

Creating Livelihood Options for the Urban Extreme Poor

Exploring the Challenges



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Creating Livelihood Options for the Urban Extreme Poor

Urban extreme poverty is a growing challenge. It is estimated that there are eight million extreme poor living in Bangladesh, with four million in Dhaka alone.

To address this, Dushtha Shasthya Kendra (DSK), a national NGO and shiree, a program funded by DFID and the Government of Bangladesh jointly organized a workshop on May 3, 2011 inviting MPs, donors, academics, NGOs, private sector change-makers, local authorities and poor community leaders to come together to discuss the challenges facing the urban extreme poor and explore possible solutions.

This paper shares the views of six experts working in the field of urban poverty reduction. We will publish a follow-up highlighting some opportunities and solutions that came out of the workshop.

What is extreme poverty?

Extreme poor households exhibit a high degree of chronic and severe deprivation. Their low income is linked to a lack of employment and secured shelter, low literacy-rates, inaccessibility to credit and social safety nets, and low community involvement and decision-making. The elderly, the disabled, female headed households and minority groups are disproportionately high among the extreme poor.

There are two official poverty measures in Bangladesh and both comprise of an upper and a lower poverty line. The Daily Caloric Intake (DCI) measure defines people consuming <2,122 Kcal per day as absolute poor and those consuming <1,805 Kcal per day as extreme poor. The Cost of Basic Needs (CBN) measure defines people with per capita income less than BDT 30 (urban) and 27 (rural) as absolute poor and those with per capita income less than BDT 25 (urban) and 13 (rural) as extreme poor. Progress towards achievement of MDG 1 is measured using the DCI.

A pro-poor urban policy

The National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction (NSAPR, 2004-2008) has been a fundamental step towards recognizing urban poverty and the growing disparities between rural and urban Bangladesh. Still, most of the government's safety net programmes are designed for rural areas only. The urban poor continue to be overlooked in national policies, urban planning processes and economic development strategies.

The cities and towns of Bangladesh are the main drivers of economic growth for the nation. Rural-urban migration cannot be stopped by stimulating the rural economy alone. To reverse this trend will require a dynamic response to rural infrastructure and macro level pro-poor growth as well as better planning in urban areas. Jobs must be created, skills developed, investments enabled through strategic pro-poor policies.

In order to achieve accelerated pro-poor growth the Chronic Poverty Research Centre suggests: *a structural change in society, involving industrialisation; a more developed private sector with the major share of the workforce engaged in the modern sector; supporting non-farm activities in both rural and urban areas.*

Reduced landholdings, a growing population, centralized government planning and the development of a 'primate' capital city has transferred poverty from rural to urban centres. This has led to a significant drain on urban resources, unbearable pressure on infrastructure and inevitably a long-term factor of limiting economic growth.

The responsibility of eradicating extreme urban poverty must become one which is grounded in learning. The government, donors, private sector, development agencies are all respon-

sible for creating the space to innovate, understand and learn ways to sustainably deal with the poverty problem.

By 2045, fifty percent of our population will live in cities, creating a new policy imperative. The government and other players should establish a viable long-term vision and work together to promote inclusive cities and eradicate urban extreme poverty.



Citizenship Rights

Suvashish Karmakar, CONCERN WORLDWIDE

Constitutional rights guarantee the right to citizenship by birth. The urban extreme poor living in slums or on pavements are often denied this right in absence of documentary proof of their birth, residence and nationality. Schools ask for birth certificates, banks and employers ask for proof of residence and election officers ask for voting cards. Thus a lack of documentary proof can lead to a denial of other human and constitutional rights such as the right to education, shelter and participation in elections. The goal of an inclusive city can only be achieved if every individual in the municipal area holds evidence of citizenship.

The challenge

There are two challenges here. Firstly, vulnerable groups are not well positioned to demand their rights. They have no voice, they have few platforms, they have little influence. Those rights which are meant specifically to protect them,

are not available to them, and they cannot do much about it. Often they do not even know about these rights. If they do happen to know about certain rights they are entitled to, the second challenge they face, particularly if they are street dwellers, is that they do not have sufficient proof of citizenship to avail those rights. Street dwellers are unable to register for National ID cards or birth certificates for their newborns due to their lack of permanent address. Often street dwellers live in the same place for many, many years, however, that place is not theirs' officially so they cannot use the address.

