

## Deprivation of Basic Needs and Denial of the Human Rights: Breaking the Nexus in Urban Poor Families in Bangladesh

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### Background Information and Objectives

Bangladesh historically was known as an agro-rural based country but over the past few years, it has been rapidly transforming into an urban society. Specifically, the nature, trend and pattern of the urbanization in Bangladesh are of varied characters. In essence, the urbanization in Bangladesh is dysfunctional. But it has been well recognized that urbanization is an effective engine of economic growth and socio-cultural development of a country. Its contribution towards the national economy is overwhelmingly significant. Globally, urbanization has been the main driving force for economic growth and contributes significantly to the national economy. Likewise, urban Bangladesh generates more than 65 percent of the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP). But its urbanization process is still uncoordinated, somewhat unplanned, and lopsided.

The urban population of Bangladesh was only 6.27 million in 1974 and it grew to more than 39.00 million in 2011 within the span of 37 years. The level of urbanization in terms of people living in urban areas has jumped to 27.66 percent (in 2011) from 8.78 percent (in 1974). Table 1 shows the growth of the population during 1974 – 2011 by urban and rural areas.

Table 1: Urban-Rural Population Growth; 1974 – 2011

Year	Urban Population (in million)	Rural Population (in million)	% of Urban Population (level of urban )	Urban Annual Exponential Growth Rate (%)	Rural Annual Exponential Growth Rate (%)	Urban -Rural Differential Annual Exponential Growth Rate (%)
1974	6.27	65.21	8.78	6.66	2.32	4.34
1981	13.54	73.58	15.54	10.99	1.73	9.26
1991	22.46	89.00	20.15	5.06	1.90	3.16
2001	28.61	95.25	23.81	2.42	0.68	1.74
2011	39.08	107.80	27.66	4.01	1.24	2.77

Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS). August 2014. Bangladesh Population and Housing Census 2011: national Report, Volume 3, Urban Area Report. Dhaka: Statistics and Informatics Division, Ministry of Planning, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.

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Another statistic signifies that the long run exponential growth rate of the urban population over the period 1974 – 2011 has been 5.18 percent against only 1.36 percent of the rural population. This is seen when in conjunction with the fact that in the period 1974-2011, the long-run trend of the total population has been only 2.18 percent illustrating an idea of the rapidity of the pace of urbanization. The rural-urban growth differential in terms of the annual exponential growth rates has averaged a sizeable 4.25 during the last 37 years representing the fact of a very rapid transformation of the country towards urbanization.

As far as the future scenario of the urban population is concerned, 50 percent of the total people of the country would live in urban areas by the middle of this century. The number would be around 120 million or more and the national population would be 240 million in 2051 (BBS, 2016). And a significant portion of the population (i.e., 30 – 40 percent) would be within the segment of the urban poor. The overall implication of such a massive concentration of urban population, in general, and the poorer people, in particular in the bigger cities and towns would be extremely critical, far-reaching, and challenging to manage in a planned manner.

More specifically, the issues relating to provisions and accessibility of basic needs in terms of services and facilities to the urban poor vis-à-vis ensuring their human rights is a vital concern of the day.

Here the main focus of the present paper is to highlight the challenge of urban poverty vis-à-vis deprivation and sufferings of the urban poor in terms of their right to stay in the city, right to work, right to live, right to basic needs and services, and the right to participate in the decision-making process of the city management.

It is to be noted here that there is an absence of up-to-date data and information and case studies that would portray the fact more realistically.

### **Challenges of Urbanization: the Context of the Urban Poor**

Though urbanization ushers economic, social, cultural and political benefits to a nation at large but in the case of Bangladesh, it poses some serious challenges, in reality, as far as the poorer people living in the urban areas is concerned. To this effect, the current and future challenges are many-fold. Some of these strategic challenges are:

- The massiveness size of the urban poor living in bigger cities – Dhaka, Chattogram, Khulna
- Providing employment opportunities for minimum survival
- Urban poverty alleviation
- Providing access to land and housing
- Provision of urban utilities and services
- Provision of education to the children
- Access to health services
- Providing mass transportation services
- Environmental management - degradation and pollution

- Crime and violence
- Political, social and cultural conflicts/disorder
- Resource mobilization/appropriation
- institutionalizing vision and policymaking
- Inclusion in urban planning and development
- Governance - participation, effectiveness, accountability, responsiveness, equality

### Urban Poverty: The Nexus Between Deprivations of Basic Needs and Human Rights

Poverty has many aspects and dimensions including inadequate consumption, inadequate income and asset base, and inadequate access to basic infrastructure and services.

