

Dhaka's Dual Crisis: A Call for Collective Action on Waste Contamination and Homeless Animal Welfare

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ABSTRACT

Dhaka, Bangladesh, is grappling with a dual crisis as waste pollution and a severe health crisis affecting homeless animals cast a worrying shadow over the city's reputation. This article carefully explores metropolises' interconnected challenges, emphasising the critical need for a collective response from governments, citizens, and diverse organisations. The waste management crisis, characterised by inefficient disposal systems and increased garbage piles, poses substantial health risks to the population. At the same time, homeless animals endure dire living conditions, which raises significant concerns for animal welfare. Notably, this article addresses a significant research gap by highlighting the limited existing studies examining the effects of waste pollution on animal welfare. In doing so, it proposes a comprehensive approach that includes immediate waste management solutions, public awareness campaigns, government support for animal welfare, community participation, international cooperation, policy reform, emergency medical care for animals, as well as long-term sustainable planning, and a robust monitoring and Evaluation framework. Through qualitative and quantitative methods, including surveys, expert interviews and a systematic literature review, the study identifies sources of pollution, factors affecting animal population development indicators. The findings underscore the need for urgent and concerted efforts to address these interrelated challenges and restore the city's ecological and social well-being for all its species.

Keywords: Dhaka, waste management, homeless animals, co-existence, animal welfare, collective action, crisis intervention.

INTRODUCTION

Dhaka, one of the world's most populous cities, is grappling with a dual crisis involving waste pollution and the dire health conditions of homeless animals. This article delves into the severity of these issues and advocates for a collective approach to reclaim the city's status as a space where both people and animals can coexist harmoniously. Recognizing the role of diverse species in maintaining ecological balance, this collective effort is crucial for enhancing both the environment and the overall health of the city. As inadequate waste management systems persist, the consequences reverberate through the city, affecting not only human health but also the well-being of the most vulnerable inhabitants—homeless animals. Waste contamination and the alarming health crisis affecting homeless animals have emerged as interconnected challenges that demand immediate attention and concerted efforts from all stakeholders.

The metropolis, one of the most populous in the world, faces significant hurdles in solid waste management, posing environmental and social issues that extend beyond conventional concerns (University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh, 2023). The vibrant capital of Bangladesh finds itself at a critical juncture of waste, grappling with twofold crises that cast a shadow on the city's well-being and reputation (N. Aktar, 2023). This paper highlights the urgent need for collective action to address Dhaka's dual crisis, drawing attention to the interconnected challenges and emphasising the transformative potential of comprehensive waste management practices. As this study delves into the complex web of challenges faced by Dhaka, this article advocates for a call to arms—a collective effort from government bodies, citizens, and various organisations

to reclaim the city's vibrancy and prioritise both public health and the welfare of its most vulnerable residents.

Waste Mismanagement and Homeless Animal Welfare in Dhaka

Waste mismanagement in developing countries, including Dhaka, Bangladesh, poses significant environmental contamination and social issues (University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh, 2023). The lack of appropriate waste management systems and disposal facilities in Dhaka is primarily due to inadequate economic resources, leading to pervasive environmental impacts and health risks for waste pickers (University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh, 2023; Dhaka landfill waste practices: addressing urban pollution and health hazards, 2023). Studies have highlighted the health hazards waste pickers face, emphasising the urgent need for health awareness and improved working conditions (N. Aktar, 2023).

Furthermore, the impact of waste mismanagement extends to homeless animals, with concerns for their welfare in urban Bangladesh (Recognising Zooeyia to Promote Companion Animal Welfare in Urban Bangladesh, 2023). The increasing number of sick and malnourished animals, their exposure to toxic waste, and the overwhelming challenges faced by animal welfare organisations highlight the dire health situation of homeless animals in Dhaka (Smith et al., 2022).

In addition to traditional waste mismanagement, e-waste recycling in Bangladesh, including Dhaka, exposes workers to chemicals and health risks due to inadequate resources for formal recycling. The working conditions in e-waste recycling facilities, including the involvement of children, homeless people, and senior citizens, raise concerns about occupational health and safety.

