LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES AND CHALLENGES IN PAVEMENT DWELLING: A REALITY IN DHAKA, BANGLADESH

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ABSTRACT:
This paper is about pavement dwellers in the capital city, Dhaka, Bangladesh. Pavement dwelling has a significant existence in developing country like Bangladesh. It is a synthesized outcome of rural, urban poverty and failing of state provision. Pavement dwellers can not afford to rent a shelter even in slum or squatter. The primary consequence is a state without roof and resource. They are beyond any infrastructural framework and are deprived of fundamental needs. They are socially excluded and treated inhumanly irrespective of age, sex, race and religion. The lack of social identity obstructs their access to jobs, education and healthcare. All these together create a vulnerable livelihood. But pavement dwelling is an urban reality and is increasing day by day. They survive the extremity by means of some unique strategies. This research will carry on accepting this urban reality that living without home is a context where some unique survival strategies are generated to make the livelihood sustainable. This paper recognizes the strategies of pavement dwellers to satisfy basic needs in their livelihood challenges and the role of NGOs and government in their survival realm. Through in-depth interviews and observation it tries to reveal that pavement dwellers’ successful survival on pavement is the complex synthesis between their livelihood assets, coping attitude, adaptation, social relations and their communal living. It also presents interventions of NGOs with objectives to uplift the socio-economic conditions of pavement dwellers by providing some basic services and also by helping them to accumulate assets. In conclusion it tries to indicate that a sense of home is felt on pavement in the presence of the household persons, here the physical entity of home is small but the social asset that is social relations are always present and thus create the ideal state home for the pavement dwellers.

KEY WORDS:
Pavement Dweller; Livelihood; Survival Strategy; Social Relation
INTRODUCTION

The urban population of Bangladesh is estimated at over 24 million people (UN-HABITAT 2005: 13) which are 25% of total population (over 130 million) in country. Metropolitan Dhaka is the largest urban area. This country has experienced one of the highest urban population growth rates in the last three decades, at more than 6% per year, which compares with a national population growth rate of about 1.5% per year (Perry et al 2007 cited in Uddin et al: 386). Dhaka city is the major economic centre of the country, unparallel to any other location in terms of economic transaction and scopes and is located in the centre of the countries transport network. As a result it is a common trend to flock around this city for people from all aspects of life from around the country. Not only the destitute but everyone and anyone is trending to go to Dhaka not only for the big city lights but also for the commodities, facilities, scopes incomparable to other areas of the country. Thus employment, shelter and basic services accessible to the growing number of urban poor have become a major socio-economic and policy issue in Bangladesh (Islam et al. 1997: 265). Pavement dwellers are among the most deprived people in urban areas in terms of living conditions, access to basic facilities and health indicators (NIPORT 1994, Thwin & Jahan 1996, Alamgir et al. 2000, Ray et al. 2001, NIPORT 2004). Pavement dwelling in Dhaka is perhaps a synthesized outcome of shear urban poverty and failing of state provisions. Here economic development has been a catalyst for increased rural to urban migration; simultaneously the structural adjustment policies have resulted in the deregulation and privatization of urban services and housing sector.

According to BBS (1999: 191) the number of pavement dweller in Dhaka city is 14,999. In the absence of well-established formal land and housing markets in cities in Bangladesh, informal sector has been playing the major role to supply the housing needs of a vast majority of urban low income population (Ghafur 2002: 7). These pavement dwellers even could not be covered by the informal sector housing lacking their financial ability to rent a shelter in slum or squatter. The result is manifold. The primary consequence is a state without roof and resource which affect pavement dwellers more than any others. The lack of social identity obstructs them from access to jobs, education and healthcare. Search for gainful livelihood is impossible as they are lacking skills and resources. As a result their earnings opportunities are fewer and lower-paid than those available to squatters and slum-dwellers.

Under this scenario of pavement dwelling the objectives of this research is to contribute to the livelihood of pavement dweller in Dhaka city in Bangladesh by a comprehensive understanding of the reality. Depending on these, this research attempts to investigate the survival strategies of pavement dwellers and the role of government and NGOs in their livelihood process, as a survival strategy. An in-depth and better understanding of the true scenario will enable practical policy development in the future and that is the purpose of this research.

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1 These are reports (except one article) published by key health research institutions of Bangladesh, where the referred statement is found common for pavement dwellers.
METHODOLOGY

This research is exploratory as it mainly seeks to look at selective case of pavement dwellers in the Green Road, Dhaka to disclose the unanticipated. Green road, a mix used area with residential, commercial, educational and business activities, is under the jurisdiction of Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) zone number 5. A substantial number of pavement dwellers are observed living in this busy area. To perform this research, a number of instruments are applied: in-depth interviews, focus group discussion (FGD), participant Observation, field notes, photographs, especially videos as supporting documents. The author conducted herself all the informal interviews during the period 04.07.2010 to 02.08.2010. Information was gathered from here are mostly qualitative. Secondary sources are from documents.

