A study of core infrastructure in the urban settlements of Bangladesh

Comparing findings from the 2010 and 2014 UPPR Settlement Living Conditions Index studies in 22 towns and cities

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Contents

Executive Summary i
1. Introduction 1
1.1 Introduction 1
1.2 Objectives of the Survey 1
1.3 Scope of Work 2
2. Methodology 3
2.1 Introduction 3
2.2 Methodology for Quantitative Survey 3
2.2.1 Sampling frame for quantitative survey 3
2.2.2 Sample size of settlements for quantitative survey 4
2.2.3 Sample (settlement) selection strategy 4
2.2.4 Sampling Weight 4
2.2.5 Preparation of sampling frame 5
2.2.6 Steps to sample frame preparation and final sample selection 5
2.2.7 Identifying the selected settlements for the quantitative survey 6
2.3 The Quantitative survey 6
2.3.1 Respondents for quantitative survey 8
2.3.2 Selection of participants for group discussion 8
2.3.3 Data collection process 9
2.3.4 Analysis process 9
2.4 Methodology Qualitative data collection 10
2.4.1 Qualitative information collection 10
2.5 Data Analysis 11
3. Profile of settlements 14
3.1 Introduction 14
3.2 Demographic profile 14
3.2.1 Settlement Size 14
3.2.2 Migration 18
3.3 Welfare Profile 19
3.4 In depth comparative analysis of water and sanitation indicators 21
3.4.1 Water Supply 21
3.4.2 Access to latrines 27
3.4.3 Drainage Facility scenario 32
3.5 In-depth analysis of infrastructure indicators 37
3.5.1 Access Roads (footpaths) 37
3.5.2 Electricity and street light scenario 40

3.5.3 Solid Waste Management scenario 42
3.6 Change in Water and Sanitation conditions sub-index SLCI sore 44
3.7 Change in Infrastructure conditions sub-index SLCI sore 46
3.8 Settlements recording increases of 10 per cent or more in both sub-indices 48
4. Statistical testing of sub-indices 49
4.1 Introduction 49
4.2 Wilcoxon signed rank test 49
4.3 One sample t-test 52
4.4 Mann-Whitney U-test 53
4. Supporting and inhibiting progress 55
4.1 Factors that support progress 55
4.1.1 Participation of the community 55
4.1.2 Benefits of forming linkages 55
4.2 Factors that may inhibit progress 55
4.2.1 Challenges in meeting local demand 55
4.2.2 Balancing resources 56
4.2.3 Finding appropriate space for construction 56
4.2.4 Gaps in project monitoring 56
4.2.5 Political challenges 56
4.2.6 Bureaucratic delays 57
5. Conclusion 58
5.1 Recommendations 58
Annex 1: Methodology for Statistical testing 60
Annex 2: Additional data tables 64
Annex 3: Survey tools 81
Annex 4: HDRC Team members 94

List of tables

Table 2.1: Distribution of survey towns by divisions 3
Table 2.2: List of variables used for sampling frame preparation 5
Table 2.3: Estimated revised sample sizes of settlements and urban wards by divisions 5
Table 2.4: Summary of sample settlements by towns and divisions 6
Table 2.5: List of indicators under consideration for this study with scores (score card) 7
Table 2.6: Challenges faced during quantitative data collection by selected indicators and their solutions 7
Table 2.7: Percentage of settlements in sampling frame by different category by number of households 8
Table 2.8: Details of Qualitative data collection 11
Table 2.9: Steps to Qualitative data analysis 12
Table 3.1: Average settlement size in households (Paired sample t-test) and contribution of migration 14
Table 3.2: Percentage distribution of settlements by household size and division 16
Table 3.3: Percentage distribution of households by settlement size and division 18
Table 3.4: Distribution of settlements by types of support received from UPPR (multiple responses) 19
Table 3.5: Distribution of settlements by types of support received from other NGOs 20
Table 3.6: Incidence of multiple water-sanitation and/or infrastructure support received from UPPR 20
Table 3.7: Percentage distribution of settlements by receiving multiple supports (selected) from UPPR 21
Table 3.8: Dynamics of actual scores (End line-Baseline) obtained by access to safe water indictor by division 22
Table 3.9: Baseline and End line scenario of water supply among surveyed settlements (paired observations) by division 22
Table 3.10: Baseline and end line scenario of water supply among intervention (tube-well) receiving settlements (paired observations) by division 23
Table 3.11: Baseline and End line scenario of Water supply among non-intervention (tube well) settlements (paired observations) by division 23
Table 3.12: Distribution of settlements by baseline category with respective end line category for water supply indicator for paired samples by division 24
Table 3.13: Responses on outcome of changes with water situation due to UPPR 25
Table 3.14: Dynamics of actual scores (End line-Baseline) obtained by improved sanitation indictor by division 27
Table 3.15: Baseline and end line scenario of Sanitation (availability of hygienic toilet) among surveyed settlements (paired observations) by division 28
Table 3.16: Baseline and End line scenario of Sanitation among intervention (latrine) receiving settlements (paired observations) by division 29
Table 3.17: Baseline and End line scenario of Sanitation among non-intervention (latrine) settlements (paired observations) by division 29
Table 3.18: Distribution of settlements by baseline category with respective end line category for availability of hygienic toilet indicator for paired samples by division 30
Table 3.19: Responses on outcome of changes with sanitation situation due to UPPR 31
Table 3.20: Dynamics of actual scores (End line-Baseline) obtained by access to safe water indictors by division 33
Table 3.21: Baseline and end line scenario of Drainage Facility among surveyed settlements (paired observations) by division 33
Table 3.22: Baseline and End line scenario of Drainage Facility among settlements receiving support by division 34
Table 3.23: Baseline and End line scenario of Drainage Facility among settlements that did not receive support by division 34

