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Participation of the urban poor in the planning process of Bangladesh: The case of Khulna City railway land redevelopment plan

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Abstract

Many governments in the global South are looking for new ways to safeguard the interests of the poor in urban areas and to tackle inequality. The neo-liberal development ideologies however adversely affected the interests of the urban poor. In cities of the fast urbanising South where the residents are predominately poor, it is of vital concern that planning plays an effective role to combat poverty. Within the context of a high concentration of the poor, this study investigates, through the case of Khulna city, the current planning challenges faced by Bangladeshi cities in engaging the poor to produce pro-poor urban plans. Findings reveal that participation of the poor is negligible in both problem identification and the decision making process which results in policies that fail to address the current poverty issues faced by the poor. In spite of firm central policy guidelines for participatory planning, the communication gap between the planning authority and the poor results in the dominance of a rational comprehensive

approach in practice. A lack of awareness and education among the poor, and the non-existence of statutory laws regarding participation remain the main obstacles for pro-poor participation. Furthermore, a lack of a strong pro-active role for city authorities and urban planners in engaging the poor in decision-making hinders the path of pro-poor planning in Bangladesh.

Keywords: Urban Planning, Communicative Planning, Participation, Urban Poor

Introduction

Local as well as central government bodies in the global South are looking for new ways to safeguard the interests of the poor in urban areas and to tackle inequality between the economically advantaged and disadvantaged in contemporary neo-liberal cities. Planning is the central means through which governments manage urban land uses and activities (Watson, 2009a). Moreover, in the current neo-liberal setting, the market dominates over agendas related to social protection (Harvey, 2005). In such contexts, the interests of the poor are adversely affected when planning policies try to promote and help markets, business interests and urban elites (see Harvey, 2005; Boyle et al., 2008). In cities of the fast urbanising South where the residents are predominately poor, it is of vital concern that planning plays an effective proactive spatial role to combat poverty. There are serious concerns outlined in the current research literature that planning in the global South is often anti-poor and needs to promote a pro-poor system (see Tibaijuka, 2006; Devas, 2001; Mitlin, 2000). Rakodi (in Wratten, 1995)

asserts that planners have little understanding about how the poor survive. The poor are affected, if not neglected in a planning process that encourages high-rise residential developments over pro-poor traditional housing and low-density neighbourhoods over compact living (Watson, 2009b). Planners are now more concerned than ever before regarding a more just and equitable planning practice to include the needs of the poor. Recent radical theories (see Watson, 2009b) in planning acknowledge the fact that true participation of the poor is necessary for assuring equitable planning in the cities. In this context, it is important to investigate whether planning in practice adequately consults poor people and accurately reflects their needs in local plans especially in the developing countries. This paper examines the pro-poorness of contemporary planning practice in Bangladeshi cities. It investigates procedural aspects of pro-poor planning with the key aim to assess the current status and key challenges regarding pro-poor participation in the plan making process. The study in particular focuses upon the presence of communicative rationale in the planning process, the level of participation of the poor in plan making process and the challenges for pro-poor participation. The findings in this study aims to contribute to the wider and growing literature on pro-poor participation in planning.

There are several reasons for focusing on Bangladesh. Consultation with the poor is pivotal for poverty-stricken countries such as Bangladesh. It is evident in recent census statistics that despite rapid urban transformation, poverty in urban areas is increasing

(BBS, 2011) and 21.3% of the people are poor in urban areas (www.worldbank.org.bd, 2012, BBS, 2011). Banks *et al* (2011) predicts that in Bangladesh around 25% of the urban population will earn less than a dollar a day in 2020. In such a context, local as well as central government bodies are looking for ways to safeguard the interests of the poor in urban areas. However, the question is whether Bangladeshi planning considers seriously the interests of the poor in the plan making process. In this context, the key thrust of this paper is to explore the current status and issues regarding pro-poor participation in the plan making process. Using a case-study approach of Khulna City in Bangladesh this research seeks to analyse the extent to which adoption of a pro-poor planning approach is fostering public participation of the poor in local plan making. The case study from Khulna city is focused on redevelopment-planning project on land owned by the government owned Railway department (Bangladesh Railway) and currently occupied by the urban poor in the city (known as Railway slums).

