginal lands where they fall prey to *mastaans*, or middle men, who charge extortionate rents for land and services and often use coercive methods. These settlements often have little or no access to basic services such as water and electricity, and

what access is provided tends to be stretched far beyond capacity. These settlements are particularly vulnerable during monsoon rains. The inhabitants also live under the constant threat of eviction. The often illegal status of these settlements also means that government and NGOs are reluctant and frequently unable to improve basic service provision.

The urban poor also tend to work informally, with low wages and lack of job security. This increases incentives to send more household members to work, contributing to the prevalence of child labour. The urban poor are mostly employed in self-managed low paid jobs in informal sectors such as rickshaw pulling, street selling, etc. Rates of unemployment are often quite low in urban areas, but this tends to mask high levels of underemployment.

Whilst government seems to recognise that urban poverty is a major challenge which needs to be addressed, the rural bias of Bangladesh's PRSP and the lack of a centralised body covering urban poverty, has meant that government policies on urban issues are not as well-developed as those which address rural poverty in terms of scale or efficacy. Importantly, Bangladesh lacks a comprehensive policy on these issues, and there are between 16 and 40 different bodies involved in urban matters in Dhaka alone (World Bank 2007). There also seems to be a belief among government officials that the issue of urban poverty is almost too large to even begin to address, it is "the impossible" (see Banks, forthcoming p.5).

Adding to this problem is the inability of the poor to make demands of their representatives in government (ward commissioners) for improvements in the urban situation. Not only are the resources available to these ward commissioners insufficient, but they are often not subject to the checks and balances that motivate them to answer the needs of those they represent in rural areas. Reasons for this include the sheer size of the urban population (Banks, 2008).

## 2. General trends

**World Bank, 2007, 'Dhaka: Improving Living Conditions for the Urban Poor', World Bank Office: Dhaka**

<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BANGLADESHEXTN/Resources/295759-1182963268987/dhakaurbanreport.pdf>

Bangladesh lacks a comprehensive policy on urbanisation and urban poverty and there are between 16 and 40 different bodies involved in one way or another in urban matters in Dhaka, with little coordination and planning. This has resulted in significant 'gaps' in urban services and infrastructure. The poor are particularly impacted by these limitations. This report focuses on analysing those needs that are critical for the poor and outlines five key issues facing urban Dhaka, outlined below. In light of these it suggests that policy priorities should include: "developing and implementing a comprehensive strategy for urban poverty reduction, implementing institutional mapping, reform and capacity building of key agencies/institutions affecting urban growth and poverty reduction, implementing the National Housing Policy to ensure shelter for the poor, improving service delivery and access to infrastructure for the urban poor and finally addressing crime and violence in slum areas" (p. xvii-xx).

**Poverty in Dhaka:** The urban poor live mainly in informal settlements or slums across the city. Nearly 80% of slums are located on privately owned land which poses significant institutional challenges for the provision of basic services. Indeed, "for the poorest quintile, only 9% of households have a sewage line, and 27% obtain water through piped supply (compared with 83% of the wealthiest)... spatial mapping shows that only 43 of the 1925 identified slums have a public toilet within 100 meters" (p. xiv). Another significant challenge is that around 7600 households live in slums that are within 50m of the river and therefore suffer significant risk of flooding, especially during monsoon season. Focus groups among the poor linked to income noted the 'many hardships of living in slums' and the 'enormous stresses of everyday life' (p. xiv)

**Employment and the Poor:** Most employment among the poor in Dhaka is within the informal sector where wages are generally low. The unemployment rate for the poor is almost double that of the non-poor. In addition, there is the issue of underemployment, which affects approximately 20% of households (p. xiv). Child labour is prevalent, with approximately 20% of all children between ages of 5-14 working. For the poorest households with child workers, earnings from the children can represent about one third of total household income. The report notes that in order to improve the income-earning opportunities faced by the poor, a vibrant labour market must first be ensured in Dhaka which depends in part upon continuing improvements in the level of education.

**Shelter for the Poor:** Secure shelter is noted as a 'major challenge' for Dhaka's urban poor. As migrants pour into the city, they often settle in illegal settlements on marginal pieces of land which pose significant environmental concerns. Often slums are presided over by middlemen, also called 'musclemen' or '*mastaans*' who offer high prices for pieces of land and use illegal methods. "The constant threat of eviction from these illegally occupied lands is a major addition to the stresses of the lives of the poor" (p. xv). The report notes that the poor are effectively priced out of legitimate settlements in the city by very high land prices in the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), an issue which results in part from the limited land supply of the city. Whilst the Government has developed a National Housing Policy which reflects an enabling approach to land and housing markets, this policy has not been implemented effectively (p. xvi).

