

UPGRADING INFORMAL

SETTLEMENTS IN BANGLADESH

BACKGROUND

Bangladesh, in the Asia-Pacific region, is one of the most populous countries in the world. Of a population of nearly 163 million people, it is estimated that 55.1% live in slums.ⁱ The capital, Dhaka, is rapidly growing, drawing up to 400,000 poor migrants every year, many of whom migrate because of the effects of climate change, river erosion or loss of livelihoods.ⁱⁱ The informal settlements that generally host these groups often have poor housing; very high population density; very poor environmental services; very low economic status for the majority of the residents; a lack of tenure security; and political, social and cultural conflicts.

Since 2012, Habitat for Humanity Bangladesh has been working to increase the resilience of communities living in slums in Dhaka through vulnerability assessments, community action planning, urban informal settlement mapping, water and sanitation infrastructure, housing repairs, and capacity building. But the challenges experienced by communities living in slums, such as the threat of eviction and the lack of access to government services, require the collaboration of numerous stakeholders across the city. Communities also did not have a structured way of engaging the various NGOs and stakeholders who were working in the informal settlements. **Habitat Bangladesh engaged in advocacy to improve urban planning and development initiatives through the establishment of an information system and through multistakeholder engagement.**

ADVOCACY METHODOLOGIES AND TOOLS

Through an advocacy approach, Habitat Bangladesh worked to:

- **Initiate an annual event called Urban Dialogues and to form the Urban INGO Forum**, which brings together 24 international organizations to discuss and contribute to urban development. Every year, the Urban INGO Forum organizes a national dialogue on urban development issues, challenges, opportunities, government planning, the role of corporate and social responsibility, and the roles of each of the stakeholders. At the end of each forum, INGO members jointly take policy positions in the form of declarations on various urban-related issues.
- **Establish an information system called Urban Informal Settlement Mapping** to develop a needs-based geo-referenced map and database of informal settlements and to promote stakeholder engagement. To complete the social mapping and develop the database, Habitat Bangladesh partnered with the Center for Environmental & Geographic Information Services, or CEGIS, which is experienced in Geographical Information Systems, or GIS, mapping and had all the required expertise for developing the database. Habitat Bangladesh also bought a domain for the GIS maps and database, purchased satellite image (3D), and provided orientation to the users of GIS databases and maps and a series of trainings on database maintenance.
- **Map selected informal settlement areas in Dhaka and develop various maps**, such as the ward base map, the map of NGO activities in slum areas, the water and sanitation map of slum areas, the household location map of slum dwellers, the road network map, and the important structures map. This process included developing data collection tools and a guideline for urban mapping, testing and sharing the tools with urban stakeholders, collecting comprehensive data from 25 slums within two wards under the Dhaka North City Corp., and making the database available to urban stakeholders.

- **Ensure a participatory approach while designing and implementing the project** that involved the Urban INGO Forum Bangladesh, the Water and Sewerage Authority, the Dhaka North City Corp. Authority and community representatives from the respective slums.
- **Conduct research on improving multistakeholder collaboration for urban climate resilience, water and sanitation**, along with research on six national policies to find the main gaps in the context of disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation to improve advocacy plans.

IMPACT, SUCCESSES AND LESSONS

This initiative provided a sustainable, user-friendly platform that generates comprehensive geo-referenced data of social and physical characteristics and vulnerabilities of informal settlements, services provided by organizations, land ownership and management, livelihood characteristics of slum dwellers, housing characteristics, and demographic information. This effort contributes to the ongoing initiatives in the country using technology, citizen engagement strategies and collaboration in developing a GIS database and mapping for upgrading informal settlements.

The physical and socioeconomic information from the slums have supported evidence-based advocacy efforts and influenced government policy decisions in undertaking holistic development plans for slums and the urban poor. Concrete changes in the informal settlements mapped through this initiative include the implementation of effective waste management systems, improvements of drainage systems, implementation of concrete drains and slab covers, and sanitation and housing improvements in 10 slums. By the end of fiscal year 2019, Bangladesh reported that 68,500 people had been impacted by their advocacy efforts. Beyond physical upgrades, these interventions can contribute to the tenure security of informal settlement dwellers from a “continuum of land rights” perspective.ⁱⁱⁱ

The database and maps are accessible to all urban stakeholders, serving as a basis for their respective programming, advocacy and policy initiatives and promoting optimum resource allocation. The web-based database is being maintained and updated by Dhaka North City Corp., which will expand the efforts to other areas of Dhaka, using the data collection tools and guidelines developed by Habitat Bangladesh.

Urban development is one of the concentrations of the Habitat Bangladesh program. Starting with a small development project in one slum in Dhaka, the program has been expanded to the city of Mymensingh in the northwest and to Khulna in southern Bangladesh. Habitat Bangladesh has partnered with eight stakeholders, including government, NGOs and institutions, for its urban development program and is playing a leading role in this sector.

From a technical perspective, important elements considered include:

- **Survey development:** Formulation of the questionnaire through wide discussion and consultation ensured ownership from the stakeholders.
- **Working with communities:** Short-term work in slums has difficulty achieving adequate buy-in from the community and follow-up activities. Orientation and awareness raising are the keys to ensuring that families better understand the process and provide more accurate information to the surveyors.
- **Data monitoring:** Close monitoring during data collection activities, cross-checking and random checking were very effective in ensuring data validity and reliability.
- **Flexibility and patience:** During data collection, it was important to accommodate the schedules of the adults in the households, e.g., timing by lunch breaks, after-work hours, weekends, etc. Sometimes two or more visits were made to the same responders to collect the data.

- **Coordination:** Coordinating among the service providers ensures required services for the community and sustainable development while avoiding duplication of work.
- **Stakeholder engagement:** The involvement of different departments of the city corporation is essential. For example, improved housing conditions led to increased rents, so Habitat Bangladesh promoted an agreement to restrict rent increases for a certain period.

Further information on how Habitat for Humanity is working to upgrade informal settlements through advocacy in other countries is available in the [*Slum Upgrading & Land Issue Brief*](#).

i <http://solidgroundcampaign.org/blog/habitat-humanity-bangladesh-improving-urban-planning-and-development-initiatives-through>

ii <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/bangladesh>

iii <https://mirror.gltm.net/index.php/land-tools/gltm-land-tools/continuum-of-land-rights>



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