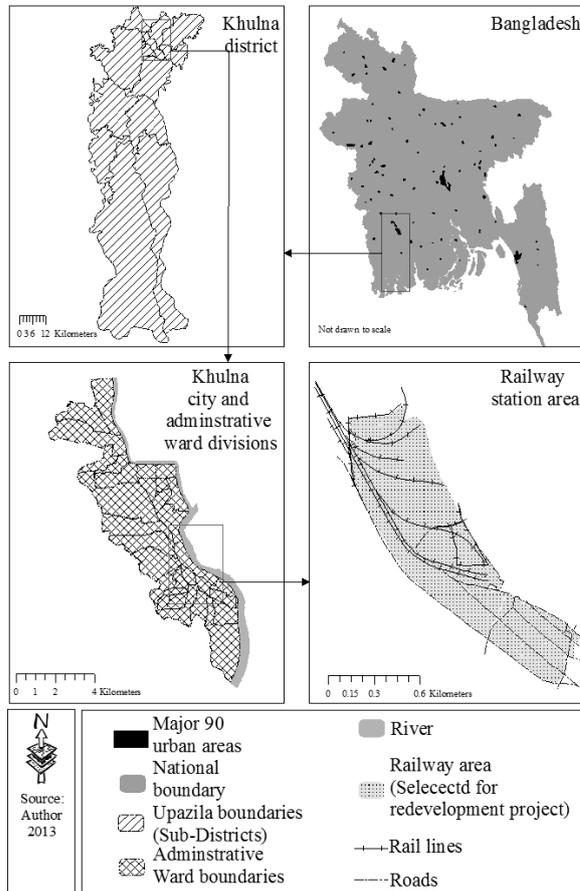


Figure 1: Urban Bangladesh, Location of Khulna city and the Railway land site

Source: Authors, 2014

Railway land site is chosen as the case study because this site is the first site in Khulna site that was brought under redevelopment scheme in 2000 in a city level plan (see Figures 1 and 2). The case study is important because a large number of poor people reside in this area and therefore ideally plan making would require to engage them if it intended to reflect the needs and demands of the poor. This unique case in one hand

helps to recognize the current procedural practice of planning while on the other it identifies the level of participation of the poor residents in the redevelopment plans.

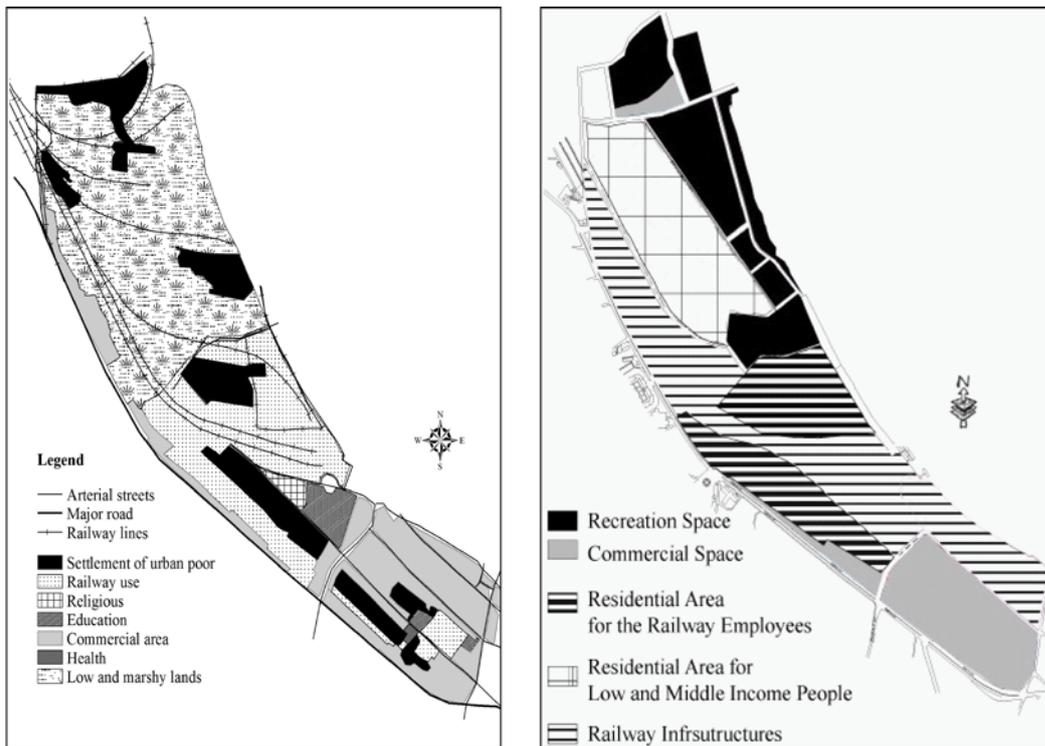


Figure 2: Existing (left) and proposed (right) land use of the Railway land redevelopment site

Source: Authors, 2014

The paper firstly discusses the conceptual framework of participation of the poor in planning and outlines the analytical framework and methodology applied in this study. It then examines the current poverty context of Khulna and Railway land and the planning process at city and community level and explores the scope for pro-poor participation in the current planning framework. This is followed by the analysis of

relevant documents using the findings from the case study site the current level of participation of the poor in the planning process. Finally, it recognises key challenges regarding pro-poor participation in planning.