Table 3.24: Distribution of settlements by baseline category with respective end line category for Drainage Facility indicator for paired samples by division 35
Table 3.25: Responses on outcome of changes with drainage facility due to UPPR 36
Table 3.26: Dynamics of actual scores (End line-Baseline) obtained by access road (footpath support) indictor by division 37
Table 3.27: Baseline and end line scenario of access roads among surveyed settlements (paired observations) by division 38
Table 3.28: Baseline and End line scenario of Access Road among intervention (support for footpath) receiving settlements (paired observations) by division 38
Table 3.29: Baseline and End line scenario for access roads among settlements that did not receive an intervention by division 39
Table 3.30: Distribution of settlements by baseline category with respective end line category for Access Road indicator for paired samples by division 39
Table 3.31: Responses on outcome of changes due to footpaths 40
Table 3.32: Dynamics of baseline and end line scores obtained by electricity and street lights indictor by division 41
Table 3.33: Baseline and end line scenario of electricity and street lights among surveyed settlements by division 41
Table 3.34: Distribution of settlements by baseline category with respective end line category for Electricity and street light indicator for paired samples by division 42
Table 3.35: Dynamics of actual scores (End line-Baseline) obtained by Solid Waste Management indictor by division 42
Table 3.36: Baseline and end line scenario of Solid Waste Management among surveyed settlements (paired observations) by division 43
Table 3.37: Distribution of settlements by baseline category with respective end line category for Solid waste management indicator for paired samples by division 43
Table 3.38 Overall change in Water-Sanitation conditions sub-index SLCI sore by division 44
Table 3.39: Overall change in end line SLCI score for water sanitation condition sub index by Baseline SLCI score category 45
Table 3.40: Percentage distribution of settlements by change in water and sanitation conditions sub-index SLCI sore by division 45
Table 3.41 Percentage of settlements showing less than 10% and more than 10% improvement in Water and Sanitation conditions sub-index SLCI sore 46
Table 3.42: Overall change in Infrastructure conditions sub-index SLCI sore by division 46
Table 3.43: Overall change in end line SLCI score for infrastructure condition sub index by baseline SLCI score category 47
Table 3.44: Percentage Distribution of settlements reporting positive change in Infrastructure conditions sub-index SLCI sore at different level by division 47
Table 3.45: Percentage of settlements showing less than 10% and greater than 10% improvement in Infrastructure conditions sub-index SLCI sore 47
Table 3.46: Number of settlements where baseline scores increased by ten per cent in both of the sub-indices 48
Table 3.47: Number of settlements where baseline scores increased by ten per cent in the combined sub-indices 48
Table 4.1: Changes in SLCI sub-index score (Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test) for Water and Sanitation conditions sub-index 50
Table 4.2: Changes in SLCI sub-index score (Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test) for Infrastructure conditions sub-index 50
Table 4.4: Testing for 10% increase in sub-indices (One sample t-test) 53
Table 4.5: Change in water sanitation conditions sub index considering water sanitation support receiving by division 54
Table 4.6: Change in infrastructure conditions sub index considering infrastructure support receiving by division 54
Wilcoxon signed-rank test 60

