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

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BACKGROUND

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 (BCS, 2015)
- Residents are mostly engaged in informal economic sector—rickshaw pullers, domestic help, day laborers, small vendors, street peddlers, beggars, etc.
- High population densities with large share of migrants from rural areas
- Average 4.3 people live in a single room of 12m²
- Two thirds live in rented houses paying comparatively higher rent
- 89% have access to electricity and 50% use water supply but pay 10-15 time higher fees
- Average 70 people use 1 toilet
- 20-40 households share single water sources

1. 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.
2. This poster focuses on understanding informal governance networks and the role of different actors.

METHODOLOGY

- Embedded mixed-method study, primarily qualitative, applying participatory research approaches.
- 3 informal settlements in Dhaka city—Kallaiyapara, Narsobari, Dholpur and Nama Shyampur
- This poster presents findings from literature review and preliminary secondary analysis of qualitative data collected by the ARISE project in 2011 and 2013 (Elj F. & Koppenjan, 2012) and Multi-level Governance Framework (Aribolwa et al., 2014)

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

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 ‘sardar’ (leaders) can be a sardar.** (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 positional (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) sardar (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 month. 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.

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.

References
