

Poverty and Housing Linkages *A Case Study of Pavement Dwellers in Dhaka Mega- City*

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Abstract : There are many programmes both under Government and Non-Government initiatives working for the development of slums and squatter settlers of the different cities and urban areas in Bangladesh. For example the successful Slum Improvement programme (SIP) has been in operation since 1985. While no single such programme in any urban areas or even in Dhaka City has so far been taken for the improvement of pavement dwellers. This case study is presumably the survey first of its kind, where an attempt has been made to highlight the socio-economic condition and to analyse the determining factors which influence the status of pavement dwellers in the Dhaka Mega-City. It also offers some recommendations and policy options on the basis of the feedback given by the 367 respondents for the Government as well as NGO's for taking appropriate plan and programme for them in future.

Introduction

Historically, poverty has been mainly concentrated in the rural areas throughout the world, while prosperity prevailed in the cities of both Western Europe and Third world countries. In fact " Cities, in the past were like the makers of wealth, magnets for the industrious and motors for invention, but their massive power to contribute to economic development and create opportunity to delivers their goods and services were unequal"¹. Over the years scale of urbanization has exceeded than any other time in the history, while urban infrastructures have not expanded commensurate with population growth. This has widened the gap between those associated with economic growth or affluence and those associated with poverty.

The concept of shelter regarding the urban poor in the developing countries can be classified into three major dimensions. In the first category any type of residence is a vital factor of production in their economic pursuits: while in the

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second it is merely a barricade for privacy in a highly congested urban environment. Third category is urban poor who live and earn their living with no form of shelter whatsoever². This class of people who not have municipal addresses, but live in various open spaces such as pavements, open verandahs, under bridges, railway platforms, abandoned large pipes, courtyards of religious places and even on hand-carts that they pull in the daytime to earn their living is the target group of this study. The section of the urban poor who live in squatters and slums has been kept outside of the purview of this study, as our focus of attention is the truly shelterless people.

Objective of the study

The present survey is a case-study on the pavement dwellers of Dhaka Mega-city to analyse the major causes of being pavement dwellers and highlight their socio-economic conditions.

More specifically the objectives of the present study are (a) to ascertain the reasons of living on the pavements through enumeration based on spot visits, and (b) to collect socio-economic information as well as their life-styles. It is worth mentioning here that since the class of population under study includes the floating population, the selection of the season and the hour of enumeration become critical for accuracy of the study.

In order to achieve these objectives, this paper has been divided into four sections. The first section describes the sources of data and survey methodology for this study and presents a picture of the size, nature and magnitude of the problem. The second section analyses the economic characteristics of the pavement dwellers, which as a class can be considered as the poorest of the urban poor. The third section examines the income-shelter

linkages, and the fourth section attempts to derive some recommendations and conclusion.

Methodology & Sources of Data.

This paper is based primarily on the data derived from the field survey conducted by the author to find out the major reasons of the socio-economic condition of a section of urban poor, who have for various reasons chosen pavements of Dhaka city as their place of residence. It was also intended to make an on-the-spot count of the floating population within the 360sq. km. geographical limit of Dhaka city Corporation area, in which it is estimated there are approximately, 1,104,600 million slum squatter and pavement dwellers³.

The survey was carried out for ten consecutive days between March 6 and March 15, 1998 at night 10 PM to 3 A.M.. About 10 assistants were engaged for the collection of data during the survey. For both operational convenience and collection of data the total area of Dhaka City Corporation was divided into five survey blocks of different sizes. A survey schedule was designed to identify the locations on the pavements of thoroughfares where the people were sleeping, and counted physically. Each survey block took one night's intense work, and a head-count of pavement dweller population in the city.

Among the identified blocks initially the samples were drawn and subsequently the survey personnel were sent with detailed questionnaires. They were advised to select sample persons at random at the designated locations. The survey questionnaire was divided into major two sections, incorporating the information on occupational and income features, migratory trends and a poverty profile.

Findings of the Survey.

(a) Causes of Pavement dwellers

The total number of pavement dwellers covered in the study were 367 located within the Dhaka City Corporation. These sample respondents along with their dependents were 1207, which represent about 30 percent of the total pavement dwellers. More than 90% of the respondents mentioned that lack of getting expected earning opportunity as well as lack of getting living facilities from any close relatives and friends thrown them to be pavement dwellers immediately after the arrival of Dhaka City. About 78 percent of respondents mentioned that they are still desperately searching any place to live in, but their earning do not permit them to find residence even with share basis. Only 15 percent of the them preferred live in the pavement, as they believe their earning at present and in future would not enable them to spend for accommodation. Generalisation of above opinions clearly indicates that the amount of income per day or month has compelled them to be a pavement dwellers.

