

Access to Urban Services in the Wave of Neoliberalism: A Study of the Urban Poor in Dhaka, Bangladesh

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Abstract:-Dhaka city has become a highly unequal society where neoliberal economic restructuring is continuously depriving the urban poor from all sorts of urban services e.g. water, gas, electricity, sanitation, healthcare services as well as education. In this backdrop, this study is to explore the basic urban services given by different stakeholders to the poor in the wave of neoliberalism in Dhaka. Harvey's 'Neoliberalism as creative destruction' (2007) and 'Right to the City' (2008) have been used to make the study theoretically vibrant. Mixed method strategies have been applied for conducting this study majorly followed by Survey counting 180 respondents as the sample which is supplemented by 6in-depth interviews. Pallabi slum at Mirpur-12 and Sat Tala slum at Mohakhali are considered as the study areas as most of the urban poor prefer living here because of relatively low costing than the other areas of the city. Descriptive analysis with statistical program and thematic analysis with necessary narratives of the subjects have been carried out for the analysis of the data. Study reveals that about 96.1% of the respondents have no access to land. On the other hand about 80.6%, 96.1% and 87.8% of the total respondents have access to water, electricity and gas supply respectively. Besides, about 77.8% and 55.6% of the total respondents have access to healthcare services and educational institutions in these areas. Although neoliberal state is withdrawing from its social commitments, the non-stake agencies especially private sectors are taking the responsibilities of various urban services.

Keywords: Urban Services, Neoliberalism, Urban Poor.

I. INTRODUCTION

After the 1970s a new economic policy called 'Neoliberalism' was initiated to restore global economic crisis (Harvey, 2009). Around the world, it has been imposed by powerful financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the Inter-American Development Bank. And neoliberal state took the responsibility of creating a convenient atmosphere for the businessman so that they can do business. According to Harvey, "Neoliberal state is expected to take a backseat and simply set the stage for market functions, but on the other it is supposed to be activist in creating a good business climate and to behave as a competitive entity in global politics" (Harvey, 2005). On the other hand, neoliberal states such sorts

of role provoke public expenditure for education, healthcare, safe drinking water and energy capabilities are considered as liabilities and as a result austerity comes as a weapon directed against the public sphere, while keeping the military budget, corporate subsidies, and tax facilities for the rich intact (Cited from Muhammad, 2015; Blyth 2013).

Besides this neoliberal attack, urbanization has reached unforeseen peak throughout the world. It is said that twenty first century is the urban century. According to UN-HABITAT (2008, 2010), "For the first time in human history, the world has become predominantly urban, half of world population is now living in cities and towns. The ratio is projected to reach by 70% by 2050. While Europe, North America and Latin America became urbanized within the 1970s, Asia and Africa are now fast catching up" (Haque, 2012: 01). And, 'accumulation by dispossession' lies at the core of this urbanization process with the image of creative destruction (Harvey, 2003). It is obstructing common people's right to the city. As a result, the poor, underprivileged and marginalized people in the city suffer socially, economically and politically most (Harvey, 2003, 2008).

Bangladesh is no other an exception. Its GDP rate of growth has exceeded more than seven during the last few years (Ullah, 2016). It has achieved huge success in reducing poverty, increasing literacy levels, and significant growth in micro and macro-economic sector as well as human development. But, now the country is recently facing huge number of crisis due to economic neoliberalization. In the context of Dhaka, the capital hub of Bangladesh, this rapid urbanization and privatization of services has accelerated serious discontents and misery for the urban poor who used to live in various informal settlements or urban slums of the cities (Haque 2012). So the concept 'Right to the City' for the poor has become a far cry which is regulated by the market driven neoliberal policies. In this context, this paper is going to explore whether neoliberalism is compatible with the right to the city concept in Dhaka. It will also try to explore the basic urban poor services given to the poor by the neoliberal state and other stakeholders. Besides, this study will try to link between the neoliberalism and urban services from the theoretical work of David Harvey and others.