**Services for the Poor:** "Access to basic services such as water, sanitation, electricity, health and education by the poor is very limited" (p. xvi). This problem is exacerbated by the fact that because slums are not recognised as legal lands, the Government, NGOs and donors generally do not provide services in these areas. This has resulted in *mastaans* providing equivalent services for a higher fee. These *mastaans* often have patronage from local and national political leaders, government officials and local law-enforcing agencies. The administration of basic services in Dhaka is complicated, with public services being provided by a mixture of both central and local agencies which have limited resources, weak administrative capacity and little coordination. The constant threat of eviction acts to prevent agencies from investing in infrastructure for health, education, water and sanitation services. This is a serious barrier to effective service provision.

**Crime and Violence in Dhaka's Slums:** This is a major issue in Dhaka which particularly affects the poor. It poses significant costs to the city in terms of the "judicial system, health care, foregone earnings, costs on private security, loss of competitiveness, loss of jobs and productivity" (p. xvii). The report also notes the importance of the non-monetary costs it poses on the population in terms of 'levels of fear and mistrust, anxiety, and lack of social cohesion' (p. xvii). This study commissioned a new survey of crime and violence in four slums which found that 93% of respondents reported being affected by crime and violence over the last 12 months. Among the most commonly reported crime and violence are toll collection, *mastaan*-induced violence and violence against women and children. There is a deep lack of trust by the urban poor in the justice system and many feel that the justice system actively discriminates against them on the grounds of their being slum dwellers.

**ADB, 2000, 'Addressing Poverty in Bangladesh,' Asian Development Bank Working Paper, Dhaka**

[http://www.adb.org/documents/epps/ban/addressing\\_poverty/addressing\\_poverty.pdf](http://www.adb.org/documents/epps/ban/addressing_poverty/addressing_poverty.pdf)

This study outlines four channels through which policy can attempt to influence income poverty in Bangladesh: growth projects, human development, microcredit-based self-employment, and income transfer programmes. The report gives substantial attention to the importance of targeting urban areas. Bangladesh has one of the highest paces of

urbanisation in the developing world and “the growth in urban per capita income has been much higher than that of rural income, but has still not been able to keep pace with the rate of urbanisation through rural-urban migration.” As a result, although the proportion of urban poor has declined in relative terms, “the absolute number of urban poor has continued to grow at a faster pace” (p.31). The report does however suggest that urbanisation should not be viewed in a solely negative light and that “whatever urbanisation the country has witnessed in recent years has been a major contributory factor behind the decline in national poverty.”

The authors note that there is strong regional variation in urban poverty in Bangladesh, with small cities having twice the level of poverty found in the big cities. The report therefore suggests that policies to target urban poverty should be aimed at cities other than Dhaka and Chittagong (the two largest cities). The heterogeneity of the poor in urban areas means that strategies to alleviate poverty must be tailored toward a variety of different populations.

### **3. Rural bias in Bangladesh’s poverty agenda**

**Banks, N., 2008, ‘Improving the Urban Poverty Agenda in Bangladesh,’ Paper presented at a GTZ conference on Understanding Urban Poverty, Dhaka, December 2008**

This article considers the reasons for and the consequences of a rural bias in government policies and programmes for poverty reduction by looking at the views of both government officials and slum dwellers. This analysis demonstrates that there is a lack of understanding of the complexity of urban poverty and a disjuncture between the priorities of government and the urban poor. The report notes that fieldwork revealed the heterogeneity of slums across Dhaka and the “different struggles and vulnerabilities within and between each slum” (p4).

To place the situation of urban poverty in context the report notes that Bangladesh’s cities have expanded without a coherent planning or governance framework, and this lack of a coherent vision for urban areas has adversely affected both urban development and poverty reduction. There is no Ministry with sole jurisdiction over urban development, and urban areas are partly administered by the Ministry of Local Government Rural Development and Cooperatives, and partly by the Ministry of Housing and Public Works (p. 5). No national policy on urbanisation or urban planning exists and there is no formal policy on urban poverty or strategy for urban poverty reduction. The six major cities – Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna, Rajshahi, Sylhet and Barisal – are headed by City Corporations, but the high level of central control within government has meant that these organisations lack the power to “enact the popular will” (p. 5).

