

A study of core infrastructure in the urban settlements of Bangladesh

Comparing findings from the 2010 and 2014 UPPR Settlement Living Conditions Index studies in 22 towns and cities

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Executive Summary

Introduction, rationale and methodology

The Urban Partnerships for Poverty Reduction (UPPR) project is the largest urban poverty reduction initiative in Bangladesh. UPPR works with communities in 23 towns and cities across Bangladesh to develop the capacity of poor households, especially women, to manage their own development issues and tackle the needs they identify as most important.

This study has been conducted to assess the community level outcomes of supporting improvements of water, sanitation, and infrastructure facilities in poor urban settlements in 22 of these towns and cities across Bangladesh using UPPR's Settlement and Living Conditions Sub-Index. In 2010 the project mapped all poor settlements in these towns and scored conditions according to a full settlement and living conditions index. Dhaka was not included in 2009 and so was omitted from the 2014 study. For the 2014 study, a total of 2,479 settlements were sampled. Paired analysis was undertaken, comparing the scores for the same settlements in both 2010 and 2014.

This study applied both qualitative and quantitative methods. The quantitative survey applied the tools developed in 2010 with some modifications to data collection to enable greater validation of findings. To achieve greater insights qualitative data was also collected through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with community members and interviews with key informants from Local Government Institutions (LGIs) and project staff.

Key Findings

The size of settlements expressed by the number of households suggests there has been an increase of 10.2 households. The number of settlements with fewer than 50 households remains high (78.3% compared to 83.3% in baseline). Almost half of the settlements estimated that inward migration was greater than outward migration (46.8%).

The indicators which coincide with the project's main areas of delivery saw broad improvements, including water supply and access to improved latrines. Levels of progress vary by indicator and Division. However limited progress was noted in areas such as street lighting and waste management. These are not core areas for the project and qualitative research suggests they were not the primary demands of community members. Additional research could explore how demand and supply interact within this project.

Scores for both the Water-Sanitation and Infrastructure indices have improved since 2010. Three in four settlements reported improved scores in the Water-Sanitation sub index since the baseline (76.8%). Two thirds of settlements also reported improved scores in the Infrastructure sub-index (66.4%).

The Wilcoxon signed rank test for sub-indices suggests that the change between the baseline and endline is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). The Mann-Whitney U-test suggests that the overall positive difference between settlements receiving direct relevant support from UPPR and those that did not report receiving such support from UPPR is statistically significant ($p > 0.001$). This does not allow us to attribute the change to UPPR but along with qualitative research strengthens the conclusion that the project has contributed to positive change.

Communities were able to articulate positive changes which have occurred as a result of improved facilities and infrastructure. However some issues regarding sustainability and also gaps in provision were noted.

Recommendations

The authors conclude that based on both quantitative and qualitative findings the project's model of community leadership is effective and encourage the documentation and dissemination of best practices in this regard.

However while this local ownership model has many strengths, some gaps were noted. While improvements may have been made, these were not always sustained. One factor was the quality of goods used in construction which suggests the importance of supporting communities in managing the contracts. Another factor was uncertainty over who is responsible for maintaining the finished facilities. While an Operations and Maintenance fund exists, it is not widely used. This suggests additional focus might be applied to building the community's sense of long-term ownership and responsibility for the facilities.

In collaboration with UPPR steps were taken to strengthen the SLCI methodology during this study. Further revisions could be made as part of future programming. UPPR have noted that a revised tool could seek to encapsulate better the diversity which exists between settlements. UPPR also highlighted the potential for community members to update their status on an annual basis along with a range of contextual data including coverage by interventions and migration. This could facilitate more frequent and accurate data which might be done through a mobile app.