A small number of respondents (eight) were purposively selected with the implementation of snowballing to represent pavement dwellers from various categories. The respondents are very small in number because the key notion for this research is to investigate each case from a very close-by situation to bring out unique characteristics rather than quantifying facts. Among eight research respondents, six are female and two are male. The higher number of female samples is mainly caused by their higher ratio in the research population. In addition to these eight respondents, four respondents from NGOs and one respondent from government are selected purposively as supplementary respondents.

Being a qualitative research, data analysis followed the framework method (ed. Ritchle & Lewis 2009: 199-262) for analyzing the qualitative data obtained from fieldwork. To recognize the survival strategies of pavement dweller, this research took the ‘DFID Sustainable Framework’ as an analyzing tool with its components- livelihood assets, vulnerability context, transforming structure and process and livelihood outcomes (Rakodi 2002).

RESEARCH RESPONDENTS

Eight persons who live in the pavement of Green Road area in Dhaka city are the primary respondents of this research. They are purposively selected in a snowballing method, thus careful consideration has been paid to include different type of dwellers living in Green Road.

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2 The DCC administrative set-up is decentralized into ten Zonal Offices each headed by a Zonal Officer (DCC 2004: 6).

3 Total pavement dwellers in Green Road area is 648 comprising adult male 125, adult female 247, child male 140 and child female 136 (information collected by researcher personally from ‘Partner Agencies Liaison Officer’ Mr. Suvashish Karmakar, Concern Worldwide, Bangladesh from “Amrao Manush” project dealing with pavement dwellers of Dhaka city).

4 See footnote 3.

5 He has been transferred to other place within the timeframe of this research. He was a Chief Slum Development, Social Welfare and Cultural Officer in Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), Government of Bangladesh (GOB). He was also working as a Project Coordinator, DCC-Amrao Manush Project.
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AERUS XII / Madrid 20-22/10/ 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age (yr)</th>
<th>Living period in Dhaka (yr)</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Current Occupation</th>
<th>Monthly Income (BDT, EURO)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ambia</strong></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Married (abandoned by husband)</td>
<td>Beggar</td>
<td>1500 (15 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Safia Begum</strong></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>Maid Servant</td>
<td>2500 (25 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mohammad Saiful</strong></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Rickshaw puller</td>
<td>2000 (20 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Firoza Begum</strong></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Married (abandoned by husband)</td>
<td>Beggar</td>
<td>1500 (15 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shahida</strong></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Md. Kalimuddin</strong></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Married (Husband of Majeda)</td>
<td>Rickshaw puller</td>
<td>2000 (20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Majeda</strong></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Married (Wife of Md. Kalimuddin)</td>
<td>Maid servant+wastepaper picker</td>
<td>2500 (25 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shima</strong></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Married (living alone)</td>
<td>Maid servant</td>
<td>3000 (30 )</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Table. 1] Primary Respondents details

[fig. 1] Respondents in their sleeping place, clockwise: Ambia with her two children; Safia Begum with her two children; Mohammad Saiful with his wife; Shahida; Md. Kalimuddin and Majeda with their son and Shima with her children. Photo by: researcher.

Another set of respondents which are termed as secondary respondents has been used to formulate the research result as supplementary to the primary respondents. They are followings:
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Table 2 Secondary Respondents details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Personal Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subash Gomes</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Project Coordinator, Amarao Manush Project (We are Humans too Project), CONCERN worldwide.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Md. Ershad Ali</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Project Coordinator, Amarao Manush Project (We are Humans too Project), SAJIDA Foundation (Project Implementing partner agency).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Parvin</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Community Mobilizer, Green Road Pavement Dweller Centre, Amarao Manush Project (We are Humans too Project), SAJIDA Foundation (Project Implementing partner agency).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saiful Alam</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Media Specialist, Amarao Manush Project (We are Humans too Project), Coalition for the Urban Poor (Advocacy partner agency).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khandker Millatul Islam</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Chief Slum Development, Social Welfare and Cultural Officer, Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), Government of Bangladesh (GOB); Project Coordinator, DCC-Amrao Manush Project.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PAVEMENT DWELLER

In holistic view pavement dweller are included in the homeless people. Homelessness is as wide as multidimensional because by the numerous perspective it is defined and being defined in the literature over time in respect of different circumstances, culture and countries. We can find different nomenclature apart from the term ‘pavement dweller’ in different typologies of homelessness. ‘Rooflessness’ (Daly 1994 cited in Tipple & Speak 2009: 50), ‘sleeping rough’ (ibid: 50) and ‘living on the street’ (The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 1999 cited in McIntosh & Phillips 2000: 2) - all are referred to pavement dweller, but appeared in various ways and terms.

