



## Urban Governance and Service Delivery Mechanism: A Slum Based Study of Dhaka Metropolitan

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### ABSTRACT

Urban governance encompasses the mechanisms used to manage cities, including public administration and the delivery of services. Effective urban governance is crucial for achieving sustainable and inclusive growth. This study focuses on the most underprivileged group in society: slum dwellers. It uses a quantitative approach to examine the issue. Dhaka Metropolitan is the primary area of focus, with data obtained from the 'Urban Informal Settlement Survey-2016.' The author analyzes the functions of the Dhaka Metropolitan service delivery system and the main responsibilities of each department. Next, the study describes the living conditions and livelihoods of slum residents using descriptive statistics, including pie charts, bar diagrams, and tables. MS Excel is used for this purpose. The findings highlight the limitations of slum administration and the reasons behind unreliable service delivery. Additionally, the provision of basic services is inadequate, leading to poor living conditions for the urban poor. This study shows that governance in the Dhaka Metropolitan slums has several areas for improvement. The service delivery system is not functioning properly. The findings also reveal the quality of life of the urban poor, their heavy dependence on informal non-agricultural sectors, poor housing conditions, and limited access to essential services, including healthcare, potable water, sanitation, and education. Ultimately, integrated policies can help address the challenges of service delivery and governance in urban slums by fostering accountability and transparency.

**Keywords:** Urban Governance, Slum, Dhaka Metropolitan, Service delivery, Life and livelihood

## INTRODUCTION

In the past few decades, the term urbanization has become more commonly used, and countries worldwide have experienced this phenomenon. Where there is urbanization, there is planning and governance. Without these, chaos often ensues. Although urbanization has many positive aspects, without proper governance, residents cannot enjoy the benefits of urbanization and development. Good urban governance encompasses key components, including participation, the rule of law, effectiveness and efficiency, transparency, and responsiveness. Urbanization offers various benefits, including higher literacy rates, improved education quality, and better healthcare (Moore et al., 2003). Additionally, it provides opportunities for cultural development. While, urbanization delivers social and economic advantages, it can also have adverse effects, especially when it occurs rapidly. These negative impacts include environmental degradation, social disparities, persistent poverty, insufficient utilities, inadequate educational and healthcare facilities, and increased crime and violence. Although financial and technical factors are vital for sustainable cities, the most crucial element is the nature and quality of governance. Metropolitan residents are generally better off than those in rural areas, but urban slum dwellers often lack basic necessities. This study focuses on them, as they are among the most disadvantaged citizens of the country. Over the last two decades, Bangladesh has achieved remarkable progress in social and economic indicators. The Dhaka Metropolitan region has increasingly become the center of the country's growth, industrialization, and urbanization (Ahmed & Ahmed, 2019). As cities grow, employment opportunities and economic activities expand.

However, along with rising GDP and income, issues of inequality and discrimination emerge. Many vulnerable and marginalized people live in these urban areas (Islam et al., 2013). Dhaka Metropolitan is divided into two City Corporations: Dhaka South and Dhaka North. Several slums are located within these jurisdictions. Major slums in Dhaka South include Dhalpur, Pura, Driver, Nubur, City Palli, Powerhouse, Mannan, Dhaka Mach Colony, Monsur Beel, Nama Para, Rail line slum, and Kamrangirchor. The Dhaka North slums include Korail, Begunbari, Daucipara, Bhola, Molla, and Vashantek. Dhaka's slums represent one of the most complex urban challenges in the developing world. While the city thrives with economic ambition and rapid growth, its slum residents, often invisible, bear the burden of broken systems and fragmented governance. An estimated 40% of Dhaka's population lives in informal settlements, existing alongside luxury developments but lacking access to basic services, voicing silent desperation amid glaring inequality (Ahmed et al., 2024). In these

communities, traditional governance, along with the public institutions meant to serve as safety nets, either fails or is overtaken by informal power brokers and rent-seeking intermediaries (Basu et al., 2012). This study examines the everyday realities of these densely populated, unofficial communities. It examines how residents navigate formal and informal governance structures to access essential services, highlighting how both systems often fall short. Therefore, this study argues that meaningful reform must involve not only restructuring institutional frameworks but also recognizing the human toll of neglecting the fight for clean water, reliable power, sanitation, and the dignity to govern one's own life.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Nuru and Mohammad (2014) mentioned in their paper that Dhaka Metropolitan City has 9.13 million people at a growing rate of 5.0 percent in a survey in 2005. But most surprisingly, out of 9.13 million people, 3.4 million live in the slum, at a growing rate of more than 10 percent year on year. The percentage of the slum population within the overall population has also increased from 25 percent in 1996 to the current 37.4 percent, occupying an area of only 4 percent of the total DMA area 3. Here, we have conducted a literature review on the major characteristics of urban governance.

