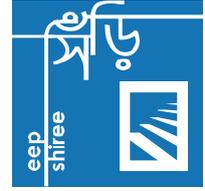




Unnayan Shamannay



Report on the seminar on
**Eradicating Urban Extreme Poverty from Bangladesh:
Consultation and Commitment to Action**



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**Swiss Agency for Development
and Cooperation SDC**

Report on the seminar on

Eradicating Urban Extreme Poverty from Bangladesh: Consultation and Commitment to Action

Held on

Monday, 09 November 2015 at BIAM Foundation Auditorium, Iskaton, Dhaka

1. Objectives of the Seminar

This seminar is the last of the six seminars organized across Bangladesh to sensitize the stakeholders about the challenges to eradication of extreme poverty from Bangladesh (as mentioned in the Manifesto of the Extreme Poor) and exchange knowledge on how to confront these challenges. While the previous seminars (organized at Khulna, Bandarban, Sylhet, Barisal and Rangpur) focused on region specific challenges and way forwards, this one focused on urban extreme poverty in the country. The purpose of the seminar was to agree a Call to Action for practical steps to eradicate urban extreme poverty. The core objectives of this seminar were as follow;

- To gain support for the manifesto goal of eradication of extreme poverty from Bangladesh by 2021
- To explore challenges of eradicating urban extreme poverty and needs of the poorest with stakeholders, especially with those from local government and different service providing government and non-government entities
- Raise the issues of safety nets and the Manifesto and inform national media
- Conduct a participatory session that will provide with policy suggestions for achieving zero extreme poverty in urban areas of the country

2. Proceedings

The first session of the seminar comprised of presentation from EEP/Shiree about objective of the program as well as objective of the particular event (by Dr. Zulfiqar Ali, Head of Research and Advocacy, EEP/Shiree) and the keynote presentation from Unnayan Shamannay on “Issues and Priorities for Eradicating Urban Extreme Poverty” (Presented by Dr. Taibur Rahman, Professor, Dept. of Development Studies, University of Dhaka). The presentations were followed by a vibrant open discussion session where participants discussed their own experiences and suggestions on how to address the issue of urban extreme poverty. The Chief Guest Mr. Annisul Huq (Honorable Mayor, Dhaka North City Corporation), the Special Guests- Mr. Nazmul Haque Prodhan (Honorable Parliamentarian, Panchagarh 1) and Dr. M. Abu Eusuf (Urban Poverty Dynamics Expert and Chairman of the Dept. of Development Studies, University of Dhaka) also participated in the open discussion session and responded to queries from the audience.

In the second session, the participants were divided into six groups and each group were tasked to prepare presentation on how to address the six challenges (mentioned in the Manifesto for the Extreme Poor) of eradicating urban extreme poverty (each group dealt with one challenge). Later representatives from each group shared their views and suggestions with the audience.

Finally, before closing the sessions the Chief Guest, the Special Guests and the Chair of the session came forward with their closing remarks.

3. Achievements of the Regional Workshop at Bandarban

This section of the report focuses on to what extents the objectives were achieved through this workshop. To do so, brief description of the stakeholders reached through this workshop, the issues put forward through the presentations made by the workshop organizers, responses from the audience to those presentations and discussions, coverage received by local and national mass media etc. are presented here.

3.1 Stakeholders Reached and Potential Outcome of this Outreach

When selecting participants, the focus was on ensuring representation of all stakeholders groups, that is- the government actors involved in extreme poverty eradication efforts, non-government actors who play or have the potential to play a crucial role in extreme poverty eradication, mass media who are responsible for mobilizing opinion, civil society actors, representatives from the private sector and last but not the least representatives from extreme poor households.

