

URBAN PROGRAMMING

Bangladesh a country in demographic transition

THE BIG DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGE

**A paper presented by the SHAHAR urban development project
CARE Bangladesh
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Executive summary

1.0 Background:

More than 1 million people urbanize annually.

Many cities are growing at a rate in excess of 8%. Dhaka is growing at 400 000 people annually.

The urbanization of rural poverty. Ultimately a greater range of survival options in urban areas

No strategy to manage urbanization.

Local government ill prepared to cope.

2.0 HLS Findings

1. Household income is unstable and insufficient to meet basic needs.
2. People feel disenfranchised, resulting in virtually no community initiative to solve their problems.
3. A high degree of exploitation exists within the household and in relationships with power brokers. Urban slum communities are poor complex and vulnerable.
4. Urban slums are often outside the main stream of governance and long term strategic development planning.
5. Poor families live in extremely unhygienic environmental conditions. The level of urban services is inadequate to ensure environmental health
6. Poor maternal health : Woman are at risk during pre and post natal period
7. Maternal and child malnutrition rates are significantly higher than for the rest of Bangladesh.

3.0 SHAHAR

Active in 4 cities, impacting on 35 000 households

Components:

1. Institutional strengthening and community mobilization
2. Income generating activities
3. Health, hygiene, nutrition
4. Infrastructure

Development Strategy:

1. Develop the preconditions for urban living
(Services, income, knowledge)
2. Foster a sustainable development partnership between Pourashava and Community Resource Management Committees.
3. Foster a sense of belonging through popular participation in education and

development activities.

4. Foster civil society through partnering with and institutional strengthening of local NGOs.

4.0 lessons learnt

- ▶ The importance of tenure and possible disputes as to whom will benefit from infrastructure investment.
- ▶ The importance of an integrated approach and not focusing too much only on urban infrastructure
- ▶ The danger of legitimizing undemocratic community leadership.
- ▶ The importance of establishing sustainable partnerships between local government and communities

5.0 Conclusion

The communities in isolation cannot solve many of the problems confronting poor urban communities. Need to link into a greater social movement to ensure poor friendly urban policy and change at a national level.

1.0: Background

A great deal has been written about Bangladesh, but little has been written about the biggest social transformation of all, the demographic transition from rural to urban. More than a million people every year become urban dwellers as a result of in-migration from the rural areas.

The level of urbanization is one of the lowest in the world about 20% (1990 estimate) but the rate has been very high oscillating between 7 and 11% over the last three decades. Recent Asian Development Bank forecasts indicate that by the year 2006 some 36% of the population will be urbanized. In absolute numbers this is dramatic representing some 51 million people.

As with most developing countries there is a tendency towards the big city. Some 400 000 migrants arrive in Dhaka the capital city annually. However there is also a high rate of urbanization to a large number of secondary towns. While Dhaka is growing at 8.2% annually the towns of Jhenaidah, Kurigram and Khulna are amongst the towns growing even faster¹. If the trend continues these towns will double in size every 8 years.

To some extent the urban areas generate a small urban pull effect as higher earnings can be made in the bigger towns. The mass of urbanization however has more to do with strong rural push factors. In essence the process can be described as the urbanization of rural poverty. River erosion alone displaces some 500 000 people annually over half of whom are forced into the urban areas.

While the cities are absorbing huge numbers every year they do so in a policy vacuum. There is no explicit urbanization policy in Bangladesh. Various documents allude to some policy measures but in a somewhat uncoordinated manner. One of the key objectives of rural development strategies is to slow down the pace of rural urban migration and to reduce the problems associated with over urbanization. Other policies relate to developing decentralized economic and administrative nodes.

While these policies have undoubtedly impacted in some way on reducing levels of urbanization they most certainly have not stopped urbanization itself. Without doubt the debate about urban size and decentralization in Bangladesh is both relevant and important but it is also potentially damaging as it is politically used as an excuse for non-action and the rampant disregard for the rights of newly urbanized poor communities. The mass eviction of urban communities is common with little regard as to how these communities are supposed to access the city.

Clearly there is a policy imbalance, while rural development strategies are a vital component of any coherent national strategy, the lack of a coherent urban strategy fails to recognize that a fundamental characteristic of developing countries is that of uncontrollable urbanization. This needs to be recognized and policy moved in the direction of attacking the environmental and social impacts. Left unchecked the cities of Bangladesh have the capacity to degenerate into a quagmire of social poverty, congestion, fumes, waste, pollution and disease.

¹ Bangladesh at 25 An Analytical Discourse on Development edited by Abdul Bayes and Anu Muhammed 1998 ch:7 Changing Faces of urban areas in Bangladesh- Nurul Islam Nazem

Any new urban policies need to suggest that social problems, pollution, congestion and other general environmental problems are certainly worse in larger than in small cities but that they can be remedied by programs aimed at developing civil society and the improvement of the processes of production and consumption. Clearly this must be done in the context of an integrated rural/urban development policy and population control.

