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Bhashantek Rehabilitation Project (BRP): The Rhetoric of Housing Project for the Urban Poor in Bangladesh

Rasheda Rawnak Khan[1]

Abstract

In general, this paper focuses on low-income housing, city planning and the state's intention in building a new housing project called Bhashantek Rehabilitation Project (BRP) in Dhaka, Bangladesh. In particular, it explores how BRP became a "failure" project dominated by different types of elites. Access to housing here in BRP is negotiated in the continuously changing arrangements of a complex between formal and informal rules and regulations. By focusing on this specific issue, this paper argues that the project was based on an exclusionary construction in the interactions within the project itself. It also examines how the dynamics of intermediaries further complicated the project. In addition, while acknowledging the power of the state's patronage for a particular class, such as the developer and the bureaucratic apparatus, this paper brings together many other issues on prevalent discourse on scientific city planning.

Keywords: Urbanization, Housing Project, Urban Poor, Formal and Informal Neighborhood.

Prelude:

The population of Dhaka is growing every day when there is not enough accommodation for them with citizenry services. As a result, one-third of the total population of Dhaka lives in informal housing where residents do not have adequate access to basic services. Due to their lack of participation at the policy level, these urban poor are given less importance towards proper housing, utilities and services. However, the Constitution of Bangladesh ensures that “each and every citizen will have an equal access to the basic necessities of life, including food, clothing, shelter, education, and medical care” (Article 15). In recent years, national policies of Bangladesh have been formulated to frame urban development, and state agencies have begun to address urban issues; however, specific guidelines for including the urban poor in times of rapid urbanization were not included. Mohit (2012) argues that policies have been adopted to deal with informal neighborhoods

[1] Rasheda Rawnak Khan (PhD, USA), Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology, Dhaka University, Bangladesh.

of Dhaka since 1975; however, these political approaches were ineffective because of large scale of the problem Specific problems included bad governance, dysfunctional land markets, corruption, and lack of political will. Recently, concerned state departments have begun to formulate their own policies and introduce development projects. One such is the BRP housing project of the Ministry of Land, whose main purpose is to allocate flats to the landless poor in the city.

This paper seeks to explain the politics of development of the state-produced projects in the light of two different arguments. First, it argues that the BRP housing project is based on an exclusionary construction in the interactions within the project itself. It also presents how the dynamics of intermediaries further complicate the project. In a second stage, while acknowledging the power of the government's patronage for a particular class such as the developer and the bureaucratic apparatus, its arguments bring together many other issues on prevalent discourse on scientific city planning.

Conceptual Debate: Urban Planning, Development Projects and Inclusion /and Exclusion

The discussion of this article is divided into three parts. First, it discusses some literature where scholars have shown how inclusion may occur through the development process. The second part discusses the scholarship where scholars have shown that development is a rational way of inventing scientific knowledge through political intervention, which extends the process of deprivation of the poor. Finally, this article will end this discussion with my empirical findings, identifying work of those scholars who are interested in calling the development a joint venture where inclusion might be achieved through community participation.

Numerous scholars (Dutta 2000; Schaferhoff 2014; Kaan 2014) studied partnership programs that attempted to provide long-lasting urban planning solutions. For example, Dutta (2000) argued that the urban partnerships of Ahmedabad in India formed with the collaboration of the city government, the private sector, local NGOs, and CBOs, which could modify the urban governance of India to accept more space democratic

decentralization and participatory development. National governments undertake development projects in poor urban neighborhoods, for example, upgrading the settlements and providing services and utilities or building housing development projects. In India, heavy investment was made to upgrade informal housing, as the new government wanted to end homelessness by 2022 (Jakhanwal 2014). Similarly, in Bangladesh, the current government wanted to provide housing to all by 2021(Khan 2022). To fulfill these ambitions, governments undertake various development projects involving state and private organizations. Influential local leaders of the community can communicate and bargain for interests with more powerful actors, including party leaders, members of parliament, ministers, bureaucrats, NGOs, and private agencies. Many of these projects also involve community participation for service delivery and other goals.

However, the studies on partnership programs were not aware of such type of politicization of these partnership politics that make it difficult to provide long-lasting urban planning solutions and excluded poor people. Community participation often takes place within the context of larger power structures. Choguill (1996) and Patel (2013) carried out research in the same upgraded informal neighborhood, Zwelisha, north of Durban, South Africa. They both focused on the relationships among the municipality, community leaders, and other residents, but their work shows the limits of top-down participatory strategies over time.