Table 1: Participants in the seminar

	Groups	Number of participants
(I)	Government	
	Mayor of Dhaka North City Corporation	1
	Member of Parliament	1
	Ward Councilors	4
	Representatives from GoB dept/divisions	8
(II)	Civil Society	
	NGO representatives	48
	Opinion leaders	3
	Media professionals	35
(IV)	Private sector representatives	4
(III)	Representatives from extreme poor households	14
	Total number of participants	118

Mr. Annisul Huq, recently elected mayor of Dhaka North City Corporation graced the event as the chief guest. His participation was ensured with a view to gain higher level of attention from the stakeholders (especially the mass media). Mr. Nazmul Haque Prodhan, MP (Panchagarh 1) participated in the event as the special guest. Mr. Prodhan as a politician has been vocal about the rights and well being of workers in the urban informal sector and is currently involved in multiple relevant forums. Dr. M. Abu Eusuf, Chair of the Department of Development Studies, University of Dhaka; was present at the event as a panel discussant. His participation added critical value to the discussion as Dr. Eusuf is a reputed expert on

urban poverty dynamics and prepared a background paper on urban social safety nets for the 6th Five Year Plan of the government.

While regional level seminars enjoyed a higher level of participation of representatives from local government bodies (Union Parishads), this event organized at the capital saw only four ward councilors of Dhaka North City Corporation. This may be due to high opportunity cost of participating in this event because of traffic in the city and/or because of the newly elected ward councilors have extremely busy schedules. Despite this, the councilors participating in the event shared their experiences about the extreme poor living in their respective wards and listened to what other stakeholders had to say about the issue.

The number of representatives from different government departments/divisions/directorates participating in the event was eight, which also is low compared to the regional seminars. This may be because of government officers working at the capital have greater responsibilities of coordinating nationwide efforts and consequently have less flexible schedules. However, it also have to be noted that at least one representative from major government offices concerned with extreme poverty (namely- Department of Youth, Directorate of Food and Department of Social Services) were present, while in previous seminars organized at the regional levels multiple representatives from such offices participated.

The event witnessed a massive participation from local and national level NGOs. Almost fifty representatives from such organization participated effectively during the discussion and group presentations. These representatives shared their valuable experiences regarding extreme poverty eradication, especially about working in the urban slums. At the same time, they also had the opportunity to listen to plans and commitments from the government bodies about how the authorities intend to eradicate extreme poverty and/or promote extreme poverty eradication initiatives undertaken by external bodies.

Four representatives from the Chamber of Commerce and Women Chamber of Commerce were also present at the event. These representatives from the private sector specially emphasized on the need to ensure living standards of the urban extreme poor who in turn may play critically important role in the booming urban industrial sector.

Fourteen representatives from extreme poor households also participated in the event and enthusiastically took part in the open discussion session. They not only pointed out the challenges they face as extreme poor in the urban setting, but also shared their views about potential way forwards. Their participation and the following coverage in the national media may be expected to further strengthen the demand for specifically addressing the issue of urban extreme poverty in alignment with the national goal of achieving 'zero extreme poverty' by 2021.

The event, in brief, ensured effective outreach to all stakeholders involved- ranging from top policy makers and offices responsible for implementing those policies to the extreme poor

themselves for whom those policies are formulated and implemented. This not only helped in gaining further support for the manifesto goal of eradication of extreme poverty from Bangladesh by 2021; but also facilitated a collaborative effort to explore challenges and way forwards to achieve zero extreme poverty. While the demand side (extreme poor, civil society etc.) voiced their concerns, the supply side also (service providing government offices, the NGOs, the donors etc.) also shared their experience regarding extreme poverty reduction programs and future plans. This both way exchange of views may be expected to facilitate agreeing upon and hence implementing a common plan of action to combat urban extreme poverty.

3.2 Keynote Presentations and Response from the Participants

While the presentation from EEP/Shiree focused on the six challenges to extreme poverty eradication mentioned in the 'Manifesto of the Extreme Poor'; the Unnayan Shamannay presentation focused on issues and priorities of extreme poverty eradication that are specific to urban areas of Bangladesh. The participants seemed quite responsive to the issues raised in these two presentations and consequently, the question and answer session following the presentation was very vibrant and fruitful.

The chief guest, newly elected mayor is naturally now in the phase of making new plans to uplift the living conditions of the urban citizens living within his jurisdiction. His participation in this opinion exchange session may be expected to influence plans of the city authority further in favor of the urban extreme poor on one hand, and on the other hand other stakeholders also have been provided with an opportunity to understand what the city authority is planning for the upcoming years. In fact, during the event the Mayor himself expressed his enthusiasm about such opinion sharing session. He committed- his office would soon organize a similar session with NGOs and CSOs working to deal with urban extreme poverty- to further pin point a strategy about combating urban extreme poverty which the city corporation may adapt in its work plan.