II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

In this research, the intention of the researcher is to explore the basic urban services given to the poor in the wave of neoliberalism in Dhaka. However, the specific objectives of this research paper are as follows:

1. To examine the role of neoliberalism in the inequality of access of urban poor to land, housing, water, electricity, gas and other basic services.
2. To explicate the role of state and private agencies to provide this services to the poor.

III. RESEARCH METHODS

In this research, an integrated quantitative and qualitative approach is taken into consideration for conducting the study. Precisely multi-method strategy was followed for the present study where quantitative findings have been supplemented by the qualitative method. Among the quantitative strategy, survey method was selected and a semi structured interview schedule was administered to the respondents. Among the qualitative strategy, few in-depth interviews, case studies, informal discussions as well as observations were conducted to supplement the findings of the survey. In order to find out the relationship between neoliberalism and urban services, two mostly populated slum areas have been picked out purposively from the city. Those are: Pallabi Slum at Mirpur-12 and Sat Tala Slum at Mohakhali. As there was no previous data on the number of urban slum dwellers living in those slum areas, the sample size of 180 household respondents were purposively selected for carrying out survey? Moreover, there was an attempt to make a fair distribution of the number of respondents from both of the slums. Therefore, consecutively 100 and 80 respondents were chosen from these slums. Furthermore, 10 case studies, 6 in-depth interview and 2 informal discussions of informal workers, house owners and local government officials were collected to supplement the findings of the quantitative data. Later that, after collecting necessary data from the respondents, the quantitative data was coded and entered into IBM SPSS 24 for statistical analysis and hence tabular presentation, bivariate and multivariate analysis and cross tabulations were operated. Beside this, the qualitative data were thematically analyzed to supplement the findings of the quantitative data. However, in this study, sequential procedure and deductive logic were applied for carrying out the research.

IV. FINDINGS

4.1. SEX OF THE RESPONDENTS

Amongst the 180 respondents of this study, the following table shows that 94 household respondents were male and 86 respondents were female in which 52.2% respondents were male and 47.8% respondents were female respectively.

TABLE. 1. SEX OF THE RESPONDENTS

Sex	Frequency	Percent
Male	94	52.2
Female	86	47.8
Total	180	100.0

4.2. ACCESS TO HOME OWNERSHIP

From the following figure it was revealed that around 65.0% of the total respondents have no access to home ownership and they are mainly living as rented. On the other hand, around 27.2% of the total respondents have access to home ownership. Another 6.7% of the respondents are living in rent free houses and 1.1% is living in different context.

TABLE.2. ACCESS TO HOMEOWNERSHIP

	Frequency	Percent
Owned	49	27.2
Rented	117	65.0
Rent free	12	6.7
Others	2	1.1
Total	180	100.0

4.3. ACCESS TO URBAN SERVICES FOR THE POOR

Access to urban services for the poor includes space for cooking, access to lighting system, access to water, access to water and sanitation facilities, access to toilet, access to drainage system, access to gas supply, electricity, access to park etc.

4.3.1. Space for Cooking.

From the table.3 it was found that about 57.2% of the respondents had to share space for cooking, another 24.4% of the respondents used their own place for cooking. Another 12.8% of the respondents said that they had to cook under the open place; whereas 5.6% of the respondents had to use other's house for cooking.

TABLE. 3: SPACE FOR COOKING

	Frequency	Percent
Own place	44	24.4
Shared space	103	57.2
Open place	23	12.8
Other's house	10	5.6
Total	180	100.0

4.3.2. Access to Lighting System.

From the table.4 it was known that almost 96.1% of the respondents had access to electric bulb, whereas 2.8%

respondents used hurican/cupi and only a few covering 1.1% used charger light as the source of lighting.

TABLE 4: ACCESS TO LIGHTING SYSTEM

	Frequency	Percent
Electric bulb	173	96.1
Hurican/Cupi	5	2.8
Charger light	2	1.1
Total	180	100.0

4.3.3. Access to Water.

Around 80.6% respondents said that they have access to supply water. Meanwhile, another 10.0% of the respondents has access to water collected by electric motor and 7.2% respondents use river water for their necessary work, whereas only 2.2% respondents have access to pond water.