About 50 percent of the total respondents preferred to live in the pavements of Central Business District (CBD) of Dhaka city Corporation because of proximity working place and other 50 percent chosen commercial areas of Dhaka city such as the wholesale markets, bus terminal, launch ghat and railway stations which offer best opportunities to earn a livelihood of selling labour services in highly competitive environments. Almost all pavement dwellers purchase their meals, from the footpath shop, which is commonly known as Italian Hotels .

More than 60 percent of pavement dwellers live without shelter as a deliberate rational decision, but the uncertain income has made them desperate to take this option. However, living on the

pavements ensures access to earning opportunities, however small they may be .

b) Poverty Profile.

In the present section an attempt was made to examine poverty-profile linkage, with reference to occupation, income distribution, willingness and ability to pay for shelter. The pavement dwellers covered in the sample study were found to be engaged in over thirty different occupations with significant intra-occupational income differentials. Table I describes the *principal* category among the pavement dwellers. Information in Table I has been for analytical convenience, divided into two major categories. First major category is termed as the *principal* informal sector with average daily income ranging between Tk.80 and Tk.120. While other group is termed as *marginal* category for being almost wholly in the tertiary sector. A distinction between the sub-groups has been made on the basis of their occupation and variations of income.

(c) Principal Occupations

The principal occupations consist about 80 percent of employment, amongst which about half the numbers are rickshaw pullers and daily casual labours who secure employment in the commercial areas and are engaged in transshipping materials and equipment over short distances. The other half is almost equally divided between handcart pullers hawkers, potters and helpers. The former group rent the rickshaws from owners on contact to carry passengers within the city, while the latter cater to the needs of casual labours for the residents of the city.

Table- 1: Distribution of Major Occupation

A	Principal Category	Percent (%)
1.	Rickshaw Pullers	18
2	Daily casual labour	17
3	Hard cart-pullers	15
4	Hawkers	12
5	Potters/Helpers	10
6	Shop Assistants	07
	Sub-total	79
B	Marginal category	-
1	Beggars	06
2	Tokais	05
3	Domestic Servants	03
4	Others	07
	Sub-total	21
	Grand total	100

In the principal category as many as six major classes have been identified in the Table-1. Respondents have mentioned several reasons which compel them to stay in the CBD area for example, the hand cart pullers and rickshaw pullers need to have a parking spot for their vehicles and in the congested slums of the city such space is usually unavailable. Moreover, one has to guard against possible theft of equipment. Secondly, in the case of porters, employment is secured in commercial establishments where employer entrusts these persons for knowing each other. Moreover spending the night near the source of employment ensures that the person is available on first call, and in addition, potential rivals are excluded from the earning opportunity. Third, all these activities provide scope for earning insignificant amount of money and as well as require

physical exertion. Under conditions of intense poverty people are naturally reluctant to expense extra energy on unnecessary lead-time commuting between the residence and work place.

The second major of principal category consists of self-employed persons, who have been again divided into two classes for example, service related and other occupations. Service related are vocations providing employment for at least 17 percent of the sample population. They are teashop keepers, vegetable vendors, hawkers and sweepers. Other occupations cover a diverse range of service and production activities ranging from paper bag makers to painters, from cobblers to tokaies. Among the self-employed persons earning opportunities are location-specific. A shoeshine boy for example works on a busy thoroughfare by seating a strategic point in the appropriate location for his business. In all such vocations the place of work becomes the place of shelter of the respective persons. Moreover, in many trading activities the individual has to safeguard his inventories against theft.

The third group comprises of daily labour engaged in a miscellaneous range of activities such as shop assistants, helpers to skilled construction workers and labour that is supplied to the city's daily labour markets. A distinction between shop assistants and daily casual labour has been made because the former work is of a durable in nature with long-term relations with employers. But the day labourers do not have this guarantees he has to make available appropriate place in order to seek best possible opportunity to get the work. This could be for one day or sometimes for weeks. The interesting point emerging from this study is that wages between the occupations

do not show marked differentials. However within specific occupations substantial income variations were observed.

(d) **Marginal Occupation**

The marginal category divided into four groups(See Table-1) composed of mainly domestic servants, beggars and tokais. Data also indicates, there is a sharp dichotomy in earning levels between the principal and marginal groups. In the marginal sector, incomes are extremely low, and working hours extend to all seven days of the work. Raggicking is the only activity earning an hourly (imputed) wage of more than one taka, and this is clearly a most undesirable and the sanitary type of vocation. Earning of this category of people differ greatly from man to man, but less than the man of principal category. About 7 percent of this category sometime had to spend the night without meal, as they were not able earn the minimum amount of money. The implications for shelter-income linkages will obviously be significantly different between the principal and the marginal vocations. In overall terms, the pavement dwellers have had their income levels keeping pace with inflation. About 19 percent of pavement dwellers reported income levels less than Tk. 30 per week than previous year. In the present study the average income itself was around Tk.95 per day.