Following this discussion, this article will empirically show how intermediaries can create complications by participating in development projects. It will explain how the pattern of interactions between the urban poor, who are known as the landless and low-income group of people, and the state agencies, which are responsible for implementing and managing the BRP project. Before understanding the relationship between the local people and the authority, this paper will discuss whether the development intervention itself is exclusionary in the name of inclusion. Many scholars have studied the nature of development intervention (Escobar 1995; Ferguson 1994; Scott 1998). These scholars have shown in their research that development is a misleading phenomenon. This group

of scholars believes that development policies are unable to meet the needs of the 'target group' because of their reliance on 'scientific knowledge' and disregard for local knowledge and people's demand.

In this endeavor, this article will use Mosse's useful terms "social relations of successes" in aid projects, showing how a project's success is socially produced and the result of carefully managed representations of reality, using particular formats and forms of knowledge (Mosse 2005). In a different research, Mosse (2010) found that the very poorest people in India, such as Bhil migrants, could not gain benefits from a development project due to the asymmetrical reciprocity of clientelism. Many scholars argued that formal development projects possessed an exclusionary vision of the urban poor (Mahadevia 2011). Mahadevia (2011), for example, found that big money and big players in the urban space were promoted through formal development policy, opening up cities for control. Mahadevia found that the Mumbai development policy formulated in 2003 by an international consulting firm, McKinsey, emphasized political decisions by the state that excluded the urban poor.

Powerful actors capture programs to reduce urban poverty risk and end up deepening existing inequalities (Patel 2013; de Wit and Berner 2009). Because of this inequality, many urban practices benefit the elite. Rahman (2003) argues that in Bangladesh, urban policies reflected the interests of the dominant class, creating inequality through policies and development projects. Similarly, Nahiduzzaman (2006) argues that most of the private land development companies had strong financial or business dealings with higher government bureaucrats and strong links to powerful political leaders. In this vein, Harvey (2009) indicates that the structural conditions that privilege private sector development led to urban problems and excluded the poor.

Some scholars have shown that people can play a role in developing policy or at least negotiating to include their voice through community participation. Scholars have found that partnerships between the urban poor and state actors in upgrading programs can gradually redesign pattern of urbanization, citizenship, and the rights of the urban poor to

the city (McLeod 2011). Appadurai (2001) used the concept of alliance to discuss the work of a group of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that have organized around land tenure, housing rights, and urban services for the city poor of Bombay. The NGO-facilitated federation encouraged the urban poor to demonstrate and display effective strategies to achieve formal recognition (Appadurai 2001). I have explored whether the presence of NGOs in the BRP was available. Masuko (2008) showed that in 2011, few community-based organizations (CBOs) in the Harare neighborhood challenged the conservative way of housing provision against the city authority and struggled to include land reclamation.

In a similar vein, this article will focus on low-income housing, city planning, and the government's intention in building a new housing project called Bhashantek Rehabilitation Project (BRP) in Dhaka. Inspired by Scott's (1998) "Seeing Like a State," This research has explored how the urban poor of the city in the list of the proposed BRP project were identified exclusively as "vagabond migrants." They were seen as a "burden" and reduce the standard of city life. Over some time, the state agency, Ministry of Land, gathered the information through statistics (e.g., survey), and arguments were made to create legal categories of "squatter settlement" whereby unskilled homeless people migrating from outside Dhaka were solely identified as "in need of help." Thus, a very specific city problem in the city became an arena of intervention to build a housing project for the low-income groups. I take this argument further and show how in-migrants were treated as a "problem" in the city imputes the shortage of affordable housing.

Methodology

My argument is based on the government sponsored BRP project in the Bhashantek area of Mirpur from April 2017 to December 2018. Studying BRP was a part of my Ph.D. research project[2]. In researching how the urban poor are deprived in the name of city

[2] Unpublished PhD thesis, Khan (2022) entitled "Domination, Bargaining, or Control Over Their Lives: inclusion of the urban poor in Dhaka, Bangladesh." Department of Anthropology, American University, Washington, DC. To uncover the nature of the relationship between citizens and authorities, and the power of people to gain inclusion in entitlements, understanding people's political action is an important aspect of this study.

development, I concentrated with the respondents of the present BRP housing and some evictees of the Bhashantek settlement on which the BRP project was built. To explore inclusion and exclusion, I asked to what extent city authorities considered the urban poor as citizens, to what extent they were integrated into the economic, social, and political life of the city, to what extent they had access to housing, basic utilities, and services. How do they manage housing in this city? Can housing inclusion increase the assurance of more inclusion? The research methods included in-depth interviews, case studies, focus group discussions, and participant observation. I prepared myself to conduct fieldwork by creating questions for surveys and interviews of the respondents. A key aspect of the fieldwork was to discover how BRP residents are included and excluded and how they interact with authorities and incorporate themselves. I have also utilized legislative BRP housing project documents, rationale, inception reports and council debates, committee reports, and media commentaries to show how the state concerns housing problems in Dhaka city.

