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SLUM IMPROVEMENT SCHEME IN KHULNA CITY – A REVIEW

Md. Ghulam Murtaza*

Urban and Rural Planning Discipline, Khulna University, Khulna 9208, Bangladesh

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Abstract: Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh has taken up a programme entitled Slum Improvement Project (SIP) to ameliorate the living conditions of the slum dwellers of 20 municipal areas including Khulna city of the country. The physical conditions of the slums of Khulna are worse and of sub-human standard nature. As a participant of the SIP, Khulna City Corporation (KCC) has started its activities from January 1990. In the first phase, KCC selected Sonadanga and Rupsha slums to start with the activities of the SIP. The present article has made an attempt to highlight the background of rationality of undertaking SIP activities in Khulna; operation and progress so far made to deal with the problems of slum settlements; and, a critical evaluation including the underlying issues to improve the operation mechanism of the SIP activities in Khulna.

Key words: Slum; Squatter settlements; Khulna City Corporation

Introduction

The urban population of Bangladesh is growing at an alarming rate. Every year approximately 2 million new urbanites require shelters (UNDP-UNCHS, 1993), 50 per cent of the urban population are below the poverty level (The World Bank, 1985). The majority of these urban populations are likely to be poor and its consequences on the housing sector will inevitably be serious unless effective and appropriate measures are not taken in time. This is only saying about the immediate future years. What about the existing slums and squatters settlements? According to the survey results of Bangladesh Household Expenditure Survey 1985-86, approximately 50 per cent of all urban households were classified as economically weaker or lower income groups of people (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 1988). They do not have regular assured income. They are inadequately serviced and as such live in a sub-human standard accommodation. The formal system of developing urban land and related services and facilities by the public and private sectors are not effectively addressing the needs of these groups. On the other hand, the rate of growth of slums and squatters settlements is accelerating. In order to combat the problems of the slums, the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh with the assistance from United Nations Children's Emergency Fund

* Corresponding address: Tel.: +88-041-732749, 720171-3; Fax: +88-041-731244; E-mail: <gmurtaza@bttb.net.bd>
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(UNICEF) has undertaken an ambitious programme to improve the physical conditions of the slums as well as the living conditions of the slum dwellers of 20 municipal areas including 4 city corporations of the country. This article has made an attempt to highlight the process, operation and progress of Slum Improvement Project (SIP) dealing with the problems of slum settlements of Khulna City.

An overview of Khulna City

Khulna City is located in the southwest part of Bangladesh and on the central part of the Jessore-Khulna-Mongla axis. It is the third largest city of the country with a population of more than one million. Khulna experienced the fastest growth of population and industrial expansion during the 50s and 60s of the last century. The industrial growth was mainly centered around large scale mills and factories such as jute processing, newsprint, hardboard paper, salt refining, ship-building, textiles, etc. The growth after Independence was markedly slower and mostly of small-scale industries. Recently, the export of shrimp has quickened the development of related activities in Khulna city such as marketing, processing, freezing, transportation, banking, insurance etc. However, still the large-scale industries provide the larger share of Khulna's economic output and employment (Louis Berger International Inc., 1986). As far as the occupational structure of the employees is concerned, most of them are semi-skilled or unskilled industrial workers. The informal sector is another major employer to a large number of new migrants of Khulna City. The income of this group of people is significantly low. The income distribution of the households of Khulna city is heavily concentrated in a narrow range of monthly income between Tk. 1000 to Tk. 3500 (The World Bank, 1985).

The city's overall physical development and housing situation are being conditioned by the socio-economic development with poor housing condition and dysfunctional urban development. According to the results of 1981 Census, 64 per cent of Khulna's urban dwellers live in rented houses as compared with 32.5 per cent of the country's urban households (BBS, 1985). The figure of house ownership is also low (27 per cent compared with a Bangladesh urban average of 60 per cent). The use of poor building materials, small house units, lack of basic urban services and facilities are the most common features of the settlement of Khulna City. The most striking structural feature of Khulna City is the pervasive presence of slum and squatter settlements. The city is largely a haphazard collection of small settlements of shacks with little urban infrastructure. And they constitute the majority of housing stock to the low-income residents. Sanitation facilities in the slums are primitive; water supply is either non-existent or poor. Numerous ponds serve as receptacles of drainage and sanitary wastes and at the same time for bathing and washing utensils. The drainage facilities and the access roads in the slums are inadequate.

The governmental actions and plans so far undertaken to develop housing facilities in Khulna City did not address the problems of the housing of the slum dwellers. Housing and Settlements Directorate (HSD) developed housing for the refugees in 1960s in Khulna. All other housing estates developed by HSD and Khulna Development Authority

(KDA) are the enclaves of the high-income groups of the people of the society. It is noteworthy to mention here that originally all these housing plots were intended for distribution to the lower and middle-income groups of peoples. The role of the private developers in Khulna's housing sector is almost nil. They lack desire, financial and managerial capability to develop serviced housing plots. Moreover, the slum residents have already been priced out from the land market.