Government officials outlined three main obstacles to urban poverty reduction. Firstly, the PRSP is strongly rural-oriented and “urban poverty was notably excluded from the draft PRSP, and only incorporated into the final PRSP after campaigning” (p.5). As a result, urban poverty has also been neglected in policy and spending. Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) struggles to meet its responsibilities due to resource constraints, making it impossible to prioritise urban poverty. Secondly, there is a “lack of coordination and vision at both national and local level” which has “provided obstacles to urban poverty reduction” (p.6). If they are to be effective, strategies for improving urban livelihoods will need input from numerous government agencies. Finally, many officials demonstrated a “common resignation that financial and administrative constraints rendered urban poverty reduction, “the impossible”” (p5). All government officials interviewed stressed the discrepancy between the scale of urban poverty and the resources allocated to address it. Key in this regard is an inability to find permanent solutions due to the temporary nature of slums. Furthermore, in rural areas, local officials are far more accountable to those they represent than in urban areas. In urban areas ward commissioners “have little presence in the slums after elections, and therefore

rely on intermediaries for their interactions with slum dwellers” (p.9). This is often through *mastaans*.

Although slum dwellers are identified as a vulnerable group in the PRSP, the PRSP does not prioritise or outline plans for urban poverty reduction. Perceptions amongst these populations showed that 80% of respondents believed that rural areas got more assistance from government. This government bias was often explained by the urban poor as being because the rural poor were indeed ‘poorer’ and that their livelihoods were indeed more difficult, especially when compared to urban areas which offer a minimal level of food security. However, urban dwellers are reliant on cash income which increases their vulnerability, especially in a climate of price increases. Furthermore, the urban poor cannot be categorised as a heterogeneous group. Slum dwellers also saw the very number of urban poor in Dhaka as a major obstacle to government assistance: “Large numbers of the poor mean that each individual is invisible and inaccessible to the government... the political economy of city governance for the poor is hostile and unfavourable” (p. 11). This is in contrast to rural areas where elected representatives can be held accountable to their constituency. High concentrations of the poor make it impossible to provide assistance to everybody. A lack of legitimacy and identity also provides a barrier to the distribution of assistance or the implementation of programmes (p.11). A further problem outlined by slum dwellers themselves was that any government relief or assistance provided to the slum is distributed to *mastaans* who use the relief to maintain patron-client relations rather than to assist the poor.

#### 4. The heterogeneity of urban areas and urban livelihoods

**IFPRI, 2003, ‘Urban Livelihoods in the Slums: Jessore and Tongi’, The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI)**

<http://www.ifpri.org/themes/mp14/profiles/jessoretongi.pdf>

The report states that “until recently much international development money in Bangladesh has been focussed on improving rural economic prospects and attempting to stem rural-urban migration” (p. 1). This is despite the fact that the country has one of the highest urban growth rates in the world. As a result, the deprivation faced by the poor and the opportunities available to them to improve their lives can vary by city. This report is based on surveys conducted in 2000 vulnerable urban households in selected slums and low-income settlements in the two secondary cities of Jessore, a city in the southwest, along the main transport route to India, and Tongi, an industrial ‘suburb’ of Dhaka.

Conditions vary across the study cities. In Jessore, poor households are dispersed throughout the city, with slums located alongside middle-class and well-off neighbourhoods. In Tongi, the poor live in sprawling but distinct slums or settlements that are isolated from neighbouring communities. Migrants make up a large proportion of both populations. New arrivals usually come from rural areas and most of these migrants are not transient, with over 70% of the *basti* (slum) residents in both cities having lived in their present location for more than 10 years. Often new arrivals are forced to squat on government, industrial or railway land where they are preyed on by *mastaans*, who extract fees for land, latrines and water, often using coercive and illegal methods.

Incomes in both cities are very low and in total more than half of the households in Jessore and nearly two-thirds of those in Tongi live in absolute poverty. Female-headed households suffer even more, with 70% of these households in Jessore and 85% in Tongi not being able to meet basic needs. Conditions in these informal urban settlements are unhygienic, and houses are closely packed together. During the monsoon, water floods these settlements creating damp conditions. Two thirds of households use unsealed or open latrines that frequently overflow. Whilst rates of unemployment are quite low, this masks a situation where

large numbers in the labour force are chronically underemployed. Employment in the two cities tends to reflect their different economic bases, industry in Tongi and inter-country trade with India in Jessore. Non-employment sources of income play an important role in supplementing the incomes of the poor and remittances, rental income from their house or other property, rural or urban-based farming, and other non-employment sources.

Clearly the living conditions of the urban poor need to be addressed. Thus far, NGOs have tended to emphasise the importance of credit and saving schemes in the slums of Bangladesh but have tended to shy away from water and sanitation issues because of the perceived unstable tenure of slum residents and uncertain land rights. However, the report argues that data shows that slum populations are not as transient as is sometimes suggested, and investment in essential infrastructure is therefore important.

