



Urban Change:

Voice of the
UPPR Community



LIFTING THREE MILLION PEOPLE OUT OF POVERTY

Integration of Poor Women in City Governance Structures



Women in Bangladesh suffer under pervasive gender discrimination. Access to justice and services such as education and health remain far lower for women than for men. Significantly fewer women are employed and the ones that are receive considerably lower average salaries compared to their male co-workers. Decision-making power and mobility are often restricted, while early marriage and motherhood worsen their situation. In a predominantly male society like this, it is rare for women, especially poor, to participate in political and social life and even rarer to be elected for a leadership position within their communities or government. As a consequence, Bangladeshi women suffer from an inferior social status, limited political influence, high rates of poverty, poor health, and malnourishment.

In that context, UPPR has focused over the past years to empower women and integrate them into community development structures, with many having taken over leadership positions in their neighbourhoods. In fact, nine women that have been supporting UPPR community structures have been elected as Councillors in Khulna, Barisal, and Rajshahi in this year's City Corporation elections held on 15 June 2013. In interviews, they attribute their success to a large extent to UPPR's empowerment efforts and their communi-

ties' support. In the words of Jahanara Begum, new Councillor in Barisal, "before UPPR, we were only housewives. We could not talk easily. Now we can speak anywhere, can represent in various workshops, seminars, and meetings. We can also easily mix with all kinds of people. We have received different trainings from UPPR, so we have been more capable to face any situation in the community." Like Jahanara, many women interviewed by UPPR highlight their lack of decision-making power, restriction of movement, and a lack of respect aggravated by regular verbal and physical abuse by family members, before joining UPPR efforts.

Their active engagement in various activities and interaction with the communities through UPPR's Community Development Committees (CDC) not only helped them understand what leadership positions entail but also encouraged them to campaign for elections. Hasna Hena who was elected as Councillor for Khulna says: "If I was not familiar with CDC activities, I would not have contested the election. Before the elections, I shared my intention to compete for the Councillor position with my CDC members. They greatly encouraged me. Community members campaigned day and night for me and helped elect me. Now I am one of the Councillors in Khulna."

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FACTS & FIGURES (AS OF JUNE 2013)



50,159

beneficiaries receiving skills development training



88,615

beneficiaries receiving small enterprises block grants



89,809

children supported for primary and secondary school



166,726

households benefitting from improved water sources



143,163

households benefitting from improved latrines

UPCOMING EVENTS

22-24 October 2013

South Asian Conference Sanitation

15 December 2013

Urban Food Production Day

Our office:

Urban Partnerships for Poverty Reduction
RDEC-LGED Building, Level 8
Agargaon, Dhaka-1207, Bangladesh

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Our partners:



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Having an active role in improving the living conditions of the poor and provide grants for marginalized women within UPPR community structures, encouraged the women to extend the reach of their doing through political engagement in their local governments. As the nine elected women took their oath as the new Councillors, they expressed their dedication and commitment to carry out their duties and bring change to the urban poor in their jurisdictions. Monira Khatun who competed successfully in the Khulna City Corporation elections explains: *"I wish to continue to work for the poor community with my full efforts. I am committed to helping marginalized women and extend all my support for them. I also want to be a women's representative for the next term. I want to see the women in a better position. I will encourage all other poor and vulnerable women to become women's representative like me."*

UPPR will continue to empower women who on their part will take action to support others, multiplying the reach for the betterment of living conditions for women in Bangladesh. To that end, the newly elected Councillors serve as an inspiration for other vulnerable women to follow their footsteps.



Hasna Hena contested the 2013 Khulna Elections and became a Councillor. Before the election, she was the Chairperson of Boyra Bazar CDC in Khulna.

Ensuring nutrition of urban poor from an early age



Poor nutritional practices contribute significantly to high rates of malnutrition in Bangladesh, especially among children, with practices worse among the urban poor.

Breastfeeding is an affordable and effective way of improving the rates of malnutrition and the general health status of children, as breast milk contains rich nutrients and antibodies that protect and help babies fight diseases that formula does not contain. In fact, breastfed babies have lower risks of respiratory infections, asthma, atopic dermatitis, type 2 diabetes and other diseases than infants who are formula-fed.

There have been various initiatives to promote and support breastfeeding in Bangladesh since the 1980's; however, the practice has not improved accordingly. To date, only 24 percent of children in slums are breastfed within one hour of birth and 75 percent are breastfed within one day after delivery, compared to 43 and 89 percent in the general population, despite the fact that colostrum is rich in antibodies and essential nutrients for the babies and helps the mother with improved lactation and less loss of blood. Even when mothers are able to get off to a good start, all too often in the weeks or months after delivery there is a sharp decline in breastfeeding rates, and practices, particularly in exclusive breastfeeding.