The Slum Improvement Project (SIP)

Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh with the assistance from UNICEF has taken a programme to improve the condition of the slums located in 20 municipal areas including Khulna. The total financial allocation of the SIP is Tk. 913.09 *lakh* and the duration of the project is 5 year (abridged from SIP project documents). The main objectives of the SIP are to:

- provide basic services and facilities to the slum dwellers;
- formulate policies and programmes in order to provide municipal services and facilities to the urban poor;
- facilitate the urban poor women's participation in improving their conditions;
- develop community's participation in utilizing the resources of the government and the community; and,
- develop the nutrition and health conditions of children and women through integrated improvement of drainage, sanitation and primary health care.

The main work components of the SIP are: (i) community formation, organization and participation; (ii) primary health care; (iii) improvement of physical environment; (iv) development of block grant fund; (v) introduction of functional literacy; and, (vi) research and development. Khulna City Corporation (KCC) as a participant of the SIP, has started its activities from January 1990. Two slums sites namely Sonadanga municipal slum and Rupsha slum were selected in order to start with the activities of the SIP, in the first phase.

A survey was conducted jointly by KCC and UNICEF to identify the locations of the slums for the SIP activities. The survey results indicated that 54 slums are spread over the city area. During January 1990 to June 1992, KCC spent a sum of amount of Tk. 48 *lakh* in two slums and accomplished the following works;

- construction of 4800 metres surface drains;
- construction of 6617 metres footpath;
- construction of 28 dustbins;
- installation of 56 street lights;
- sinking of 26 deep-tube-wells and 17 pit latrines, and
- granting loans to 484 slum residents (@ Tk. 2000 to each)

About 15,000 slum dwellers or 2250 households of the two slums were directly benefited by the SIP. The owner of the land of Sonadanga slum is KCC and Rupsha slum belongs to a Christian Association, private parties and the government.

As far the tenurial aspects are concerned, the SIP has adopted certain policy measures so that sustainable development achieved. These are as follows:

- the Pourashava shall not enhance any rates and taxes on the owners of the slum included in the project because of physical improvement after commencement of the project during the first 5 years.
- in case the land/house or both belong(s) to the Pourashava there shall be no imposition of rates and taxes on slum residents payable to the Pourashava because of the physical improvement by the project for the first 5 years after commencement
- the Pourashava shall not evict or cause eviction of any slum resident during the 10 years unless there is any social reasons. In case the matter shall be decided jointly by the Pourashava concerned, LGED and UNICEF
- in case the slum belongs to private owners, after 5 years the Pourashava may increase rates and taxes of the owners not exceeding 10 per cent of taxes and rate payable for the similar facilities in order areas so that reflection of such rates and taxes payable to the Pourashava by the slum residents remain limited to 10 per cent. This arrangement would remain in force until completion of 10 years time
- the Pourashava shall take such measures as to enable the slum residents to remain in the slum in peace and untidily and to gain self confidence to improve quality of their life through proper utilization of project input.

It is reported that the financial and physical progress of the SIP of KCC is satisfactory and project targets would be achieved as envisaged in the work plan.

Some Underlying Issues

A welcome approach has been taken by the Government to deal with the residents of urban slum and squatter settlements, departing from the conventional policy of either demolition or resettlement. The slums should be considered as part of our urban socio-economic life and all efforts should be made to utilize their potentialities.

It may be pointed out that improvement of structure of houses of the slum dwellers remains unaddressed. The improvement of environment has been well taken care of. However, the issue of improvement of structures is to be dealt with in an integrated approach. The low cost durable building materials developed by Housing and Building Research Institute (HBRI) could be used by the slum residents. The Grameen Bank's approach of using four RCC pillars in building houses could also be replicated here.

The improvement of socio-economic conditions of the slum residents of the SIP are not prominent. Through arrangements have been made to provide credit facilities for small business to the slum dwellers, it seems that the amount granted to them is not significant

enough to create a fund out of the amount given. The main thrust of SIP should be to create enabling capacity of the slum residents, so that in future they can pay themselves for the improvement of houses and infrastructure and the plots.

The major drawback of the SIP, however, remains in its being implemented in a context of overall housing policy of the city's growth and development. New slum settlements might well be added to at a rate faster than that at which slum improvement is being carried out. This needs to be resolved in context of preparation and implementation of master/landuse plan of the city concerned.

The arrangements for 99 years lease on the basis of payment of nominal charges and complying with a number of other conditions could also be made to the slum residents. Possibly, this is feasible because the majority of settlements selected for improvement is on Government land and, therefore, high acquisition costs and lengthy acquisition procedures are not the major problems. Another factor facilitating the implementation of such a policy is possibly the relative absence of alternative competing uses for the land occupied by the slums in Khulna City.

The goods and services produced by the slum residents are not properly marketed. It requires adequate training, guidance and credit facilities to develop skills of the workers and improve the quality of the produced goods. The private sectors and NGOs should come forward in the field. In the Chinese eye, as for example, the peoples and the cities are not the consumers but the producers of goods and services as well (Alam and Murtaza, 1990).

Conclusion

Since expertise is available in the field of urban planning, computer, economics and business administration at Khulna University, an in-depth survey could be undertaken to obtain all relevant information on the slum dwellers of Khulna City. Therefore, a policy could be adopted that before undertaking any SIP activities in Khulna City, the detailed survey would be conducted by Khulna University. It will serve various purposes such as field training to the students of various Disciplines – Urban and Rural Planning, Business Administration and Computer Sciences and Engineering, development of expertise at the local level, establishment of shelter related data base, possession of actual and reliable data to the KCC for formulating effective and appropriate planning and implementation strategies of the SIP.

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