Homeless people in Bangladesh are usually referred to as ‘the floating population’ or ‘rootless people’. The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) defined ‘floating population’ as “The mobile and vagrant category of rootless people who have no permanent dwelling units, however bad and who are found in the census night.....in the railway station, launch ghats (water transport terminals), bus stations, hat-bazaar (market places), mazar (shrines), the staircases of public/government buildings, open spaces etc.” (BBS 1999: 4). In this definition rootlessness is the central concept with rooflessness and resourcelessness. Analysis on homelessness in Bangladesh, rooflessness i.e., people living in public outdoor or indoor spaces, specially in streets without shelter has been taken as the primary basis for understanding and enumerating homelessness (Ghafur 2004: 270). A very important fact revealed during the survey that not all pavement-dwellers are homeless; they might have homes in their ancestral villages, which they usually visit periodically. ADB-GOB-LGED (1996) also presented a classification of homeless people in Bangladesh by the nature of their residential circumstances: slums and squatter settlements; servants living in upper or middle-class residences; floating population; garment workers living outside the slums and squatter settlements; people living in industrial buildings; people living in shopping areas, construction sites, katcha bazaars (market places) and on trucks/push-carts/rickshaw vans and other vehicles; and poor families living outside the

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6 The loss of the identity, privacy, comfort and protection given by a home (Ghafur 2004: 269).
7 The loss of shelter from the elements (ibid: 269).
8 The loss of resources that severely affect one’s ability to earn, learn and live for a long time (ibid: 269).
slum settlements in various arrangements (ADB-GOB-LGED 1996: 20). In summary three types of urban homelessness have been identified in Bangladesh by Ghafur (2004) based on residential circumstances. They are, floating homelessness, situated homelessness and potential homelessness. Among them, floating homelessness is the most visible type and is based on the physical criterion of rooflessness. It refers to people living in the streets or other public spaces without permanent shelters of their own. Floating homeless people are often pavement dwellers, street dwellers or destitute (Ghafur 2004: 271).

PAVEMENT DWELLING IN GREEN ROAD

It is possible to find several kinds of pavement dwellers throughout Dhaka city as pavement dwellers are scattered all over the city. Thus it is important to notify that this research is solely regarding the pavement dwellers of one area, i.e. Green Road area of Dhaka city. Hence the consequentially formulated survival strategies might not be generalized without further in-depth analysis of pavement dwelling on other parts of the city. The followings are some reasons behind selecting this as study area:

- The familiarity of this place for a long period of time to researcher as a significant pavement dwellers’ presence.
- As Green Road is one of the busiest and diversified mix used area (commercial, residential, educational and business), it was expected that a diverse characteristics of pavement dwelling will be revealed.
- Green Road is under the catchments area of an ongoing project (Amrao Manush, “We are human too”) conducted by Dhaka city Corporation, CONCERN Worldwide-Bangladesh (NGO) and SAJIDA Foundation, Bangladesh (NGO), dealing with pavement dwellers of Dhaka city. Hence, this area could be an appropriate case study to investigate the interaction with government and NGOs.

It is observed that a stable form of pavement dwelling exists in Green Road for long time which is convenient and feasible for doing research with such vulnerable groups. Moreover this area could be potential for further continuation/ extension of this research as pavement dwellers here are quite settled and be likely to continue their livelihood in Green road.

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9 An Irish based organization that funding the project “Amrao Manush (we are human too)”.
10 Project Implementing partner agency for the project, “Amrao Manush (we are human too)”.
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Field

GR Pavement Dwellers Centre

S 1
S 2
S 4
S 6
S 3
S 5
S 7
Field

Sample in their sleeping places.
Field used by the pavement dwellers.
Pavement dweller centre by NGO.

Source: Adopted from Google Earth

[fig. 2] Areal view of research area, Green Road, Dhaka indentifying respondents’ sleeping place (note: Respondents usually sleep in the same spot every night). Source: Adopted from Google Earth

Pavement dwellers in Green Road live on the wide footpath of both sides of this road. As it is a mix used (commercial, residential, educational and business) area, the road is mostly edged by row of shops. In addition residences, apartment buildings, hospitals, schools, garment factory buildings, hotels, restaurants, office buildings, shops, are lined along this road.

[fig. 3] View from north-east of Green Road, showing pavement dwellers are sleeping in early morning (2nd July, 2010) inside their home. Photo by: researcher.

