

Socio-economic Problems of the Urdu Speaking Residents at Mohammadpur

Background

Twenty million people became homeless and another one million died in the year 1947 due to the conflict between Hindus and Muslims when British India was divided into two States, India and Pakistan. Seven and a half million Muslims migrated to East and West Pakistan. Out of 1.3 million Muslims migrant in East Pakistan one million were from Bihar, rest were from Orissa and West Bengal. Because of vicious communal riot they had to take shelter in East Pakistan. Besides cultural and geographical difference they faced language problems in East Pakistan. As a result, from the very beginning they remained isolated from the mainstream population and this trend continues to date. Moreover after the liberation war of 1971 when Bangladesh became an independent country, its consequences made them more segregated and isolated.

In 1972 the International Committee for Red Cross (ICRC) built a number of camps in Bangladesh to assist this community. There were 25 camps in Mirpur and six in Mohammadpur. The six camps in Mohammadpur are : Geneva Camp, Town Hall Camp, C R O Camp, Market Camp, Community Center Camp, Staff Quarter Camp. The head office of ICRC is in Geneva. That is why one of the camps in Mohammadpur was named Geneva Camp. According to a survey (2003) some 2,75,000 Urdu speaking residents are living in several camps of Bangladesh. The population of Geneva Camp is 30,000.

Rationality of the research

Urdu speaking people living in different Camps have become a marginally displaced community since 1971. It is important to know their socio economic condition which will assist in identifying their problems, basic rights and demands and find solution to the problems.

Objective of the study

The general objective of the study is to know about the socio economic condition of the Urdu speaking people such as their living standard, day-to-day problem and needs and find out the root causes of various problems and identify their solution. Specifically to know :

- (1) personal and family information of Urdu-speaking people.
- (2) problems faced by them.
- (3) opinion of the residents on solution to their problems.
- (4) their access to services both in government and non-government sectors.

Methodology

Mohammadpur area of Dhaka city was selected as study area considering easy access, time limit and availability of research population (living in a clustered housing). The household heads of all the household of Mohammadpur Geneva Camp was the population of the research. A total of 230 heads of households were interviewed. Primary data were collected through direct interview with a pre-tested structured questionnaire written in Bangla. Some information were also collected from census reports, other research reports, open discussions and observations.

Limitations

As this research was a part of training course so the sample size was small. Therefore, generalization of the findings is not logical. The research was confined only to Geneva Camp due to financial and time constraints. Better information could be achieved if the research could be conducted in other camps too. Due to internal clashes in these camps, the investigators encountered some difficulties while interviewing.

Findings of the Research

(Results from observations, interviews and open discussions)

Sex and Age distribution of the respondents Family members

Total number of members in the respondents. families was 1326. Almost half of them were female. Most of the people are Sunni Muslims. There are also some Shia Muslims.

Age of these family members ranges between below one year to ninety years and fifty percent of them were in their reproductive age.

Accommodation and Utilities

- 1 The houses of camp are semi pakka. Most of the houses consist of one room. Some of the inhabitants reside in two storied buildings. They have two rooms on two floors. The staircases of these two storied buildings are so narrow that it is impossible for more than one person to climb at a time. The average size of a room is 80 square feet. They usually keep their house neat and clean. However leading a family life in such a small space is really difficult. In half of the families. three-generations live under the same roof. The position of bed is made high to protect it from flood. A little rain creates water logging. They informed that in dry season some members sleep under the bed.
- 60% families have televisions or audio devices.
- The bathrooms are open. There are a total 170 toilets in the camp. A large number of these toilets are unusable.
- There are no toilets in block 8 and 9 of the camp .The residence of those blocks use the toilets of block 3 (C).
- Aged people and children often use open drains as toilet at night. These drains remain full of garbage. Actually there is no complete drainage or sewerage system.

- Some better off families have built toilets in their living room (size about 3 Square feet). They had to arrange illegal water connections.
- There is no gas connection. So they use kerosene and wood for cooking. They cook both inside and in front of the living room.
- The supply of water is enough. But they informed that the water is full of dirt and bad odor. But they claimed if there is any problem in water supply line they have to repair it at their own cost.
- There is supply of electricity. Bangladesh Red Crescent Society pays the electricity and water bills. But some of the residents claimed that they pay the bills.
- The Dhaka City Corporation does not clean the garbage of this area. Neither do they spray medicine to protect the area from mosquito.
- There are 2 mosques, 14/15 small sized Imambara (Some ritual structure of Shia Muslim.s. But these are also built and used by Sunnis) and 8/10 video game shops in the camp area. There are two schools in the camp, which are used as community center on Fridays.

Economic Activities (Occupation, Income, Savings related information)

One of the major occupations of the respondent is handicraft, which includes sequin work, Jari, karchupi and related work. Most of the family members including women and children are involved in income generating activities such as in various handicrafts, Karchupi and selling homemade food item. There are some service holders mostly in non-government service. Some male-headed households working as drivers or caterer but do not allow their women to earn extra income through income generating activities.