The overall poverty situation in Bangladesh has been improved over the years both in rural and urban areas and as such at the national level. This can be seen from Table 2 below. In 2010 at the national level the incidence of poverty under the extreme poverty line was 17.6 percent corresponding figures was 25.1 percent in 2005; at the rural level it came down to 21.1 percent in 2010 from 28.6 percent in 2005; and, at the urban level, it was 7.7 percent and 14.6 percent in 2010 and 2005 respectively. The change of urban poverty in the case of extreme urban poverty is dramatic.

Table 2: Incidence of Poverty (Headcount Rate), 1995 – 2010

1995			2000			2005			2010		
National	Rural	Urban	National	Rural	Urban	National	Rural	Urban	National	Rural	Urban
Upper Poverty Line											
53.1	56.7	35.0	48.9	52.3	35.2	44.0	43.8	28.4	31.5	35.2	21.3
Lower Poverty line/Extreme Poverty Line											
35.6	39.8	14.3	34.3	37.9	20.0	25.1	28.6	14.6	17.6	21.1	7.7

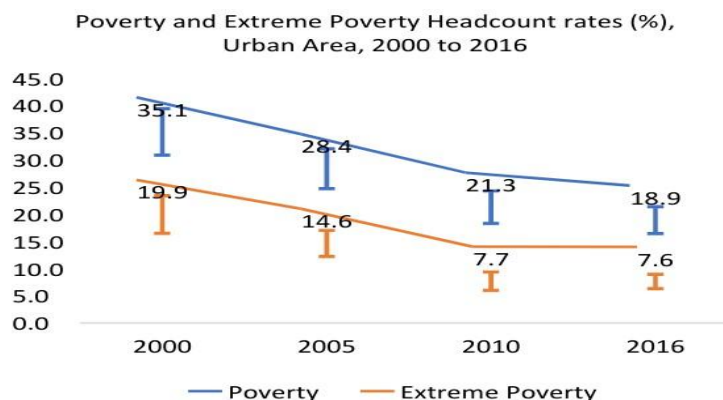
Source: Sen, Binayak and Ali, Zulfiqar. 2015. Ending Extreme Poverty in Bangladesh during the Seventh Five Year Plan: Trends, Drivers and Policies. Background Paper for the Preparation of the Seventh Five Year Plan. Dhaka, General Economics Division, Planning Commission, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Although Bangladesh has achieved much in the way of poverty reduction and human development, progress has been slower in some urban areas.

Despite the steady growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), successive Household Income and Expenditure Surveys (2005 to 2010 and 2010 to 2016) suggest that the rate of poverty reduction has been slowing down while the absolute number of extreme poor have been increasing in urban Bangladesh. Given the accelerating rate of urbanization, it suggests that more people live in extreme poverty in 2016 than they did in 2010. With nearly 44 percent of the country's population projected to be living in an urban setting by 2050, this issue is only likely to intensify.

Again, between 2010 and 2016, urban poverty rates declined from 21.3 to 18.9 percent, while rural poverty decreased from 35.2 to 26.4 percent. While extreme poverty in urban

areas did not change over time - the proportion of the urban population living in extreme poverty was 7.7 percent in 2010 and 7.6 percent in 2016. (The World Bank, 2017).



The challenge is still there regarding how to eliminate extreme poverty and to facilitate the urban poor in their access to housing, health, education and other basic services. Both the extreme poor and moderate poor need support in the struggle to improve their quality of life/living conditions.

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### **Operational Definitions of the Terms Used**

#### *Urban poverty in the context of deprivation and rights*

Urban poverty is usually defined in two ways - as an absolute standard based on a minimum amount of income needed to sustain a healthy and minimally comfortable life, and as a relative standard that is set based on average the standard of living in a nation.