Participation of the poor: a conceptual framework

Participation of people in the plan making process has been of vital concern in contemporary planning literature that seeks to address the limitations of conventional positivist models that are over focused on scientific rather than social reasoning. Scholars including Healey (1997, 1999), Friedmann (1993, 1987), Habermas (1984) and Forester (1999) emphasize that planning is about a process of consensus building where different stakeholders play a role that ensures the efficient use of space. This paradigm intends to narrow the gap between actors and structures and seeks to bring about the democratisation of decision-making (Innes and Booher, 2000, 2003; Habermas, 1984; Sager, 1994; Healey, 1997, 2006; Godschalk *et al.*, 1994; Susskind and Cruikshank, 1987). Since a communicative approach tries to include opinions from different interest groups, this approach can be effective for pro-poor planning with a hope that the ‘force of the better argument’ triumphs in the end (Watson, 2002) and eventually help those who are in greatest need. Nonetheless, if communicative planning ends up favouring socially advantaged groups, this is always detrimental to the urban poor. If opinions of both the poor and non-poor are included in decision-making, the poor may still be

affected by wider market and political forces. This problem contributed to the development of public participation in planning in western societies as a way of connecting communities to urban decision-making (Atkinson and Moon, 1994). More recently a not too dissimilar story could be told in cities of the global South. Thus, to ensure pro-poor planning policies in the South, it is crucial that proper participation of the poor people is present.

Creation of an 'ideal speech' situation for the poor is not an easy task if the power relationship is capitalist in nature. The reality in the global South, as in the global North, is that there are elements of structural inequality and hierarchies of power (Fainstein, 2000; Yiftachel, 1989; Campbell and Fainstein, 2003, Berke, 2002; Harvey, 2005). Local political leaders are always reluctant to hear about the poorest and deprived groups once they have been elected. Even community organisations do not necessarily enhance representation of the poor if they are run by local elites (Crook, 2003). Hester (1996) argues that citizen participation has evolved into a movement that can be characterised as selfish, short-sighted, segregated, sophisticated and scared. To address the problem link to under representation of deprived groups, recent theories have advanced the idea of communication through integrating the idea of justice. The 'just city' concept points out that planning needs to create consensus in a way that the rights and needs of the oppressed and marginalised groups such as the poor are not compromised. Just planning focuses on ensuring policy justice to marginalised people

through an inclusive planning process (see Fainstein, 2000; 2005; 2008) where the opinion of marginalised people would be ensured through just representation of the poor rather than equal representations of poor- and non-poor groups. From a poverty perspective, the major role of planning should be maximising the benefits of the poor (Cristancho, 2009; Watson 2009a, 2009b). The word 'pro-poor' is popular in the growth-led development concept, but not widely used in spatial planning. Pro-poor growth is the progress that favours the poor (Essama-Nssah, 2005). Growth process is pro-poor only when the poor benefit proportionately more than the rich (Fainstein, 2000). Pro-poor participation is fundamentally embedded in the communicative rationale of planning and is focussed on engaging the poor in the plan making process.

The idea of pro-poor planning here is to promote equity rather than equality of consensus. The idea used in pro-poor planning can be referred back to the classical work of Arnstein (1969), who identified an eight rung ladder of participation (manipulation, therapy, informing, consultation, placation, partnership, delegated power, citizen control) and states that true participation cannot be assured until 'degree of citizens power' through partnership, delegated power, citizen control is evident. If people and those in power's relationship within the participation process are in the form manipulation or therapy, then there is no presence of true participation and people are rather engaged in non-participation which actually does not give any assurance that the voices of the people are heard. In such a situation, information sharing, consultation in

the form of public hearings, and deliberate selective representation of the views of the poor would lead to tokenistic participation and a form of placation (Arnstein, 1969). Since communicative philosophy clearly states that communicative planning cannot be assured unless citizens act as partner and there are elements of negotiation between planners and ordinary citizen. Communicative rationale believes that holistic planning is possible when citizens can make joint decision and are an integral part of plan implementation. Following this view, it can be argued that communicative planning is positioned within the rung of 'degree of citizen power' as described by Arnstein (1969). From a pro-poor ideology such a degree of power would mean that the poor would be fully integrated into the plan making process. If such power and control of the poor are missing, then the actual participation would be either tokenism (in the form of placation, consultation or informing) or non-participation in the form of therapy and manipulation. Participation of both poor and non-poor depends on both external and internal factors (Khan and Swapan, 2014). Khan and Swapan (2014) review international literature on participation and identify that external factors such as legislative framework, political will, governance structure and role of planners are the components of institutional aspects. They add that internal factors are related socio-cultural aspects such as public awareness, social capital, and economic conditions. Their findings underline that the causes behind high or low level participation of the poor would be influenced by both external and internal factors. Overall, it can be conceptualised that true participation of

the poor requires: firstly, a holistic communicative approach that is focused on justice and radicalism; secondly, true presence of the power of the poor in the decision making process; and thirdly, a level of participation of the poor which can influence both the institutional and socio-cultural context.