The general pattern of pavement dwelling in Green Road is using the wide footsteps and or shop front spaces as living spaces. This space is occasionally elevated 20cm-60cm high from the street level and sometimes partially covered by a projected upper storey. During night after the shops close and other daily activities are over for the day, these people make hasty preparation for night stay. With a mosquito net or with a wide plastic sheet attached to the shop shutter and other end to some collected bricks some of them make their night shelter, while others just put a brick under head and cover their body with rags and pass the night. Usually they keep these belongings near to their specific lie down places. They wake up very early in the morning before sunrise to do the morning freshening under the curtain of darkness and get ready for the day. During day time they usually go to works or to look for
work, perform other activities near and around this space and return to their selected places after work hours.

**STRATEGIES AND CHALLENGES OF PAVEMENT DWELLING**

Life on pavement is a set of circumstances which has its own grammar. It is not living in a home like any other person because pavement is no home; it is an urban public space for pedestrian circulation. Yet it is home for pavement dweller because they perform regular residential activities here in the pavement. Every single household activity to be performed here face challenges. It is a continuous tackling of situation by asset implementation and management whose characteristic is totally different from a conventional living in houses. These situation handling results in developing some unique strategies of pavement dweller to survive on pavement. Relation with surrounding people acted as a major survival strategy in the life of Green Road pavement dwellers. It is perhaps possible because of the existence of lower middle class and middle class people among the neighborhood along with some higher class people. Because of the closeness of social class, pavement dwellers here could manage to develop some relationship with surrounding people, which along with mental adaptation, hope and future expectation contribute in development of the unique strategy to be able to live on pavement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Challenges: Physical &amp; Mental</th>
<th>Incident</th>
<th>Coping strategy: physical</th>
<th>Coping strategy: mental</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sleep, cook, eat, rest, all other livelihood activities on footpath.</td>
<td>Insecurity, no hygiene, exposed to weather, address less, identity crisis etc.</td>
<td>Pavement women working as maids in neighboring houses.</td>
<td>Social relationship: internal &amp; external, stably stationed in specific location of a footpath, social attachment.</td>
<td>Sense of home &amp; hope</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following indicators revealed the pavement life in Green Road with continuous challenges faced and strategies to tackle them.

**SOCIAL CONTEXT: SURROUNDING NEIGHBORHOOD; INTERNAL COMMUNITY; SAFETY AND CRIME**

The life of pavement dwelling can continue and becomes bearable because of a successful symbiotic relationship develops between the pavement dwellers and surrounding peoples. In this scenario the closest and most interactive relation that the pavement dwellers have outside their own community is with the local shopkeepers. The shopkeepers allows them to use space for night stay in front of their shops, this is a fundamental gain for the dwellers because this space gives them the opportunity to settle down. To have a fixed space means a sense of stability, an address that helps to form an identity upon which their survival is depended in this particular road. On the other hand the shopkeepers get free security during night time. As the shop front which is the only accessible way to these shops, is occupied by sleeping people is impossible to break into. They also use children of the dwelling families for small works like bringing waters, cleaning footpaths or garbage disposals with very little or no payment at all. Mainly for security purposes and for these small benefits the shopkeepers allow the pavement dwellers to stay in front of their shops even though from the perspective of the potential customer pavement dwellers are often dirty, noisy and create disturbance.
From these relationships both parties have their gains, but the shopkeepers holds the authority to control the relationship and thus the pavement dwellers remains in a vulnerable situation, relying on the mercy of the shop owner and his moods. As a result a scope for extortion is inherent within this system and often the pavement dwellers falls victim to it. Pavement dwellers often keep savings with these shopkeepers and this money savings also put the pavement dwellers in a better position because it makes him or her reliable and responsible, working and progressive person.

I observed the relationship between housewives and the female pavement dwellers too. This can be characterized as a master-servant relation. As pavement dwellers women seek for maid’s job and demand lower salary, surrounding inhabitants use this opportunity to meet their need of house maids, which at this point is rather difficult to get in Dhaka city, because of a result of semi industrialization of the country, for which a large number of female workers are engaged in garments industry, and people prefer industry works to house maid works as the maid work has less or no dignity in the society and also less payment. This is a relationship from which both parties get equally benefited and from this relation the female pavement dwellers primarily get a secured job, which not only ensure their fixed regular income but also provides an opportunity to clean themselves by means of using the bathroom, prepare food from the kitchen, wash cloths and save money with the female employer.