In the context of deprivation, suffering and ensuring rights of the urban poor comprehensively refers to their right to stay, right to work, right to live, right to livelihood and right to participate in the decision making process in anywhere in the country; and thereof extent and magnitude of availing of the above-mentioned rights.

#### *Human Rights*

Human rights in Bangladesh are protected as fundamental rights in Part III of the Constitution of Bangladesh. However, constitutional and legal experts believe many of the country's laws require reform to enforce fundamental rights and reflect the democratic values of the 21st century. Article 11 proclaims that "the Republic shall be a democracy in which fundamental human rights and freedoms and respect for the dignity and worth of the human person shall be guaranteed". Here, the human rights denote entitlements/privileges to be received by the poor people; more specifically, services and facilities that are available to the urban poor within their reach.

### *Basic Needs*

Basic needs refer to the necessities of things that are wanted/required by the human being for mere survival. A traditional list of immediate "basic needs" is food (including water), shelter and clothing. Many modern lists emphasize the minimum level of consumption of 'basic needs' of not just food, water, clothing and shelter, but also sanitation, education, healthcare, and the internet.

### **Constitutional Provisions of Rights of the Urban Poor**

All citizens either living in rural or urban areas have the right to basic needs such as to food, clothing, education, health and shelter as mentioned in Article 15 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. Article 32 emphasizes the protection of life and personal property. The right to political freedom or freedom of speech and belief are also universally recognized. In terms of accessibility to five basic needs, there are huge inequalities by socioeconomic groups of people, areas/places of living, sizes of the cities and towns and so on.

#### *Right to stay in the city*

The Constitution of Bangladesh has allowed all citizens to move freely in any part of the country and to settle anywhere within legal limits (Article 36). This freedom is applicable for the poor to move to urban areas and to settle down there. However, squatting on public or privately owned land without permission is not allowable/acceptable, although the poor people particularly coming from the rural areas do forcibly adopt this practice.

#### *Right to work*

Article 15 and Article 20 of the Constitution of Bangladesh guarantee work as a right. Work for an income is essential to livelihood. The Government cannot provide employment or work for all people neither the private sector can do this. The Government mostly creates an environment or facilities for creating employment opportunities. The urban poor naturally have to create their own work which is usually in the unorganized informal sector.

#### *Right to education*

Article 15 of the Constitution mentions the provisions of basic necessities of life including education and medical care. Unfortunately, in reality, the urban poor is less covered by education services than the rural poor. The literacy rate in urban slums are terribly low and all children do not attend schools. Many of them work as urban child laborers often in hazardous working environment.

#### *Right to medical care*

The notion of health as a human right is essential to ensuring human welfare and development. The Constitution of Bangladesh also gives high priority to the development of the social sector, including health and education. Constitutional provisions guarantee employment with reasonable wage, the right to social security and good quality of life, and the protection, promotion, and respect of healthcare as a constituent of human rights in Bangladesh.

As regards health service, the prevalence of diseases is high in urban poor settlements due to poor sanitation and environmental problems.

*Right to basic services*

For survival and good health, one needs access to safe water and sanitation. In fact, the accessibility of these services to the urban poor is extremely low and in some cases absent.

*Right to children's recreation*

Although the right to recreation is not listed among the basic necessities of life in the Constitution but it is universally accepted as essential to the healthy development of children. Hardly there is any playground or open space for the children in poor urban settlements.

*Right to vote and right to participate in the decision making*

Bangladesh is a democratic country and every adult has the right to vote. The urban poor and poorer people living in the slums and squatters do enjoy the right to vote. However, they are hardly consulted in the decision-making process of undertaking any development projects.

*Right to organize*

The Constitution in its Article 38 ensures its citizens to form an association for good reasons. The urban poor particularly the slum dwellers have been able to organize their own associations and collective forums. The largest of such organizations is the *Nagar Daridra Bastibashi Unnayan Sangstha* (NDBUS) which was formed in 2010 with support from the Centre for Urban Studies.