TABLE 5: ACCESS TO WATER

	Frequency	Percent
Electric motor	18	10.0
Pond	4	2.2
River	13	7.2
Supply water	145	80.6
Total	180	100.0

4.3.4. Access to Gas Supply.

Figure.1 shows that almost 87.8% respondents have access to gas supply, whereas only 12.2 % respondents don't have any access to gas supply. As a result they had to rely on 'Lakri' or "Kerosin" for cooking their everyday meal.

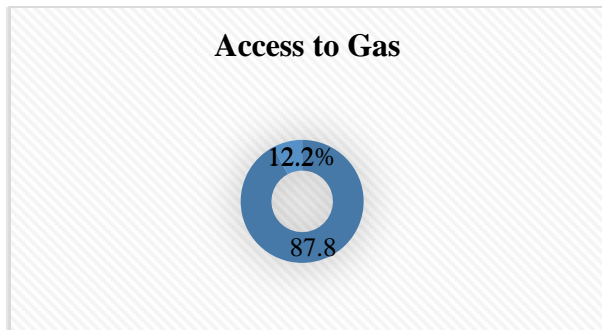


Fig.1 Access to gas supply

4.3.5. Access to Sanitation.

Most of the cases, it was seen that in the slum areas most of the people have to share latrine with other family members. Table 6.19 revealed that 72.8% of the urban poor have to share their toilet whereas 13.9% have gone to private toilet. On the other hand, another 11.1% used public toilet as well as 2.2% used other things.

TABLE 6: ACCESS TO SANITATION

	Frequency	Percent
Private	25	13.9
Shared	131	72.8
Public	20	11.1
Others	4	2.2
Total	180	100.0

4.3.6. Access to Drainage System.

The following table shows that 35.0% respondents said that they have *paka* drainage system and 34.4% said that they have *kacha* drainage systems. On the other hand, another 30.6% respondents said that they don't have any drainage system.

TABLE 7: ACCESS TO DRAINAGE SYSTEM

	Frequency	Percent
Paka drainage	63	35.0
Kachadrainage	62	34.4
No drainage	55	30.6
Total	180	100.0

4.3.7. Access to Educational Institutions.

The following figure.2 discloses that about 55.6% respondents think that it is possible to get access to these educational institutions. On the other hand, another 42.2% respondents think that it is not possible to get access to those educational institutions easily.

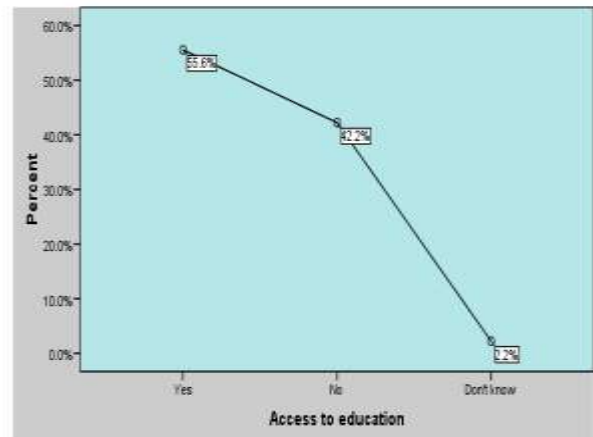


Fig.2 Access to educational institutions

4.3.8. Access to Health Care Services:

The following table indicates that among the 180 respondents about 140 respondents said that they have access to health care services which covers 77.8% of the total response. On the other hand, 40 respondents covering 22.2% said that they don't have any access to health care services.

TABLE 8. ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE SERVICES

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	140	77.8
No	40	22.2
Total	180	100.0

V. DISCUSSIONS

5.1. NEOLIBERALISM AND ACCESS TO URBAN SERVICES FOR THE POOR:

Dhaka is under the neoliberal influence where the invisible hand of the market and state force the urban poor to accept any dissocialized change as they are the prisoner of poverty and they are bound to pay this neo-liberal penalty (Wacquant, 2001). In this context of neoliberal economic restructuring, Harvey (2008) uttered that the poor are forced to push from metropolitan to semi periphery under the neoliberal project of capital accumulation. In Dhaka city, urban poor are locating in those dumping areas such as Mirpur and Mohakhali which are centrally detached and have become the place of informal activities and manufacturing industries.