Research methodology

This paper explores the presence of communicative rationale in the planning process, the level of participation of the poor in plan making process and the challenges for promoting pro-poor participation. Analytically, this study firstly studies to what extent the current plan is making practice following a communicative rationale. Secondly, it discusses weather or not the planning process is assuring partnership, delegated power or control of the poor. Thirdly, it traces the implicit challenges in promoting pro-poor participation in the Khulna context.

This paper is based on part findings from fieldwork between 2010 and 2014 It involves both quantitative and qualitative data. Khulna, as a metropolitan city, provides a very good case study example as it is one of the key metropolitan cities in Bangladesh and has experienced a rapid urbanisation of poverty over the last few decades (KDA, 2002a). The discussion and analysis mainly uses a combination of quantitative and qualitative data collected through questionnaire survey with the poor people living in slums, and interviews with key informants including four planners, five policy makers, five academics, four local leaders, and twenty poor people (Table 1). Detailed

interviews with professionals and officials explore the process of participation and involvement of the poor in the planning process. On top of this, following stratified sampling technique the study surveys 144 urban poor households out of 1,223 households (level of confidence 95%, error margin 5%) in five selected slums in the study area. Mainly household heads answer the questions and provide an insight about their social and economic status, current planning and development issues faced and their opinion about pro-poor participation.

Table 1: List of interviewees

Sector	Institute	Number
Public sector officials (7)	KDA (Planners)	2
	Khulna city Corporation	1
	LGED, Dhaka	4
Planning consultants and researchers (8)	Urban and Rural Planning Discipline, Khulna University	5
	Architecture Discipline, Khulna University	3
NGO activity group members and NGO officials (2)	BRAC	1
	Nobolok	1
	ASA Samitee (Micro-credit group leader)	1
	World Food Program	1
	Jagroto Jubo Songstha	1
Local leaders (2)	UNDP	1
	Ward commissioner (Ward 21) and local leader of Bangladesh Aoami-league	1
	Local leader of Bangladesh Nationalist	1

Sector	Institute	Number
	Party(Ward 21)	7
Community leaders (7)	Community leaders from each surveyed slum clusters	7

Source: Authors, 2014

The poverty context of Khulna and Railway land

Despite rapid urban transformation, poverty in urban areas is increasing in Bangladesh (BBS, 2011). Based on the findings from Khulna, it can be argued that urban poverty is increasing sharply in Bangladeshi cities against a background of slow economic growth and rapid population growth. According to BBS (2003) (cited in CDIA 2009), in Khulna city, the incidence of general poverty was around 28% in the city with 15% of the population falling below the extreme-poverty line (income less than US\$ 1/ day). Around 189,000 people lived in different informal settlements within the city and there were around 520 informal settlements (CUS 2006); most of which were established between 1970 and 1980. Only 5% of poor people have access to jobs in the formal sector and the informal sector is the main income contributor for the poor (CUS, 2006). 32% of the poor work as day labourers and 31% are transport workers. Most of the informal jobs demand hard physical labour but provide only extremely low earnings. Only, 1.8% of the poor households have an income more than USD\$58 per month, whereas 88% of the poor households earn less than USD\$1.43 a day. In fact, only 0.3%

of families have an income over USD\$2.3 a day (CUS, 2006). Thus, poverty is a major concern for metropolitan city Khulna.

Fieldwork research on Railway land found that the site is one of the most poverty stricken areas of Khulna city. There is a growing demand for increased commercial activities in this case study area, while on the other, there is a rapid increase of urban poverty challenges. From an economic point of view, the Railway Area needs to be improved to accommodate more economic activities to address the urban economic crisis in Khulna city and create new job opportunities for the poor. However, the fieldwork found that in the context of the prevailing poverty, problems such as unemployment (27% of the total poor population are in full time employment), low income (average income of household heads: US\$62/month), low-quality housing (48% of the sampled household live in shacks) and inadequate urban services are crucial concerns since they affect the quality of life of the people living in this area. Fieldwork identifies that the poor in this area are currently exposed to many challenges. Because of their high involvement in the informal sector, the poor are deprived of a decent income, regular working hours, or other facilities that they could get from formal economic activities. Housing conditions are poor and the crucial housing concerns for the poor are currently characterised by temporary construction materials, limited space, high rent in comparison with their income and shortage of housing. Furthermore, the lack of services and facilities in the Railway Area is so acute that people could only get

extremely basic standards of sanitation, water supply and solid-waste disposal system. Unlike many other parts of Khulna, people living here are disconnected from any formal and long-term arrangement regarding services and facilities.