Why has this challenge persisted?

Under the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) ordinance there is no specific guideline on street dwellers, hence DCC cannot take an initiative on their own to improve the well being of this vulnerable group.

Impact on the extreme poor

Various government services, including safety net support and even basic education, require some proof of ID. Street children are often denied access to education as they do not have birth certificates. Adult street dwellers face challenges securing permanent jobs due to lack of ID. As a result, these vulnerable people are then less able to vote or voice their political concerns.

In January, Concern and shiree, presented this issue to the MPs of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Extreme Poverty. The MPs were sympathetic to the plight of the urban extreme poor. The following week, in parliament, Mr. Maustaque Ahmed Ruhi, MP of Netrokona, raised the issue and the Minister of Social Welfare committed to form a sub-group to lead an initiative on helping the urban extreme poor to register for National ID cards and birth certificates.

Secure Tenure for Urban Poor

K A Jayaratne, UPPR

Tenure insecurity among urban communities is a key factor contributing to acute poverty in Bangladesh. Nearly 90% of slum populations live as tenants on private lands. Most families do not own the land or home in which they have been living for more than 30 years. Several studies have identified as many as 20 types of complex tenure arrangements through which the poor are generally exploited. Slums for many extreme poor families are transit accommodations until they find proper livelihoods and a place to live, though they end up living there for years on end. Most slum dwellers live in constant fear of eviction, fire, bullying and other forms of insecurity such as lack of basic services.

The challenge

Cities and towns in Bangladesh are growing at an alarming rate compared to many other cities in Asia. The inflow of rural poor to urban areas is rising. Populations in existing slums are growing. The value of land in urban Bangladesh has sky rocketed. The majority of slums

are privately owned by people who do not provide basic services to their tenants though rents are increased annually. Bangladesh lacks good practices to follow on to provide secure tenure to the large and growing number of urban poor.

Why has this challenge persisted?

Several factors have contributed to the continued insecurity of tenure in urban areas. Increasing urbanization attracts more people and more investment into cities. This process erodes the informal settlements which used to exist in cities. In order to meet growing demands, cities build large infrastructure projects such as expressways, bridges, sewers, water supply pipelines, electricity grids and telecommunication systems. This infrastructure is necessary however the lack of planning when it comes to implementation results in a large-scale displacement of the poor. Land use pattern in cities is determined by the markets forces - public as well as private sector allocations of land

for profitable uses. The poor are under pressure to deal with their own problems. The lack of pro-poor policies and the ineffective laws do not help the matter.

Impact on the extreme poor

Lack of security makes it difficult for people to establish firm roots, build upon their assets and access income earning opportunities. A sense of community is diminished as all slum dwellers struggle to meet their own needs in constant threat of eviction as well as bullying from more powerful landlords and neighbours. Article 15 of the Constitution of Bangladesh states that the Government has a responsibility to provide access to basic necessities, including shelter, and to ensure that citizens are not forcibly evicted, without adequate rehabilitation in place, yet this is rarely the case. Immediate evictions also pose a challenge to organisations trying to improve the livelihoods of slum dwellers. Service providers are reluctant to invest in providing services in an area likely to be removed.



Disability Inclusive Corporate Sector

Mosharraf Hossain, ADD INTERNATIONAL

The challenge

One million physically challenged people reside in Dhaka alone. Twenty percent of these people are extreme poor. They do not have skills, education, employment or secured shelter.

Marginalization and segregation ensure that challenged people are chronically poor. They have almost no opportunities for work or employment.

The attitude and environment for disabled people in the corporate sector in Bangladesh is far from enabling. The challenge is to build a private sector that is inclusive of disabled people.

Why has this challenge persisted?

Most disabled adults remain unemployed despite their desire to contribute to the workforce. They face social stigma from employers and co-workers. From their childhood they have been deprived of opportunities for education and training, especially if they are women.

Government support for this group is not sufficient. Only 1.5% of Bangladesh's annual development budget in 2007-2008 was allocated to the 15 million people with disabilities.

On the national disability day, 2nd April, the Prime Minister urged the private sec-

tor to provide employment for disabled people. However, without a policy and statutory obligation, employment of disabled people will not happen.

