The Inception Workshop Report

Transforming the Rules of the Game: Gendered Liveability in Peri-urban Dhaka

Meeting Room, Training Building, 3rd Floor, Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC), Khamarbari, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Authors: International Potato Center and Bangladesh Agricultural University
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20 December 2021

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Summary

The inception workshop on “Transforming the Rules of the Game: Gendered Liveability in Peri-urban Dhaka” was held on 20 December 2021 in Dhaka, Bangladesh, to introduce the key partners to this project, and to share ideas, knowledge, and experiences that could helpfully inform the execution of the research. Thirty-three people (50% women) participated in this workshop, including government officers, local and international NGO representatives, university staff and private sector employees from the garment industry. Collectively, this group represented expertise in many subjects such as nutrition, food systems, environment, and urban development. The participants shared some practical approaches towards improving the living environment and food/water/nutrition for poor residents in urban areas.

This workshop highlighted the importance of cross-sectoral collaboration with diverse institutions to understand the government’s priorities and interests. This report outlines key points and messages including feedback from project partners. The links to key documents are also included in this report.

Objectives

This workshop is aimed to bring research partners together to map and connect ongoing initiatives on gender and urban food systems as framed within the context of the readymade garment industry in peri-urban Dhaka. There are three objectives:

- To introduce the goals and objectives of the Project Gendered Liveability in Peri-urban Dhaka
- To establish a cross-sectoral research consortium with various stakeholders, including the government, NGO actors, research institutions, and grassroots actors
- To identify relevance and scope for developing a trans-disciplinary MSc module on the ‘Gendered dimensions of UPU Food Systems’ at Bangladesh Agricultural University.

Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10:00am – 10:30am</td>
<td>Registration and Tea/Coffee</td>
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<tr>
<td>10:30am – 10:40am</td>
<td>Welcome and Introductions</td>
<td>Dr. Debashish Chanda, Country Program Coordinator, CIP Bangladesh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:40am – 11:00am</td>
<td>Context setting (presentation)</td>
<td>Prof. Dr. Sadika Haque, Department of Agricultural Economics, BAU</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:00am – 11:45am</td>
<td>Panel Discussion: Ongoing initiatives</td>
<td>Syeda Khairun Naher, Joint Secretary, Women Committee, MoL&amp;E</td>
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<td></td>
<td>in Dhaka</td>
<td>Md A.K. Azad, Head of Program, ICCO Corporation</td>
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<td>Prof. Dr. Md Abdus Salam, Department of Aquaculture, BAU</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:45am – 12:00pm</td>
<td>Remarks by Chair</td>
<td>Dr. Khairul Bashar, Country Director – Bangladesh</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:00pm – 12:10pm</td>
<td>Introducing the project</td>
<td>Dr. James Garrett</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Speaker</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:10pm – 12:20pm</td>
<td>Address by Special Guest</td>
<td>Dr. Shawkat Ara Begum, Country Director, Practical Action Bangladesh</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:20pm – 12:30pm</td>
<td>Address by Special Guest</td>
<td>Dr. Rudaba Khondker, Country Director, GAIN Bangladesh</td>
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<td>12:30pm – 12:45pm</td>
<td>Address by Chief Guest</td>
<td>Prof. Dr. Lutful Hassan, Vice-Chancellor, BAU</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:45pm – 01:00pm</td>
<td>Closing Remarks</td>
<td>Dr. Nozomi Kawarazuka, Scientist – Gender Research, CIP Vietnam</td>
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<td>01:00pm – 02:00pm</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
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**Notes**

1. **Introduction**

**Dr Debashish Chanda (Country Program Coordinator, CIP)**

- On behalf of the project team, CIP highly appreciates the chief guest, special guests and all participants for their contributions today to bring insights and ideas together
- While we are agricultural organizations, today’s main topic is gender
- Women represent poor workers in urban and peri urban areas
- Without addressing gender as an issue affected by underlying structural problems, we cannot transform urban food systems, nutrition, water security and the environment
- Today we would like to learn from your expertise and experiences