The internal relationship between the pavement dwellers’ own community are strong but it cannot be observed as a positive progressive behavior to each other all the time, rather a common scene is a fight and quarrel among themselves, but in times of emergency a helping hand within the community is always found. This particular behavior reveals that the sharing of assets is not welcomed amongst themselves and they want everybody to get his or her share on their own by earning it from the surrounding. So they even engage their children in garbage collection or in begging. As a result none of my respondents take the education facility for children provided by the NGO. This is easy to understand because there is no scope of easy access to livelihood capitals for the pavement dwellers and they cannot afford to feed one idly. As a result this basic method of asset management is developed and practiced among the pavement dwellers. This results into special behavioral patterns amongst the pavement dwellers. They are usually seen rude while talking, sometimes very frustrated, sometimes careless about everything and next moment too conscious about very small things, like may be a torn rag or some found materials. The absence of privacy also causes a harsh mental state. As a result of lack of privacy, their personals secrets are exposed often within the community. But this information, they guard from others outside the community and again violently use as criticizing element while quarrelling. This also shows their sense of internal community, and their desire to keep the equilibrium and general respect of the community upheld. This is also part of their unique survival strategy- surviving as a community and as a part of it. The young and lonely pavement dwellers are more vulnerable to external and internal extortions. Here is no formal sense of community guiding for the younger one, only extreme criticizing can be seen after something harmful has occurs, but not before it had occurred. As a result the young ones can be easily excluded from the community and lost into more vulnerable situations.

The most vulnerable aspect of pavement dwellers life is the lack of security and a continuous presence of an imminent threat of danger. This continuous presence of danger makes them psychologically unsecured form a normal person which results in an ill tempered, irritated, edgy person who can also be very numb or careless in some cases. This emotional behavior is an outcome of their vulnerable
context. A sense of group or communal protectiveness also develops because of external harassments. Women here frequently face physical harassment but they never speak about it. For example, one female pavement dweller from Green Road went to a nearby place for begging and was sexually harassed by a man there. This also happens when everybody is sleeping at night. Surrounding men like street mastaan\(^{11}\), gatekeepers of buildings, men from surrounding area, even relatives propose them or force them into sex. But no woman ever complains or speaks about it to others because of the fear of being labeled as a “bad woman” in their community. If anybody is branded in their community as a “bad woman” it is tough for her to live among them as part of their society because of continuous severe criticism.

Pavement dwellers’ vulnerable lives become more vulnerable when judicial cases are filed against them. It is another common trend in Bangladesh to file case for inheritance of family property- mainly land. Then they have to manage the money needed for defending the case which put them into an additional pressure in earning their daily livelihoods. This is caused by the sheer crisis of land in proportion to population. Family violence is also a common picture of the pavement life, like beating wife and children. Though they face and faced different kinds of oppressions and extortions none has ever given any formal complaints to the police, as they consider themselves illegal and do not want to stir things up, but rather want to endure the harassment and consider it as a part of life, this reluctance to a formal complaint and ignorance of rights is interconnected and results in the stable presence of a vulnerable livelihood for the pavement dwellers of Green Road. Hiding their misery especially women, shows their aspiration for a respected and clean living which they cannot easily attain in street life. Still they try to carry on putting behind their shocking memories to become respected by others; this is an example of mental adaptation the pavement dweller has to go through as survival strategy.

THE URBAN ECONOMY, ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTH

People living on the street in Green Road do not have any access or opportunity to get formal jobs. Their lacking of formal trainings including education and other professional skills bounds them to work as cheap daily labor. Women here are mostly maid servants or beggars. Men work as rickshaw puller or rickshaw van puller. Their income is very low which even cannot ensure all the meals of a day let alone providing other necessities of life.

Though some of the pavement dwellers are permanently staying in this area for many years, their main economic life is in and around their village. In spite of living in a vulnerable context, their involvement in economy in terms of cash handling is frequent and greater in comparison to their counterparts in the village. All through the year they barely manage to survive in this vulnerable context and in festival seasons they collect a major portion of their yearly income. They only participate in this urban economy as cheap daily laborer or beggar and by staying in the pavements save the outmost to be able to engage in his traditional economic circle. Every money they earn here and can save will be invested in the village either through loans towards some village relatives, or buying crops, or livestock. Though they are living in the pavement their dream is to settle in the village they migrated from and hence they try to get involved in the rural economy by all means, however small that maybe. As a result even if any of the pavement dwellers progress in terms of asset-wealth, it might not reflect on his or her pavement life, only when they can afford to move to a slum or

\(^{11}\) It is a Bengali word which could be defined as a thug, a tough, often aggressive and violent youth.
back to village to support their livelihood that may be recognized. This is the dream of every pavement dwellers but only few may be able to achieve this.