### **Governance Structure & Coordination Failures**

Jessop (2002) stated that local autonomy, economic growth with sustainability, market forces with quality of life, and the needs of the highly skilled with the economic development of the entire city. This harmonization at the urban level is good governance. Karim (2023) highlighted that overlapping mandates, weak autonomy, and political control among central and local agencies cause fragmented and inefficient service delivery in urban areas. Banks and Roy (2011) further noted that until the mid-1990s, slum residents lacked even voting rights, opening space for local “mastaan” power brokers to distribute services selectively and obstruct accountability. Nazrul (2013) observed that good urban governance demands attention to several key indicators, such as participation, transparency, accountability, responsiveness, authority, rule of law, decentralization, coordination, efficiency, and leadership. These structural issues undercut systemic coherence and leave slums stuck in governance gaps.

### **Political Economy & Informal Power Dynamics**

Lata (2020) documented how informal syndicates in Dhaka's slums control utility access, collecting illegal fees and involving complicit officials. This “parallel governance” means the

urban poor often pay more for services yet remain marginalized, reinforcing entrenched inequality and urban precarity. Sheng (2010) identified that many national governments of Southeast Asia have adopted policies of decentralization and privatization, and these improve urban governance and service delivery. Pierre (1999) pointed out that in most local government systems, decentralization has enabled subcultures in the organization to build stronger networks with their environments. Although this has impaired central control, it has many cases enhanced the governing capacity of these organizational segments.

### **Service Vulnerability & Health Risks**

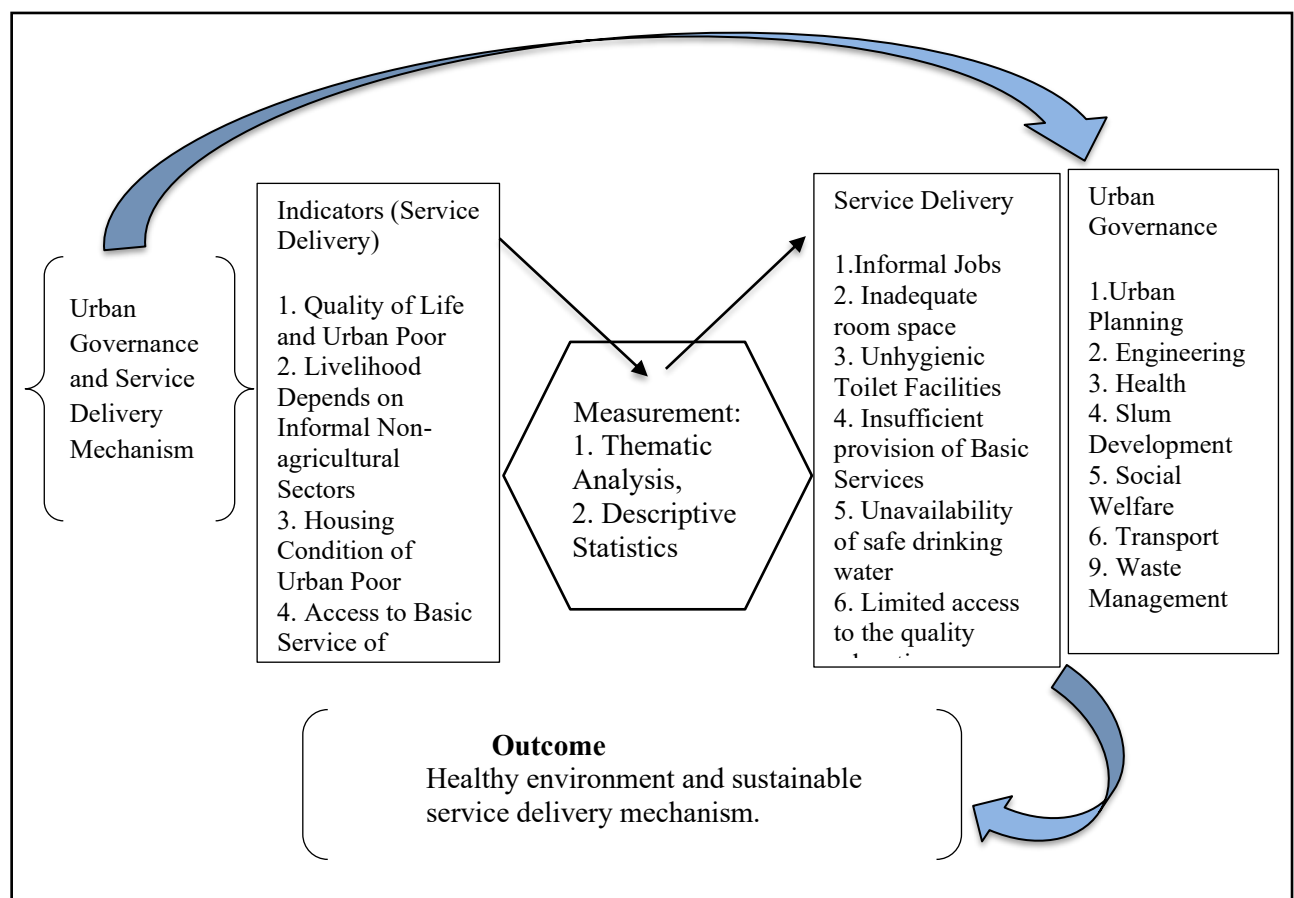
van der Heijden et al. (2019) found that slum residents rely on pharmacies for immediate relief, facing treatment delays and workplace disruptions. Similarly, Tadesse et al. (2023) demonstrate that inadequate Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) infrastructure, lack of ventilation, and improper waste disposal lead to increased disease exposure. Alan Gilbert (2006) observed that much more competent administration, putting public finance in order, investing heavily in public works, improving public transport, and servicing many low-income settlements the quality of governance can be improved. These deficits are larger governance failure points with direct ties to structural neglect.