Current planning process and scopes for participation of the poor

There are currently four tiers of planning documents in the city: urban strategy, the structure plan, the master plan and the detailed area plan. The first tier is a 20-year strategic plan that outlines nine key strategies for planning and development in Khulna city (KDA 2002a, 2002b, 2002c, 2002d). The second tier is a 20-year structure plan that focuses on sector-specific spatial strategies based on the urban strategies. The plan contains composite maps drawn at a scale of 1:10,000, which illustrate various spatial planning areas and proposals at the city-level. The master plan is designed for 10 years and sets strategies for the structuring of future urban growth. Here at a mapping scale of 1:4,000, it shows the locations of spatial improvement for each of the sectors for the next ten years (Table 2). The fourth statutory level is the detailed area plans based on uniform physical characteristics, functions or problems. The Khulna structure plan identifies 14 development and planning zones within its boundary. The zones of various land-use areas require either development or improvement. Consultants select priority areas for detail area planning. In the city there are two priority zones: the redevelopment of a spontaneously developed residential area, slums, or squatter rehabilitation in the

Rupsha area and the revitalisation of Railway land as a civic centre and commercial space.

Table 2: Planning policy framework for Khulna city

Plan	Mapping scale	Duration of the plan
Urban strategy	Not Applicable	20 years
Structure plan	1:10,000	20 years
Master plan	1:4,000	10 years
Detailed area plan	1:1,000-1:2,000	5 yrs.

Source: Authors, 2014 after KDA, 2002a

Planning in Khulna city adopted a three-stage planning process for preparing the Khulna Master Plan (KMP) 2001 comprising the conceptualisation of issues, the understanding of detailed problems and plan preparation (Figure 3). Khulna Development Authority engages consultancy firms for preparing the plans and the consultancy firms hire individual planning consultants for the preparation of plans. At the beginning, the inception phase detail technical methodologies for the studies are declared.

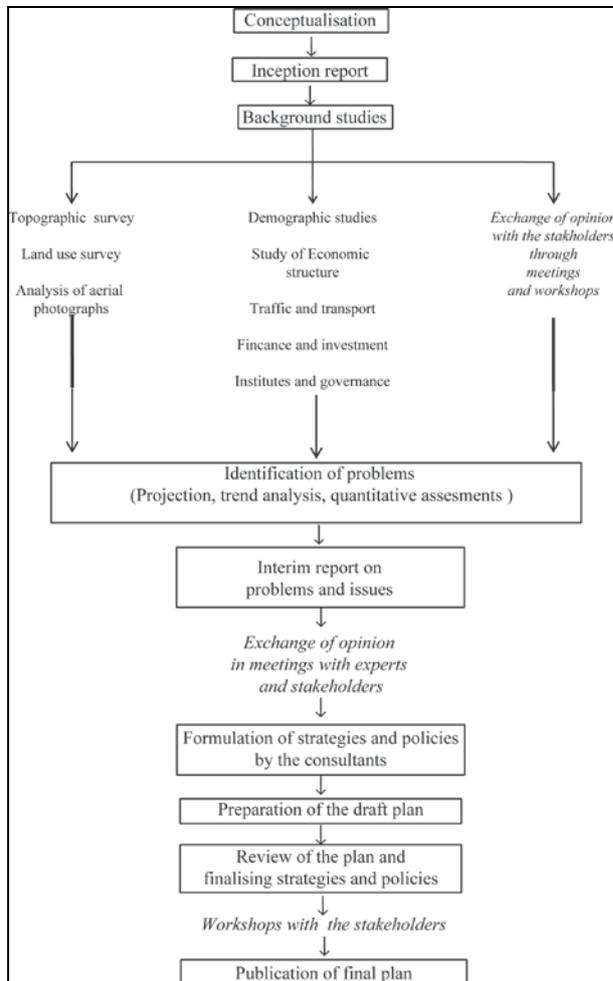


Figure 3: Planning process applied for preparing KMP 2001

Source: Authors, 2014 after KDA, 2002b

In the second stage, consultants appoint surveyors to conduct different surveys to obtain quantitative information and a survey report is prepared. Findings from the surveys accumulated along with available secondary statistical data are used to perform scenario analysis and publish survey report. In the third stage, consultants prepare broad strategies and publish an interim report. In the fourth stage the urban planning

documents (Structure plan, Master Plan and Detail area plan) are produced based on the decisions of the expert.

As far as public engagement is concerned, KDA practices it in four different stages. An initial brief is given to the local political leaders, civic society members and community leaders once KDA starts the plan preparation process. After the survey phase, KDA shares the base maps with the community and validates the maps. At this stage community leaders and political leaders are invited to validate the spatial information and spatially identify problems on the maps. The consultants take note and further update the maps and write up of the survey report based on public opinion. Peoples' opinions are again taken after the preparation of the draft plan. Different interest groups, local leaders and ordinary people join the consultation and put forward their recommendations in the meeting. The consultant planners then include some of the recommendations based on their expert knowledge before finally publishing the plan for public hearing.

