

Impact of slums on urban environment

by Md Sohrab Ali

"ENVIRONMENT" means the aggregation/totality of things both living and non living species of a particular place in a particular moment, but the abstract meaning is much more elaborate. To give special preference to a certain environmental area different adjectives are often prefixed to the word "environment" e.g. Urban Environment, Rural Environment, Economic Environment etc. Similarly the environment of the

conventional residential area and the environment of the slums. The co-existence of the last two entities is very common specially in Dhaka city. Although they run hand in hand there remains a huge gap between their means of livelihood, joys and sorrows, hopes and confidence etc. They are almost unknown to each other. Such a situation needs to be eliminated as soon as possible for the well-being of the nation. Attention has been given mainly to environment of the slums, health and sanitation, source of drinking water, population density, working class and per capita income, education, reasons to be a slum dwellers etc. Most of the slums are in low-land and easily get inundated (due to medium to heavy rainfall). Very unhygienic condition prevails there and most of the people specially the children suffer from different diseases. Sanitation is very weak and insufficient. No legal electric power supply or gas line connection are there i.e. almost all civic facilities are absent in the slum areas. Most bread earners are rickshawpullers, day labourers, autorickshaw drivers, gatekeepers, etc. And most of the female workers are housemaids and a significant part of them are garment workers especially the young girls. Almost every slum dweller falls under low income group and have migrated to Dhaka in quest of a livelihood.

Slum Scenario in Brief: According to BBS (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics), total population of Bangladesh is 112 million as of 1991, out of which 19.1 per cent are rural people and 2.4 per

cent are urban people and are extremely poor and shelterless. About 150 million people are facing at least some sort of housing problem and 35 million are absolutely homeless. Only 10 per cent people live in the houses that are hygienic having all the modern facilities. According to the survey report, 1992, of Urban Research Centre, about 40 per cent of total population of Dhaka are floating and are slum dwellers. There are

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more than 1700 slums in the Dhaka city and among those 423 slums are illegal. Most of these slums/clusters (76 per cent of total slums) were established after the independence of Bangladesh and over 50 new clusters per year are added to the total units.

It is reported that most of the slums/squatters in the city are owned by private individuals and a significant part of the settlements were established on the government or semi-government lands owned mainly by the department of Railways, Public Works, and Roads and Highways.

Impact of Slums on Bio-physical Environment: Unlucky, low income people are the inhabitant of the slums and their activities like defecation, urination in open space cause environmental degradation. Many of them have made hanging latrine by jute sacks and bamboo pole for want of sufficient sanitation in the slum areas. There were no legal gas, water electric supply also except for a few. The slums are in comparatively low-land areas and due to opening of the drains from the surrounding areas, household wastes, polythene bags and other wastes (including their own) heap up, get decayed and produce bad smell and different harmful gases. They also use waste papers, tires, tubes, wood, bamboo, rags from garment factories and such other things as fuel for cooking and other house-

hold purposes. They use kerosene (KIC) lamps at night time and for inefficient burning, gases like CO₂, CO, soot are released into the atmosphere which appears to be the last straw that breaks the camel's back in case of air pollution of the Dhaka city. In some cases, diesel or petrol fuel, lubricating oil from garage-cum-workshop pollute the soil. Due to water stagnancy, the environment of the slums is very unhygienic for

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These are a few examples of the physical and environment pollution of the slums leading to environmental pollution of Dhaka city, where no anti-pollution measures are there. In the slum areas, there is not a single tree or herbs that can be a sink to CO₂ released by above means for photosynthesis and which can purify the air.

Impact on Human Health: As a filthy condition prevails in the whole slum area, mosquito, housefly etc breed there in masses and they are suitable vectors of different pathogens. They transmit diseases within the slums and also in the surrounding areas in many ways e.g. food contamination. The slum dwellers may also be a vector of different pathogens (of course unknowingly and due to lack of awareness about health care) and spread diseases in their working places such as residences of other people while working (as housemaid), in hotels, clinics etc.

The slum dwellers are the victims of the first order of such an unwholesome condition of their habitat and then the surrounding people. They often suffer from various diseases like diarrhoea, dysentery, fever, pain of stomach etc and sometimes complex diseases. Mainly children suffer from the above mentioned diseases. They also suffer from ill health, malnutri-

tion etc.

Socio-Economic Impact: About 38 per cent of the slum dwellers are engaged in income related activities. They are serving urban people in many ways like as rickshaw pullers to bus drivers, housemaids to sweepers etc. Most middle to old aged women work as housemaid and that's why lower middle to middle class people can have housemaids at cheaper rates. In fact, the city dwellers are very

much dependent on slum dwellers in maintaining their daily life. Majority of young women work in garment factories and depending on this labour force, the

garment sector has emerged as a fast growing export-oriented sector in Bangladesh. So these people who were totally jobless in the village can now earn two square meals and can dream to educate their children at least upto the elementary level.

On the other hand, they engender various problems in the urban society. About 50 per cent or more rickshaw pullers have no licence and it is whether a single rickshaw puller has a minimum knowledge about traffic rules thus creating serious traffic jam in the city every day.

In Bangladesh, the slum dwellers have imposed extra pressure on socio-economic and bio-physical environment of the city. Such being the case, the government must be determined to take appropriate measures against natural calamities, social injustice and simultaneously steps must be undertaken for creation of employment generating activities so the distressed villagers can earn their livelihood in the rural areas. So that they don't feel inclined to migrate to the cities, and this is because one's native village is much more beloved to him. But in case of those who are already in the cities, and became closely associated with urban life are to be provided with minimum civic facilities and some sort of professional training for efficient use of manpower.