



Informal Governance in Dhaka's Slums: Implications on Urban Livelihoods

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Informal governance in Dhaka's slums: implications on urban livelihoods

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Overview

1. Introduction to urban livelihoods
2. The research: reconciling structure and agency in urban livelihoods
3. Urban livelihoods in Dhaka: Strategies and limitations
4. Informal governance in Dhaka's informal settlements
5. Implications on our understanding of urban poverty
6. Conclusions

1. Understanding urban livelihoods

- Consistent across frameworks is
 - A focus on the household as unit of analysis
 - Role of a portfolio of 'assets' or 'capitals'
- Amenable to policy recommendations and creates quantifiable indicators.
- But while providing insight into household *experiences* of poverty, they overlook some of the key drivers of urban poverty.
 - Local political economy that controls the distribution of assets across poor households.
 - Fail to attribute the centrality of employment within analyses

2. The research: Reconciling structure and agency in urban livelihoods

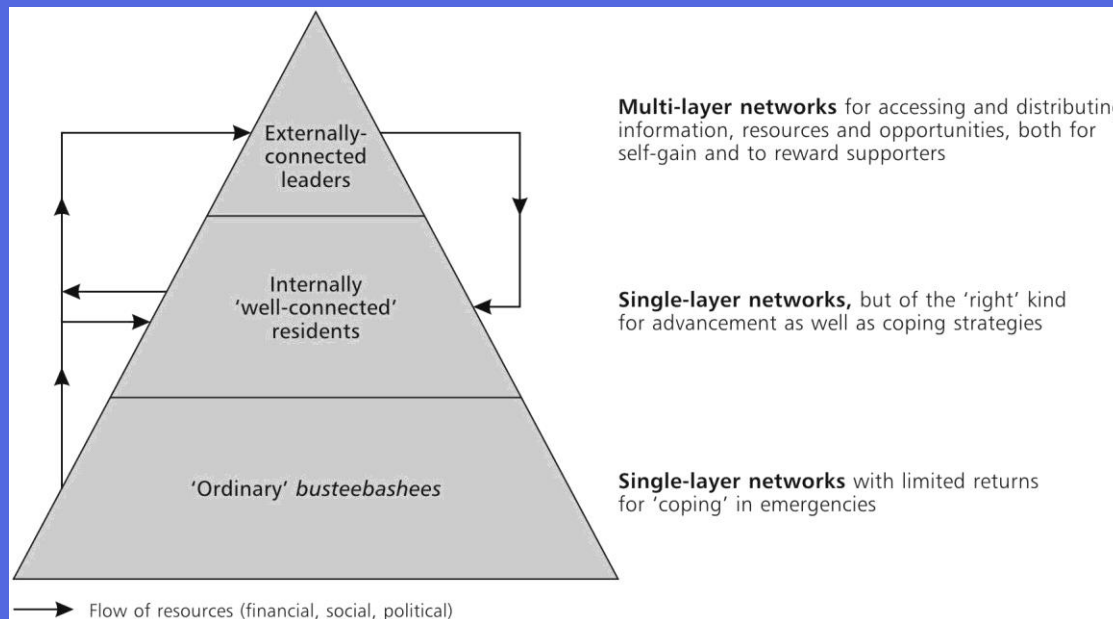
- Why can some households use employment to support household improvement over time, while others cannot?
- Compared experiences of 'coping' and 'improving' households headed by unskilled labourers, small businessmen and formal sector workers
 - To what extent were these differentiated by specific livelihoods strategies or structural influences outside household control?
- Four research sites in Dhaka:
 - Two central, two peripheral
 - Two with legally negotiated access to services, two with illegal
 - Focus groups
 - Community surveys and mapping
 - 75 in-depth interviews

3. Urban livelihoods in Dhaka: Strategies and limitations

- Three main livelihoods strategies differentiate between coping and improving hhs:
 - Labour mobilisation (importance of female labour)
 - Asset ownership (universally low for unskilled labourers, but vital for small businessmen)
 - Savings and loans (protection and promotion)
- Household improvements tend to be small, incremental and vulnerable to reversal due to:
 - Income shocks
 - Changing household circumstances
 - **Limitations to agency based on structural inequalities at the community level.**

4. Informal governance in Dhaka's informal settlements

- Clientelistic relationships substitute for the formal governance functions urban poor lack, but this creates 2 distinct groups:
 - Vulnerable households who use them to achieve minimum level of security and
 - More powerful households who use them to create networks of advantage that secure them greater profit and control



5. Are these networks closed? Implications for our understanding of urban poverty

- Is there any scope for agency in securing access to accumulation networks?
- No, access dependent on:
 - Family links
 - Active political support
 - House ownership
- Channels through which hhs can access distribution networks are closed for the majority of households.
- What serves as accumulation networks for elite maintains and exacerbates insecurity for majority of residents.

6. Conclusions

- Structural inequalities place significant limitations on hh agency when it comes to expanding social networks to those conducive to longer-term stability.
- Asset-based frameworks have overlooked central influence of the local political economy and the constraints on agency it creates:
 - Need politicised understanding of social capital
 - What *types* of social connections are important in meeting different needs of security and advancement – *and who can access the latter?*
 - Creation of power hierarchies through which those at the top of the hierarchy seek to continue their domination of the housing market, service provision and other forms of income-generation.
- Asset-based frameworks will continue to overestimate agency, leading to poor policy prescriptions