The vulnerability of pavement dwelling life primarily depends on the health condition of the person, as in this concrete jungle one is for his or her own self. People are totally exposed to nature and surrounding built environment, surrounded by a society that they are excluded from but again from them receives basic survival assets just to survive. As a result any simple illness or sickness causes major setback in one’s life.

As the weather of Bangladesh is not so extreme almost all year round except some heavy rainy days and few cold nights of the winter, pavement dwellers can live on the footpaths. Except for the weather they has to rely solely on the built environment as natural assets, like the pavements as living place where they do everything a human life needs to be done, but being exposed to weather all the time, living in bare footpaths which are often very dirty besides dirtier open drains that they use as toilets and drinking water from unhygienic sources all of these causes chronic contagious diseases along with malnutrition. As an outcome most this I found none of my respondent in sound health, specially the children. And so they often fell to serious illness causing break in works, draining out savings and making loans for treatments. As a result they get economically fragile and exposed to further vulnerable situations.

Sometimes sudden illness may cause deaths and create shocks for a family. Their continuous malnutrition and extreme lifestyle keep them in an unhealthy physical and mental condition resulting in less working capability and a pessimistic attitude towards the future. A lack of a public health system and ignorance of the existing system which they can afford, along with a reluctance of using public system based on superstitious beliefs about modern medication its expenses comparing to well known, reliable village quake and “kabiraj”12 tends these pavement dwellers to go back to village during illness and get treatment.

GOVERNANCE: INVOLVEMENT IN ASSOCIATION AND LEGAL STATUS
Most of my respondents originally migrated from the rural areas of Bangladesh for several decades as part of the continuous rural to urban migration. Before coming here they were actively involved in the rural economy and some of them were engaged in micro-credit13 programs, which generally require at least a permanent address. While some of the respondents are satisfied with the system others are not so, some are rather outraged by such programs. But In the urban context their economic life is very informal as pavement dwellers of Green Road have no direct access to any formal banking or financial institution for loans or saving facilities and hence no attachment to any formal program. Among many reasons the primary one is their homelessness – lacking of any permanent address. Most financial institutes like public and private banks and NGO’s that give small loans without any mortgaged assets requires at least a permanent address for loan sanction. This is not possible for a pavement dweller to provide because of his homeless and hence address less vulnerable context. Living in such

12 “Kabiraj” is one type of illiterate village quake.
13 Micro credit is the extension of very small loans (micro loans) to those in poverty designed to encourage entrepreneurship. These individuals lack collateral, steady employment and a verifiable credit history. Therefore they cannot meet even the most minimal qualifications to gain access to traditional credit. Micro-credit is a part of micro finance, which is the provision of a wider range of financial services to the very poor (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/microcredit).
vulnerability, they are forced to be involved and remain in an informal urban financial context. This leads to getting loans from individual loan brokers without proper rules and regulations resulting are a financially vulnerable situation. Their only involvement to any institutional financing is in time of receiving aids unconditionally given by different philanthropic organizations. Other than financial organizations they only get attached with associations that directly contact them and encourage then to join like the NGOs for various development programs. These programs most of the time being short ranged and of short period help the pavement dweller to barely sustain their vulnerable survival. From these programs they increase their minimum survival assets by means of getting temporary places for cooking, toilet and bathing, resting as provided by “Amarao Manush” or by receiving health assistance from some other NGO. It is understood from the above scenario that these involvements increase successful survival context for the pavement dwellers but cannot promise any up gradation or salvation from this vicious circle.

Any association between the pavement dwellers and local urban governance is subjected on their legal status. Which is mostly ambiguous, as for Dhaka City Corporation rules it is illegal to use the footpath as it hinders pedestrian access flow, but the Corporation itself permits various small shops – hawkers to use the pavement for their business and there is not a clear law stating that it is considered illegal to use the pavement as sleeping place in the night time. All around the city, not only in Green road, pavement dwellers consider themselves as outsiders and illegal people themselves. Though they are legal citizen of the country they have no clear idea about their rights neither about their responsibilities from and towards the city. Usually the only time they come in contact with any democratic process is around the time elections and it only happens if they go to their village where most of them are voters.

In these pavements they are ruled by the laws of the street; by the policemen, by their employers, the shopkeepers and all others that has some power over them. Living in pavement is like living in uncertainty. Anytime a policeman can come and beat them up to clear up the footpath. Local people can forcefully evict them, can be arrested by police, and can be kidnapped by mastaan. This is the way it is, this the way how it used to be. This whole scenario is informal and outside of any governance system that is implied by any government of Bangladesh. The NGO programs played some role for this by creating an enabling environment for pavement dwellers. The NGO’s intervened with the scope of providing information and making them aware of their rights. These NGOs succeeded in some cases, like stopping the police bribery incidents by making the pavement dwellers aware that they are not allowed to do so by the constitution of the country and they has their right to protest it. As an urban citizen every bit of information especially regarding rights and legal status helps to form a survival strategy for the pavement dwellers.