The periods when mothers do not visit a healthcare facility is the time when a community support system for mothers is essential. Continued support to sustain breastfeeding can be provided in a variety of ways. Traditionally, support is provided by the family. As societies change, however, in particular with rapid urbanization, support for mothers from a wider circle is critically needed, whether through trained health workers, lactation consultants, community leaders, friends or other type partners (www.worldbreastfeedingweek.org). To raise awareness on this issue, this year's World Breastfeeding Week from 1-7 August was

held under the theme 'Breastfeeding Support: Close to Mothers', highlighting Breastfeeding Peer Counseling.

Failing to improve the nutrition of infants and children gravely impacts their ability to learn and generate income in the future, thus reinforcing the generational cycle of poverty. UPPR is therefore kick-starting its work towards accelerating progress in reducing malnutrition in Bangladesh through providing large-scale and targeted support to pregnant and lactating women. UPPR believes that improving nutrition in early childhood is a long-term economic investment

In that context, UPPR's nutrition promoters and volunteers are raising awareness on causes, consequences and preventive cure of malnutrition, including exclusive breastfeeding, through household visits and courtyard meetings. So far, UPPR has deployed 851 promoters and volunteers across the country to monitor household counseling of pregnant and lactating women and their husbands and mothers-in-law in order to improve practices among the urban poor. As such, UPPR expects to achieve sustained behavioral change among mothers and adolescents for inter-generational transfer of acquired knowledge and behavior.

On the 7th of August, in observation of the World Breastfeeding Week, UPPR joined efforts with Comilla and Gazipur City Corporations to provide a space for dialogue and learning around the positive effects of breastfeeding to both mothers and infants. The participants discussed the benefits of early breastfeeding, the continuation period of breastfeeding and the fundamentals of nutrition and health care for mothers and newborns. Partnering with Government officials, UPPR aims to increase policy focus on nutrition with an aim to integrate nutrition interventions in the existing health system and increase national budget allocations on nutrition.

Expanding Government's reach to poor urban communities through new Information and Service Centers



Over the past three years, UPPR has been supporting communities and local governments to establish Community Resource Centers (CRCs), where poor urban citizens can access NGO, private sector and government information and services, such as on-line application for jobs abroad, health and agricultural extension service information.

At the same time, the Government of Bangladesh, supported by the Access to Information (a2i) project, has been establishing information and service centers at different administrative levels throughout Bangladesh. The Union, City Corporations and Pourashava Information and Service Centers (UISCs/CISCs/PISCs) provide e-services, such as birth registration, univer-

sity admission, passport and citizenship certificate application, and mobile banking, apart from the information on government circulars and notices as well as information for education, health, agriculture, human rights and employment. The centers also provide citizens with computers, internet and telecommunication services.

In an effort to streamline the service provision of the CRCs with the Government-run information and service centers as well as to upgrade them to enable e-services, UPPR signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with a2i on 18 July 2013. As part of the agreement, the CRCs will be upgraded to PISCs, and officials including the honorable Mayors, Chief Executive Officers, Member Secretaries,

Town Managers and those in charge of the centers will receive training to manage the extended range of services.

As part of this integration, on 22 September the CRCs opened an online registration of workers seeking employment abroad.

The upgrading of CRCs will bring the total number of Government service centers throughout Bangladesh to 5,916. UPPR welcomes the new cooperation as it will ensure that more poor urban citizens have access to government information and services. For more information on the available e-services and center locations, please visit <http://a2i.pmo.gov.bd/>.