### **NGO & Grassroots Interventions**

Taufiq (2021) reports that NGOs and grassroots actors have introduced creative solutions ranging from equity-focused programs to urban greening initiatives like Ashar Macha that bypass systemic neglect. However, the broader sustainability of these interventions is limited by insufficient integration with formal governance systems.

### **Socioeconomic Vulnerability & Service Access**

A BMC study by Hasan et al. (2024) across Korail and Shyampur slums reveals that nearly half of the households endure “severe vulnerability” due to a lack of utilities, limited education, and inadequate access to healthcare. Raihan et al. (2020) identified three fundamental institutional weaknesses in Bangladesh’s development: the supremacy of ‘deals’ over formal industrial policymaking, ineffective regulations, and a weak state capacity. They also noted that these three fundamental institutional weaknesses are not independent of each other. Mahmood et al. (2022) also show that in Dhaka, 80% of slum dwellers were excluded from COVID-19 relief due to political bias and a shaky administrative system.



**Figure 01:** Conceptual Framework

**Source:** Author's Constitution

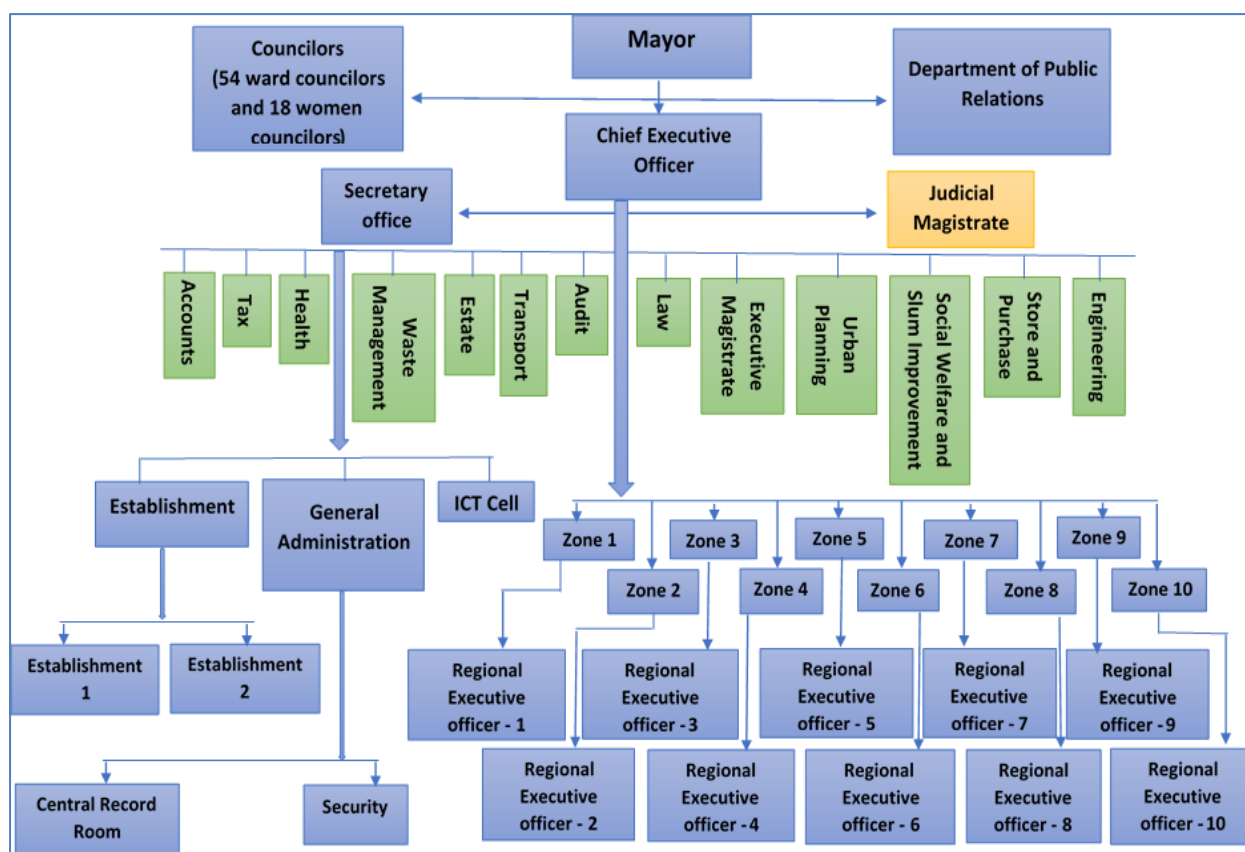
## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study has used a quantitative method. In this regard, this study has used the secondary data from “Urban Informal Settlement Survey-2016” as a data source. The survey collected data from 600 urban slum homes in both City Corporations, 10 slum households from 57 medium and large-sized slum communities, and 5 slum households from a total of 6 small slum communities. The sampling frame for this study came from the 2014 BBS Census of Slums and Floating Population. Urban slums or slum communities were divided into three strata: small-sized slums (5-10 homes), medium-sized slums (11-200), and large-sized slums (more than 200 homes). The Primary Sample Units (PSU) in the survey were the slum communities. There were a total of 3,360 slum settlements with more than 5 households within the Dhaka City Corporation. PSUs were allocated equally between stratum 1 (small and medium-sized slum communities) and stratum 2 (large slum communities), using a combination of PPS and practical allocation. This study has utilized different descriptive statistics to analyze the data,