GENDER ISSUE

Being man or women does not give any relief in the pavement life, but traditionally a man requires less privacy then a woman in the open life of the pavement. A man living on the pavement is generally considered as a common thing, and is seen a strive of life. On the other female pavement dwellers are often associated with floating prostitution and despised by the surrounding society. As a result men enjoy a better interaction platform than the women. It puts the women in a more vulnerable

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14 “Amaro Manush (we are human too)” is a five-year (March 2008-February 2013) program which CONCERN worldwide is implementing with local partners to address the needs of pavement dwellers of Dhaka city (http://www.dhakacity.org/amrao_manush/index.html).
situation not only by means of physical and other tangible aspects but also by means of mental aspect too.

But once they are settled in a specific space for a considerable amount of time and earn some reliability of the surrounding households the women can get better jobs than men and can earn more. They then also enjoy a better sympathetic attitude towards them. From the field work studies it is clearly seen that the female pavement dwellers are fairly more actively engaged in the earning process and are also more positive in future planning. Most of the women work from morning to evening. On the other hand the majority of men to work half days. Gender discrimination cannot be distinguished as the whole entity is in a vulnerable condition, no discrimination can be outlined among this. Women are more reliable than men and enjoy better relationships with people. But the women being more vulnerable and having fear of scandals are often extorted by opportunists.

Children in the pavement life are very vulnerable to different forms of harassment and abuses. If not observed closely by guardians they can easily get involved in hazardous activities like drugs peddling for others, in forced prostitution, in theft and other criminal activities. More dangerously, children can get lost or stolen by human traffickers. As whole, men, women, children all are vulnerable and can be exposed to various types of danger and levels of extortions at any time in their vulnerable pavement life.

POLICY INTERACTION WITH GOVERNMENT AND NGO

From the focus group discussions, interviews of the primary respondents and from discussion held with some NGO personnel (secondary respondents) it is found that pavement dwellers are only recognized as “others” in case of any policy development and program taken for them, as a result these policies often misjudge their true nature and offers nonviable solutions resulting in no development after using up national resources designated for the purpose. On the pavement dwellers part they consider themselves as illegal occupier of the space and is not aware of any rights , not responsibilities, most of the case they are reluctant to participate any formal program fearing of deportation or eviction etc, thus they most of the time keep themselves out of any formal participation and live by themselves. In cases of NGO program who works more closely and deeply with the pavement dwellers, achieve to get involved in their life cycle even that is only after they have spent a considerable amount of time to gain their faith. Only then thus the NGOs can help to survive them in their present condition and to upgrade their lifestyle if possible.

CONCERN worldwide-Bangladesh has been implementing a project known as “Amrao Manush (we are human too)” on the pavement dwellers of Dhaka city. Their objectives is to uplift the socio-economic conditions of pavement dwellers by providing some basic services and also by helping them to accumulate assets to be able to eventually return to their homes or to find locations off the pavement in which to settle (Alam & Rahman 2009: i). Green Road is under their catchments area where SAJIDA Foundation, Bangladesh is working as implementing partner agency. Pavement dwellers here had interacted with SAJIDA for the first time during the inception period of the project, which is collecting some data before implementing the services (ibid: 2). In the initial days these people were quite reluctant to co operate them. They were suspicious about their intervention and
always trying to reserve their information/identification hidden. Although occasionally express, in that case the information was fake. They value their working and leisure time rather than talking with a NGO worker.

But things have been changing as the present situation reveals. Now, majority of the pavement dwellers from Green road are receiving some supports from SAJIDA through their Pavement Dwelling Centre (PDC). The respondents expressed their positive responses regarding the supports they get from PDC. According to them, it contributes to improve their livelihood.

Comparing to these relations with NGO’s Pavement dwellers in general do not have much formal or direct interactions with any government agencies in the city. Pavement dwellers of Green road have no formal recognition or identification by the local city corporation. There are no legal ties between them and government. Though they live in the city, sometimes for many years, they obtain their national identification cards from their villages and remain excluded from the local city corporations.

Any voluntary participation of the pavement dwellers in any government program is only observed in the case of receiving benefits by means of unconditional charity and donations like mobile paramedical treatments, occasional food, money distribution and occasional winter cloth distribution. Pavement dwellers are deprived of beneficial policies of the government because of their identity crisis. In general the existing policies and laws to protect and support the destitute people primarily require a basic identification and address or reference from and of the victim, which is unaffordable for the pavement dwellers. As a consequence, the pavement dwellers cannot even make a formal report of harassment or extortion in the police station. Observation from the field works reveals that though the pavement dwellers cannot make formal complaint to the law enforcing agencies, local police stations and officers often informally supports them.