Recognizing slums in Bangladesh

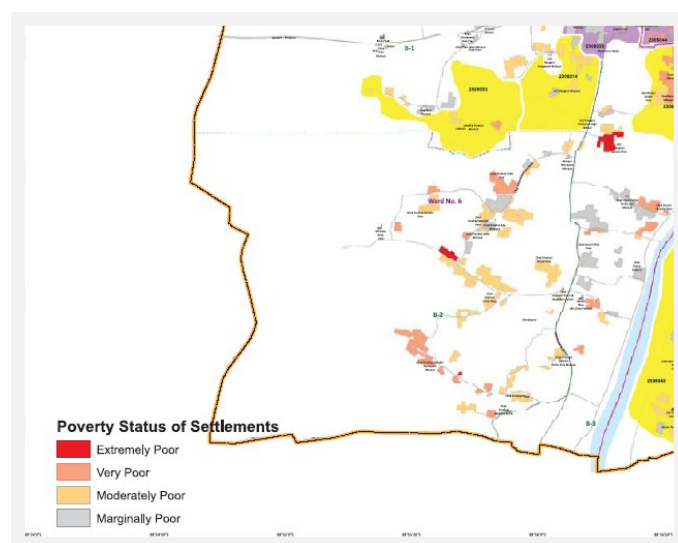


Approximately 40 million people in Bangladesh live in urban areas, out of which 21 per cent live below the poverty line. This means that more than eight million Bangladeshis live on less than USD 2 a day. Such poor urban households live in inadequate and insecure houses, often in unsanitary conditions and face difficulties in accessing employment, made worse by having little or no social protection. Further, they have limited access to adequate health services and education opportunities. With one of the highest urbanization rates in Asia, the situation continues to worsen for an increasing number of urban poor in Bangladesh. Despite this, urban poverty goes largely "unrecognized" in Bangladesh as the misperception that addressing it might result in increased migration to the cities still persists. The identity of Bangladeshi slum dwellers as rightful citizens is therefore continuously challenged.

In September 2013, however, the Mayors of Barisal, Gopalganj and Khulna took a step forward in recognizing and addressing urban poverty in Bangladesh by officially endorsing the Settlement Land Maps of their towns which include neighborhoods of poor and extremely poor urban households ('slums').

What are Settlement Land Maps?

Using GIS maps produced with the support of UPPR, slum community members mark the low-income settlements and plots of vacant land in the wards in which they live. Once the settlements and vacant land have been marked on the maps, trained community members assess the poverty level of each of the mapped settlements. Using a set of sixteen indicators - such as access to water, electricity and roads - the settlement is categorized as extremely poor, poor or non-poor. Details on the vacant plots of land - such as their size, topography and potential use - are also recorded in case a slum settlement is destroyed or evicted and alternative living space is needed. To date, Settlement Land



Maps have been successfully prepared in 29 towns across Bangladesh, and five have been officially endorsed by the respective Mayors.

Why does this matter?

By endorsing the maps where slums are included, the Mayors are allowing their inclusion in the Town Master Plans and therefore, allowing future inclusion of those slum dwellers in government programs like any other citizen in Barisal, Khulna and Gopalganj. Further, the SLMs will help policy-makers gain an improved understanding of the scale and nature of urban poverty in these areas, enabling them to design better and more informed policies and accurately direct resources for infrastructure and services to those who need it the most.

Requests for maps interested organizations should be directed to queries@upprbd.org.

Learning from our work and sharing what we know



The Research, Evaluation and Learning Unit has been working hard to measure the impact of our work with poor urban communities and communicate this success to our partners.

- UPPR has completed the design of two scorecards in a participatory manner to measure women's empowerment in the communities where we work. Roll-out will begin soon.
- We are undertaking a multi-dimensional poverty index (MPI) study. The MPI assesses poverty in the 24 towns where UPPR works, taking into account not only income but also factors such as health, education, and housing conditions. This reflects

UPPR's integrated approach to poverty reduction. By comparing it to our 2009 baseline, this MPI study will form key evidence of our progress. Wait for the results in December 2013.

- We have also begun a study of our savings and credit groups. We will be looking at high performing groups to understand what makes them successful and how their good practice might be replicated. Findings will be shared in our next newsletter.
- RELU is also about to start a study looking at our Settlement Improvement Fund interventions. The focus will be on tubewells and latrines that

have been built with support of UPPR. Tools have already been designed and field-tested and data collection will begin in October.

- Our Facebook and Twitter pages have been re-launched and we will shortly be improving our project website. Follow us, share our stories and help us spread the word on effective ways of reducing urban poverty!
- Finally, we are also kicking-off an exciting participatory impact study where a professional photographer will work with women and teenagers to document the differences that the project has made to their lives.

A letter from Bhashantek

We thank our online volunteer Seama Mowri for the translation of this letter

My name is Mossammat Julekha Akhtar. We are three sisters and I am the eldest. My father is a day labourer, and the sole earning member of the family. In 2012, when I was in the sixth grade and my younger sister in third grade, our family's financial situation deteriorated. My father's income, after paying for household expenditures, was not enough to pay for our education. My school fees had gone unpaid for four months. At one point, my parents decided that I should discontinue my schooling. I was devastated and cried myself to sleep every night.

One day, I heard of a mysterious friend, who had arranged to finance my education. I was overwhelmed with happiness on hearing that I was going to receive financial support for my educational expenses. If I had dropped out of school at that time, I would have had to start working by now. But thanks to my mystery friend, today I study in class seven.

Do you want to know who this mystery friend of mine is? It is UPPR. So, on behalf of everyone who has benefitted from the program like I did, I would like to thank UPPR for being a very dear friend.