i.e., pie charts, horizontal bar diagrams, and tables. In this regard, the authors have used the Microsoft Excel application.

### **Organizations of Urban Local Government of Dhaka Metropolitan**

Urban municipal governments and city Corporations were regulated by their own rules till 2009. With the amalgamation of all prior laws, declarations, gazettes, and acts, the government established a new legislation titled the Local Government (City Corporation) Act 2009. Through the Act, Dhaka City Corporation has been separated into Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) and Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC). The City Corporations are governed by a two-tier administrative system, where the upper tier is termed the “city corporation” and the lower tier is designated the “ward.” As per the Local Government Act 2009, the Mayor is the leader of the City Corporation as well as the approving authority for administrative, budgetary, policy, and decision-making affairs, and the Ward Councilors are the focus persons for each ward. The Mayor and the Ward Councilors are elected by the universal adult voters for a 5-year tenure. There is the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) selected by the government, who is the executive head of the organization as well as the regulating authority of all departmental activities. In exercising his/her power and fulfilling duties, he/she is responsible to the Mayor. To execute the administrative duty smoothly, each city corporation has been divided into 10 administrative Zones. Each Zonal office is led by a Zonal Executive Officer (ZEO) and retains oversight power for controlling all tasks within the respective Zone. In exercising his/her power and fulfilling tasks, he/she is responsible to the Chief Executive Officer. The Figure 02 organogram of Dhaka North City Corporation is provided below:



**Figure 02:** Organogram of Dhaka North City Corporation

Source: Retrieved from <http://www.dncc.gov.bd/dncc-setup/organogram-of-dncc.html>.

## Functions of Service Departments

Several departments are closely related to formulating and implementing policies and actions corresponding to citizens' needs and desires, which could promote the quality of public services. The following table presents the key functions of some such departments.

**Table 01:** Key Functions of City Corporation

Departments	Functions
<b>Urban Planning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Ward-based GPS mapping.</li> <li>➤ City beautification.</li> <li>➤ Restrictions, regulations, and prohibitions to be imposed concerning the development of sites and the erection and re-erection of buildings within the city.</li> <li>➤ Heritage &amp; risky building identification and development scheme.</li> </ul>
<b>Engineering</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Proper lighting of the public streets.</li> <li>➤ Plant trees on public streets and other public places.</li> <li>➤ Construct, maintain, and improve the adequate drainage system</li> </ul>
<b>Health</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Mosquito control activities.</li> <li>➤ EPI (Expanded Program on Immunization) activities through routine immunization programs for children &amp; women.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Clinical service through the hospital, maternity centers, and charitable dispensaries.</li> <li>➤ Food and sanitation activities</li> </ul>
<b>Waste Management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Collecting, transferring, and final disposal of the Waste.</li> </ul>
<b>Transport</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Revenue collection from bus terminals.</li> <li>➤ Cleaning the terminals.</li> <li>➤ Ensure security and service to passengers.</li> </ul>
<b>Social Welfare</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Establish, manage, and maintain welfare homes, asylums, orphanages, widow homes, and other institutions for the relief of the distressed.</li> <li>➤ Execute and undertake rescue and relief activities during a natural disaster.</li> <li>➤ Organize rallies, tournaments, cultural festivals, sports, etc.</li> </ul>
<b>Slum Development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Shelter for child pavement dwellers.</li> <li>➤ Increasing the potable water supply and sanitary conditions in slums.</li> <li>➤ Improving drainage systems in slums.</li> <li>➤ Providing pre-primary and non-formal education to urban slum dwellers.</li> <li>➤ Provision of training and micro-credit for self-employment and income generation activities, based on their existing skills.</li> </ul>