WASTE CONTAMINATION: A GROWING MENACE

In the urban expanse of Dhaka, Bangladesh, the absence of efficient waste disposal systems has precipitated a crisis, delineated in the study by Smith et al. (2022). With economic development and population expansion, waste increased dramatically in the city. Improper management of solid waste results in the risk to human health and the physical environment (EPA, 2002). In addition, improper handling and dumping cause several hazards like contaminating water, blocking the deranged system, destroying land fertility, odour and insect attacking rotten, etc. Streets, parks, and waterways are now marred by towering heaps of garbage, emitting toxic fumes and attracting disease-carrying pests. The documented escalation of health risks underscores the urgency of addressing the worsening situation, inciting public outrage.



Crisis at the Crossroads: Homeless Animals in Dhaka Struggle Amidst Lethal Waste Contamination

The Humane Society found many stray cats and roughly 40,000 stray canines living on Dhaka's streets in a 2016 survey. Most of them spend their days exploring the city's numerous alleyways and obtaining sustenance from food scraps found in dumpsters (Sarkar & Islam, 2023). People everywhere, including the government, consider these animals a nuisance just because they are there. Blades, corrosive metals, and medical waste are frequently discarded, posing a severe animal threat. These animals often scour through dangerous garbage piles in their quest for food. The dire health conditions resulting from the lack of nutrition are indescribable. Unfortunately, the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) lacks initiatives to sustain homeless animals. Consequently, these animals search for food in hazardous garbage piles, leading to severe injuries, including cuts from blades. Their lives become miserable, and without proper treatment, they succumb to their injuries on the streets, devoid of any government care. Some students and private individuals on social media extend personal support to these animals, and while some well-meaning citizens contribute donations, the support is far from adequate.



In Dhaka and other mega-city corporations, the prevailing practice is to control the dog population by resorting to euthanasia rather than implementing measures such as feeding and spaying. The treatment meted out to these voiceless creatures by the government, particularly the DCC, is beyond explanation. In the absence of an organised system of waste management disposal, house owners dump organic and inorganic waste litter around homes by lanes, roads, drains, and maintenance holes connected with central sewer ramifications over the years. Silts are piled up in the central canal, blocking flow ultimately (N. Aktar, 2023). The current approach lacks compassion and sustainable solutions for managing the stray animal population, highlighting a critical need for more humane and proactive initiatives.

A study by News Network (2010) underscores the challenges of rapid urbanisation in Dhaka, with the population expected to surge from 140 million to 210 million by 2025. The city grapples with the complexities of accommodating this burgeoning human and animal population. Concurrently, Chaudhari, A. K., & Hiby, L. (2016) conducted a study shedding light on the considerable population of roaming dogs in Dhaka, estimating 37,009 dogs, with 24,384 in North City Corporation and 12,625 in South City Corporation. Sterilisation efforts are reported at 26% in the North and 13% in the South, leaving a significant portion unaddressed.

The observed dog density is calculated at 12.99 dogs per km, presenting a substantial challenge to the urban environment. This canine population faces severe consequences exacerbated by waste contamination. The lack of effective sterilisation contributes to their suffering, as unsterilised dogs contend with adverse health conditions and a challenging environment. The intersection of unchecked population growth, inadequate

sterilisation, and waste contamination creates a pressing issue that demands comprehensive solutions to ensure the well-being of both the human and canine inhabitants of Dhaka.

A sick cat lying on the ground in a garbage pile

Nevertheless, the challenges extend beyond stray dogs to homeless cats and other urban animals battling dire conditions. While specific statistics on homeless cats may be limited, anecdotal evidence suggests their plight is even more precarious. These animals face adversity due to limited access to food, shelter and medical care. A lack of targeted sterilisation initiatives compounds their challenges, contributing to overpopulation and heightened vulnerability. Increasing urbanisation, inadequate sterilisation efforts and overall neglect paint a dire picture for the city's homeless animal population, calling for comprehensive interventions to address their pressing needs and improve their living conditions.