Impact on the extreme poor

Extreme poor challenged people will remain poorest of the poor, deprived of basic needs and rights unless we start changing social attitudes and create enabling work environments.

No impact will sustain unless the system is changed. A systemic solution is needed to lift people out of extreme poverty - a combination of human skill development and social change - to make society inclusive of all!



Access to Basic Services -- Education, Healthcare and Watsan

Mehejabeen Z Khan, TDH-ITALIA

The challenge

Despite great strides in primary education over the past few decades, major improvements are still needed in Bangladesh to assure education for all. Children living in urban slum areas and in particular children belonging to minorities and marginalized groups are at risk of being excluded from the formal education system. The crucial barriers to mainstreaming marginalized children are the lack of government schools in slum areas, cost of education, social exclusion, poor quality education and difficulties in setting up schools in slum areas.

Infrastructures and facilities are inadequate in slum areas and public health is often at risk, especially during the rains. Common challenges related to environmental situation, infrastructures and service providers are, water contamination and diseases, poor accessibility due to water sources unsuitable for Public Works Department (PWD), mere lack of water points in the slum area, lack of improved sanitation facilities, few public health clinics (7.3 % of slums have such clinic), inadequate dissemination of information on preventive health and hygiene promotion, etc.

Why has this challenge persisted?

Lack of special targeted strategies to achieve equitable enrolment, school attendance and completion of the study, poor equity, lack of knowledge, and understanding on the inclusive and child-centred approach are the major causes for persisted challenges in education sector.

Poor coordination among the few actors involved and gaps of information sharing and dissemination is another main cause. In fact there is no system

to disseminate information on available services and local authorities that should provide these services are seldom linked with NGOs activities and no exchanges of experience takes place.

Capacities, skills of service providers are not sufficient to deliver quality services. Absence of governmental urban development strategy to provide slum dwellers with rights and social services, mobility of slum dwellers and eviction can be mentioned as other major

causes for persistence of the existing challenges in the urban slums.

Impact on the extreme poor

Poor quality education limits the potential for economic growth in the country. The growing population becomes a burden rather than a strong asset. The urban poor, who are more vulnerable than their rural counterparts, suffer greatly as a result of the lack of basic services.





Protection of Children

Mohammad Tarequl Hoque, PLAN BANGLADESH

Pavements and streets of Dhaka and other cities in Bangladesh are the homes and workplaces of around 380,000 children, 55% of whom live in Dhaka city. Street children live and grow up as a marginalised population in a state of neglect and deprivation, often without protection, without education, affection, care and guidance from adult members of the families (Department of Social Services, 2001). A two year old child on an eight year old girl's hip is a common sight in Bangladesh.

The challenge

Children living on the streets are particularly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Even when these children live with their families, poverty and a lack of services means that most parents are not in a position to provide appropriate care (Unicef, 2009). Increasing number of children are moving to the streets, mainly from rural areas, attracted by the expectation of comparative economic opportunity. Persistent extreme poverty,

physical and sexual abuse, death of parents, lack of education, insecure shelter, all contribute to the challenge of bringing them into a safety net mechanism to ensure adequate protection. Moreover, the lack of basic necessities to survive (food, clothing, water, medicine, shelter) drives children to desperation. Desperation then pushes these vulnerable children into precarious situations, increasing their susceptibility to sexual abuse, drug addiction and recklessness. The absence of family structure and perception makes the street children bondless and frequent mover, which instigate vulnerability and deprive from adequate protection.

Why has this challenge persisted?

Most often, children end up on the streets due to family pathology, such as abuse and neglect. Violence of various forms drive children to leave home. In other cases, children are abandoned by their destitute families at a very young age. Extreme poverty in the family, death of parents, social disruption caused by frequent relocation, parent-child friction in reconstituted families, are some of the other causes. Street children are rarely orphans, but rather victims of unfortunate circumstances. Material and emotional desperation, drug addiction, lack of family structure and education ensure their continued vulnerability.

Impact on the extreme poor

Street children who have been sexually abused or exploited suffer from severe physical and psychological damage that takes years to begin to heal. Children who have become addicted to Dandy (industrial glue) may have brain damage. Because of their distressing experiences, abusive behavior of adults and law enforcing agencies, they often become psychologically diffident and distrustful. Adjusting to a normal life proves very difficult for many street children. They do not like to accept the rules of society as society has rejected them. They usually have no access to money so they must drop out of school and take up odd, and usually dangerous, jobs for some measly income.

