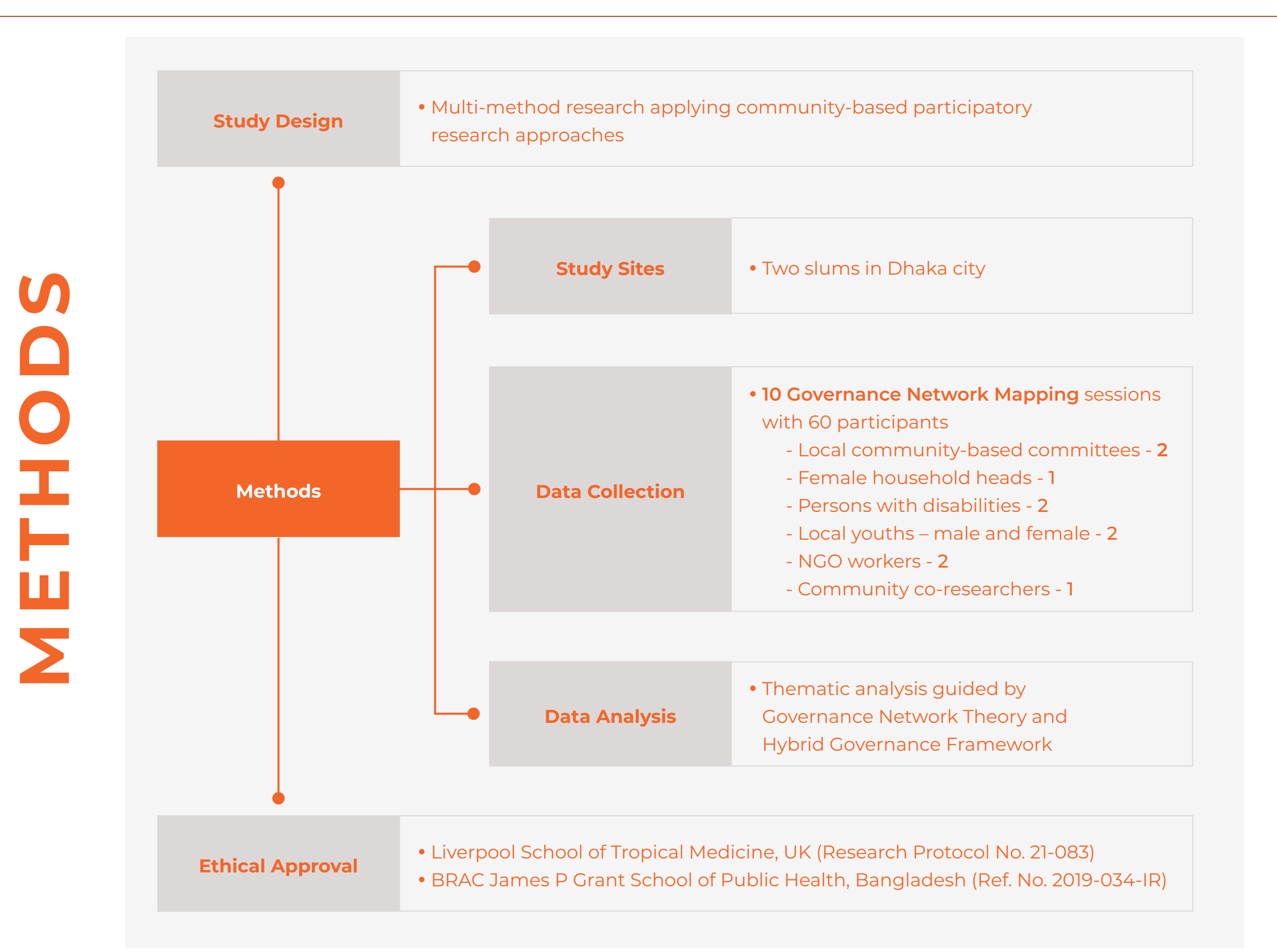# Local-level governance of COVID-19 pandemic management in selected informal urban settlements in Dhaka city, Bangladesh: Findings from Governance Network Mapping