**Helen Keller Worldwide, 2002, 'Urban Poverty in Bangladesh: the Perspective of the Nutritional Surveillance Project,' Nutritional Surveillance Project Bulletin No. 9**

[http://www.hki.org/research/nsp\\_storage/NSP%20Bulletin%209.pdf](http://www.hki.org/research/nsp_storage/NSP%20Bulletin%209.pdf)

This paper presents data from the Nutrition Surveillance Project that shows how living conditions and food security vary widely from one poor area to the next, suggesting that the solutions to urban problems may not be the same everywhere. The report notes that the national census in 2001 showed that over the last 10 years the population of all urban areas in the country grew by 38% compared with only 10% growth in rural areas.

The report details the variation between slums. In 2000, about 50% of all the households in Khulna had lived in the same slum for more than 15 years compared with less than 20% of households in Dhaka. However, only 20% of households in Khulna had access to a closed latrine compared with 60% in Dhaka. The report notes that "even though many households in all cities live in unsanitary and crowded conditions most had access to electricity and over 40% in Khulna owned a television, a relatively expensive item for poor people." In addition, about 70% of households in both Dhaka and Chittagong reported owning land outside the slum. In addition to differences between cities, there is also much variation between slums within the same city, and some poor urban settlements suffer much more from acute food insecurity than others, despite being relatively close to each other.

The report concludes that it is clear that the urban poor of Bangladesh are in need of improved food security and health services and sanitation. If this is to be secured, then more accurate, relevant and timely information is needed in order to decide how and where to deliver services and programmes and how best to evaluate their impact. This will also help to determine the best priorities for programmes.

**Pryer, J. A. et al., 2002, 'Livelihoods, Nutrition and Health in Dhaka Slums,' Public Health Nutrition, Volume 5, Issue 5, pp. 613-618**

[http://journals.cambridge.org/download.php?file=%2FPHN%2FPHN5\\_05%2FS136898000200824a.pdf&code=e9e1a3c68398aaaf3e3ad43a422129d3](http://journals.cambridge.org/download.php?file=%2FPHN%2FPHN5_05%2FS136898000200824a.pdf&code=e9e1a3c68398aaaf3e3ad43a422129d3)

This paper tests the hypothesis that 'livelihood groups differentiate economic, social and demographic variables and predict health and nutritional outcomes in children and adults' through an analysis of the Urban Livelihoods Study which was a 'multidisciplinary research study exploring the environmental, material and social conditions of an urban slum settlement in Dhaka City' (pp. 613-614). This study is based in the slum settlements of Mohammadpur which is on government land that has been informally occupied for over 20 years. It uses clustering statistical methods and demonstrates that there are 'relatively well-defined livelihood groups within urban slum populations, each with particular economic, demographic and social characteristics. Crucially, 'cluster analysis has shown that slum populations are not

homogenous. Rather, there are more or less well-defined livelihood groups within slum populations, each with particular economic, demographic and social characteristics. The groups were also differentiated with respect to nutritional status and experience of illness' (p.617).

**Hossain, S (2004) 'Urban Poverty and Household Adaptations in Dhaka City, Bangladesh' in Globalisation Section of Revisioning Institutions: Change in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (CD Rom), The Australian Sociological Association (TASA), December 2004, <http://www.tasa.org.au/conferencepapers04/docs/GLOBALIZATION/HOSSAIN.pdf>**

This paper draws on data from a survey of 500 households in three neighbourhoods of Dhaka conducted between October 2002 and June 2003. The study reveals that the number of urban poor in an 'absolute' sense has increased over the years as a result of rapid urbanisation, and that the poor have adopted different household strategies in response to the challenges this has posed. The paper suggests that these strategies are necessary for the poor to survive because they have limited access to the existing urban economic and social systems, which tend to be overstretched and inadequate.

The urban poor are mostly employed in self-managed, insecure and low paid jobs in informal sectors such as rickshaw pulling, street selling, construction, and factory work. One of the main strategies households undertake to account for these factors is to send more household members to work, often women and children.

The urban poor spend their earnings in order to meet basic needs. Earnings are often taken up by food and shelter. The poor have little access to urban land and so tend to build their houses on vacant private and government land, often living in self-made houses known as *jupri*. These tend to be constructed from materials such as tin, bamboo, straw and polythene and are particularly vulnerable during the rainy season. Only 18% of the households interviewed in the study live in semi-structured houses with permanent walls and most of these households have a single room where as many as five people often live. The majority of households (54%) have no cooking facilities and cook in their living room or open space. About 60% of households collect firewood and straw for cooking and mostly obtain electricity connections from informal sources. This electricity provision is inadequate and irregular. Most of the poor have no access to the city's water supply and they collect water from a common municipal tap or from hand tube-wells. More than 65% of households have no access to city sewerage systems and share temporary pit latrines.

