

# Informal Governance Networks in Urban Informal Settlements in Dhaka City, Bangladesh: Power, Positionality and Participation in Health Systems

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## BACKGROUND

### Governance in Urban Informal Settlements

- No comprehensive urban policy in Bangladesh
- Lack of coordination and continuous conflicts among public city governing bodies lead to poor infrastructure development and inadequate basic service provisions (World Bank, 2007).
- Informal settlements in cities are unrecognized by the government in policy and city development plans.
  - ✓ People living there are invisible with no voices and no representation in formal governance network (Hossain, 2013).
  - ✓ Unrecognized by government and in policy frameworks limits access to basic facilities and healthcare services (Banks, 2011).
  - ✓ Non-responsive formal accountability results in disproportionate resource distributions (Hackenbroch & Hossain, 2012).
  - ✓ Due to the absence of formal city governance, informal systems and actors emerged to fill in the gaps.
- Informal governance has become the norm for governing urban informal settlements in Dhaka city.
- Residents are dependent on local informal governance networks for claiming their rights (Hossain, 2013; Jones, 2017).
- Urban utilities and services are managed through complex unrecognized yet powerful 'hybrid institutional arrangements' - 'pathways of legitimation' of public services connect formal and informal governance actors and service providers (Hackenbroch & Hossain, 2012; Hossain, 2013).
- 'Hybrid institutional arrangements' are mostly controlled by powerful people affiliated with ruling political parties (Hackenbroch & Hossain, 2012; Hossain, 2012, 2013).
- Local leaders, goons and *maastans* (local gangsters), backed up by political leaders, play mediating roles in this hybrid system (Hossain, 2013).
- Through a dynamic 'mutual support system', local leaders and *maastans* get political power from political leaders, and control over resource distribution and utility supply businesses water, electricity and gas in the slums (Hossain, 2013).

### Urban informal settlements in Dhaka city

7 million people live in more than 3,379 urban informal settlements, known as 'bosti' (slum), in rapidly-growing Dhaka city (BBS, 2015)

- Eviction is very common irrespective of the ownership of the lands
- Residents are mostly engaged in informal economic sector - rickshaw pullers, domestic help, day laborers, small vendors, street peddlers, beggars, etc
- Established in vacant privately-owned and public abandoned lands
- High population densities with large share of migrants from rural areas
- Average 4.3 people live in a single room of 12m<sup>2</sup>
- Two thirds live in rented houses paying comparatively higher rent
- Average 70 people use 1 toilet
- >89% have access to electricity and 50% use supply water but pay 10-15 time higher fees
- 20-40 households share single water sources

- My Ph.D. study aims to map informal governance networks of informal settlements in Dhaka city, Bangladesh and asks how these influence the health and wellbeing of the residents.
- This poster focuses on understanding informal governance networks and the role of different actors.

## METHODOLOGY

- Embedded mixed-method study, predominantly qualitative, applying participatory research approaches.
- 3 informal settlements in Dhaka city – Kollayanpur Parabosti, Dholpur and Nama Shyampur
- This poster presents findings from literature review and preliminary secondary analysis of qualitative data collected by the ARISE project in Bangladesh
  - ✓ 4 community meetings
  - ✓ 2 reflexivity sessions with co-researchers
  - ✓ 15 phone interviews with residents
- Content analysis was guided by Governance Network Theory (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2012) and Multi-level Governance Framework (Abimbola et al., 2014)



## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Key Findings

#### 1 Informal governance networks operate based on personal relationships

"A few families control our slum. Power and leadership carry forward from generation to generation. Only the children of the 'sardars' (leaders) can be a sarder." (Female co-researcher, Reflexivity workshop)

- Individuals' personal relationships with key governing actors is the key for connecting to the networks, and availing services and supports.
- Individuals' identity and positionality (gender, family, political background, NGO-affiliation, economic and social status) are the determinants for building personal relationships.
- Individuals' voice and negotiation skills are also built on personal relationships.
- People having strong personal relationships with local governing actors and NGO workers have more access to services.
- Landlords, and relatives/associates of local leaders have more voice for negotiation.