The problem is further made worse by weak local government structures. In Bangladesh there is decentralization but not devolution. Decisions on budgeting and investments are made by the central government. Pourashavas remain heavily dependent on the national government for their revenues. The allocations of functions between central and local government institutions are such that central government dominates the management of the urban sector. In particular the central government prepares the plans and has largely retained the responsibility for the preparation and execution of development projects, leaving the local governments with the minor responsibility of helping with implementation. Some 20 out of 52 Ministries or divisions have important responsibilities for policy formulation in the urban sector. There are at least 40 executing agencies with important functions in the urban sector. Clearly this leads to a coordination nightmare and near paralysis

Furthermore urban planning in a manner that facilitates land development and urban growth simply does not exist. Except for the four largest cities, the Urban Development Directorate (UDD) prepares master plans for all pourashavas centrally. The present planning process is highly centralized, and lacks public participation and transparency. The plans themselves are highly inflexible and do not reflect economic and financial realities. They are also poorly linked to the aspirations and capacities of urban local bodies. Consequently there is very little sense of municipal ownership of these plans.

This lack of clear policy and institutional arrangements is resulting in massive and growing backlogs, the decreasing quality of the environment and worse of all in increased conflict and evictions. It cannot be stated strongly enough Bangladesh has to change course towards a managed sustainable urban environment where households can endeavor to engage with the economies of scale inherent in the city to meet their household livelihood security needs. The alternative is to continue on the low road to an urban quagmire of pollution, poverty and social disintegration.

2.0 SHAHAR

Within the context described above CARE Bangladesh undertook a detailed HLS assessment of slum communities in secondary towns of Bangladesh in October 1997.

The assessment team identified 7 key interrelated problem areas;

8. Household income is unstable and insufficient to meet basic needs.
9. People feel disenfranchised, resulting in virtually no community initiative to solve their problems.
10. A high degree of exploitation exists within the household and in relationships with power brokers. Urban slum communities are poor complex and vulnerable.
11. Urban slums are often outside the main stream of governance and long term strategic development planning.

12. Poor families live in extremely unhygienic environmental conditions. The level of urban services is inadequate to ensure environmental health

13. Poor maternal health : Woman are at risk during pre and post natal period

14. Maternal and child malnutrition rates are significantly higher than for the rest of Bangladesh.

On the basis of these findings the SHAHAR project was designed. The overall goal of SHAHAR (Supporting Household Activities for Hygiene, Assets and Revenue) Project activities is to improve food and households security of poor urban households. In achieving this objective the project design has four discreet yet integrated focuses.

- I. Social mobilization and human rights
- II. Income generating activities
- III. Health, hygiene and nutrition activities
- IV. Urban infrastructure

The project is operating in the secondary cities of Tongi and Jessore and is presently being set up in the towns of Mymensingh and Dinajpur. The project will have some 35 000 households as direct project beneficiaries .

Urban vulnerable communities have been defined as 50 or more contiguous houses that are typically located on land with weak land tenure rights and which have access to inadequate urban services to ensure adequate environmental health. The different communities vary in settlement history and in the broader relationship to the city. Some are very recent while others are long established. Some are transitory, others are more settled. Some have distinct identities and are to a large extent spatially isolated from neighboring communities. Others are smaller scattered throughout the town.

Fundamental to the project design is the building of an effective development partnership. The partnership aims to ensure project delivery but equally important the institutional mechanism for long term development and sustainability. The project in effect promotes a joint venture approach to development. A joint venture in which the local authority and the community work together playing discreet but complementary roles in attaining local level development. To enable an effective partnership project activities are focused on the building of community structures in the form of Community Resource Management Committees and women's groups as well as the strengthening of local level NGOs and local government structures (Pourashava). While community participation lies at the center of this modus operandi the project hopes to help define specific roles and responsibilities to ensure the mobilization of different role players and resources to manage urbanization.

In this respect four partners will implement SHAHAR project activities;

Pourashava (local government)
Community based structures
CARE
PNGOs

In achieving the project objectives each partner has a discreet set of roles and responsibilities. These roles and responsibilities need to be coordinated so that each organization benefits from the synergies of cooperation.

3.0 lessons learned

Integrated Urban programming is new to CARE Bangladesh and the SHAHAR project is not based on any pilot experience. While SHAHAR is a large project it is to some degree also a pilot project. Thus important lessons are being learnt.