**Source:** Author's Compilation, 2025

## RESULT AND FINDINGS

### Quality of Life and Access to Basic Services of the Urban Poor

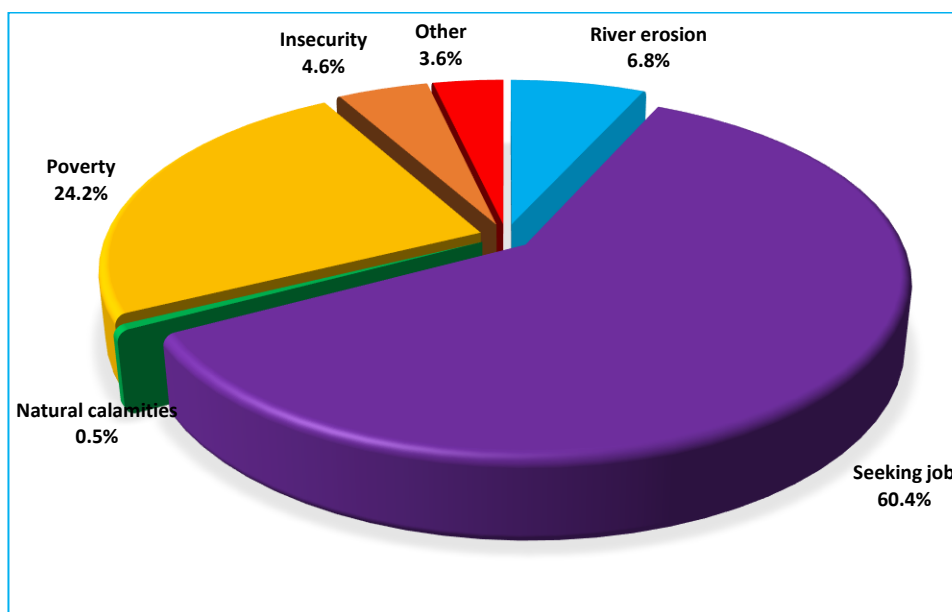
Dhaka's slums serve as the poor's primary dwelling environment. The Government of Bangladesh defines slums as: "A cluster of compact settlements of 5 or more households that generally grow unsystematically and haphazardly in an unhealthy condition and atmosphere on government and private vacant land." The definition also includes six general characteristics of slums: small structures made of very cheap materials; high population and structure density; lack of land ownership; "inadequate" and "unsafe" water supply and sanitation systems; inadequate lighting and road facilities; and low socioeconomic status (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), 2015, pp. 15-16). Arguing that governments often overlook development issues due to ambiguous definitions and a lack of data, Patel et al. (2019) found that the Bangladeshi government's definition yields significantly lower estimates of slum populations than those classified by the international development community. Lata (2020) claims that "the urban poor's housing rights are denied both by the state and by the market in Dhaka," citing a case study from the city.

This section examines the quality of life and access to essential amenities among the urban poor, using secondary data sets such as the Bangladesh Informal Urban Settlement Survey-2016.



### Getting a Job is the Main Reason for Migration

According to the World Bank's 2016 urban settlement survey, it is determined that almost all people living in the slums of the Dhaka Metropolitan region have migrated from different parts of the country for various reasons. As Dhaka is the heart of the primary number of businesses in Bangladesh, the majority (about 60%) of those living in the slums travel to Dhaka to seek employment, as shown in Figure 03. Besides, roughly 24 per cent have stated that they have come to Dhaka owing to Poverty, which is closely tied to the challenge of obtaining a job. Among others, river erosion & insecurities are key factors driving migration to Dhaka and living in the slums.