#### 2 Power structures are fluid - evolving and changing continuously

"Malek (pseudo name) sarder (local leader) established this bosti (slum) and brought people here from his village. But after his death, his sons can't enter here." (President of an NGO committee, Community meeting)

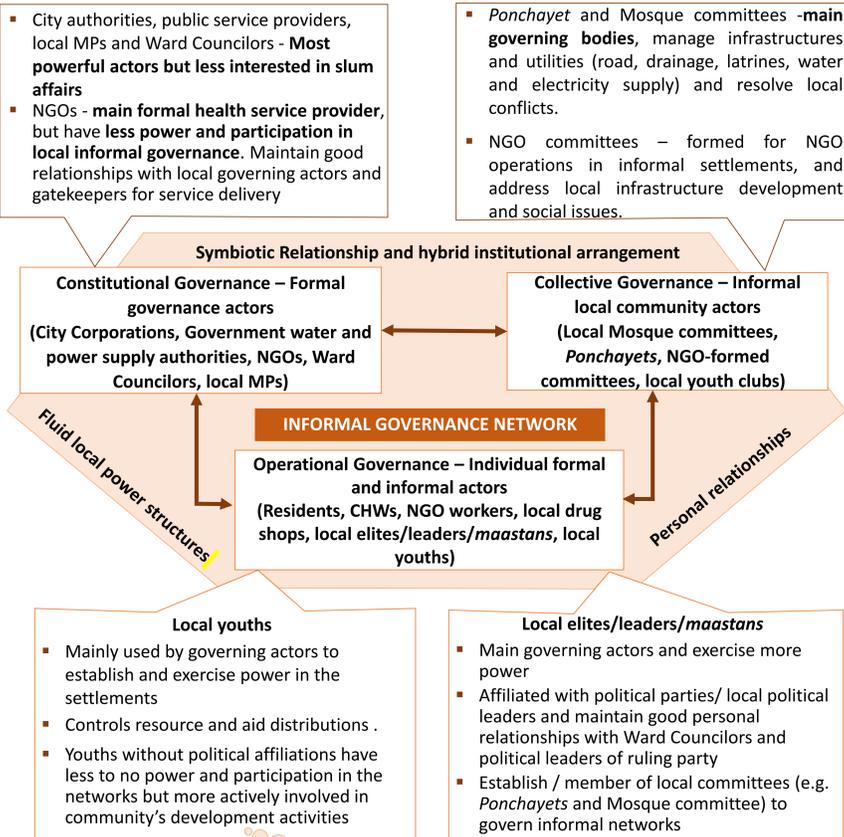
- Levels of power depends on personal relationships with governing actors which changes over time.
- Power (managed informally) is continuously shifting, based on individuals' connections with local committees and governing actors.

#### 3 Most powerful actors are not engaged in managing/arranging healthcare services

"You are here today. But you won't be here if you are evicted next moth. Why should we do something for you". (A male community member quoted from Ward Councilor, community meeting)

- City Corporations, local MPs, and Ward Councilors appear uninterested because of frequent evictions of the unrecognized temporary settlements and mobile population.

Figure 1: Multi-level informal governance networks in urban informal settlements in Dhaka city



"Patinetas (local masstans/goons) removed named from the list for relief distribution and added names of those who they know. Not all of them are poor. NGOs also know this. But they don't interfere as they are helpless. They (NGOs) can't operate without them (local maastans/goon)." (Male co-researcher, Reflexivity workshop)

- 'Symbiotic relationship' and 'hybrid institutional' arrangements between local political leaders (MPs, Ward Councilors), and local community leaders, elites and *maastans* create a complex multi-layered informal networking system.
- Informal governance networks consist of multiple local level committees (such as *Ponchayet* in Dholpur, Mosque committees in Kollayanpur and NGO-formed committees).
- The structure of these committees are highly context-specific, and each committee has an internal hierarchy and management system.
- Local elites (landlords, older residents, local businessmen, political leaders, Ward Councilors), local leaders and *maastans* are the gatekeepers and key governing actors in multiple committees, and hold more power.
- Committee memberships depends on personal relationships, and family and political background.
- Different committees have levels of tractions, power and agendas which change over time.
- Women have less participation and power at the top level of the hierarchy in male-dominated networks.
- Committees in well-established and older settlements are more structured, with strong networks and connections with local politicians, city authorities and NGO service providers.

## CONCLUSION

- Personal relationships, local fluid power dynamics, and individuals' negotiation skills, influence individuals' participation in informal governance networks, and gaining benefits.
- Unwillingness of formal governance actors coupled with informal governance actors' disengagement in health issues creates a constant challenge for providing healthcare services to the poor.

### Acknowledgement

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