2. **Context Setting**

**Prof. Dr. Sadika Haque (Department of Agricultural Economics, Bangladesh Agricultural University)**

Presentation link: [here](#)

- Bangladesh has been experiencing rapid urbanization and Dhaka is one of the most vulnerable megacities in Asia
- The ready made garment industry is described as an “economic success story,” in which employment opportunities are opened to women and to reduce gender gaps
- But the women in the readymade garment industry sector work long hours and their food and water environments remain very poor in terms of quantity and quality
- Data on women workers’ food intake and food budgets illustrate difficult situations
- Intersectoral approaches are required to address underlying structural problems
3. Panel Discussion

Syeda Khairun Naher (Joint Secretary, Women Committee, Ministry of Labour & Employment)

- In the garment sector, women’s educational attainment is particularly low. Seventy percent of women workers lack educational qualifications. They are victims of a male dominated society and left without opportunities for exercising their legal rights.
- In addition to raising awareness about their rights, trade unions can negotiate with companies to provide financial support such as fares allowance, bonuses, and other benefits.
- After the incident at Rana Plaza in 2013, two projects provided financial assistance to garment workers, which were supported by Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) and Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA) under the Ministry of Labour, the Workers Welfare Foundation and the Central Fund:

After the incident of Dhaka Garment Factory Collapse in 2013, there were some improvements in welfare support for garment workers. This was led by the Ministry of Labour and additional costs incurred for this improvement were funded by BGMEA and BKMEA. Support includes:

1. Accidental disability allowance
2. Allowance for maternity leave
3. Education allowance for meritorious children of workers
4. Compensation allowance to the families of the slain workers
As the worker representatives, we will cooperate in the implementation of three issues that you have emphasized in this workshop today.

Md A.K. Azad (Head of Program, ICCO Corporation)

- ICCO Corporation ([link](#)) works for supporting women’s income generating activities such as micro enterprises, and addresses issues related to water and sanitation, health and hygiene issues, and nutrition.
- Women garment workers’ working conditions have improved, but there are still some issues.
- Bangladesh is a male dominated country. Women’s responsibility for domestic work is another burden for women garment workers.

Prof. Dr. Md Abdus Salam (Department of Aquaculture, Bangladesh Agricultural University)

- Garment workers primarily live in the Hatirpool area where low-cost houses are available, but living conditions and sanitation conditions are poor.
- Garment workers have time constraints as they work long hours. They do not have the time and money to invest in their own health in terms of nutrition and health care.
- Some practical suggestions for improving their well-being include establishing day care centres for working mothers, and improving transport and communication systems for poor workers.
- It is estimated that 50% of the pollution in urban areas could be reduced by implementing green city ideas like rooftop gardens, electric vehicles and more green space in the city. These ideas would also help lower summer temperatures.
- Data shows that 77% of women garment workers have anemia. There are some practical suggestions to improve nutrition such as introducing protein and micronutrient rich foods (e.g., using fish powder) for the poor, changing rice-dependent food habit, and encouraging consumption of more nutrient dense foods.
4. Remarks by Chair

Dr. Khairul Bashar (Country Director – Bangladesh, Harvest Plus)

- There are significant nutrition gaps to be addressed; for example, garment workers have very limited time for their food consumption and quality of life.
- They buy cheap vegetables, potatoes and rice in the evening or night.
- They suffer from lack of exposure to sunshine (Vitamin D deficiency) and other micronutrient deficiencies (zinc, iron).
- Biofortified foods may be a good idea such as biofortified rice and bread, nutrient-rich vegetables, and processed fish products.
- We need to incorporate these issues explicitly into existing policies.
- This research project is promising and should bring good recommendations and practical actions.