However, these places occupied by the urban poor are often established in the form of informal settlements or slums which are devoid of basic amenities like water, gas, electricity, housing as well as health care facilities. This condition is viewed by Hossain (2013) as 'Hyper- Slumization' in which urban services like electricity, water and gas supply are irregular in these areas. Moreover, basic needs as such as access to health care and education are also very limited in these new urban peripheries. From the study, it has been explored that more than half (65.0%) of the respondents lived in the slums by renting a room, in which most (77.8%) of them named as "Tin-shed" room. Most of the cases, it was also noticed that 53.8% respondents have more than five family members living in a single room in a very inhumane condition. This acute housing shortage was critically analyzed by David Harvey in his book "The Right to the City (2008)". In there he addressed that urbanization permits a few people to afford sky rocking houses. On the other hand, it permits a majority not to afford the sky rocking house prices in urban centers. Rather they are forced to metropolitan semi-periphery (Harvey, 2008).

Moreover, the poor communities have no access to urban land and the most have been forced to settle on vacant land on the periphery of the city, where they have been relocated because of increasing demand for land and its increasing values (Hossain, 2013). From the study, it was found that about 96.1% of the urban poor living in various slums has no access to urban land. Although most of the cases, the ownership of this sorts of private land is always contentious in Dhaka city. However, the urban poor within their staying at slums experienced evictions for several times from their informal

settlements. Sometimes, this eviction caused heavy damage to them and many of them had to flee from the city. Apart from this, the urban poor in Dhaka city have limited access to water, gas and electricity. The study depicts that about 80.6% of the respondents have to rely on supply water which is mainly provided by the WASA, under the supervision of an NGO DHK, although the urban poor had to pay as monthly fees of 40-50 taka per room for accessing water. On the other hand, 87.8% respondents have access to gas supply and another 96.1% have access to electricity respectively for which they had to pay monthly bill of 200 taka (per stove) and 200-300 taka (One Light + One TV). Though their access to water, gas and electricity improved a lot than before, but the way they are getting these services questioned the legality of those lines. Bayat's survival (2004) strategy model can be related with this matter in which he implies that although the poor are powerless, they don't sit around waiting for the fate to determine their lives. Rather they are active in their own ways to ensure their survival, thus to encounter unemployment or price increases they of resort to engaged different informal activities like theft, street begging, street vending, prostitution or reorientation of the consumption pattern. It has also been observed that if they don't get the urban services like gas, electricity, water then most of them managed the services with the help of local goons and powerful leader in an unlawful means. In this connection, it was found that there are allegations that the associates and relatives of local AL MP Ilias Mollah control the illegal gas, water and electricity supplies to four slums in Pallabi, whereas the illegal gas supplies to Sat Tala Slum is controlled by a separate syndicate run by local Juba League leader Zakir Hossain (The Bangladesh Chronicle, April 19, 2016).

In this study, it was also found that most of the slums contain non-sanitary latrines (53.3%) which are shared (72.8%) by many households at the same time in an unpleasant and dirty environment. From this study, it was discovered that about 34.4% respondents uttered that they have 'kacha' drainage system and another 30.6% mentioned that they don't have any drainage system in their locality. As a result most of the cases, the urban poor have to face severe environmental injustice which causing serious health crisis to them. One of the respondents from Mollar Bosti expressed her experiences as:

"Is it possible to live in this slum in this environment? If MP Sahib allows me to sell my rooms, I will return back to my village".

This poor environment also deprived them from seeking health care services from different public hospitals. About 40.88% respondents said that they went to nearby dispensaries/pharmacies to take different health care services. Most of the time, they couldn't be happy with the services provided by different health care organization and pharmacies. As their income is poor, they couldn't afford to go to quality health care services.