In my research questions, I hypothesized that by having legal status, residents of the formal housing project, BRP, would show more inclusion, for example, access to formal housing, than any informal neighborhood of the city. I employed comparative data analysis between the respondents of the BRP regarding their levels of access to housing. Regarding housing, I measured the level of inclusion and/ exclusion by examining aspects such as affordability, accessibility, stability of tenure and socio-political networks. For example, to understand the quality of housing, I examined accessibility to communal space, living conditions, housing structure, etc. To understand the nature of the relationships between the urban poor and the more powerful actors, such as political leaders and bureaucrats, I studied the diverse relationships of the respondents with different elite actors. These actors could be internal or external political actors and bureaucrats. It is important to know who can build this access and how people have built these networks. It is also significant to know who the elite actors are; they include bureaucrats, political leaders, police and NGOs. I examined the interrelationships of

powerful actors to neighborhood residents. I looked at how they were embedded with the politics of accumulation, everyday struggle, development projects, national political factions, the role of voting banks, and socio-economic relations and networks. I also studied how numerous service providers and government officials possessed diverse institutional and individual interests; this shaped the relations between the urban poor and these authorities. In essence, I looked at the number of different relations with powerful networks that people had to gain housing in BRP.

To understand socio-political activities and participation, I identified different modes. These are working in party politics, election campaigns, voter registration and voting, community activities within development projects, filing lawsuits, liaison with government officials through political leaders and bribery transactions, and organizing movements. For example, I studied how they brought lawsuits in the face of evictions. I examined how people could get BRP flats through political networks and relationships with powerful state and non-state actors. I looked at how they actively engaged in party politics to gain political inclusion and later used these political networks to reduce exclusion.

Participant observation provided me with important insights about communal relationships, the capacity to access power, and every day socio-political networking within and beyond the neighborhood. During fieldwork, I observed the everyday happenings of the BRP housing complex by watching how respondents and local leaders interacted, the gaps and contradictions between residents and service providers, and how these related to formal and informal power and connections.

Throughout the interviews, I investigated the relationships between the respondents and people in authority by asking research participants to discuss external relations and pressure in political decisions at home and beyond. I asked about their experiences, challenges, struggles, voting, political activities, and difficulties in accessing services and utilities. From the focus group discussions, I gathered data on interpersonal and communal relationships, and networks with NGOs. To investigate the relations between

the respondents with the project office in the BRP housing project, I asked about the relationships they needed to maintain with the project office. Were there any alliances among the flat owners and tenants? I looked at how the respondents interacted with local government offices, political leaders, and existing formal housing project power structure to gain benefits and solve problems.

The first issue of data collection was sampling. BRP is a smaller housing project, consisting of 18 buildings. I conducted a mini survey of 36 residents from BRP's eighteen buildings.

Upon completion of the survey, I selected 18 respondents from BRP. I was primarily concerned with the willingness of the respondents to speak with me as I noticed that many residents were afraid of conversing with outsiders. Therefore, I selected the BRP respondents based on different categories, such as length of stay here, type of job or business, engagement in party politics, victims of police harassment, etc. I was also aware of the respondents' residential status, whether they were flat owners or tenants, the relationship with the BRP office, etc. I was also keen to choose several building representatives, protestors against the BRP administration, etc. I also interviewed few respondents from diverse authorities. They included governmental officials, NGOs, political party leaders, police, civil society members and the chief of the private developer for BRP.

Table 1: Number of Respondents

Respondents	Number
BRP respondents	18
Bhashantek informal neighborhood respondents	3
Bureaucrats, NGOs, media and civil society members	9
Party Political Leaders	2
NSPDL chief	1
BRP office chief	1

Source: Fieldwork, 2017-2018

To understand the nature of evictions and destitution, I also interviewed three evictees from the Bhashantek informal neighborhood who did not receive flats in BRP. Throughout the paper, I call them the Bhashantek evictees. They had deposited money in the bank for the flats and filed cases against the private developer company, the North South Property Development Limited (NSPDL), and the Ministry of Land (MOL). They resided in a different neighborhood near the BRP project and were continuing their legal fight. Their interviews helped me to understand their legal battle. A few of the BRP respondents helped me to find them.