Nazmul Haque Prodhan MP participated in the open discussion session and pointed out that such sessions are critically important as these create scopes for different stakeholders to interact with each other, which in turn may make way for a common 'agreed by all' action plan to deal with the issue of urban extreme poverty. He added- while the government is working relentlessly to eradicate extreme poverty from the country, it definitely needs experience based inputs from development organizations who have tried different models of extreme poverty reduction initiatives in both urban and rural settings.

The expert on urban poverty dynamics Dr. Eusuf pointed out key policy makers, development thinkers and practitioners engaging in vibrant discussions on eradicating urban extreme poverty- as a leap forward from policy perspective, as a few years back the entire attention was going to rural extreme poverty only. He also stated that rural to urban migration is sure to continue as Bangladesh is still in the process of industrialization. Hence, policy makers while devising strategies to combat urban extreme poverty must keep in mind that the urban population will keep on growing throughout the upcoming decade or so.

Representatives coming from different development organizations, both local and international, also shared their own experience in dealing with extreme poverty. While their primary focus was on projects and programs dealing with urban extreme poverty, they emphasized on learning from best practices in poverty reduction in rural setting as well. Additionally, they put forward what kind of cooperation is needed by the NGOs from the part of local government bodies such as the city corporation to confront urban extreme poverty more effectively and efficiently.

Representatives from urban extreme poor households effectively seized the opportunity to interact with both government and non-government service providers with a view to make them understand the everyday struggle of urban extreme poor in mega cities such as Dhaka. They emphasized on ensuring basic services such as power, gas, water and sanitation facilities in urban slums. They specially emphasized on the fact that even when ready to pay more than usual (as paid by non-extreme poor citizens), the urban extreme poor living in slums cannot access quality services as they live in informal settlements. The discussants also pointed out in some cases with support from different NGOs slum dwellers have managed to reach informal or quasi-formal agreements with service providers and now have access to some basic services. They recommended that due authorities should consider replicating or scaling up such initiatives.

Other major points discussed in the open floor discussion following the presentations were- slum eviction related issues, low access to quality healthcare for slum dwellers, formalizing the dwelling arrangements of the urban slum dwellers, decentralizing industrial sector of the country to reduce the rate of rural to urban migration to crowded mega cities such as Dhaka and Chittagong.

3.3 Regional Extreme Poverty Related Concerns coming from Participants

As mentioned earlier, in the second session the participants were divided in six groups (each having fifteen to twenty participants) and each of these groups were given one challenge from the 'Manifesto of the Extreme Poor'. Each of these groups were asked to point out concerns about the challenge assigned to them while considering the urban setting, point out way forwards and point out who they expected to come forward to resolve the issues they identified. Later a representative from each group made a presentation based on their discussions. Following are brief summary of all six presentations-

i. Presentation on Challenge 1: Insufficient Economic Opportunities

The major impediments to availability of economic opportunities identified were- lack of access to financial services due to informal dwelling and engaging in informal economic activities; not having sustainable employment; and lack of opportunity to develop skills.

Proposed way forwards included- establishing vocational training centers and launching training programs especially designed to cater the urban extreme poor;

programs from government and non-government entities to enhance access to resources etc.

To do these, group participants suggested that stronger government and non-government partnership is needed; involvement of local leadership and civil society may play the role of catalyst in this regard; and setting up community based organization is also needed.

ii. Presentation on Challenge 2: Poor Access to Public Services and Transfers

Major problems identified in this regard were- very few social safety net programs which are specially designed to serve the urban extreme poor; lack of transparency and efficiency in beneficiary selection process; and low or no access to information.

Way forward suggested included- increasing allocation; scaling up or replicating successful programs; active role of beneficiary selection committees to ensure service provision regardless of religion, political stand etc., organizing awareness raising campaigns, strengthening institutions etc.

Group participants suggested that to take these steps- further pro-active role is needed from the lawmakers, local government bodies as well as government officials is required; while the civil society and community based organizations also need to learn from their experiences and cooperate with government to ensure efficient service delivery.

iii. Presentation on Challenge 3: Vulnerability to External Shocks

Challenges identified by the participants included- inadequacy in post-disaster management; not providing relief in time; access to adequate emergency healthcare which intensifies the problems of water-borne diseases.

