

Access to Urban Basic Services of the People Living in Urban Poverty: A Case Study of Bede Community in Savar Municipality

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Introduction

Municipality requires a serious attention of all concerned for efficient and equitable delivery of various service provision in its jurisdiction. Access to a minimum package of urban basic services such as health, education, water supply, sanitation, and solid waste management is critical for improving welfare of an urban community. Savar is an “A” class Municipality. The area has experienced rapid growth of population, unplanned urban expansion due to the influences of urbanization process of the Dhaka Metropolitan Area. The basic services are distributed haphazardly through the Municipal area. As a result, there is no universal access to the urban basic services and the people living in urban poverty suffer the most.

Cultural and ethnic diversity has molded a number of distinctive communities in Bangladesh. Among them the Bede people, known as the River Gypsy, are the only major nomadic community live scattered in different parts of the country. Bede is a marginalized Muslim community in Bangladesh (Arefeen, 1992). The Bede people are well known for their nomadic lifestyle and unique socio-cultural way of life. Usually they show snake charming, monkey show and have esoteric knowledge of magical healing. In spite of being Muslim, they believe in a number of gods and goddesses, mainly snake goddess. The Bedes have their own language and different culture than the other ethnic groups in Bangladesh. But this traditional scenario has undergone significant changes over the past decades. An estimated 98% of the Bede people live below the poverty line and 95% are illiterate. While the average household size in Bangladesh is 4.2 people, among the Bede it is 7.5 (Das, 2013). Poverty and desperate attempt for survival force them to shift from their traditional occupation to conventional. In 2010, the estimated population was 10 lakh (Daily Star, 2010). The Government is encouraging the Bede community to join the mainstream population by giving up their wandering ways on the rivers. In recent years, the Government is trying to settle the community, which is spread in small pockets throughout the country by allotting them places to live by the rivers where they can erect their own homesteads and lead a more settled life. One such

community of about 7,500 people is settled by the river Bangshi in Savar Municipality, which is on the outskirts of Dhaka (Hossain, Miajee, Khatun and Rahmatullah, 2010) and at present more than 20000 Bede live there adopting urban life (Khan, 2015). Though everybody acknowledge the cultural diversity and special identity of Bede community, Bede community's recognition as socially excluded and absence of official recognition instinctively limits their access from various services and social rights as well as lead a settled life with the mainstream society. Very few researches have been done for the Bede community and most of the researches are based on cultural perspective. This study intends to make an investigation to the status of Bede community as urban poor as well as an unexplored and untouched community in a municipal setting, analyze the situation of their accessibility to basic services and recommend some guidelines to develop an easy and effective mechanism for provision of better urban basic services for their improvement.

Present Status: A Society on Change

The traditional lifestyle is undergoing drastic change in some areas, where Bede People live permanently leaving their gypsy lifestyle. Because of the innovation of medical science, change of river channels, river pollution and natural disaster, they are forced to come down from their boat houses. It has shifted profession and traditional lifestyle of the nomadic community to the permanent settlers. Such changes are evident in Savar area.

A large number of Bede people have settled down in Savar Municipality near the river Bangshi in ward no.1 in. They live at Porabari, Omorpur, Boktarpur, Kanchanpur, Badda and Jamshing. Porabari, Omorpur and Kanchanpur localities. These areas together are known as Bede Para, where only Bede community live in large number. The actual population of Bede is tough to identify as some Bede people go to other places for their businesses for 3 or 4 months. According to SUS (2018), 3000 Bede families live in Savar area, where 1560 families live permanently. With their settling down, they have created a new shape of their social structure. Now they have certain amount of lands to live; they have private property and enjoy modern recreational amenities. Those who live permanently participate in voting and pay taxes for services. They are trying to mix with the mainstream society and lead a normal life though they are not yet welcomed enthusiastically.

Given the circumstances, this research has made an attempt to investigate if the Bede communities in Bangladesh, especially in urban areas, such as Savar Municipality can access to basic urban services to improve their well being.