BRP as "Development Project"

BRP is a state-produced formal housing project meant for the landless urban poor. In its "vision" to modernize, the government of Bangladesh undertook the housing project for the urban poor. Broadly speaking, it was driven by the modernistic concepts of development with a focus on industrialization and urbanization. Like many urban experts and politicians, local government and leaders also started to see certain conditions of poverty and backwardness as a problem; therefore, a new domain of thought and knowledge, namely, development, arrived as a new strategy for dealing with the alleged problems (Escobar 1995: 6). Initiated in the developed areas such as the USA and Europe, this strategy became in a few years a powerful force in the Third World (Escobar 1995: 6). The development thrust by the developing countries is shaped and reshaped by the models followed by the West. Within this process, the elites of the developing countries are in alliance with the elites of the developed countries and stand against the interests of the poor segment of their societies. The development planning reflects this rich-poor cleavage. Therefore, it is obvious that these types of notions such as industrialization, urbanization, and development are the "illusionary words" of the First World.

In short, the government created a low-cost housing project known as the Bhashantek Rehabilitation Project (BRP). The primary objective of it was to provide a permanent home to the city's underprivileged scattered people who used to live in informal

neighborhoods, especially to relocate the homeless. An earlier attempt in 1975 to provide legalized housing areas for the urban poor in the same neighborhood Bhashantek in Mirpur was not entirely successful (Choguill 1987). As both the affordability and sustainability aspects of that project were faulty, the resettlement process was disruptive (Choguill 1987). Since then, different governments have conceptualized resettlement projects within Dhaka; however, no government has so far taken action. Many hoped that the new BRP housing project would be successful. Fully funded by the government of Bangladesh, it prompted local and state actors to engage with urban rehousing.

Figure 1: BRP Map (Source: Google map)

The construction work was to be carried out under the full control of the government, and the poor would receive housing. The "beneficiaries" were supposed to be relocated from the informal neighborhoods and lower-income groups such as low-level staff of government and private offices, although, as will be seen, the reality was different. Like the previous 1975 effort, it also failed to resettle the urban poor (Kabir 2013; Mohit 2012). In the following section, I explore the ways in which state has intervened in the name of development.

The BRP: State Intervention Vs. Inclusion and/Exclusion

The following section investigates the processes and impacts of state intervention in the name of the rehabilitation project of the urban poor. In this section, I will analyze my

obtained data and discuss whether state intervention helps include the poor? Through presenting data, this article will show how state intervention itself excluded the urban poor from being entitled to housing in BRP.

In 1998, however, the Awami League (AL) government took the initiative to build a resettlement project in Mirpur. To implement this project, they chose the government land where the Bhashantek informal neighborhood was located, and more than 80,000 people lived. Around 3,300 families were evicted from the Bhashantek without any relocation or compensation to begin constructing the BRP housing project in 2003. The Executive Committee of the National Economic Council approved the BRP project in May 1998; work was to commence in July 1998 and be completed by June 2003. The Ministry of Land (MOL) was given the responsibility to implement this project. In 1998, when the MOL authority took the initiative to evict the settlers, the settlers created obstacles, organized themselves for demonstrations, and forced the authorities to move back. The project did not begin at the planned time due to political and bureaucratic complexity.

In 2001, after the national elections, the BNP came to power and, after two years, in 2003, the BNP government adopted the BRP project. On September 29, 2003, the Land Ministry signed an agreement with a private development company, the North-South Property Development Limited (NSPDL), to build the housing project and fixed the end date of the project in December 2009. The duration of the project was then extended until December 2010. The government was responsible for providing 47.90 acres of land, and the NSPDL was to bear the construction cost. On January 12, 2004, the NSPDL received the approval of RAJUK to begin construction.

It was laborious to evict a part of the Bhashantek informal neighborhood. This time when the Land Ministry and NSPDL tried to evict the inhabitants of Bhashantek, they reframed the project as an accommodation for the evictees. Nonetheless, the residents remained opposed to the eviction and new construction and prevented authorities from

commencing the construction. When the project faced strong protests from the inhabitants of Bhashantek, the NSPDL promised the settlers that they would receive the highest priority for new flats in BRP. A series of meetings were held with the concerned authorities in the face of a demonstration. With the support of political leaders and Members of Parliament, both Land Ministry and NSPDL finally succeeded in convincing some influential house owners and local leaders to move.