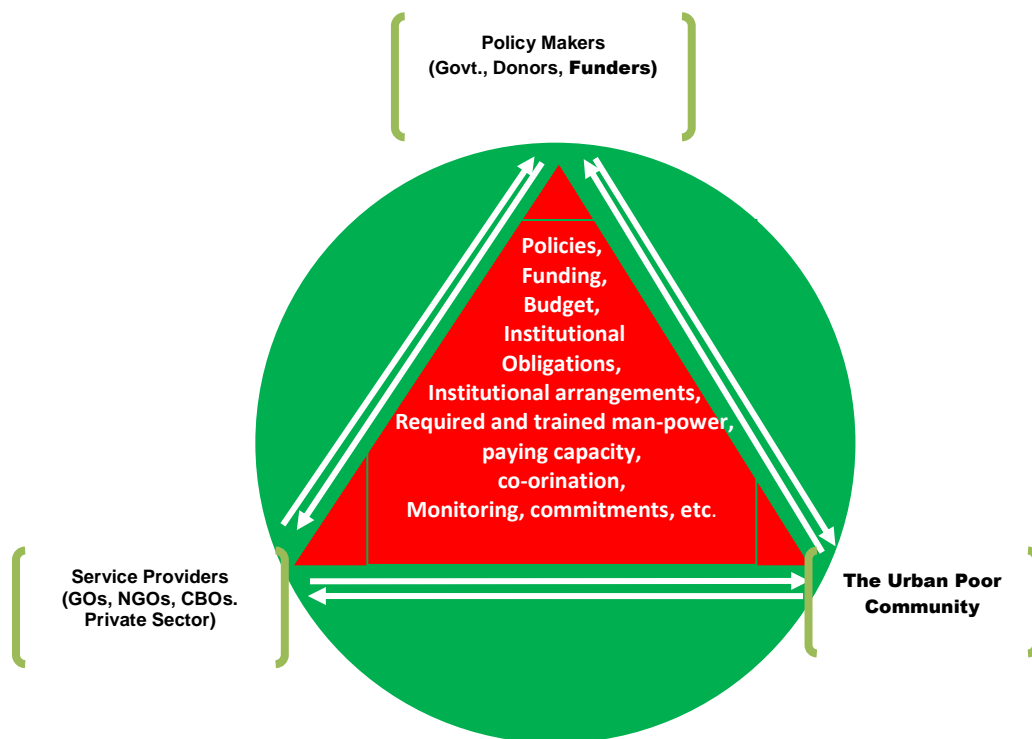
*Right to shelter*

The shelter is one of the recognized five basic needs right. Housing is the most critical problem for the urban poor especially in Dhaka, a megacity.

**Conceptual Framework: Breaking the Nexus Between Deprivations and Denial of Human Right of the Urban Poor**

The figure below indicates linkages of the urban poor between the policy-makers in terms of government, donors and funders; and the service providers in terms of government, non-government organizations and private sectors. In the context of governance, there is a need for an effective and well-coordinated relationship among the three parties. A critical analysis of the existing relationship among these partners in Bangladesh shows a gloomy picture resulting in the non-functional overall service delivery system in general, and the urban poorer section of the society is deprived of receiving the services and facilities, in particular.

### Governance Conceptual Framework: the Context of the Urban Poor



#### The Existing Situation: Extent and Dimension of Accessibilities of the Urban Poor to Services and Facilities

In 2014 the Government counted 14,000 slum settlements. These settlements share characteristics such as high population densities, a large share of migrants from rural areas, inferior public water and sanitation services and poor-quality housing, which creates greater health challenges for their residents.

However, other estimates show that there are about 4000 slums in Dhaka where about 30 percent of the Dhaka population are living.

The type and characteristic of the slums differ widely in locations and land ownership. Around 62.45 percent of slum dwellers live in Tin/*katcha* houses and 64.87 percent of slum dwellers live in a rented house with a space of less than 100 sq. ft. and pay high rent.

Over the years the location of slums has been changed. In Dhaka 90.7 percent slums were in public land but now on an average 80 percent slums are in private land and only 20 percent remained in public land. Access to water supply, sanitation and electricity has increased but the threat for eviction of slums continues.

Most of the slum population is engaged in the informal sector mainly as rickshaw pullers, transport workers, construction workers and small traders/vendors. The average income of a slum household in Dhaka city is over Taka 10,000 but about 50 percent is spent for living in the slums without tenure security. And their incomes are unassured

and not regular. The existing engagements in jobs do not provide any guarantee of mobility, security, stability and prospect for advancement. Most of the families do not have any savings. About 43 percent of the families are members of NGOs and took microcredit.