Local government has indirect impact on the livelihoods of pavement dwellers of Green Road through various NGOs. Like being a partner agency of “Amrao Manush” project, Dhaka City Corporation is providing legal support for conducting the project activities. This project is now trying to acquire some land/ abandoned house from government for night-shelter. Sometimes related NGOs like CUP (Coalition for the Urban Poor, Advocacy partner agency of “Amrao Manush”) arranges programs and gather pavement dwellers to aware them of their rights and to demonstrate their destitute situation to the society and the government demanding their basic human rights.

Because of their vulnerable context of the pavement life, pavement dwellers grow an expectation to receive livelihood assets unconditionally and to achieve that they rely on assistance from willing organizations. In any intervention either by government or NGO or individuals, the pavement dwellers only seek the direct benefit and assistances. Thus pavement dweller’s perception about any intervention is as opportunities to obtain livelihood assets.

NGO’s involvement and attachment with the pavement dwellers are more direct and formal comparing to Government’s informal and indirect involvements. This informal and indirect approach gives the government an opportunity to deal with Pavement dwellers within general development policies for poor. As a result pavement dwellers are not defined or identified by the government as any special vulnerable group. On the other hand, pavement dwellers on their own cannot put effort to get directly or indirectly involved in any policy development regarding them. Generally without NGO assistance they are unaware of their constitutional rights and national development policies. Only through direct
actions of related NGOs pavement dwellers get aware of their rights, policies regarding them, and by these NGOs get organized to claim the rights, individually or in group.

Pavement dwellers vulnerable context compel them to cope with existing policies and adapt their livelihood according to new policies, they are not in a position to judge a policy or to decide about its acceptance or rejection, the only thing they can do about any government policy is to comply with it. Usually the NGOs develop their respective policies for pavement dwellers with adequate feedbacks from them and thus include the pavement dwellers in policy making, this form of participation is quite absent in the case of government policy making.

CONCLUSION

The survival of pavement dwellers, the poorest of the poor, on the pavement in Green Road only possible because of their efficient management of few livelihood assets as their survival strategy. Livelihood assets of the pavement dwellers are a set of very limited capitals, in concise this set comprises of capitals like -pavement dwellers casual laborer as temporary and permanent jobs, human resources like earning family members, social networking like kinship and other human relations, a set of portable belongings like the elements of the temporary shelter, few usable natural resources like the open fields and Lakes, a temporary or permanent employment, some savings or investments, and an overall positive attitude towards life expressed by common hope and ambitions. Pavement dwellers primary asset management is to cope with any presented situation and to adapt their living pattern according to available resources and limitations. This coping and adaptation succeeds through their simultaneous sharing of assets and stresses, and working together to perform simple daily life works. Pavement dwellers gain their basic livelihood earnings as an outcome of social interactions with surrounding peoples by means of employment or charity. They exercise intimate mutual relationships among themselves and compose a sense of community. They circulate gained assets within this community by means of loans, barter or simply giving in times of extreme needs.

Pavement dwellers of Green Road do not live in an adequate home, they live in the open pavements in makeshift shelters, but they perceive, recognize and use this shelter along with the open pavements as their own home. Temporary but continuous existence of the small shelter along with these intimate relationships gives the pavement dweller’s a sense of safety, security and comfort; a sense of permanence, identity and authority. Pavement dwellers successful survival on the pavement is the complex synthesis between their livelihood assets, their coping attitude, their adaptation, their social relations, their communal living and above all their shelter.

Pavement dwellers first priority is to obtain livelihood assistance from anyone or any organization, they cannot afford to judge provider’s identity, method, purpose or structure of that organization. Each and every assistance provided by any organization, government or non government help the pavement dwellers to improve their sustainability of livelihood. The NGOs formal and direct developments program positively effect by providing direct livelihood assistance to them while government’s more informal and indirect involvement also provide livelihood assistance to the pavement dwellers. Pavement dwellers are more comfortable and satisfied with NGO programs after they get involved to it and start to receive direct benefits; they are not as satisfied with government activities as they cannot
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perceive indirect benefits from government through NGOs. They are solely focused in receiving livelihood assistance from all interventions and cannot afford to put effort to participate in government policy making, though sometimes get chance to participate in the NGO policy making process.

Note:
This research is conducted for the master thesis in MSc. Program in Urban Management and Development in Institute for Housing and Urban Development Studies, Erasmus University Rotterdam. The thesis entitled, “Living on Pavement: ‘Home’ in a homeless situation”.

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