Monthly income of the respondents Families

Lowest income of the camp dwellers family is Tk. 800 per month and highest is Tk 22000 and above. 60.42 % family has an income ranging from Tk.2000-Tk.6000 per month. Only 6.95% families have income over 10000, who are working as cook, driver, mechanic or engaged in small trade.

Women of 64 families are directly contributing in family income, which represents 28% of total sample size. Four families are female headed.

Family Income versus family expenditure

48.26% respondent opined that their family income is not enough to meet their family expenditure. They have to take loan to meet the family expenditure. Neighbors, Samity, grocery shop (buying product on credit) are their main source of credit. Some of them take loan from ASA as member of this NGO. Only 7% family can save from their income.

One respondent informed that he could keep his savings in a bank. But he has to use false identity to deal with the bank as they have no access

to commercial or any kind of bank. The main reason behind this is lack of guarantor and permanent address. They do not get any help from the office of ward commissioner.

Education

10% families do not have any literate members. 38.26% of total respondents have completed primary level education. 27.83% have educational qualification up to lower secondary (Class 8) level 11.74% respondents have an educational qualification up to SSC or HSC. Most of the children of the camp go to school.

More girls than boys go to school. Boys generally leave school after class 5 while girls are leaving after class 7 or 8. The main reason behind the drop out is financial.

They hide their identity to get admission to the schools. Students use false address instead of their camp address. They said that they do not get any help for education from the NGOs.

They have problems of enrolment in educational institution due to identification of nationality.

The expense of education including the cost of educational materials (books, paper, pen etc) is high for them.

Lack of security is also a reason.

General Disease and Treatment

Cold with fever are the common disease here. 31.8% percent respondents reported about these disease. There is also presence of waterborne disease such as Diarrhoea, Jaundice, and Typhoid etc.

They suffer from various kinds of skin disease.

The entire respondents take modern treatment.

They are conscious about mother and child health.

Densely populated environment, filthy water and lack of proper sanitation cause various disease.

There are 2 modern and 3 homeopathic medicine shops in the area.

Mother and Child Health and Family Planning

Generally they are conscious about mother and child health and immunization of mother and child. 69.57% respondent freely discussed about family planning without hesitation. This shows their positive attitude. 17.39% respondents did not give any answer to this question. 43.48% respondents use family planning devices.

Marriage and Dowry

The tradition of giving dowry is a common practice. Sometimes males live with wives families if there are limited number of male guardians. Presently there are some incidents of marriages between Bengali speaking population and Urdu-speaking residents.

Other Observation

- The major problem of Urdu speaking residents in Bangladesh is their nationality crisis.
- The main source of entertainment for the young is playing cards. There is limited scope of entertainment for the children in the camp.
- Only people of two out of nine blocks want to go to Pakistan. Rest of them want to live in Bangladesh and want citizenship.
- People of some older generation treat themselves as stranded Pakistani rather than refugee or stateless.
- Most of them think citizenship can solve all their problems. If the process of citizenship takes time they will demand improvement of accommodation, water and sanitation situation. They also demand the facility of free universal primary education.
- Some wealthy and educated people of the community moved to other areas. But residents of the camp said that they (who left the camp) have to face problem socially in renting houses etc.
- Traders and business people claimed that they are being discriminated. Some Mahajans (money lender) exploit them.
- A few of them are engaged in various crimes because of poverty. The police have no easy access to this area, so it may develop as a crime zone.
- Many of older generation still want to go to Pakistan. However, the young and middle aged are interested to get citizenship of Bangladesh.

Recommendations

It is important to find out the following issues :

- How does lack of citizenship affect occupation, land buying, banking facilities etc of Urdu-speaking people?
- The socio-economic condition of Urdu speaking residents living outside the camp.
- Urdu-speaking residents living outside Dhaka.
- Women's rights, violence against women with gender perspective.
- Child labor and schooling.

Any future study should incorporate these issues.

Necessary steps should be taken as early as possible about the future of this community through dialogue between Bangladesh and Pakistan at the government level.

Meanwhile they can be provided with the following facilities :

- Assistance of government to get adequate space for living.
- Providing gas facilities for domestic and business places.
- Increasing assistance of WASA to solve water and sanitation problem.

- Low cost water treatment method should be introduced through Government and NGOs.
- Increase facilities for low cost treatment of disease.

Comments and recommendations from the participants present at the discussion

Ms. Taleya Rehman

Ms. Rehman said this research was possible due to a very good teamwork and a friendly environment of the respondent. She had admitted that before this research she did not know about the miserable life of Urdu-speaking people living so close. She expressed her intention to work for this community especially for Urdu speaking women to make them empowered. She also mentioned that Democracywatch would come forward to develop the skills of the young generation Urdu speaking community.