5. Introducing the project

Dr. James Garrett (Senior Research Fellow, Alliance Bioversity-CIAT)

James briefly introduced this project. His presentation is available [here](#).
6. Discussions

Dr. Shawkat Ara Begum (Country Director, Practical Action Bangladesh)

- The issues of garment factory workers are closely linked to rural poverty and climate change.
- Urban development requires holistic approaches considering both technical and structural issues.
- It is important to develop urban infrastructure (water and sanitation systems), provide microfinance, and improve nutrition for the poor urban residents.
- It is also important to address structural problems by engaging with relevant institutions in a cross-sectoral approach and by setting up clear policy goals (especially those associated with SDG 8).
- Current major approaches remain sectoral, and many initiatives are scattered.
- Bangladesh’s economy heavily depends on women garment workers, yet their working and living conditions remain poor. There have been a few improvements after the 2013 Dhaka garment factory collapse.

Dr. Rudaba Khondker (Country Director, GAIN Bangladesh)

- Three things are important: accessibility, affordability and desirability for improving food consumption among garment workers.
- We need to segregate the readymade garment factories located in EPZ areas and outside the EPZ areas.
- Building partnership is important to launch such ideas like a food system dashboard and urban planning development.
- It is also important to support individual worker’s skill development to ensure they are not excluded from the fourth industrial revolution.
- Our honourable prime minister spoke on 23 September 2021 about resilient and sustainable food systems and raised this issue again on 7 December 2021, indicating the government’s commitment to this issue.
- The idea of cross-sectoral interdisciplinary approaches is very important to address environmental problems, food systems, and gender inequality.

Ideas on MSc module on the ‘Gendered dimensions of UPU Food Systems’ at BAU

- We can build on existing curriculum gender education and develop a new curriculum through insights from this research project.
- This is a great timing as we want to make curriculum revision next year in January 2022.
- We want to reduce the courses to ensure a three-month internship program for all other four faculties.
• Agricultural research tends to focus on productivity with scientific problems of and solutions for nutrition and food safety. They lack understanding of human behaviours and underlying social problems of farmers.
• Our students should have broad perspectives to address complex problems

Suggestions for organizations to collaborate with

• Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA)
• Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA)
• FAO
• Danish International Development Agency (DAIDA) – Practical Action Bangladesh has an ongoing project
• Dutch Government who supports biogas
• FAO, GAIN, and the John Hopkins are currently working on Dhaka food system dashboard in Dhaka South, North, Narayanganj and Gazipur until March 2023
• The ministry of agriculture
• The ministry of science and technology
• Women garment workers should be invited next time

7. Speech from Chief Guest

Prof. Dr. Lutful Hassan (Vice-Chancellor, Bangladesh Agricultural University)

• The ground water level of Dhaka city is going down so the idea of the rooftop gardening needs to consider available water systems
• The government is interested in reducing the pollution in Dhaka
• Partnerships among NGOs, the public sector, the private sector, the governments, universities are critical to address urban issues as Dhaka city is a heritage of Bangladesh
• Water security to ensure clean water is important and public and private partnerships can help introduce technologies and innovations already adopted in developed countries
• The introduction of aquaponics has a great potential
• There are some garment factories who offer food, day care and health care, those can help women workers’ and their children’s wellbeing significantly
• The issues of family such as divorced women should not be neglected, and social works could provide support
8. Closing remarks

Dr. Nozomi Kawarazuka (Scientist, CIP)

- Special thanks to Chief Guest Dr. Lutful Hassan and distinguished guests and participants including students.
- CGIAR highly values stakeholder engagement with local experts and decision-makers
- We received concrete technological innovations and actions and various approaches to policy change. These ideas are so important and valuable
- Urban areas represent inequality and young women garment factory works are symbols of those inequalities. This is a global concern because Bangladesh is involved in global markets
- Historically, inequality is always reinforced by crises. And now we have multiple crises such as COVID, a global economic recession and climate change
- We need new thinking, new methodologies and new approaches. The key word here is “cross-sectoral”
- With this small group of experts from various sectors who are knowledgeable, we can bring new ideas together to address the problem of inequality
Acknowledgement