▸ Tenure

In communities where land tenure is not such a problem, there is great enthusiasm for interventions of an infrastructure nature such as drain construction, toilet provisioning, road improvement and repair. This however is not true of communities where land tenure uncertainties are acute, where a mixed response emerged. A clear contradiction of interest emerged in some communities between the landowners and the tenants. In general the tenants value the soft components of the project, while the landowners valued the hard component.

Communities have raised the direct question as to who benefits from the SHAHAR project. The poor tenants mentioned that the Slum Improvement Project (SIP) implemented by the Local Government Division and the City Corporation resulted in the increase of their house rent. The poor people felt that the further improvement of the slum infrastructure will again increase their cost of living and may force them to leave that slum resulting in a situation where better off people will replace them gradually. This fear is so deep that on the first day the tenants groups were unwilling to draw the social and resource map and only did so with the condition that the SHAHAR Project will not undertake infrastructure improvement projects. On the contrary the landowners were in-favor of the improvement of the slum infrastructure, as they clearly would benefit by the improved infrastructure.

It is clear that CARE must be very careful not to undertake activities that might ultimately result in the worsening of the situation for the community for which it is intended. Furthermore the complex issues around land ownership and tenure cannot be easily resolved and might impact on program design.

▸ **Hard component is not the most important aspect of the project design**

In all the communities it was clear that living in slums is not only a problem of inadequate infrastructure. On the contrary people raised constantly their need for employment to increase their income and to support their family rather than getting other assistance. Furthermore it is clear that slum communities suffer abuse of their human rights and are highly vulnerable in all aspects. It is important that the SHAHAR keeps itself focused on the integrated nature of the project design. This is especially true as the key partner the local government has no history or officially defined role in poverty reduction and social programming, and thus has a strong impetus to promote disproportionate spending on urban infrastructure.

▸ **Undemocratic community leadership structures**

In many areas it is clear that people do not feel free to participate in development processes. There is no doubt that slum dwellers living on private land are abused by the land owners and that within all the slums exist self proclaimed leaders who have different vested interests. Until such time as democratic Community Resource Management Committees (CRMC) are formed, it will be important for CARE to increase interaction with individuals through door to door communication and broad based communication

campaigns.

The failure of local government to plan for urbanization and to reserve appropriate lands with some form of tenure rights provides the ideal circumstances for exploitative relationships. In many of the slums it is clear that access to the land comes at the cost of submitting yourself to the demands of corrupt elements that gain control over the land.

The nature of this exploitation almost always includes the provision of services at a lower level but higher cost than those living in formal conditions, but also typically spreads into other arenas. This has been most noticeable with regard to micro credit, where communities in which SHAHAR is working have complained that credit programs only enrich the Mustaans and landlords while they remain with the financial obligations. Furthermore democratic community organization is difficult to achieve as those most capable of inflicting violence and fear could by circumstance be elected to represent the community.

The extent of this problem has resulted in a very cautious approach to the formation of democratic Community Resource Management Committees.

▸ **Maintenance**

State investment in urban infrastructure unless it is maintained quickly deteriorates to the point where it is as much part of the problem as the solution. The slums show evidence of numerous one-off initiatives that short of maintenance have become part of the environmental health problem. Unless infrastructure is installed with a workable long-term maintenance strategy it will surely not survive given the population pressures into the medium term. Long term maintenance issues have increased in importance and become central to project design with a clear link to the formation of Community Resource Management Committees.

4.0 Conclusion

Desperate communities literally grab any land they can, most often land with the least protection namely land of low value. As land availability becomes scarcer so available land becomes more and more densely populated until environmental health standards are severely compromised. Commonly people who gain access to the land first use their control over the land to control the lives of the later settlers. Furthermore, the land is often owned by state departments who place restrictions on the land to protect future development options. This hinders state investment as any state investment might be interpreted as a form of tenure right.

While community empowerment is a cornerstone of any successful development the hard facts are that many of the solutions rest outside of the isolated community and center around the availability of land, land tenure, urban policy and local governance in general. Given the present policy and institutional framework, a great deal of work is required in lobbying and building up community pressure to ensure an enabling environment conducive to the creation of decent human settlements.

In effect this would mean programming not only with localized NGOs focused on local needs but also with grass roots social movements (developed or embryonic) operating at a city wide level most typically struggling for environmental rights, access to land and meaningful participation in local government planning and decision making. While such urban community based movements are presently weak in Bangladesh, they are growing in

strength and confidence throughout the Americas, Asia and Africa. In Asia the different social movements are networked into the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights. In South Africa the Homeless Peoples Federation networked the homeless and demonstrated that given an enabling environment the poor can house themselves more appropriately than waiting for the state resulting in a shift in policy. Networks are developing not only between regions but also across the continents. It is these grass roots social movements that are actively taking control of the struggle for inclusion in the city both spatially and politically and provide some direction to future programming options.