Mann–Whitney U test....61
T-test for comparing means....63
Annex Table 2.1: Dynamics of Water Supply scenario of settlements by baseline category with respective end line category by division....64
Annex Table 2.2: Dynamics of Sanitation (availability of hygiene toilet) scenario of settlements by baseline category with respective end line category by division....67
Annex Table 2.3: Dynamics of Drainage Facility scenario of settlements by baseline category with respective end line category by division....70
Annex Table 2.4: Dynamics of Access Road scenario of settlements by baseline category with respective end line category by division....72
Annex Dynamics of Electricity (for private use) scenario of settlements by baseline category with respective end line category by division....75
Annex Table 2.6: Dynamics of Solid Waste Management (Municipal solid waste collection service) scenario of settlements by baseline category with respective end line category by division....78

Executive Summary

Introduction, rationale and methodology

The Urban Partnerships for Poverty Reduction (UPRR) project is the largest urban poverty reduction initiative in Bangladesh. UPPR works with communities in 23 towns and cities across Bangladesh to develop the capacity of poor households, especially women, to manage their own development issues and tackle the needs they identify as most important.

This study has been conducted to assess the community level outcomes of supporting improvements of water, sanitation, and infrastructure facilities in poor urban settlements in 22 of these towns and cities across Bangladesh using UPPR's Settlement and Living Conditions Sub-Index. In 2010 the project mapped all poor settlements in these towns and scored conditions according to a full settlement and living conditions index. Dhaka was not included in 2009 and so was omitted from the 2014 study. For the 2014 study, a total of 2,479 settlements were sampled. Paired analysis was undertaken, comparing the scores for the same settlements in both 2010 and 2014.

This study applied both qualitative and quantitative methods. The quantitative survey applied the tools developed in 2010 with some modifications to data collection to enable greater validation of findings. To achieve greater insights qualitative data was also collected through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with community members and interviews with key informants from Local Government Institutions (LGIs) and project staff.

Key Findings

The size of settlements expressed by the number of households suggests there has been an increase of 10.2 households. The number of settlements with fewer than 50 households remains high (78.3% compared to 83.3% in baseline). Almost half of the settlements estimated that inward migration was greater than outward migration (46.8%).

The indicators which coincide with the project's main areas of delivery saw broad improvements, including water supply and access to improved latrines. Levels of progress vary by indicator and Division. However limited progress was noted in areas such as street lighting and waste management. These are not core areas for the project and qualitative research suggests they were not the primary demands of commuity members. Additional research could explore how demand and supply interact within this project.

Scores for both the Water-Sanitation and Infratsurtucre indices have improved since 2010.Three in four settlements reported improved scores in the Water-Sanitation sub index since the baseline (76.8%). Two thirds of settlements also reported improve dscores in the Infrastructure sub-index (66.4%).

The Wilcoxon signed rank test for sub-indices suggests that the change between the baseline and endline is statistically significant ($p<0.001$). The Mann-Whitney U-test suggests that the overall positive difference between settlements receiving direct relevant support from UPPR and those that did not report receiving such support from UPPR is statistically significant ($p>0.001$). This does not allow us to attribute the change to UPPR but along with qualitative research strengthens the conclusion that the project has contributed to positive change.

Communities were able to articulate positive changes which have occurred as a result of improved facilities and infrastructure. However some issues regarding sustainability and also gaps in provision were noted.

Recommendations

The authors conclude that based on both quantitative and qualitative findings the project's model of community leadership is effective and encourage the documentation and dissemination of best practices in this regard.

However while this local ownership model has many strengths, some gaps were noted. While improvements may have been made, these were not always sustained. One factor was the quality of goods used in construction which suggests the importance of supporting communities in managing the contracts. Another factor was uncertainty over who is responsible for maintaining the finished facilities. While an Operations and Maintenance fund exists, it is not widely used. This suggests additional focus might be applied to building the community's sense of long-term ownership and responsibility for the facilities.

In collaboration with UPPR steps were taken to strengthen the SLCI methodology during this study. Further revisions could be made as part of future programming. UPPR have noted that a revised tool could seek to encapsulate better the diversity which exists between settlements. UPPR also highlighted the potential for community members to update their status on an annual basis along with a range of contextual data including coverage by interventions and migration. This could facilitate more frequent and accurate data which might be done through a mobile app.