Major Findings of the Study

Access to Education of Bede Students

Most of the children go to Badda Primary School as it is the nearest government primary school of Bede Para. But there is lack of capacity of student in government primary school. Besides, there is two schools run by BRAC, two schools run by SUS NGO and two schools run by VERC NGO for children in the locality. In these schools, children can study up to class 5 or 10 but the capacity of these schools is

limited. Many Bede children can't continue to study for lack of financial support or they have to enter into labor force to support their family. Some parents are unaware of the importance of study. It is also revealed that many Bede children don't want to go to class for lack of acceptance from classmates as well as from some teachers at school. Those who study in private school find it difficult to bear the expenses as there is no provision of low cost facilities or stipend for the poor Bede children. Most of the Bede people are unaware about the educational stipend which is provided by every government and private educational institution to Bede and some backward communities

Access to Health Care Facilities

It is a significant fact that most of Bede people now prefer allopathic medicine. There is only one government hospital but the surprising fact is in spite of being poor, they prefer to go to private clinic as the service at Upazila Health Complex is inferior and inadequate. Sometimes medical staffs misbehave with them for their identity. They do not get any free medicine which is supposed to be provided. The average family size of the community denotes high birth rate, which poses a predicament for the present and future generations of the Bede. The big size of family is considered as an asset by them. Only few families follow family planning method. Bede people avail primary health care facilities from some NGOs which come to visit the area.

Access to Water Supply

There is no piped water supply system in Savar provided by the Municipality authority. Many Bede people do not have the ability to install water pump. Though Bangshi river flows near Bede para but it is so polluted that it is not suitable for usage. They collect water for drinking as well as other purposes from deep tube well or hand pump. Many Bede families have installed deep tube well by taking loans or got tube well from Urban Partnerships for Poverty Reduction Project. But considering the total families, only few families got tube well from UPPR project and those who are powerful among the community got the facilities instead of extreme poor. There is no shared deep tube well in the locality. Those who do not have hand pump or deep tube well, collect water from neighbor and most of time they have to pay monthly for it. Only some Bede people are aware of drinking boiled water.

Access to Sanitation Facilities

All type of latrines is seen in the study area. Many latrines are inadequately designed, made of low cost inferior materials and therefore wastes discharge spread bad smell which is unhygienic and unsafe for health. Though some households get low cost sanitary latrine from UPPR project but the distribution was unjustified. The extreme poor mostly face discrimination in getting sanitation programme. The sewerage condition is not good. There is lack of provision of Municipality authorized sewerage and sanitation facility. It is found out that Bede people, especially children and adult are not aware of post hand wash activities.

Access to Solid Waste Management

The entire area shows a poor scenario of solid waste management. There is no dustbin or litter bin in the entire Bede para. People throw their household wastages in

open place, beside road or into water body. Some personal arrangements are seen to dispose wastes which are very minimum comparing to total produced wastage in the locality. Though Municipality authority claims that municipal garbage truck collect wastage from the area, the actual scenario is completely different. Solid waste collection is quite absent in the area. Solid waste management remains absent in many projects taken with collaboration of Municipality.

According to the Policy on Development of Living Standard of Dalit, Horizon and Bede Community 2013, each local government in Bangladesh is liable to act upon the policy. It is stated that the actual number of Bede shall be identified and government with the help of local government shall give sub-stipend to the students above 5 years. But no committee has been formed in the Municipality for the implementation of the policy on Development of Living Standard of Dalit, Horizon and Bede Community 2013. Even no Municipality officer knows about this policy and no development activities is done directly from Municipality targeting the Bede community where a large number of Bede live in municipal area permanently. Lack of segregated data of present population and households of Bede community is another finding. Even the number of Bede community is not same in various data of NGOs working for Bede. Community engagement in planning, decision making and implementation is quite absent in Savar Municipality. Though some NGOs such as SUS, VERC, ASA are working for the development of Bede People, there is no linkage of Savar Municipality with those NGOs. Inaccuracy in area identification for development of Bede community is another problem. All development work toward Bede community is focused at Omorpur, Boktarpur, Kanchanpur and Porabari. The socio-economic condition of Bede in Jamshing is not so good. But in various partnership projects Jamshing Bede para is not selected. Even the NGOs do the same fault which marginalizes the Bedes live in Jamshing from all development projects. Besides, it is revealed that when any development project is planned for the community, those who are more powerful in the community get the access to services first and biasness is seen in distribution of services where the needy families always become deprived.

Recommendations

Municipality should improve the existing services and provide services based on the need of the Bede community. Following guidelines can be adopted for improving the access of Bede community.

Primary Education

All government and private educational institutions should be maintained and monitored by the Municipality authority to improve the quality of education. Municipal investment in education should target the quality of teachers, equipment and environment at primary school. Municipality may also take initiatives to provide sufficient space to meet the actual requirement. Municipality should arrange seminar, workshop with teachers to make them cooperative with Bede students. Compulsory education should be enforced to all Bede children and ensure that every Bede child of school-going age attends a school. Municipality should take necessary action to

reduce dropout of Bede students and make arrangement for provision of scholarships to deserving or especially bright students of Bede Community, provision of tiffin, study materials to attract the Bede children to continue school. Most importantly, Municipality committee must be formed as soon as possible to implement the Policy on “Development of Living Standard of Dalit, Horizon and Bede Community 2013” to ensure sub-stipend to students from educational institutions. Municipality can collaborate with NGOs working on education for Bede children and provide necessary support.