Private Sector Engagement for the Extreme Poor

Asif U Ahmed and Saif Islam, CARE BANGLADESH

Extreme poverty is a major challenge in Bangladesh and urgently needs to be addressed. A total of 25% of the population is living on less than 22 taka a day. Though Bangladesh has a massive labour force, companies in growing sectors such as garments and footwear, complain that their biggest constraint is in employing people. Semi-skilled labour, which usually only means literacy up to grade five, is in such short supply, despite the huge population. Why is this?

The challenge

Every year many young women migrate to urban areas in search of a better life, however, a lack of income generating opportunities leaves them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, with little or no means to combat extreme poverty. They have limited skills,

little or no literacy, and usually, no social network. They are unable to derive any benefit from the economic growth of the country. They need jobs.

Why has this challenge persisted?

The stampeding growth in the country's private sector has also not equitably benefited the poor, especially women. The gap between the rich and the poor is expanding and many rich people are gaining wealth by exploiting poor people, and the environment. Weak governance at all levels limits the participation of poor and marginalised groups in exerting any influence on policy. This means they continue to be denied basic rights, including education and skill development. The lack of enforced pro-poor policies designed

to ensure access to resources and services for the poor and marginalized leaves them vulnerable and dependent on exploitative relationships.

Lack of inclusive economic growth, coupled with inequitable distribution and inaccessibility of government services, as well as poor infrastructure, are contributing to the country's inability to absorb its growing labour force. The challenge is to ensure that economic development is inclusive of the poor, in ways that provide them with sustainable access to employment, entrepreneurial and service-based opportunities.

While the garments sector and others are creating some jobs, this is not enough. Poor people need dignified jobs, in which their rights as employees are protected. Furthermore, only through social ownership schemes, fair trade ethics and other such mechanisms, can business eradicate urban poverty.

Impact on the extreme poor

We have witnessed how exploitation in the form of low wages, long working hours, forced overtime, etc exist and are causing anarchy and unrest on a sporadic basis, causing millions of dollars worth of damage to industries like the Ready Made Garments industry, as well as creating detrimental impacts on the lives of the poor. Bangladesh's competitive advantage in the global market has been availability of cheap labor, however a large proportion of our labor remain unskilled, untrained, ill-educated and unable to compete as wage-earners, producers, traders or service providers in both local, regional and international markets. Furthermore, even if they do secure these low paid jobs, they are never offered any form of ownership, such as shares in the company, so the soaring profits never trickle down.



About Dushtha Shasthya Kendra (DSK)

Dushtha Shasthya Kendra (DSK) is an NGO that works with more than 900,000 people from 74 upazilas of 15 districts. DSK's urban projects target slum dwellers and low income communities. DSK's approach is holistic, as the projects include components of health, education, microfinance, agriculture, water supply and sanitation, food security and general livelihoods development. Currently 7,000 extreme poor households in Korail and Kamrangirchar receive support from the DSK-shiree project to improve their livelihoods.

Both the DSK and Shiree monitoring results show that most of the indicators including income, food security, health, water and sanitations and gender situation have been improved significantly. For more information, please visit www.dskbangladesh.org

About shiree

The Economic Empowerment of the Poorest (EEP) programme is a partnership between UKaid from the Department for International Development (DFID) and the Government of Bangladesh. shiree, the Bangla word for 'steps', has been adopted by EEP to describe the programme approach: to support and enable households to climb out of extreme poverty (Stimulating Household Improvements Resulting in Economic Empowerment).

In partnership with NGOs, shiree helps the bottom 10 percent of the population achieve sustainable livelihoods. In order to break the vicious cycle of inter-generational poverty, shiree strives to eliminate all forms of social exclusion and is committed to women's empowerment.

Shiree also creates learning and advocacy platforms to build and share knowledge with the government, the private sector, donors and NGOs to transform the way in which we approach extreme poverty.

One such platform is engagement with the All Party Parliamentary Group on Extreme Poverty. The formation of this group is a significant achievement, heralding government recognition along with a commitment to tackling this problem. As a part of this endeavour, a number of extreme poverty orientation sessions have been organised by shiree for Members of Parliament and several more will be organised going forward. For more information, please visit www.shiree.org