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BACKGROUND

- 7 million people live in more than 3,000 informal settlements in Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh (BBS, 2015).
- Unrecognized by the government and in policy frameworks limits access to basic facilities and healthcare services (Banks, 2011).
- Urban utilities and services are managed through 'hybrid arrangements (Hackenbroch & Hossain, 2012; Hossain, 2013).
- COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately affected millions of poor people living in informal urban settlements.
- Involvement of many formal and informal actors in COVID-19 responses raised some governance concerns.
- This PhD research aims to understand local-level governance of pandemic responses in informal urban settlements in Dhaka city.
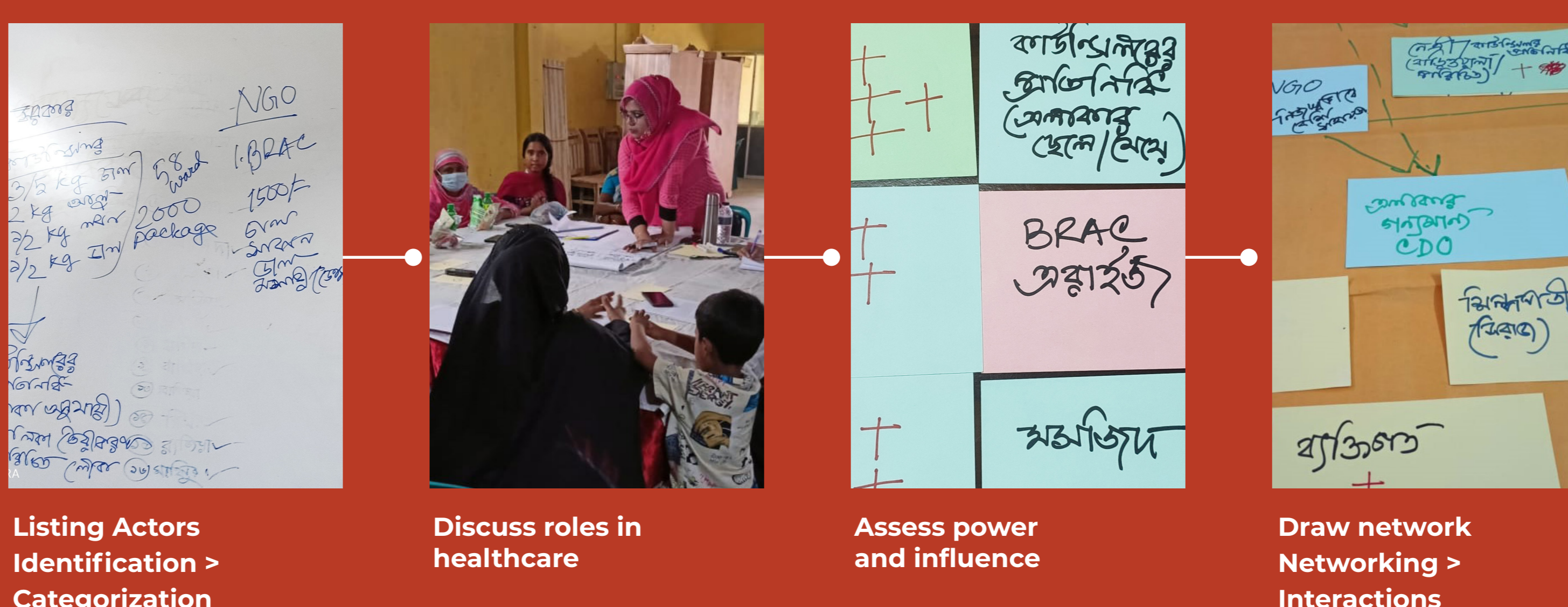
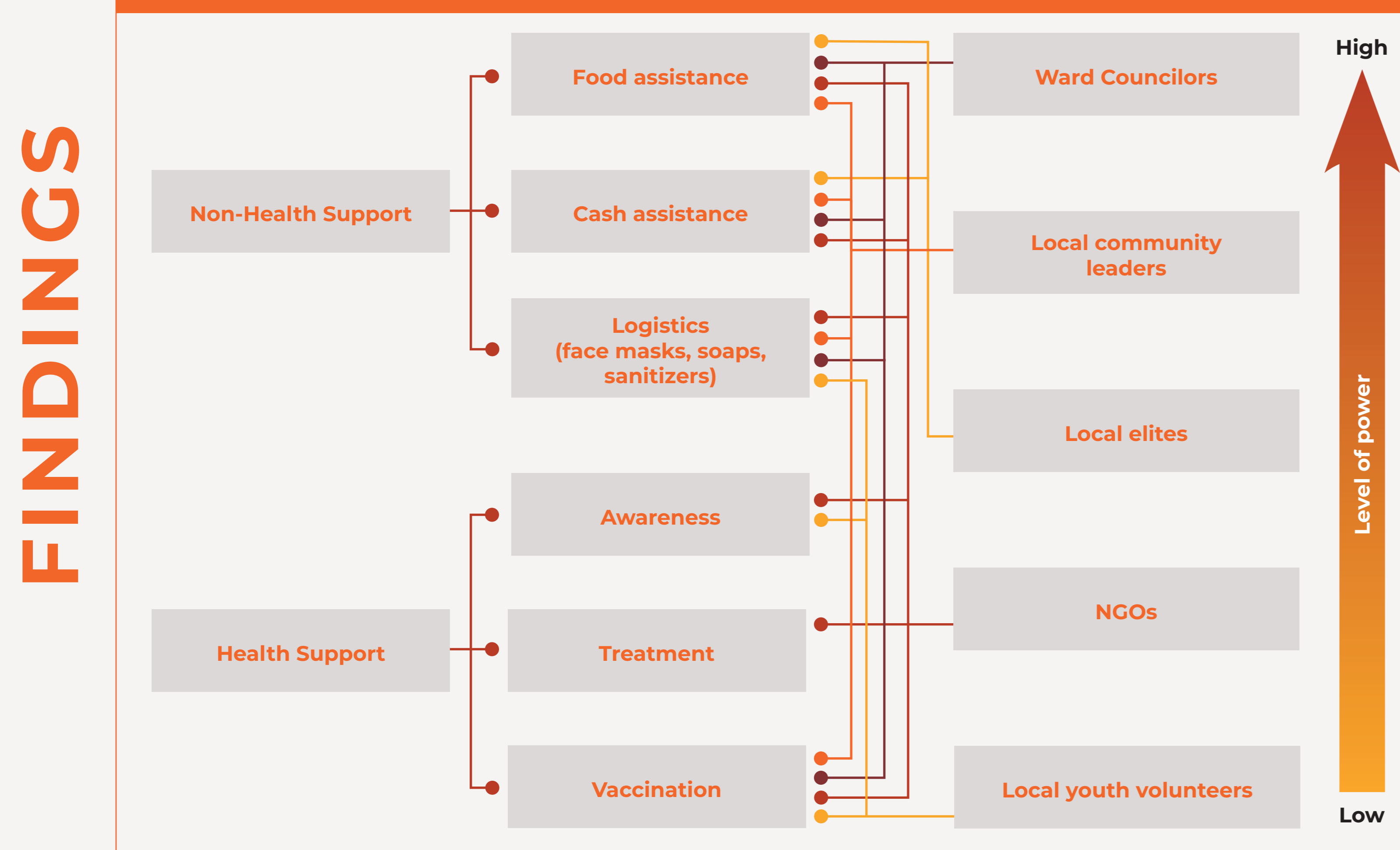### Local-level Governance of COVID-19 Responses