The urban poor also have very limited access to existing health care facilities and only 33.4% use services from city health centres. The report cites insufficient attention from physicians, lack of medicine in the hospitals, high fees and charges, and long distances as the major reasons for not using government hospitals by the urban poor. More than 60% of the poor have no formal schooling in their lifetime. Social networking plays an important role in coping with urban life and it works as social capital.

## **5. Land rights, security of tenure and eviction**

**Shafi, S. & Payne, G., 2007, 'Land Tenure Security and Land Administration in Bangladesh,' Paper prepared for Local Partnerships for Urban Poverty Alleviation submitted to LGED, UNDP and UN-Habitat**  
<http://www.glt.net/en/e-library/land-rights-and-records/land-tenure-security-and-land-administration-in-bangladesh/details.html>

The study considers constraints to the improvement of tenure conditions in Bangladesh's urban poor settlements. Key in this regard is the disjuncture that exists between the

enormous number of people and settlements that require support/ security and the limited institutional, financial and technical resources that are available in the country's urban areas.

The authors propose a framework to improve the land tenure security and land administration of urban areas. They suggest an incremental, community-based approach to tenure policy and practice. This would involve the government announcing an extension of the ban on evictions of informal settlements for a period of twelve months with immediate effect. During this time, all settlements would be surveyed to determine if they are suitable for upgrading or relocation to nearby sites. Where relocation is considered essential, because settlements are in environmentally vulnerable locations or on land required for urgent major public works, they can be designated as 'untenable' and notified for relocation. Every effort should be made to relocate communities as close as possible to their existing settlements. Those settlements which are not in environmentally vulnerable locations or on land required for urgent major public works can then be designated as 'tenable' and eligible for a Community Land Right.

**Rahman, M. M., 2001, 'Bastee Eviction and Housing Rights: A Case of Dhaka, Bangladesh,' Habitat International, Volume 25, pp. 49-67**

[http://www.sciencedirect.com/science?\\_ob=ArticleURL&\\_udi=B6V9H-41TWJ47-4&\\_user=10&\\_rdoc=1&\\_fmt=&\\_orig=search&\\_sort=d&\\_docanchor=&view=c&\\_searchStrId=1015195924&\\_rerunOrigin=google&\\_acct=C000050221&\\_version=1&\\_urlVersion=0&\\_userid=10&md5=1b20a2bf3a03b08544de99ea89e9621a](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science?_ob=ArticleURL&_udi=B6V9H-41TWJ47-4&_user=10&_rdoc=1&_fmt=&_orig=search&_sort=d&_docanchor=&view=c&_searchStrId=1015195924&_rerunOrigin=google&_acct=C000050221&_version=1&_urlVersion=0&_userid=10&md5=1b20a2bf3a03b08544de99ea89e9621a)

The report notes the inhuman conditions in slums or *bastee* settlements and the fact that the Bangladesh National Housing Policy acknowledges the right of these people to proper housing but emphasises that in reality people who live in slum settlements are constantly the subject of evictions. Whilst slum settlements have been around for 200 years, they have become particularly prevalent since independence in 1971. Over the last few years there have been both regular small-scale evictions and several massive incidents of squatter removal. Importantly, the report notes that, "a widespread negative attitude towards the poor and their lack of land-ownership inhibit the prospect of finding a viable solution to this problem". There is however "a growing awareness in Bangladesh of the positive role of the urban poor and the informal sector" (p. 49). This paper looks at "the ways in which the housing rights of the poor slum and squatter dwellers in the city of Dhaka have been violated through evictions from their settlement" (p. 49).

The National Housing Policy (NHP) recognises the rights of the poor *basteebashees* to proper housing but despite this, the government has ignored policy provisions and nonetheless practices forced eviction. There have been numerous cases in which *bastees* have been demolished as a means of evicting residents in these settlements in Dhaka. The report notes that "an estimated 200,000 people have been affected and US\$2.5 million worth of properties were destroyed in 30 cases of major forced eviction in Dhaka from 1990 to 1992 alone" (p. 53). Importantly, "the authorities adopt cruel and brutal means in the evictions. The most frequently used technique, which is both cheap and effective, is to cordon off the *bastees*, ignite them and beat the *basteebashees* to ensure that they leave" (p. 53).

This occurs despite the fact that the rights of the urban poor have been recognised in various ways in international and national declarations and charters. As a result, forced eviction of squatters without serving proper legal notice and without resettling them is a violation of the human rights and Bangladesh state policy (p. 56). *Basteebashees* are "increasingly being organised and are gradually becoming aware of their rights", principally as a result of NGO involvement (p.56). Central in this struggle has been The Coalition for the Urban Poor (CUP), a coalition of 49 NGOs working in Dhaka since 1989.