Recommendations included- ensuring emergency support to disaster victims as soon as possible, collection of reliable data and statistics on loss and potential loss due to disasters etc.

To take up the mentioned steps; the group participants opined that all service providing agencies (both government and non-government) need to further study previous experiences and prepare themselves for well coordinated urban disaster preparedness effort as well as urban disaster management and rehabilitation programs.

iv. Presentation on Challenge 4: Health and Nutrition Vulnerabilities

Major challenges identified were- lack of education and awareness; low income; lack of access to healthcare facilities; gender discrimination (health and nutrition vulnerabilities of women are even higher for women from extreme poor households).

Possible way forwards that came from this group included- awareness raising campaigns needed; community level health services need to be further intensified; higher amount of budget allocations for healthcare programs specifically designed for urban extreme poor; safety net programs that would aim to provide health services for slum dwellers; women empowerment etc.

City Corporation may seek support from corporate entities in the form of CSR to ensure access to better health service for urban extreme poor household. They may also collaborate with NGOs who have long experience of serving the urban extreme poor- opined the group participants.

v. *Presentation on Challenge 5: Gender Inequality*

Major challenges identified by this group included- sexual harassment and income related discrimination of women; women's access to market; lack of safe transportation; relatively weaker voice in family decision making etc.

Way forwards suggested included-developing a women friendly social mechanism, sustainable IGA support for women, further emphasis on education of women etc.

The participants suggested intensification of concerted effort of government and non-government actors to ensure women empowerment.

vi. *Presentation on Challenge 6: Marginalised Group Specific Risks and Vulnerabilities*

Major challenges identified by this group included- limited IGA opportunities for marginalised groups, inadequate scope of education for them, they remain neglected both politically and socially, they have least access to social safety nets.

3.4 Media Coverage of the Workshop

The news of the event was covered by four national daily, two online news portals and a national TV channel. While this level of coverage may be considered as significant it is still lower than expected, especially when the number of media professional present at the event is considered. It also has to be noted that it was naturally expected having the newly elected very popular Mayor as the Chief Guest will draw a bigger media crowd. This less than expected attention from the mass media may be attributed to the current volatility in the political scene of the country. Media houses are naturally prioritizing political events over seminars on extreme poverty. However, it may be inferred that while many media houses did not cover the news of the seminar, participation of their representatives in the event may induce further attention from the respective media houses to the issue of urban extreme poverty.

4. Challenges Faced and Lessons Learned

Following are the lessons learned from this seminar-

- Number of participating ward councilors was not as expected. Some of the invited ward councilors mentioned that the event venue (BIAM Foundation Auditorium, Eskaton, Dhaka) was at one end of the Dhaka North City Corporation area, due to which they would have to travel a long distance through high traffic of Dhaka city. If a venue situated at the center of the DNCC area was chosen, it would have been easier for many of these participants and then higher number of ward councilors would have participated.

- Low number of participants from different government departments/divisions/directorates is another area of concern. While representatives from major government offices responsible for extreme poverty eradication (namely- Directorate of food, Department of Youth and Department of Social Services) were present at the event, the number of participants from such offices was low compared to other events organized at the regional levels. The reason working behind may be government officials invited were all from the capital and were most likely responsible for coordinating national efforts; and hence had relatively less flexible schedules compared to the regional level officials. Yet higher level of participation could have been ensured if during pre-event communication, the organizers could have further clarified the importance of the seminar to the respective officials. To do so they could have utilized the support from public relation officials of the newly elected Mayor and officials from other EEP/Shiree PNGOs who have long working relationships with these officials.

Overall, the outcome from this seminar may be considered to be satisfactory. This is so as it has attracted attention of the key policy makers and local government personnel (to the extreme poverty issue), views and advices of different stakeholder groups (including the civil society, private sector and the extreme poor themselves) have been shared and the mass media coverage can also be expected to sensitize the community as a whole about the EEP/Shiree agenda of achieving 'zero extreme poverty'. This seminar will become even more useful if lessons learnt here can be used in arranging the upcoming seminars.