Health and nutrition policies and program have largely focused on providing health services to rural areas. As a result, the urban poor has not enjoyed sufficient access to quality health and nutrition services.

Land and housing are central to livelihoods security for the urban poor. While the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper of Bangladesh finds a close nexus between housing and poverty, and the National Housing Policy acknowledges the rights of the urban poor to housing, there has been limited government action in this sphere. The Government's interactions with the urban poor, therefore, are largely limited to eviction threats and practice.

Informal *bustee* housing supplies an estimated 35 percent of dwelling units across Bangladesh's first six city corporations. These are predominantly low quality, built from corrugated iron, thatched bamboo partitions, palm leaf, wood or plastic sheeting.

The *bustees* are often located on low-lying, flood-prone land with poor or absent of drainage capacity.

Safe and hygienic water and sanitation facilities, solid waste management services, and community infrastructures, such as footpaths and drains, are all limited or absent in *bustees*. This leads to an overflow of wastewater, muddy and flooded conditions, scattered disposal of solid waste, escalating exposure to illness and widespread menace of mosquitoes and other disease-carrying insects.

The urban poor's exclusion from services and infrastructure goes beyond physical availability and extends to political, institutional, and economic factors/conflicts.

The issues of urban poverty are deeply embedded in the social and political processes that limited the access of low-income residents to better incomes, assets, services and employment opportunities. The complex urban political economy is amongst the biggest obstacles facing the urban poor. It fuels their social and political exclusion, leaving vast segments marginalized from local politics and formal decision-making processes.

Half the population in urban areas has no access to improved sanitation facilities, impacting their health, safety, dignity and economic opportunities.

Last but not the least, it is to be observed that City Corporations' and Pourashavas' existing annual development plan (ADP) allocation exclusively for the urban poor is either absent or minimal; holding of town level coordination committees' (TLCCs) and ward level coordination committees' (WLCCs) are not regular and spontaneous which are the only platforms wherein the urban poor can ventilate their problems and demands.

The inadequacy of urban services is a severe hindrance to the continued development of urban areas as well as to efforts to reduce poverty.



### Way Forward

It is noticeable that the Government of Bangladesh has been undertaking a number of projects and programmes with its own funds as well as with assistance from different development partners in the areas of income-generating activities/livelihood, health, education, water supply, sanitation and other infrastructural development addressing the needs of the poor people living in the low-income urban settlements. The involvement of non-government organizations (NGOs) is also noteworthy. The existence of coordination among these initiatives/actions is not much visible. Centrally there is no mechanism for sharing lesson learned/good practices among the stakeholders.

In Bangladesh the urban population's contribution to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is estimated as more than 60 percent. Urban slum dwellers having migrated from rural areas in search of better economic opportunities are an important part of this economic growth. As a matter of human rights, therefore, slum dwellers should have the same opportunity as others in the country to access basic amenities as full citizens. To achieve this, the state will need to give special attention to policy planning for the poor and disadvantaged in urban Bangladesh.

In this connection, some pragmatic recommendations are: keeping a significant amount of regular annual development plan (ADP) allocation for the urban poor by the city Corporations and Pourashavas; performing effective operational role by the town level coordination committee (TLCC) and ward level coordination committees (WLCC) where the urban poor have representatives; mainstreaming the affairs of urban poor with regular activities of City Corporations and Pourashavas; and activities of slum development officers (SDOs) are to be broadened, monitored and regularized in line with the need of the urban poor.

Moreover, there is evidence that in developing countries, focusing on urbanization positively and proactively can result in a large portion of the urban poor population becoming strong contributors to overall economic growth rather than being a social burden. In light of these examples, Bangladesh should adopt an inclusive strategy for urban areas targeting the health and other basic needs issues of the urban poor.

The concerning issues and problems of providing basic needs for ensuring human rights to the urban poor are wide-ranging and deep-rooted. There are no other alternatives except to undertake concerted, holistic, time-bound, down-trodden oriented activities and actions in terms of projects and schemes. Above all, the mind-set and wisdom of our policy makers towards the cause of the urban poor, in general, and extreme urban poor, in particular, has to be attuned.

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