Solutions suggested in the report include stemming the flow of rural to urban migration that feeds the expansion of these settlements to allow proper provision for those who do live in

the city. Securing tenure and land ownership is also critical in giving legitimacy to squatter settlements. In addition, there is a need to move away from the idea that any provision for the poor who reside in these areas would result in high subsidies to these groups.

**Ahmed, K. I., 2007, 'Urban Poor Housing in Bangladesh and Potential Role of ACHR,' Asian Coalition for Housing Rights, Bangkok**

<http://www.achr.net/Download%20Library/Urban%20Poor%20Housing%20in%20Bangladesh%2001.pdf>

The report states that of the total population of Bangladesh, 25% is urban. It is projected that by 2030 the level of urbanisation will be more than 40%. Evidence suggests that the urban population is growing at a higher rate than the national population, indicating that the country is becoming increasingly urbanised. Of the 30 million people in Bangladesh who live in urban areas, 10 million reside in Dhaka and the remainder in other urban sites across the country (p. 6).

The majority of the urban population lives in informal settlements and manages to build and maintain their habitats without direct or with very limited support from the formal and public sectors. These people often also face tenure insecurity and the near constant threat of evictions. Slums are characterised by poor quality housing with very high population density and room crowding, and poor environmental services, particularly water and sanitation facilities. In Dhaka, an estimated 2.84 million, that is, nearly 30% of the population lives in more than 4000 of these informal settlements.

Lack of security of land tenure has been highlighted as a key characteristic of these informal settlements (p. 8). A cited study indicates that more than 90% of these settlements in different cities of Bangladesh are located on government and private land. As a result, government and donors are unwilling to allocate funds for communities living in these settlements. Almost 80% of households in these settlements in the CUS et al1 (2006) study were paying rent to informal landlords, gang leaders, even though the land belonged neither to this group nor the inhabitants. A significant amount of informal revenue is therefore generated, but the actual owners can accrue only a portion or none of it. Legalising these settlements may allow private landowners to earn this revenue, while at the same time easing the onus of the poor who at the moment pay extortionate rates.

The report states: "Eviction is the corollary of the widespread tenure insecurity in informal settlements" (p. 9). Importantly, "for organizations providing infrastructural services such as water supply and sanitation in informal settlements, evictions can suddenly undo the progress made in these fields, which is also a reason for such organizations to keep their interventions limited in scope" (p. 9). 'A recent development since the activation of the Interim Government in January 2007 was a spate of widespread demolitions and evictions in the name of anticorruption, which present a new set of challenges to the housing struggles of the urban poor' (p. 10).

The report notes that the PRSP of Bangladesh "includes policy agenda for housing provision of disadvantaged groups such as single working women, the elderly and disabled, but does not have a clear agenda for the urban poor living in informal settlements" (p. 12). In addition, "a National Housing Policy was formulated in 1993, and pro-poor agenda was included in it in 1999. The policy was further revised in 2004, but to date remains to be approved due to various deadlocks arising out of the volatile political situation in Bangladesh. It is yet to be seen how much of the policy is translated into the groups and whether it can bring about any significant change for the urban poor" (p. 12).

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1 Access to the CUS and its publications was sought, but was not available on the web.

The report considers possible solutions to the problem through detailing a number of case study examples of interventions by: Local Partnerships for Urban Poverty Alleviation (LPUPAP), Coalition for the Urban Poor (CUP), CARE-Bangladesh, Dushtha Shayshta Kendra (DSK) and LOSAUK (p. 14-16).

## 6. Governance and political participation

**Banks, N., 2008, 'A Tale of Two Wards: Political Participation and the Urban Poor in Dhaka City,' *Environment & Urbanization*, Volume 20, Issue 2, pp. 361-376**

<http://eau.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/20/2/361>

An earlier version is available online:

[http://www.bracresearch.org/workingpapers/nicola\\_ward\\_text.pdf](http://www.bracresearch.org/workingpapers/nicola_ward_text.pdf)

This article explores the extent of political participation of the urban poor in Dhaka, potential barriers to effective political participation and how opportunities for participation can be advanced. It does this by comparing different experiences in two wards and uses the experience of the Coalition for the Urban Poor's (CUP) Basti Basheer Odhikar Surakha Committee (BOSC) to illustrate the "accomplishments of grassroots mobilization of the poor" (p. 361).