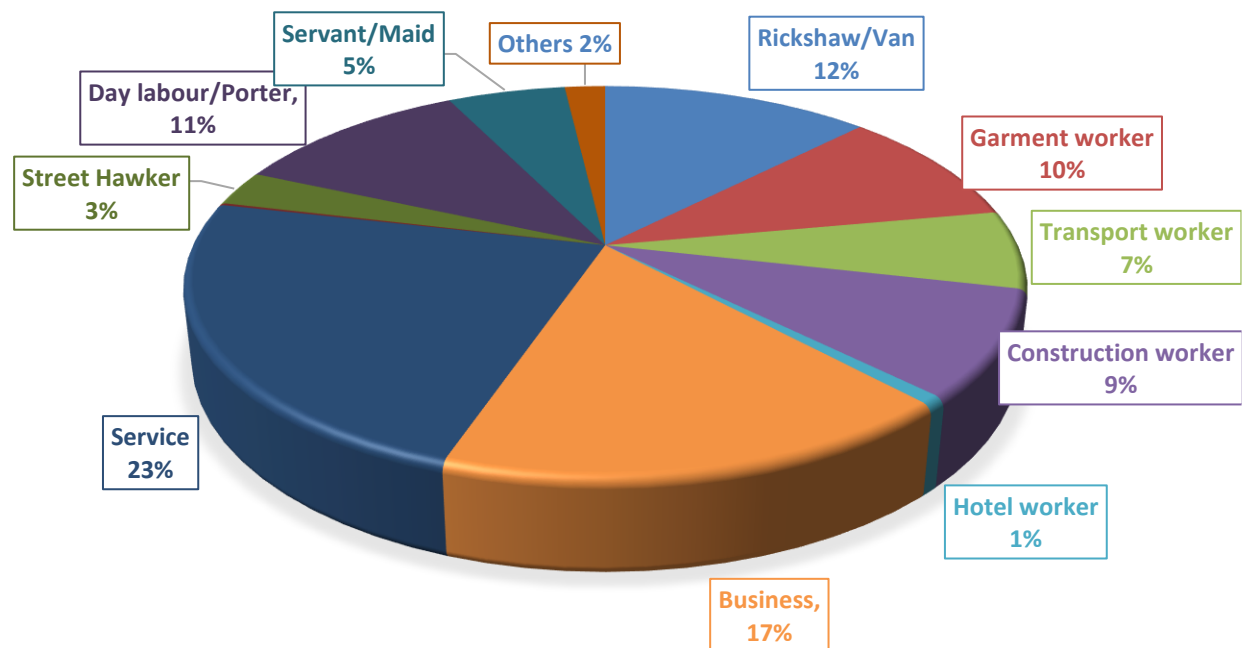


**Figure 03:** Reasons for Migrating to Dhaka

**Source:** Bangladesh Informal Urban Settlement Survey, 2016

### Livelihood Depends on Informal Non-agricultural Sectors

As it is observed that people living in the slums of Dhaka city are highly vulnerable to economic shocks, it is essential to understand that the risk arises from the fact that the majority of households (an estimated 85.1 per cent of workers) in the slums depend on informal earning sources. It is obvious from Figure 04 that a bigger share of households' main source of earnings is service, 23 percent, and small business, 17 percent. Nearly 10 percent of the households living in the slum area have stated that their major source of earning is the garment and most of the garment workers normally live in the slum area. The sources of income of the households are Rickshaw 12 percent, day labor 11 percent, and construction worker 9 percent.



**Figure 04:** Household's Main Source of Income

**Source:** Bangladesh Informal Urban Settlement Survey, 2016

### Housing Condition of Urban Poor

To indicate the living standard of urban slum households, the dwelling condition can be an essential indicator. Bangladesh Informal Urban Settlement Survey, 2016, observed that just 25 percent of the households living in the urban slum regions have their own house, while the majority of them, 72 percent them live in leased housing. Since most of them live in rented dwellings, they have to pay a greater fraction of their total earnings on housing rent, which makes them more vulnerable, given the fact that most of them rely on low-earning informal sector work.

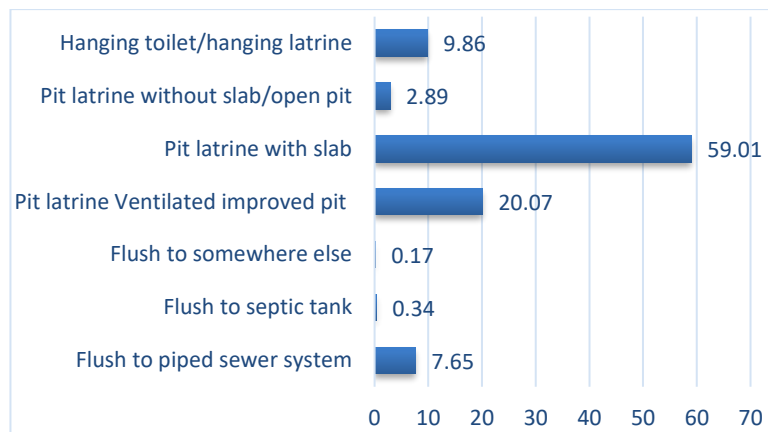
### Inadequate Room Space

Having a suitable number of rooms for all household members is a significant measure of the standard of living. It is noted from the Bangladesh Informal Urban Settlement Survey, 2016, that roughly 80 percent of the households living in the urban slums have only one room, while the average size of their households is 4. This shows that the majority of them live in an unhealthy environment. The primary reason for having only a few rooms, proportionate to their family size, be the exorbitant house rent in the Dhaka metropolis. The majority of urban poor live in “Kacha” House, which is another crucial indicator of the housing status might be as the

type of building of the house. Data showed that roughly 60% of households reside in Jhupri and Kacha dwellings. It is virtually impossible to maintain a healthy living state when someone lives in a Jhupri or Kacha home. Furthermore, severe temperatures, as well as waterlogging, bring misery to the people who dwell in Jhupri and Kacha dwellings.