One member from the team of recent detail area planning consultants claimed that since there is no opportunity for communication with the poor in the current method of problem identification, it fails to reflect the problems of the poor (Interview, 2013). Planning officials acknowledge that the poor are not consulted while making planning decisions and they have two compelling arguments regarding this. One of the planners at KDA claim:

“...prior to the plan-making process, the planning authority conducted household level surveys throughout the city and used the BBS database to understand the actual situation of the poor..... this information is the main basis of our planning decisions”

Thus, clearly rationale comprehensive planning processes still dominate the decision-making. Since, there are limited opportunities for public consultation with the people in the current practice; poor people have no scope to uphold their opinions. The surveys that are conducted are for all of the existing income groups and the issues of the poor come forward indirectly rather than being identified specifically. In fact, currently there are no surveys that particularly intend to understand the desperate situation of the poor.

In this regard one NGO activist asserts:

“...the data on the occupation status provided in the Khulna Master Plan (KMP) represents the pattern of occupation and income of the citizens and grossly give an idea about the percentage of people who are earning less in compare to others. However, in the plan and its interim report there are no further information about the situation of the people who are earning less and there are little information about the context of such low earnings.”

Level of participation of the poor in practice

The questionnaire survey showed that none of the poor people had been interviewed during the preparation of the master plan for Khulna city. Since the plan making process for the current plan started in 1998, there were chances that many poor might not be in Khulna city and therefore they were not present during the interviews. However, the

survey shows that 89% of the surveyed dwellers were living in Khulna city at the time of the socio-economic survey for this plan. Again, the study finds that the claims of the poor are valid as the local political leaders have similar observations about the consultation with the poor. A Local Ward commissioner (elected member of a community who represents the community in KCC) said that their colleagues from other political constituencies have also expressed the same concerns to them during different discussion in meetings. One of the Ward Commissioners agrees that the poor are seldom consulted claiming:

“The poor in my constituency faces a number of issues in their slums and they need immediate physical interventions. They are well aware about the problems they face and when asked they always provide me vital information about their problem. However, the planning authority never approaches them or asks them about their problems. I am the only person in this constituency who speaks for them in the city corporation and in KDA.”(Interview with local political leader, 2013)

There are concerns among the poor that the plan fails to reflect many non-quantitative aspects. The prevailing planning documents or interim reports lack any discussion on the qualitative information provided by the urban poor. For example, people in Railway land site identify that their access to housing and urban services is dependent on their personal relation with the local political leader. If the political leaders do not back them up or support them, they would not be able to reside in these slums. Again, the problem

regarding available employment is not only linked to the gap between the number of available urban poor labour forces and jobs, it is also related to whether the poor have the capability (social, human, physical etc.) to get access to the created jobs. Even though, KDA (2002a) claim that the problem identification stage comprises an exchange a local political leader counters this claim:

“it fails to reflect the views of ordinary citizens which are beyond quantity. There are issues that you cannot quantify for example: difficulties regarding (Interview, 2013).

Study explores that through interview with planning consultants engaged in the process that problem diagnosis depends on the opinion of the decision makers in lieu of ordinary citizens’’. (Interview with local political leader, 2013) The policy formulation process ideally advocates the participation of all people but the reality is somewhat different. Although the structure plan asserts that ‘people of all income groups should be involved in planning and development activities’ {Khulna Development Authority (KDA) 2002c}, the consultation meetings during plan preparation did not ensure proper engagement of ordinary people. These meetings have representatives from different public departments, NGOs and some selected ward commissioners, and the representatives gave their opinion on the proposed draft plan before it was finalised. In fact, the practice is less than therapy in Arnstein’s terms as only selected stakeholders get a brief about the proposed changes rather than having an opportunity to put forward

alternative proposals into the decision-making process. One representative who was invited for consultation to a meeting for a local level plan expressed his concerns:

“We were informed that there would be a meeting the next day. We were told over phone by ‘X’ that the key topic for tomorrow’s discussion will be revitalisation of the New Market site. That was all that we know and on the day of meeting, a member from the team of consultant briefed us through a 10 minute presentation. After that, we were asked for opinions but we do not know till today, the outcome of the meeting.” (Interview, 2014)

Study finds through interview with the planners in KDA that draft plans are consulted only after selecting proposals from different alternatives. A project director of one of the recent plan said that stakeholders can give an opinion on the final draft proposal rather than debating the different alternatives since the consultation meetings are brief and to accommodate comment from others, they usually avoid lengthy discussions on individual comments. A planning consultant raises his concern about the current participation practice and adds:

“In the recent consultation process, even privileged community leaders cannot uphold their own opinions because the consultation meetings do not include all the ward commissioners” (Interview, 2014).