The article notes that a lack of effective governance has been identified as a major constraint on previous poverty alleviation initiatives. In the context of Dhaka, this report focuses upon Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) which is split into 10 zones and 90 wards, each headed by a democratically elected ward commissioner. Ward commissioners are the closest representatives to residents and therefore play a key role. However, they tend to lack a fully defined framework of duties and responsibilities and their success therefore depends a lot on their individual initiative and commitment. The report notes that there is much variation in efficiency and that many commissioners "lack empathy for the poor" (p. 362). They submit proposals to authorities such as Dhaka Water and Sewage Authority according to their personally perceived priorities. Financial resources fall far short of the amount required to run wards effectively and corruption further diminishes the available finances.

The report cites Khan (1997) as noting that "the poor's exclusion from local urban bodies is complete. They simply have no means through which to directly or indirectly participate in the deliberations of such bodies and influence decisions" (p. 363). As a potential solution "in 2000, the Coalition for the Urban Poor (CUP) – a network coalition for the 53 NGOs working with urban poverty in Bangladesh – created BOSC, a network of local committees throughout low-income settlements in Dhaka through which the urban poor could mobilize and press their demands upon local government" (p. 363). The BOSC network consists of a hierarchy of committees run for and by the urban poor themselves.

The study compares two wards, ward A having participation limited to the voting process itself and ward B where collective mobilisation allowed the poor to press their demands on elected representatives and city government. Ward A has a high proportion of low-income communities and Ward B was selected on the basis of its 'elite' status but also houses Dhaka's largest informal settlement. The study found that along with ward commissioners, the poor identified several other actors with whom they interact to solve problems – *mastaans*, government service providers and NGOs – and that these posed numerous problems. NGO programmes in urban areas were seen as not meeting the primary requirements of the urban poor which are closely related to security of tenure. Government services were said to often fail to reach respondents. The report noted that "without secure tenure, service provision to low-income settlements is illegal. Consequently, poor urban

communities face difficulties in obtaining legal services. In this environment, political patronage has become a substitute for government services” (p. 369).

In this climate the report examines the role of *mastaans* who act as intermediaries, “making connections between underserved informal settlements and political leaders” (p. 369). Elites and politicians often rely on links with local *mastaans* for support and re-election. These leaders tend to be greatly feared among the urban poor, as they frequently use extortion or threats of violence to control a neighbourhood. In addition, both groups identified police harassment as a frequent occurrence and noted that the police offer no help or protection to the poor, while protecting the rich and powerful.

## 7. Education, health and child labour

**Kabeer, N. and Mahmud, S. 2009, ‘Imagining the Future: Children, Education and Intergenerational Transmission of Poverty in Urban Bangladesh,’ IDS Bulletin, Volume 40, Number 1**

<http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/journal/121659735/abstract?CRETRY=1&SRETRY=0>

A draft version of this paper is available at: <http://www.chronicpoverty.org/pubfiles/Kabeer.pdf>

This article considers survey data on low-income households in urban Bangladesh to explore what differentiates parents who have managed to send their children to school from those who have not. Education is identified as a major factor, and the study finds that parents with no education are more likely to have children of school-going age who are not at school. It also notes that different aspects of household vulnerability also play an important role in whether children go to school or not, as do contextual factors which influence how parents imagine their children’s future and how children themselves regard education. Importantly, the study notes that “the hazards of daily life in slum environments, the limited range of job opportunities available and the absence of decent educational facilities all serve to undermine parental commitment and children’s motivation with regard to education” (p.71).

The article notes that the transmission of poverty across generations occurs through the transmission of various kinds of deficit and that “in the contexts where poor people rely primarily on the sale of their labour power to meet survival needs, the failure to invest in the “human capital” of successive generations, their education and skill, is likely to be a common route through which the intergenerational transmission of poverty occurs” (p.10). This is obviously the case in urban areas and is therefore worthy of consideration when considering policies to improve education and to counter the intergenerational transmission of poverty in urban Bangladesh.

**Caldwell, B. et al., 2002, ‘Why Do the Children of the Poor Die in Dhaka, Bangladesh?’ Population Research and Policy Review, Volume 21, Number 3, pp. 159-178**

<http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/klu/popu/2002/00000021/00000003/05090475>

The article notes that “mortality data from much of the developing world show that the health advantage of urban over rural areas is being eroded. The single most important factor is the very high mortality of the slum populations, mostly rural-urban migrants in the large cities. This has been shown to be true of Dhaka, Bangladesh, where much of the mortality differential between the poor and other residents can be explained by higher mortality in the slums among young children, especially infants. This paper reports on a collaborative project, Access to Health and Reproductive Health Services in the Dhaka Slums, which confirmed this situation in a 1999 survey and employed an in-depth approach in 2000 to investigate the circumstances of child deaths” (p. 159). Importantly the article demonstrates that the deaths are only partly related to poverty. In fact ‘these deaths mostly occur among illiterate rural-

urban migrants who have brought pre-Islamic folk beliefs about illness and its treatment with them' (p.159).