Key characteristics of local-level governance of the pandemic response in informal urban settlements

- **Hybrid arrangements between formal and informal actors**: NGOs negotiated and collaborated with local community gatekeepers to provide services.
- **Informal governance actors influence access to services**: Local leaders and elites prioritized their families and acquaintances in relief distributions and mass vaccination.
- **Personal relationship is the key driver of local-level governance**: People having personal relationships with local governance actors and NGO workers had more access to services and reliefs.
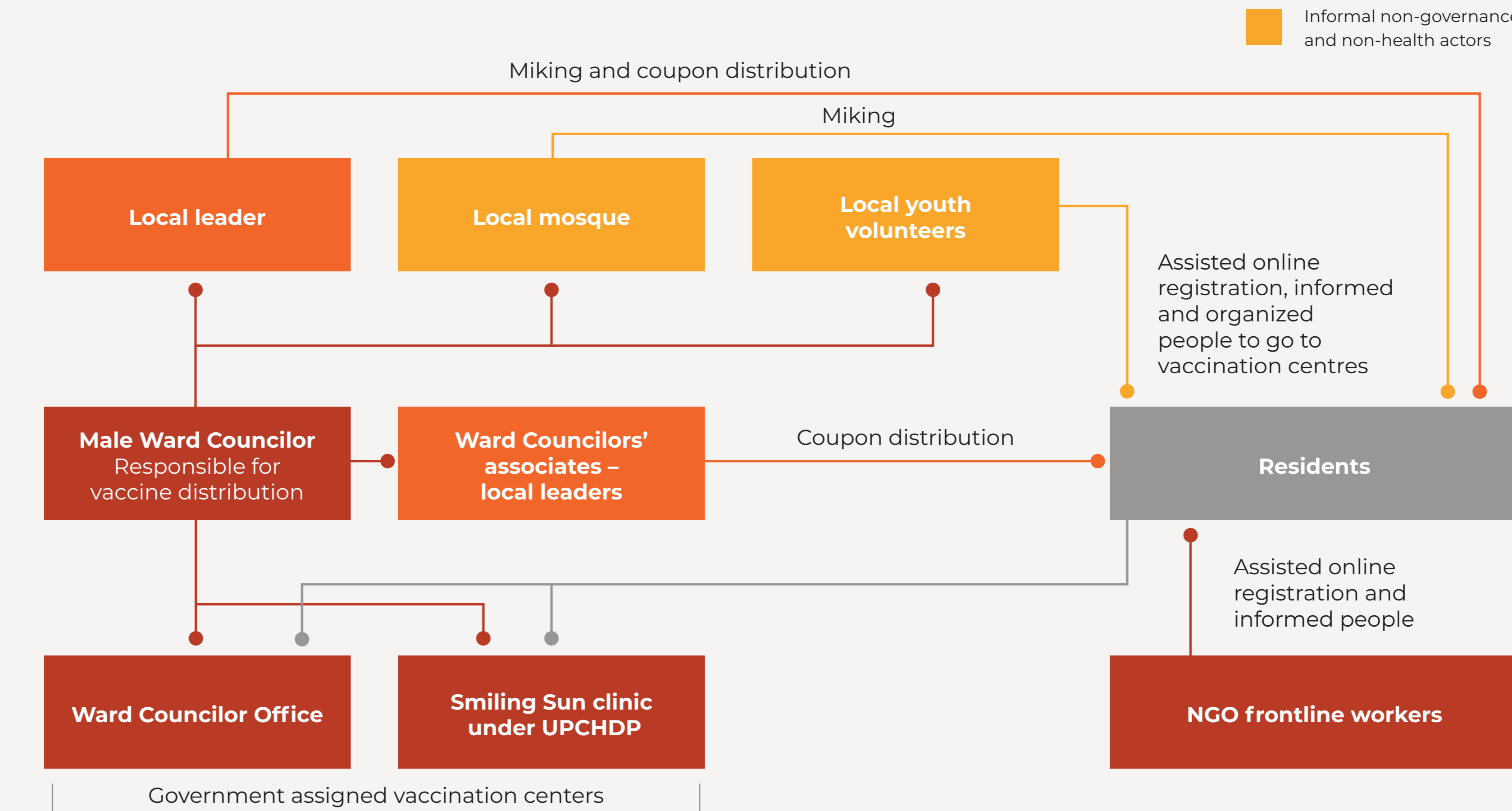
METHODS