Primary Health Care Facilities

The medical service of Upazila Health Complex and Provision of free medicine should be monitored by Municipality. Besides, service facilities and cost of community clinics should be monitored by Municipality so that the poor people are not deprived or they can get medical facilities at minimum cost. Municipality should promote public health education on the prevention and control of health problems in area where Bedes live. Municipality with assistance with community clinic should promote counseling on family planning programme to control high birth rate among Bede families. Municipality can also provide a community health worker who will spread the importance of taking vaccine to children, adolescents and women and inform the time and place of giving vaccine among Bede.

Water Supply

Savar Municipality, with the help of DPHE should provide free tube well to the extreme poor in the area. Municipality should ensure uniform distribution of tube well among poor in various infrastructural projects and arrange awareness programme for drinking pure water. Sanitation Municipality should arrange enough fund and adequate manpower to run and control the sanitary program and also provide shared sanitary latrine to the extreme poor Bede. Hygiene education programme need to be provided for the awareness of the people. Besides, Municipality should ensure uniform distribution of low cost sanitary latrines among the poor under various infrastructural projects.

Solid Waste Management

Municipality should take immediate action for removal of existing scattered waste and provide sufficient dustbin in Bede para. Municipality should update SWM related rules & regulations in accordance with 'Local Government (Municipality) Act, 2009'. The conservancy department should be well equipped and more expert personnel are needed for proper planning and management. Adequate human resources should be recruited for waste collection, transportation and disposal. People should be encouraged to dispose solid waste at fixed point and not to throw waste into water bodies. Bede people's awareness regarding solid waste segregation at the source, waste minimization and its proper storage should be introduced.

To provide basic service for Bede community, it is necessary to know their population and total household and areas of living exactly. Data should be computerized at the Municipality for easy access to information as well as for planning. The Municipality should identify the need of different kinds of basic

services of the community and provide urban basic services based on the priority. The Bede community can participate both directly or indirectly in the development of urban basic service programme. The community can give labor at free of cost or at below the market wage rate by the perspective beneficiaries. Besides, they can be involved in maintenance activities which will reduce the development cost Municipality. For provision of urban basic services, collaborative performance between Municipality authorities and service providing authorities is essential. In Savar Municipality, there are some well-known NGOs such as BRAC, Proshika, ASA, World Vision, AKASH, Sathi Samaj Unnoyon Songstha, NSDP, ADESH, SUS, VERC, BAST, Green Force Society etc. But only some NGOs have been working with Bede people. Others NGOs should come forward for the development of Bede community in various service provisions and socio-economic development.

Role of Government for the Development of Bede Community

Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper is the only document of the government where name of Bede community is mentioned for the first time in the history and so far. The government should plan for the Bede community prioritizing their development needs. Bede people should be included in social safety net programme of government of Bangladesh such as old aged allowance, widow allowance, disable allowance, VGD, VGF card etc. Major livelihood-related policies such as health, nutrition, water, sanitation, land and education policies in Bangladesh need to categorically refer to the disadvantageous condition of the Bede and provide a framework for improving their access to such basic entitlement. The government should introduce health insurance for extreme poor and socially excluded people. Besides, government should provide subsidy for the purchase of medicine and professional health care service. The Ministry of Education should develop activity-based modules to promote diversity, equity and social inclusion in classrooms and schools, and these should be included in teacher training modules. As a policy has been formed in 2013 under the Ministry of Social Welfare for “Development of Living Standard of Dalit, Horizon and Bede Community”, the government should monitor the activities properly that are levied on local bodies to ensure the development of Bede community.

Conclusion

Though the Government of Bangladesh, some NGOs, social solicitors and other wellwishers have come forward for the socio-economic development of Bede of Savar area but the locality where Bede community lives reveals a poor scenario of urban basic service provision. It is the responsibility of Municipality authority to understand their problem and demand for urban basic services and provide support based on their priorities and also ensure their accessibility to those services. Local government officials need to have a comprehensive understanding about Bede and run the Municipality committee for implementation of the government policy regarding Bede and backward communities. The Municipality should collaborate with other service providing agencies, NGOs and engage Bede community in planning and implementing urban basic services and improving their access to

services which will help them to combat poverty and lead an urban life with dignity. It is expected that this study will illuminate future researchers who will conduct studies on urban poverty, especially on Bede community.

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