The article agrees with previous academics who have concluded that the best way of combating high infant mortality is to concentrate on impoverished pregnant women and their infants during the first six months of life, but notes that more consideration needs to be given as to how this can be done. Child deaths occurred almost entirely in the poorest and least educated families where sickness was explained by "spirit possession" (p. 172). The long-term solution to this is said to be education for all. The second issue for consideration is that child illness occurs almost entirely within the 'women's world'. This is an important concern where *pardah* restricts access to outside services and where older household members are dominant, often insisting upon the male of the household being present before major decisions are taken regarding seeking health advice on behalf of their children. Again, the report proposes education for wives and husbands as a solution and the introduction of more intermediate range health clinics that are more socially accessible (p. 175). Clearly, the relative powerlessness of children's mothers is also a key issue (p. 164).

**Delap, E., 2001, 'Economic and Cultural Forces in the Child Labour Debate: Evidence from Urban Bangladesh', *Journal of Development Studies*, Volume 37, Number 4, p. 1-22**

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/304379082-730615/content~db=all~content=a713601048>

This study considers the importance of economic forces as determinants of child work in urban Bangladesh. In so doing it finds that whilst household poverty and income stability are indeed important economic determinants of child work, cultural factors are also crucially important. These include "the availability of adult household members to replace child contributions, and gender and age differentials in household labour deployment" (p. 1).

The study suggests that the most common professions for boys are shop work, street selling and garment work (p. 7) and that girls are involved in a smaller range of activities, most often working in garment factories but sometimes also in domestic work and brick breaking. On average the study found that boys are involved in income-generating work for 7.7 hours per day, with girls working an average of 1.3 hours per day more than boys. There are also clear gender divisions in children's unpaid housework activities and girls seem to make a significantly greater contribution than boys (p. 8).

The report found that "purely economic explanations for child work deployment are inadequate for several reasons. First, boys' income-generating work and girls' housework are commonly not essential to household survival, as adult household members are often available to replace their contributions. The decision to deploy child rather than adult labour is often made on the basis of gender norms, rather than economic rationality. Secondly, there are significant gender differentials in the type and amount of work that boys and girls complete. Again, such differentials can only be explained using cultural norms. Here, gender norms, and, in particular, a belief in the importance of female seclusion, are especially important. Such beliefs restrict many girls to house and paid work activities that enable them to retain a degree of *pardah*. Thirdly, the research suggests that age subordination affects child work, forcing children to do the low status activity of firewood collection. Finally, the research suggests that the cultural importance of avoiding idleness has an important impact on child work participation. Combined with a lack of an alternative to work provided through school, the belief that children should not remain idle has pushed many children into the workforce. These beliefs are based on concerns about deviancy, and should be understood in the context of the community dislocation and deviance that is a feature of urban slum communities." (p. 16-17).

## 8. The implications of flooding

Rashid, H., Hunt, L. M. and Haider, W., 2007, 'Urban Flood Problems in Dhaka, Bangladesh: Slum Residents' Choices for Relocation to Flood-Free Areas,' *Environmental Management*, Volume 40, pp. 95-104

<http://www.springerlink.com/content/a23p11j728q983m5/>

The article notes that "flooding is undoubtedly the major hazard and leading environmental problem in Bangladesh" and that "although all sectors of the urban society are inconvenienced by these floods, residents of slums and squatter settlements are particularly vulnerable to this type of flooding, because, most often, surface runoff accumulation in such settlements results from the lack of, or inadequate provision of, storm sewers [...] The problem is further exacerbated by low-quality dwellings of squatter settlements that lack effective flood-proofing devices and by the limited ranges of indigenous flood alleviation measures or coping strategies taken by the residents, all of which are linked to the socioeconomic marginalisation of the slum residents" (p. 95).

This article considers preference choices among urban poor who live in two squatter settlements in Dhaka and what factors might influence their decision if they were given the choice to relocate to flood-free areas. The survey indicated that despite having been frequently affected by flood problems, many residents of Mirpur and Vasantek found that certain configurations of economic incentives were not attractive enough for them to relocate to flood-free areas. At the same time, they would prefer a reduction in the risk of flooding at their current location. The report showed that "respondents would indeed opt for flood-free lands, provided additional economic incentives, notably provisions for employment, were offered to them. Paradoxically, without such additional incentives, many individuals were inclined to opt for the status quo. Respondents were strongly inclined to stay at their current flood-prone locations without employment provisions being attached to the move" (p.103).

## 9. Additional information

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Google, Google Scholar, Eldis, World Bank, Asian Development Bank, Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, BRAC, Wateraid, Centre for Policy Dialogue, Ingenta Journals

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