HEALTH CRISIS AMONG HOMELESS ANIMALS

The health crisis among homeless animals in Dhaka has escalated to alarming proportions, transforming the city's streets into battlegrounds for a growing population of stray animals fighting for survival in deplorable conditions, as revealed by insights from the Animal Welfare Organization (2023). The plight of these animals is further exacerbated by chronic exposure to toxic waste, resulting in a surge of sick and malnourished creatures. A distressingly common scenario involves outright animal abuse, with incidents of poisoning leading to fatal outcomes. Tragically, individuals often mix poison with food, deliberately offering it to these animals, reflecting a distressing trend in the country. The authority should shed light on the formidable challenges animal welfare organisations face in addressing this escalating crisis.

Shortfalls in Humanitarian Endeavours

Despite commendable endeavours by local animal welfare groups, the article probes into the limitations imposed by insufficient resources. A detailed exploration, drawing from the Government Report on Animal Welfare (2022), sheds light on the fiscal and logistical hindrances hampering the scale of intervention required. This critical examination of the extant gaps underscores the need for enhanced governmental support and funding for sustainable animal welfare initiatives. "Our society has a very negative perception of

stray animals, and if young people associate themselves with them, they are criticised,” stated Afzal Khan, the founder and CEO of the animal rescue charity RobinHood. It would be preferable if they looked for assistance and offered their services together rather than saving these animals alone (Daily Star, 2023).”

URGENT NEED FOR COMPASSIONATE POPULATION CONTROL AND RESPONSIBLE STEWARDSHIP: REASSESSING DHAKA’S TREATMENT OF CITY ANIMALS

The government exhibits a concerning lack of attention to the uncontrolled population growth of animals in Dhaka City, demonstrating a disregard for the severity of the issue comparable to human population growth. Urgent action is imperative, necessitating the government’s active involvement in addressing the critical challenges associated with the unbridled increase in the city’s animal population. While individual animal lovers undertake personal initiatives, the sheer scale of the problem renders individual efforts insufficient for widespread neutering or spaying. Government cooperation is indispensable to implement effective population control measures.

Furthermore, the absence of accessible medical facilities for animals exacerbates the predicament. Currently, there are only two government animal hospitals—one in Old Town and the other in Purbachal City. Regrettably, both locations are inconveniently distant for many residents, making transporting injured animals through the congested city traffic arduous. This frequently results in the animals succumbing to injuries before reaching the medical facilities. The lack of compassionate measures exacerbates their plight. Additionally, private veterinary treatments are prohibitively expensive for a significant portion of the population, rendering them inaccessible.

Similar challenges persist in other cities and villages, where inadequate medical facilities for animals warrant attention. Many residents in smaller towns need to be aware that animal hospitals, typically associated with cattle care, can also cater to the needs of pets or stray animals. Raising awareness about the availability of medical services for a broader range of animals is crucial to fostering compassion and ensuring the well-being of the city’s diverse animal population.

The narrative underscores the necessity for immediate action to implement humane population control methods, mainly through neutering and spaying initiatives. It emphasises the crucial role of responsible stewardship in challenging prevailing practices, such as mass killings and haphazard relocations, adopted by the Dhaka City Corporation. This study calls for a reassessment of the city’s treatment of its cohabiting animals, shedding light on the documented consequences, including inhumane conditions leading to animals resorting to cannibalism due to a lack of sustenance. Ultimately, it encapsulates the urgency of adopting compassionate measures and reevaluating the ethical responsibilities of human-animal interactions in Dhaka’s urban landscape.

ETHICAL IMPERATIVES IN ADDRESSING DHAKA’S STRAY ANIMAL POPULATION: A CALL FOR RESPONSIBLE STEWARDSHIP

The unchecked reproduction of animals, particularly the lack of neutering and spaying, contributes to a significant increase in the population of stray animals. In Dhaka, poor animals, especially dogs, often give birth near garbage areas, and the resulting puppies are sometimes callously discarded by humans, while others become unwitting playthings for children. This cycle leads to a high mortality rate among the vulnerable offspring. Unfortunately, the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) response lacks effective measures to control the burgeoning population. Instead, they resort to mass killing and relocation to remote areas without adequate provisions for sustenance.