Professor. A. S. M. Atiqur Rahman

Mr. Atiqur Rahman said that Democracywatch is working with the Democracy watcher. The participants are getting practical experience, knowledge, and learning how to conduct a research and the technique of presentation. He also opined that the traditional educational institutions have failed to provide such opportunity, which GGTP provided as such GGTP course attracting more student.

He said that we are aware about Palestine issue but we don't know the miserable condition of our Urdu speaking brothers and sisters.

He mentioned that people of this community are hard working. They have a rich culture and language. They have to hide their identity to enjoy some basic rights. But they are contributing to this country. This contribution can be amplified. A positive side of them is that after so much misery no one of them is engaged in begging. They are skilled people and have the potentiality to contribute more for the country.

Dr. C.R. Abrar

Professor of International Relations DU

Dr. Abrar said that Democracywatch has done a very praiseworthy job by engaging young people in this type of research activities on people who are deprived of the benefit of the development activities of the country.

The participants clearly chose the topic and tried hard to expose the situation of Urdu speaking community.

According to him ideals of liberation war cannot be achieved fully if people of all walks of life cannot be integrated in the development process. Democracywatch has been working to achieve this goal.

This type of research will contribute in breaking the misconceptions that all the Urdu speaking people want to leave Bangladesh and go to Pakistan.

He also pointed that the government doesn't have any program or policy to integrate this skilled community into mainstream development process. He also opined that these people are not truly benefited by the activities of different NGOs and government, even orphan children of this community do not have access to orphanage due to their identity crisis. The negligence of decision makers in this regard is the main cause of the identity crisis.

We should celebrate the diversity of culture in this country.

Professor Latifa Akand**Social Activist**

Mrs. Latifa Akand said that she is feeling sad and ashamed because she never thought about this community prior to this presentation. It's a matter of sorrow that culture is making a distance. One society can't be divided into two parts; we do not want segregation; one excluded pocket cannot be created in a country. We must accept the cultural diversity among us. We have to think about them as we are getting service from them. They are part of our daily life. She advised the community to protest against all discrimination. They have to fight for their basic rights. But she advised them to change their attitude about going to Pakistan.

Ahmed Illias**Executive Director, Al Falah**

Mr. Illias said no development is possible without study or research. This program has two major achievements. These are: through Democracywatch people are learning about the condition of the Urdu speaking community, specially the students knowing about them through interview, discussion and fieldwork. And the second one is people of this community can go to government and NGOs for initiative with this document presented here.

He also mentioned that the situation in Geneva Camp is more known to people.

Research should be conducted on other camps.

The community people need recognition. They or their forefathers came from India not Pakistan. Then they were refugee. As such they are not stranded Pakistani.

This community has immense prospect but no steps have been taken to use their potentialities. Their skill should be properly utilized. They should get educational support, support for learning computer and English which will help them to become self sufficient

**Comments from the representatives
of Urdu speaking resident****Khalid**

As a member of Urdu speaking community he said that too much research was conducted on Urdu speaking community. But the situation remains unchanged. He demanded the solution of their problem according to the constitution.

Hasan

He said that he is optimistic about the positive attitude of the speakers about cultural diversity. He also added that, as Pakistan is not concerned about this community why should they go there? They should try to settle here. For this they can go to UN and other donors.

Suggestions from open discussion

Dr. Khursid Alam Chief Executive

Bangladesh Institute of Social Research (BISR):

The information of the research should be more qualitative.

Nirban Paul

Information should be collected from the respondent about marriage related issues. It is high time Democracywatch take some development program for this community.

Durafshan. H. Choudhury

Senior Program Officer

UNDP

Ms. Afshan opined that the word camp should be banned. Because when it is mentioned as a camp it means the residents here are like transit passengers who would go to other country whenever they get chance. But they have to merge themselves with rest of the inhabitants of Bangladesh. They have to take responsibility for the maintenance of camp through Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Dhaka, so that whatever grant is allocated for them can properly reach them. They have to approach to UN agency for further assistance.

Conclusion

The research was conducted in a small range and had some limitations. The experience of this presentation ceremony was very significant for Gender and Governance Unit. The valuable remarks and recommendation by the panelists and the participants will contribute as a guideline for future studies and help in enriching the program. This research also creates a scope for further study about this community and finding a way to improve their condition.

Compiled by

Mahbub-un-Nabi

GGTP 3rd batch presented their research report on 24th July 2006 at Press Institute of Bangladesh (PIB) auditorium. Ms. Taleya Rehman-Executive Director, Democracywatch, chaired the occasion. A.S.M Atiqur Rahman Director, Institute of Social Welfare and Research; University of Dhaka moderated the session. Ms. Latifa Akand, Social Activist, Dr C.R. Abrar, professor Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka attended as panelists. Tahrunnesa Abdullah, Advisor of GGU, Durafshan H Choudhury, Senior Program Officer, UNCDF, Ahmed Illias-Executive Director Al Falah, representative from Geneva Camp also spoke on this occasion. A total of 80 participants including NGO leaders, journalists, and eminent personalities attended the session.