- **Study Design**: Multi-method research applying community-based participatory research approaches
- **Methods**
  - **Study Sites**: Two slums in Dhaka city
  - **Data Collection**: 10 Governance Network Mapping sessions with 60 participants
    - Local community-based committees - 2
    - Female household heads - 1
    - Persons with disabilities - 2
    - Local youths – male and female - 2
    - NGO workers - 2
    - Community co-researchers - 1
  - **Data Analysis**: Thematic analysis guided by Governance Network Theory and Hybrid Governance Framework
- **Ethical Approval**:
  - Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, UK (Research Protocol No. 21-083)
  - BRAC James P Grant School of Public Health, Bangladesh (Ref. No. 2019-034-IR)

Governance Network Mapping - NetMap

Listing Actors Identification > Categorization

Discuss roles in healthcare

Assess power and influence

Draw network Networking > Interactions

FINDINGS

Local Actors and Their Roles in COVID-19 Response

- Non-Health Support
  - Food assistance
  - Cash assistance
  - Logistics (face masks, soaps, sanitizers)
- Health Support
  - Awareness
  - Treatment
  - Vaccination

- Ward Councilors
- Local community leaders
- Local elites
- NGOs
- Local youth volunteers

Level of power: High / Low

Local-level management of COVID-19 mass vaccination in Site B

- Formal governance and health-actors and networks
- Informal governance actors and networks
- Informal non-governance and non-health actors

Miking and coupon distribution

Miking

- Local leader
- Local mosque
- Local youth volunteers

Assisted online registration, informed and organized people to go to vaccination centres

- Male Ward Councilor — Responsible for vaccine distribution
- Ward Councilors' associates – local leaders

Coupon distribution

Residents

- Ward Councilor Office
- Smiling Sun clinic under UPCHDP

Government assigned vaccination centers

Assisted online registration and informed people

- NGO frontline workers

"Councilor (referring to female Ward Councilor) makes '*netri*' (female leaders) from '*bariowalas*' (landlords) in our area. During corona lockdown, she gave relief distribution slips through those *netris*. People who had good relationship with them received distribution slips. But those who are actually poor and vulnerable did not get anything as they were not related to those *netris*."
Female community-based committee member, Site B

"*Patinetas* (associates of Ward Councilors) removed names from the list for relief distribution and added names of those 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 leaders)."
Male co-researcher, Site A

Conclusion and recommendations

- The COVID-19 pandemic unveiled the importance of recognizing the influence of informal governance actors and community engagement in pandemic and disaster management, especially in informal urban settlements.
- Hybrid arrangement has the potential to provide support to poor and marginalized communities, that might not be otherwise forthcoming, but also brings challenges to effective targeting and delivery of support to those most in need.
- The pandemic has highlighted the need for strengthening the capacity of local government to play the coordination role effectively in future pandemic and public health emergency management.

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