Current planning process is very selective and limited numbers of community leaders are invited. Community leaders argue that if they can serve their community’s interests this would enhance their position as a political leader in the community. Community

leaders always speak for their community, but the whole consultation mechanism is unclear and obscure and offers limited opportunities for the holistic meaningful participation of the stakeholders in the planning process. When overall participation is insignificant, participation of the poor is obviously constrained.

Based on the above findings it can be claimed that currently the level of participation of the poor is very low. It is far distant from the true communication and 'degree of citizen power'. The current practice can be actually positioned in the stage of non-participation and manipulation. In a context of clear practice of a scientific and rationale comprehensive mode of planning, participation in Khulna is included by means of exchange of opinion with a selected few. Although there are indications in the planning process regarding such exchange of opinion, in reality as discussed in this section, the exchange of opinions does not include the poor.

Challenges for participation of the poor

The proposed plan for the Railway area demonstrates that commercial redevelopment has been the centre of attention in the project whereas the needs and demands of poor people are not acknowledged. This section identifies the reason behind limited participation of the poor in planning process based on the findings from interviews with key decision makers.

External factors

Planners at KDA argued that the poor have no legal rights in most cases as they very often illegally occupy land. An extensive consultation process in favour of the poor

might suggest that the planning authority is encouraging such illegal occupation and intends to safeguard those (the poor) who are violating the laws. This consultation might damage the regulatory system and pull a large number of poor into this area. However, the planners demand that there is a public circular and that planning documents are made available to the public so that anyone can comment on the proposals.

Existing survey based planning process is a major challenge for pro-poor participation. Key informants agree that dependency on survey based problem identification method obstruct the chances for representation of the poor in decision-making. When interviewed, one planning academics express concern that:

‘Since this problem identification phase is dependent on field questionnaire surveys by members of the urban planning team. Field surveys largely collected quantitative information on the existing urban dwellers in the Railway area and questions were not designed to get the opinions of the poor in particular or a detailed understanding of poverty issues experienced. Such surveys sheets were prepared for all economic classes and consequently fail to know the issues of the urban poor.’ (Interview, 2014)

In fact, existing surveys aim to identify overall current supply and future demands for housing and services relying upon the social-economic status survey. It aims to identify existing housing units, their conditions and the existing number of tube-wells and predicted future requirements based upon the population projection at that time

(Interview, 2013). One of the key informants, who is working for the City Corporation, claims that:

“If you go through recent documents, you can find that 90% or even higher percentage of poor people have access to drinking water in Railway slums. Although, this statement is absolutely true, the question is ‘how many people depend on one particular source or one tube-well?’. The answer is rather frustrating, as people were in queues to fetch water and the questions are very often long.” (Interview, 2014)

Current survey based and quantity focused forecasting is deficient as far as poverty is concerned in two ways. Firstly, these projections fail to recognise the qualitative needs of the poor which (for example the inconvenience and waiting time while fetching water). Secondly, forecasting methods are applied on the basis of total population but they do not identify the quantitative needs of the poor in particular (housing forecasting). Thus, current simple quantitative surveys are inadequate in reflecting the qualitative needs of the poor.

The urban poor interviewees in the study were concerned that expert-led plan preparation remains at the core of the planning decisions and they feel that mostly these experts are from the “non-poor” part of society. Some of the interviewees further elaborated that by the word non-poor they indicate that these experts belong to rich or higher middle-income groups who never experience poverty. The study finds that the claims of the poor people are legitimate and national-level planning consultants (usually

the 'experts' are from different academic institutions, planning consultancy firms and former planning professionals) and high officials from government departments have a direct input to the plan. Since the planning process does not as yet encourage public consultations, poor people cannot get access to meetings.

The planning authority does not have any links with the day-to-day activities of the poor or local politics, and therefore, it does not have the fear of losing political support from the public. Two interviewed planning consultants claim that if there are no legal pressures or compulsion to take a participatory approach, it is always difficult to push the planning authorities to adopt an expensive participatory mechanism. As one of the planning consultants argues:

“From policy makers to NGO activist talk about participation of the poor in the urban planning process in Bangladeshi cities. However, ensuring participation would require inclusion of focus group discussions, workshop, public hearings and so on. Introduction of such participatory planning tools would need funding support. The consultants appointed by the KDA and even KDA were interested to increase its fund for plan making if there are no legal obligation. Unfortunately, Bangladesh does not have laws that makes participatory planning mandatory ”
(Interview, 2013)

Planning officials acknowledge that the poor are not consulted while making the planning decisions and they have two compelling arguments regarding this. They claim that prior to the plan-making process, the planning authority conducted household level

surveys throughout the city and used the BBS database to understand the actual situation of the poor. Planning consultant engaged in the planning process of KMP, 2001 stated:

“We had a comprehensive background study for which we conducted household surveys in the area. At the same time we took data from BBS to make quantitative projections. However, there was no particular study or survey that specially focused on the urban poor” (Interview, 2011)

KDA, the autonomous agency is detached from the political system at city-level. The poor are regularly in contact with the ward commissioners who are elected by ballot. The city corporations have elected members and local ward commissioners, but the City Corporation plays a limited role in the planning process. In the current system, people are free to provide their opinions, but there are limited resources to promote awareness of the urban poor regarding the proposals of the plan. There are no formal mechanisms for mainstreaming the opinions of the poor in the decision-making process. Promotion of public participation is not mandatory for city- or local-level planning, as there is no legal obligation for a participatory planning system. The planning authority, known as the ‘development authority’, is not the product of an electoral system, and there are no elected representatives for representing the opinions of the people. In such a context, participatory planning becomes impossible without the willingness of the planning authority.