This workshop was funded by the CGIAR GENDER platform and the gender cluster of the CGIAR research program on Roots, Tubers and Bananas.
Appendix 1: Project summary

Project title
Transforming the Rules of the Game: Gendered Liveability in Peri-urban Dhaka

Project Overview
The Readymade Garment (RMG) industry fuels economic growth in Bangladesh, employing 4.4m workers, of whom 80% are women. Given rapid urbanization and migration - increasing economic opportunities for women is strategic to narrowing gender gaps in South Asia.

However, rapid urbanization also creates unprecedented governance challenges in Dhaka, which has grown by 43% and its population from 6.6 to 21.7 million in the past 30 years. For women workers - precarious RMG employment comes at a cost of systemic challenges - including unpaid domestic labour, poor housing, water supply and sanitation infrastructure, and unaccountable, masculine formal and informal governance systems.

Very little is known about how opportunity, governance and liveability play out in peri-urban Dhaka, and interventions rarely address the root causes of complex food and water challenges, which have gender implications.

This proposal aims to answer the following questions:

• How does gender, power, politics, and difference play out in the governance of food, water, environment systems in the peri-urban locations where RMG workers live and work?

• How do social positioning and gender relations determine connections to institutions, and wellbeing including food-related experiences?

Our focus in this project is to analyse how nested formal and informal institutions impact the gendered dimensions of food insecurity, agency, and empowerment. We will generate evidence through transdisciplinary research methods, including theatre, in partnership with grassroots stakeholders, in ways that can strengthen collective political voice of RMG women workers, improve their social

1 Berg et. al. 2021
2 Crotti 2021
3 Zimmerer et. al. 2021
4 World Population Review 2021
5 ILO 2021
6 WWF 2021
7 Joshi et. al. 2021
8 Lewis and Hossein 2017
9 Pande 2020
10 Chappel 2018
11 Frontino 2015
standing, relations, capacity and agency to demand more accountable food-water-environment governance.

The research is a collaboration between 3 CGIAR partners: IWMI, CIP and ABC, and the Bangladesh Agricultural University, the BotTala Theatre group and RUAF.
## Appendix 2: List of participants

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<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Designation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Professor Dr. Lutful Hassan</td>
<td>Vice Chancellor, Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU)</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>UKM Shawkat Ara Begum</td>
<td>Country Director, Practical Action</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Dr. Rudaba Khondker</td>
<td>Country Director, Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN)</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Syeda Khairun Naher</td>
<td>Women committee, Member, Ministry of Labor &amp; Employment</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Md Abul Kalam Azad</td>
<td>Head of Program, ICCO</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Prof Dr. Md Abdus Salam</td>
<td>Professor, Department of Aquaculture, Faculty of Fisheries, Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU)</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Md Shahidul Islam Rony</td>
<td>Senior Assistant Secretary and Assistant Project Manager, Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA)</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>Sirajul Islam Rony</td>
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<td>9.</td>
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<td>10.</td>
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<td>13.</td>
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<td>Nilufar Sultana</td>
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<td>16.</td>
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<td>No.</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Position and Affiliation</td>
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<td>26.</td>
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<td>33.</td>
<td>Farhana Hussain Ibrahim</td>
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CIP is a research-for-development organization with a focus on potato, sweetpotato and Andean roots and tubers. It delivers innovative science-based solutions to enhance access to affordable nutritious food, foster inclusive sustainable business and employment growth, and drive the climate resilience of root and tuber agri-food systems. Headquartered in Lima, Peru, CIP has a research presence in more than 20 countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

www.cipotato.org

CIP is a CGIAR research center
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CIP thanks all donors and organizations that globally support its work through their contributions to the CGIAR Trust Fund: www.cgiar.org/funders

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