### Unhygienic Toilet Facilities

The sanitary condition, specifically the toilet facilities of the homes, might indicate their overall standard of living. From Figure 05, it is obvious that a bigger majority of the families, 59 percent in the urban slums, utilize pit latrines with slabs. However, it is also obvious that roughly 10 percent of the homes utilize hanging toilets, which should be the most serious issue.



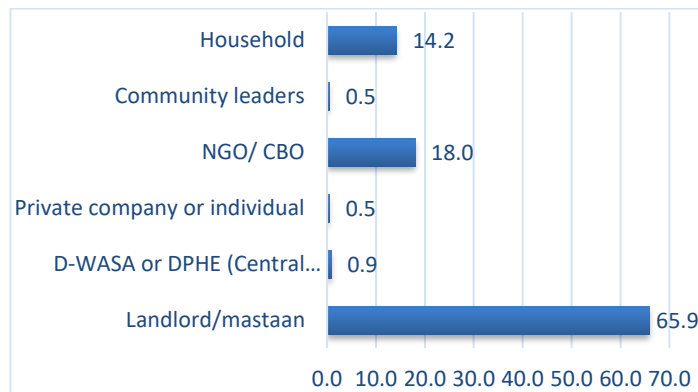
**Figure 05:** Nature of Toilet

**Source:** Bangladesh Informal Urban Settlement Survey, 2016

### Provisions to the basic services for the Urban poor:

#### Inadequate Provision of Basic Services from Government Agencies

Given the fact that there is a shortage of toilet facilities in the urban slums, it is necessary to comprehend how the problem can be remedied. But to achieve that, it is vital to identify who is now supplying the toilet facilities for the slum households. From Figure 06, we can see that roughly 65 percent of the households utilize the toilet facilities installed by the landlords, whereas a lower percentage of them use toilet facilities installed by the government agencies. Therefore, government institutions and NGOs can play a significant role by building toilet facilities.



**Figure 06:** Authorities Installing the Toilet Facilities (%)

**Source:** Bangladesh Informal Urban Settlement Survey, 2016

### Supply of Safe Drinking Water is Inadequate

The most essential measure of the standard of living of households is the availability of safe drinking water. It is obvious from Table 2 that most of them, 70.6 percent, drink water that comes from the pipe into the compound, yard, or plot, and public tap/standpipe, 18.7 percent. As a larger number of families rely on public tap water for drinking, they have to share the same supply with other households. From Table 1, we find that around 17 percent of the homes have stated that they utilize a water source that is shared by more than 40 households, while around 50 percent of the households have indicated that their water source is shared by around 10 to 40 households. This depicts the paucity of drinking water in urban slum families.

**Table 2:** Supply of Drinking Water

Sources of drinking water		Number of households sharing the same water source	
Sources	Percent	Categories	Percent
Piped into the dwelling	7.9	Less than 10	34.1
Piped into the Compound, yard, or plot	70.6	11 to 20	31.0
Public tap/standpipe	18.7	21 to 30	7.5
Tube well, Borehole	2.1	31 to 40	10.1
Bottled water	0.7	More than 40	17.4

**Source:** Bangladesh Informal Urban Settlement Survey, 2016

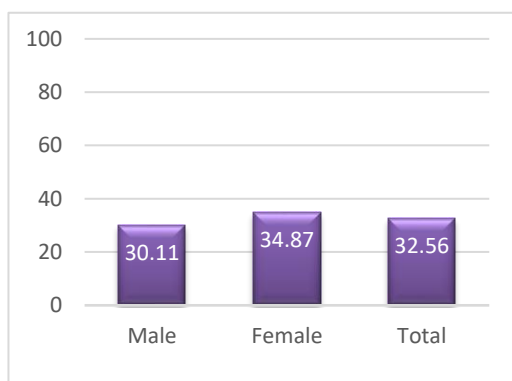
As safe drinking water is rare in the urban slums, it is vital to establish more sources of drinking water. Bangladesh Informal Urban Settlement Survey, 2016 showed that roughly 60 percent of

the households stated that their water source has been installed by the landlord, while only 15 percent of them responded that it is by the WASA.

