Research Project Summary

Becoming Poor: Social protection experiences of and attitudes towards new urban poor after Covid-19 in Bangladesh

Project lead

Dr Keetie Roelen, Institute of Development Studies

Key personnel

Lopita Huq, Narayan Chandra Das, Maheen Sultan, Zeeshan Abedin, Md. Shakil Ahmed, Shahaduz Zaman, BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD) at BRAC University

Vidya Diwakar, Institute of Development Studies

Expected project outcome

Greater awareness among key stakeholders of the psychosocial challenges in rebuilding livelihoods of those having fallen into and remained in urban poverty since Covid-19, and how social protection can help to alleviate such challenges.

Setting the scene

The Covid-19 pandemic has led to a reversal in declining poverty trends for the first time in 30 years, turning back the clock on progress towards reaching SDG #1. In Bangladesh, 19.5 million had fallen and remained in poverty by August 2021 since the start of the pandemic. Poverty increased by twice as much in urban areas compared to rural areas. Enduring restrictions in response to new spikes in Covid-19 infection rates, with the last lockdown as recent as July 2022, suggest that many millions of the 'new poor' are now facing long-term socioeconomic uncertainty. High inflation rates and increases in the cost of living are likely to compound this further.

Policies that reduce poverty – such as social protection – have great potential to counteract stress, reduce stigma and foster inclusion. However, design and delivery of such policies can make matters worse if premised on negative attitudes and pejorative treatment.

The disruptive and enduring impact of Covid-19 on livelihoods in Bangladesh is relatively well-documented. Little is known, however, about people's lived experiences in relation to unforeseen and rapid changes to living conditions, especially for the new poor, and the psychological consequences of impoverishment and engagement with social support aiming to mitigate its effects.

Methodological approach

This study takes a mixed methods and interdisciplinary approach to generate much-needed evidence on wide-ranging effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and effectiveness of policies that sought to mitigate its socioeconomic effects.

Research activities

1. Literature review and secondary data analysis will frame our understanding of the impact of Covid-19 on the 'new urban poor' in Bangladesh, including in comparison to 'chronic urban poor', and map social protection interventions available before, during and after the pandemic. We will use the PPRC-BIGD livelihoods survey for identifying localities where the rise in 'new urban poor' has been most persistent, and possibly select research participants who were identified as poor.
2. Primary quantitative data collection will consist of a survey on psychosocial experiences associated with falling into poverty, living in socioeconomic insecurity and receiving social protection. We aim for a sample of 300 'new urban poor' and 300 'chronic urban poor' to provide for ample statistical power and stratification by gender and age. We will select two urban survey sites based on analysis of the PPRC-BIGD survey.
3. Primary qualitative data collection will includes (i) focus group discussions with 'new urban poor' and 'chronic urban poor' (estimated 8 total), (iii) case studies with 'new urban poor' and 'chronic urban poor' families using multiple methods (estimated 10 total), and (iii) key informant interviews with policy makers and frontline workers having designed and implemented social protection to mitigate shocks of the pandemic (estimated 10 total).

Stakeholder engagement activities

Early engagement of key counterparts will help shape the research and identify appropriate channels for advocacy and impact across in-country and international stakeholders in social protection and social policy more broadly. We will identify "policy champions" through existing, well-established networks and strong existing in-country relationships within Government of Bangladesh (GoB) and beyond (e.g. BRAC, UNICEF, ILO, Terre des hommes) and through the policy-oriented workshops. These relationships will also be leveraged to identify specific policy engagement opportunities.

We develop a suite of research and communication outputs tailored to meet different audiences' needs (e.g. language, level of detail about research, policy-level versus practice oriented recommendations), including:

- IDS Working Paper
- BIGD and IDS Policy Briefs
- BIGD and IDS Practice Briefs
- Journal article
- Policy engagement and dissemination workshops

Primary CLEAR theme: **Poverty and vulnerability**

Secondary CLEAR themes: **service delivery, accountability and governance**