Moreover, this underprivileged and marginalized group also denied from recreational activities, as most of the neighborhood slum areas in Dhaka didn't have any park. About 74.4% respondents said that in their locality they didn't find any park for recreational activities. Besides, the study also reveals that most of the cases the urban poor have to depend on NGO regulated schools (42.78%) and privatized schools (23.33%) as government regulated schools (6.6%) are not seen in their localities. Although, all the urban poor didn't have equal access (42.2%) to those sorts of schools, mainly in privatized schools as it cost high. So, they have to rely on NGO regulated schools like and madrasahs because they provide free education and in some cases education by a merely fees. Hossain (2013) described their condition as stated that poverty is clearly seen in terms of their consumption, housing and access to services in the city. The exclusion and deprivation of the urban poor and their criminalization by the authorities often make them desperate and violent. As a result, they also denied from the enjoyment of their rights as a citizen of the country.

5.2. PRIVATIZATION OF SERVICES IN THE WAVE OF NEOLIBERALISM:

Harvey (2007) claims that public utilities of all kinds (water, telecommunication, transportation), social welfare provision (Public housing, education, health care), public institutions (such as universities, school) and even warfare have all been privatized to some degree throughout the capitalist world. In this regard, urban services like housing, health care, education, and various utilities have become privatized in the peripheral areas of Dhaka city.

The number of public housing project which could provide the access to the poor is very limited. The increasing number of real estate companies mostly provides housing for the affluent class. This apartment housing or according to Harvey 'built environment' is the rational product of the process of capital accumulation. This 'housing classes' has widened the differences between the different classes in the society. From the study, it was found that most of the urban poor living in various slums in Pallabi and Sat Tala has limited access to housing. The study also depicts that getting access to new home ownership in both the study areas is a new means of private business which is perpetuated by the local elites and businessmen.

The neoliberal state has withdrawal from its social commitments and non-state agencies especially private sectors are taking responsibilities for ensuring health. Data reveals that about 25.56% respondents said that in case of emergency they prefer to take services from various private hospitals because they provide good services.

In the age of neoliberalism, education has become commodity. As a result, massive privatization of this sector creates immense tensions as it is costly and poor can't afford it. From the study areas, no government school was found. At SatTala, a government nursing institute was found beside the

IPH School. IPH School, a semi- government educational institution which is giving educational facilities in this locality, but very little poor can afford it as it is expensive. On the other hand, at Pallabi slum, no government school was found. But both the study areas some private schools e.g. Rahman Kinder Garten School, Anando School, Dr. Shahidullah Kinder Garten School, Agragati Biddya Niketon, Mohakhali Nurani Keratul Madrasah etc. are found, but it becomes difficult for the urban slum dwellers to send their children to these kinds of institutions as those are costly. So, they send their children to the various NGO regulated schools like BRAC School, Jagoroni School etc. But most of the informal interviewee said that the qualities of these NGO operated schools are not good, so their children's are depriving of quality education.

At Dhaka city, water has become privatized. And urban poor have to pay the burden because GoB failed to ensure water for all. In both the study areas, it was observed that DHK, an NGO is providing water for the poor, funded by UNICEF and Sweden, but urban poor people had to pay monthly cost of 40-50 taka for taking water line. So water becomes privatized for the urban poor too. Moreover, from the study areas it was revealed that most of the basic urban services have become also privatized in this age of neoliberalism.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

Dhaka City has become a highly unequal society where a sharp divide between the rich and the poorer segments of the population is very firm. Over-urbanization, neoliberal economic restructuring and state's withdrawn from its social commitments continuously making urban poor vulnerable and as a result they are being deprived of from all kinds of urban services as well as their rights to appropriate and participate in the decision making process in the city. Even urban citizenship for this informal citizen is not recognized by the state which violates the central motto of the "World Charter of the Right to the City".

What we found in this study is that Dhaka has become a city of beneficiaries where the control of the production of urban space as well as command over the urban process lies within the neoliberal elites. So the 'Right to the City' in Dhaka is narrowly composed of for the business elite which supported the claim made by Harvey (2009) as, 'The right to the city means the right to command over the urban process.' Apart from neoliberalist intervention urban poor themselves are also responsible for their present condition as they are clogged under the capitalistic systems.

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