### Inadequate Access to Education

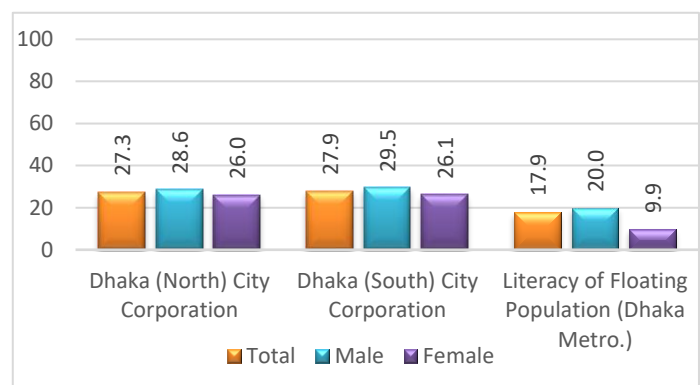
Education is one of the primary indicators of a country's standard of living. It is obvious from the Bangladesh Informal Urban Settlement Survey, 2016, that roughly 32 percent of the urban population aged more than 7 have never attended a school, which suggests that almost one-third of the urban poor can't access education. Bangladesh Informal Urban Settlement Survey, 2016, finds that the literacy rate among the slum population is roughly 30 percent, which is drastically below the national literacy rate. The literacy percentage for the floating population of Dhaka city is about 20 percent. These data reflect the dreadful status of the urban poor's access to education. However, in urban areas, the social Assistance is quite unsatisfactory according to the Bangladesh Informal Urban Settlement Survey, 2016, that just 4.42 percent of households have received any type of help or assistance in the past year. This means the social assistance program covers a very small percentage of disadvantaged urban households.

**Figure 7: Never Attend School (%)**



Source: Bangladesh Informal Urban Settlement Survey, 2016

**Figure 8: Literacy Rate (%)**



Source: Bangladesh Informal Urban Settlement Survey, 2016

## DISCUSSION

Based on the above findings, the study reveals that the living conditions and livelihoods of slum dwellers are far below standard. Most of them migrated in search of better job opportunities and eventually took up informal jobs. The majority of urban people live in rented houses with limited space and inadequate toilet facilities. Moreover, the toilet facilities are often unhygienic, shared by many households, which increases the risk of illness. Additionally,

access to safe drinking water is also inadequate; furthermore, children in slums often lack basic educational facilities. Due to the low social assistance coverage, all these factors lead to increased hardship and suffering among residents (Chowdhury et al., 2013).

Moreover, the government's involvement in providing these basic services is quite dissatisfactory, with most being supplied by local landlords for profit, and government support in this area is again very limited. Local governments often act not based on residents' needs but on political interests, skewing services toward those with local power (Gwayi, 2010). Coordination between local authorities and the urban poor is almost nonexistent, leaving communities disconnected from the systems meant to help them (Kader & Ullah, 2020). Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are absent, so no one is tracking whether aid reaches those who need it (Makanyeza et al., 2013). The constant movement makes it difficult for aid agencies to reach them consistently and for service providers to locate them. Their mobility reflects instability and complicates efforts to plan sustained interventions (Kwiringira et al., 2023). The issues are not only local; central and local governments often work in isolation, causing inefficiencies and confusion over responsibilities (Agyabeng et al., 2022). Local governments, nominally autonomous, are often hindered by political interference, and additionally, they lack the resources and capacity to deliver effective public services (Gwayi, 2010). Accountability and transparency mechanisms are often only on paper (Vian, 2008). Consequently, misdirected benefits and leakage are common, perpetuating inequality. These systemic flaws, including political influence, disjointed governance, lack of oversight, weak administration, corruption, and a lack of accountability, create a cycle where the most vulnerable remain unseen and unsupported.

## **CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

Governance in the slums of Dhaka Metropolitan has many issues, as the study found. Besides, not only are elected public representatives unable to address the solution, but also the officers of the administration are unable. The distress and sufferings of slum dwellers are beyond description, while governance isn't functional there. Furthermore, without registered residency or voter status, these communities often fail to attract political attention. Government works for those who vote, not those whose names aren't on the rolls (Banks & Roy, 2011). Even local governments, which could bridge this gap, are under-resourced and disorganized, lacking the structure needed to respond to these challenges (Swapan, 2014; Waliuzzaman & Alam, 2022). Perhaps most heartbreaking is the isolation these communities experience. This is more than

a failure of systems; it's a failure to acknowledge people whose voices are drowned out by transience, bureaucracy, and neglect. Moreover, this study examined the reasons behind key urban issues and obstacles to effective urban governance. In this circumstance, this study would like to recommend the following policies such as local government needs to be free from political influence, proper monitoring and evaluation need to be developed, coordination between the local government bodies and slum dwellers needs to be improved, and administrative mechanisms, as well as autonomy of local government bodies, need to be ensured. Besides, government organizations like Dhaka WASA and DESCO (Dhaka Electricity Supply Company Limited) need to be more active in ensuring the water, electricity, and education facilities for the slum dwellers in urban areas.

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### **Author's Contribution**

Conceptualisation- M.A.S. and S. U. S.; Methodology- S. U. S. and M.A.S; formal analysis- M.A.S. and S. U. S.; original draft preparation- S. U. S. and M.A.S.; writing- M.A.S. and S. U. S; review and editing- M.A.S., and S. U. S.; All the authors have read and agreed to publish this version of the manuscript.

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**Conflict of Interest**

The authors of this paper declare no conflicts of interest.



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