Internal factors

The poor are aware of their situation from their own perception and the changes they expect also depend on their perception of an issue. However, because of limited knowledge about planning and overall urban development, it is often difficult for them to foresee the future and to put forward critical opinions on proposed changes. Poor people claim that their limited access to newspapers and the media hinders them from knowing about planning and urban development. Interviewed planners are concerned that genuine participation becomes a difficult task for the planners since it requires intensive education of the urban poor if they are required to provide active feedback. However, the poor usually have low levels of literacy and education. Only 57% of the urban population over 15 years are literate in Bangladeshi cities with Khulna SMA having a similar literacy rate (55.6% in 2008). National statistics show that 36% of the extreme poor are literate while 48% of the moderate poor in the urban areas are literate. In comparison with other income groups, literacy and education are limited among the poor. Only 38% of the urban population have advanced literacy skills rather than the simple ability to read and write. Though there are no city-level statistics on the literacy status of Khulna, the situation of the urban poor in Khulna can be predicted from the national urban statistics. The poor are only able to identify the problems they face, but it is difficult for them to articulate future directions without some level of wider awareness.

All citizens are free to provide their opinions, but there are insufficient actions to make the urban poor aware of the proposals in the various Khulna plans. This study found that there were no set rules or guidelines in the Railway land redevelopment plan about how these opinions should be included in decision-making. Current trends suggest that on rare occasions, the public would resist a decision. A semi structured survey on the poor identify that only 2% from the surveyed household have launched a complaint about the planning decisions through their local ward commissioner (i.e. elected community leader, similar to local councillor). However, in the end, all of them dropped their claims because they would have to go to court if they want to veto any proposal. The local leaders and commissioners claim that when they pursue the complaints, unusually KDA discourages objections since the institution would have to go through expensive correction processes and this would delay the final decision. An official from KDA argues that it has extremely limited funds available for the consultation process since a major portion of the funding is consumed in surveys and consultancy payments.

Conclusions

Pro-poor participation is easy to say but extremely difficult to practice, especially in developing countries like Bangladesh. Participation of the poor in the planning process is limited in Khulna city for complex reasons, such as the communication gap between the planning authority and the poor, the lack of education and awareness among the poor and the dependence of the planning authority on expert-led decisions. In the

current system, people are free to provide their opinions but there are no mechanisms in place for mainstreaming the opinions of the poor in the decision-making process.

In this context, planning authorities in Bangladesh need to be pro-active in upgrading their planning process and to move away from the current rational comprehensive dominant ideology. Planners will not be able to understand the problems of the poor unless they adequately communicate with them. Current survey-based problem identification seriously limits such communication. A combination of different approaches including group discussions, consultation meetings with local communities and other techniques that encourage participation is necessary to assure a true integration of the poor in the plan making. However, adopting such a proactive role depends on the willingness of the planning authority. The planning authorities are often reluctant to create a participatory environment because there are no strict legal obligations for them to do so. If there are no legal pressures or compulsion to take a participatory approach, it is always difficult to push the planning authorities to adopt an expensive participatory mechanism. Creation of an act or an ordinance on participatory decision-making could be effective in forcing the planning authorities to provide such a mechanism. Thus, a new statutory law needs to be enacted to ensure that it becomes obligatory for the local authorities to create opportunities for the participation of the poor, though such law should not ignore the rights of the general public who are not poor. The law should be shaped in such a way that it does promote participation of both

the poor and the non-poor citizens. Furthermore, the new law for pro-poor planning participation should go beyond quantitative dimensions of poverty while selecting the urban poor. Low levels of education and awareness among the poor prevent them from participating in the current planning process. In this context, planners need to engage more with the poor to educate and build awareness about aspects of planning. The urban poor have limited skills, education and awareness, and these limitations impede their ability to participate in planning debates. Planning agencies should run awareness programmes to enrich the knowledge of the poor. These programmes can also include the basic skills required for a participatory decision-making process, such as the skills required when attending a consultation meeting. At the same time, planners can get involved in decision making with poor people and work as advocates to advise them about possible good options. Finally, the exchange of knowledge between planners and the public can be an effective tool for ensuring the involvement of the urban poor.

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