In this category, except very few, large number of beggars earning were far less than the member of principal category. Their belonging are most cases, very insignificant they can easily spent their night any where as they wish. But in case of domestic servnts and Tokais they prefer to stay on their place of work. While for other categories some of them prefer stay on specific areas as an opportunity of getting the type of work they are doing and for other do not have this choice. They are more concern about the work rather than place of staying.

(e) Working Hours

In most of the cases the average working day is a fairly uniform eight hours for six days a week. There are however several individuals (particularly among porters, hawkers and shop assistants), who work several hours in excess of the average. The longest working day was found to observe amongst the sedentary occupations, such as tea shopkeepers, fruit and vegetable vendors, etc. The beggars and daily casual labourers follow as such specific working hours, it usually starts as long as the movement of people continues from dawn to even after sunsets.

(f) Families and Meals

About 29 percent of the sample lived on pavement with families, a majority of whom belonged to the marginal sector. Out of sixty one respondents who reported having only one meal a day, cooked food in open kitchens. In the mainstream categories respondents do not have any such arrangement. All of them have their meals from the pavement hotels commonly known as "Italian hotels"

(g) Poverty - Housing Linkages

For the findings on the pavement dwellers about the willingness to pay for shelter, each respondent was asked how much he or she was willing to pay per night for a shelter. It is important to note that the gap in willingness to pay between the mainstream and marginal categories is fairly narrow.

Another feature that confirms poor income-shelter linkages is the available information on respondents length of stay on pavements. Out of 568 respondents in the sample study, 42 persons claimed Dhaka's pavements to be their place of birth itself. The remaining persons reported that they came mainly from the villages of Faridpur, Barisal, Noakhali, Comilla, and

other districts. Most common features found in more than 80 percent respondents, that they have had inherent quality of getting housing fairly but the poverty itself is the main culprit depriving them.

For the recently migrants people as a group, an attempt was made to test the hypothesis whether willingness to pay for shelter would be negatively or positively related to income and duration of stay in the city. The results of their opinion were statistically significant. The point of interest is that willingness to pay for shelter is uniformly high for all categories of pavement dwellers. While migrants remit substantial savings home and non-migrants spend money on tobacco, liquor and cinema other entertainments.

The above results indicate a positive willingness to pay for shelter when (i) duration of stay on the pavement is longer (i.e. older the person gets), and (ii) individual income earnings is considerably higher. What is more intriguing however, is the positive relationship between family size and willingness to pay for shelter. On further analysis, why family size shows positively related to willingness to pay for shelter, the following findings emerged: (a) among Dhaka born pavement dwellers, respondents with spouses and dependants desperately needed for a shelter not only for sake of shelter but also for the social recognition and future for the generation. Thus living on the pavement may be a means of access to earning opportunities for an individual as well as for family members; nevertheless, no one does like to be pavement dwellers in his life.

Recommendations

Considering the opinions of the pavement dwellers, considering the trend of migration of this type of people in Dhaka Maga City and also considering the findings of other studies, it is evident that no initiative has taken so far both by the

Government as well as by the NGO's for the improvement of pavement dwellers in Dhaka Mega City. Given this situation, several actions need to be taken right-away:-

- (a) Soft long-term loan can be given to the pavement dwellers to run small business. This would not only enable them to earn certain amount of money but help them to find out a shelter.
- (b) One pertinent issue can be consider by the policy makers to construct inexpensive dormitory-type housing for pavement dwellers. The difficulty here lies in execution, not only for the budgetary constraints but also appropriate areas where pavement dwellers would like these structures to be constructed. The residents on the CBD and commercial areas pavements. Costs of acquisition of land in these areas are expensive and very stringent in nature. But the Government with foreign assistance would make a comprehensive plan as in case of slum dwellers residential facility.
- (c) NGO can also take special initiative to provide funding for the pavement dwellers, appropriate type of earning opportunity on the basis of their age and physical conditions, so that their earning would make them able to spent on housing.

Conclusion:

The main lessons that emerge from the interpretation of poverty-shelter linkages that the amount of earning made the pavement dwellers unable them to afford even the low cost housing. Poverty pushes them to the city with a hope of getting employment opportunity. But the Dhaka City does not have the capacity to provide expected employment opportunity of the in-migrants as well as unable to absorb the enormous influx of

these workers. Subsequently they forced to take ill-paying or hazardous jobs, which do not generate enough income to meet their basic needs for food and shelter. This situation not only compels them to accept the reality but also forces them to take shelter on the roads. Unless an integrated approach and concerted efforts are taken to resolve this issue without further delay, the city of Dhaka would turn into a city of pavement dwellers. This would aggravate existing law and order situation, environmental condition, and inequalities of income as well as restrict to the basic public services to the urban residents.

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