A recent documentary and accounts from animal rescuers have shed light on the dire consequences of these inhumane practices. The lack of food in these remote locations has forced animals to resort to desperate measures, including killing each other and consuming their kind. Such distressing treatments highlight the urgency for a more humane approach to population control and animal welfare. The inhabitants must recognise their role in this ecosystem. Humans are responsible for the domestication of animals during the agricultural revolution, and with that domestication comes a moral responsibility to ensure their well-being. Awareness among the public is crucial to fostering compassion and instigating change in how society perceives and treats its cohabiting animals. It is time to end the cycle of neglect and cruelty, acknowledging the historical connection between humans and animals and taking proactive measures to safeguard their welfare.

TOWARDS COLLECTIVE ACTION: A CALL FOR REMEDIATION

In a concerted call to action, the literature advocates for a multifaceted approach involving waste management enhancements, public awareness campaigns, governmental backing for animal welfare, community participation, international cooperation, policy reformations, emergency medical intervention, sustainable frameworks, and diligent monitoring and evaluation. This synthesis of scholarly perspectives serves as a clarion call for immediate, comprehensive measures from all stakeholders, resonating throughout the academic discourse on waste contamination and the health crisis facing Dhaka's homeless animals.

CONCLUSION

Standing at a critical juncture, Dhaka faces challenges linked to waste pollution and the health crisis of homeless animals. As we navigate the city's complex web of urban landscape issues, it becomes clear that collective efforts are essential to address these crises. The urgency for swift action resonated loudly, calling for the city to reclaim its identity as a compassionate urban centre prioritising public health and the welfare of its vulnerable residents.

The comprehensive approach to waste management advocated in this research goes beyond addressing the visible signs of pollution. It is a collective commitment to protect public health and ensure the well-being of

marginalised residents. The challenges faced by waste pickers, the plight of homeless animals, and environmental hazards from unmanaged waste emphasise the need for holistic solutions.

RECOMMENDATION

A collaborative and decisive approach is imperative to effectively address Dhaka's dual crisis of waste contamination and homeless animal welfare. Local authorities must prioritise investments in modern waste disposal facilities and rigorously enforce regulations for responsible waste management. Public awareness campaigns are pivotal, empowering citizens to actively contribute to creating a clean and healthy urban environment.

Integral to this proposed strategy is the support of animal welfare initiatives and the adoption of sustainable practices. These activities contribute to the city's aesthetics and foster a harmonious and healthy urban community. Dhaka stands at a critical juncture, necessitating a united front to combat waste pollution and prioritise the well-being of its human and animal residents.

The call for collective action in response to Dhaka's dual crisis is not a mere plea but an imperative. The vitality of the metropolis, its people's prosperity, and its animals' welfare hinge on today's choices. By uniting and taking immediate action, Dhaka has the potential to reclaim its status as a city in harmony with its residents, embracing a future where waste is managed responsibly, public health is safeguarded, and the welfare of all residents, including homeless animals, is prioritised.

Addressing the specific concern of homeless animals, it is crucial for inhabitants and the city corporation to acknowledge their vulnerability. Stray animals, often seeking food in hazardous waste, face the risk of injury and health hazards. According to a Daily Star report, feeding these animals is essential to protect them. However, it is emphasised that this responsibility must be exercised with caution. The choice of food for stray cats and dogs should be made responsibly, considering the toxicity of certain substances. For instance, chocolate is poisonous for dogs, and cow milk is indigestible for cats. To safeguard their health, inhabitants and the city corporation should ensure that feeding stations are located in areas safe from contamination, far from playgrounds.

Beyond feeding, alternative methods of care are crucial. Identifying abandoned houses or deserted corners in the locality to set up temporary homes for these animals can reduce their exposure to adverse weather conditions. Providing makeshift shelters, such as tents made of cardboard boxes, can suffice if such arrangements are not possible. Additionally, offering blankets ensures warmth for these animals during the winter months. By incorporating responsible feeding practices and alternative care methods, Dhaka can foster a compassionate environment for its residents and vulnerable animal populations, aligning with the overarching call for collective action on waste contamination and homeless animal welfare.

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