Figure 2: Bhashantek Protest (Source: Google)

The project was intended to be completed by the NSPDL; however, at one stage, the NSPDL took control of all affairs, including flat pricing and distribution. Therefore, the reality of the project came to be far removed from the government's objective of solving the housing problems of the poor. Some scholars have blamed the absence of the government for this (Begum et al. 2018), while others have blamed the corruption of a group of bureaucrats of the Land Ministry and the NSPDL (Hussain et al. 2015).

The project plan included approximately 111 buildings, which would accommodate 13,248 families. In October 2010, the Ministry of Land canceled the contract to NSPDL due to corruption, irregularities, and delays in execution. At this time, the NSPDL had only built ten (10) buildings instead of 111. These ten buildings included two buildings with 288 small flats (144 flats in each) and eight buildings with 768 larger flats (96 flats in each). The NSPDL pocketed 300m taka ($355,029,6) in additional profits by selling 1,056 flats in the buildings to well-off families at higher prices (Dhaka Tribune 2017). Not only that, the NSPDL did not maintain the formal process or get approval from the ministry for the list of recipients allotted as per the rules. Instead, it advertised abroad for

the sale of flats. In the wake of these allegations, the project was brought under the Land Ministry.

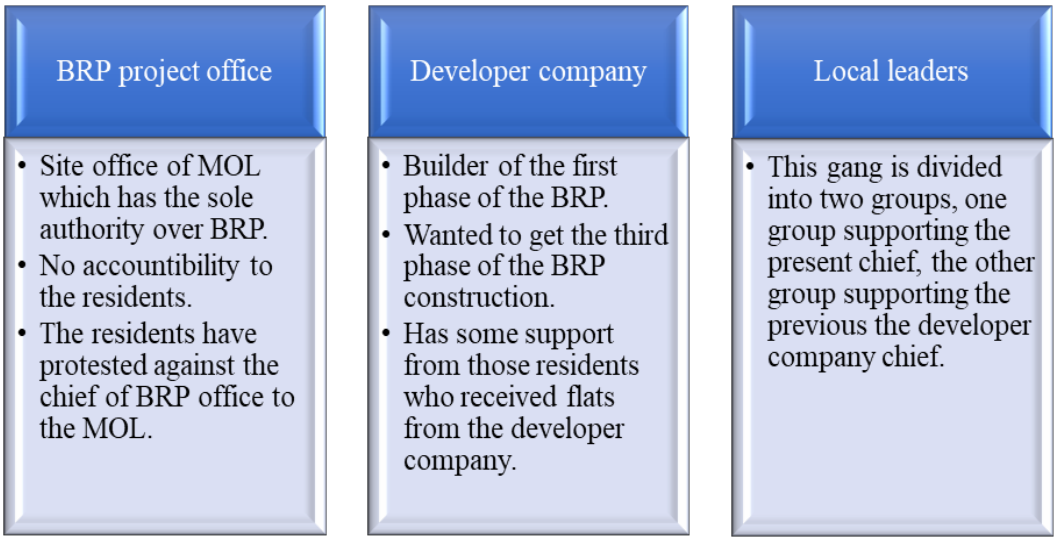

Figure 3: Political Structure of the BRP (Source: Fieldwork)

Although the authorities promised that evictees would be prioritized, the reality was different. More than 1200 households from the Bhashantek had made deposits to NSPDL for flats. However, most did not receive them as the NSPDL had sold the flats at higher prices to well-off clients. Respondents said that among these 1,056 flats, 500 were sold to well-off families who had a relationship with the NSPDL chief or with the bureaucrats, influential local leaders, and expatriates, and the rest of the flats were sold to the general public. These elite flat owners later rented out the flats to the Bhashantek evictees and other lower-income tenants such as garment workers, low-level staff of government, and private offices.

There is controversy over how many evictees were allotted flats in BRP. The NSPDL chief said that a significant number of evictees received flats though they could not buy them due to poverty. Among the poor evictees, some were forced to sell their flats due to a lack of affordability. On the other hand, respondents said that only eighteen flats were sold to residents of the Bhashantek; among them were four local leaders and three influential house owners. Moreover, the NSPDL sold flats at higher prices than the fixed

government rate ($2248 or 0.19 million taka for smaller flats and 0.35 million taka or $4201 for larger flats). Even then, many of those who have struggled to pay their deposits have not received flats. In many cases, the NSPDL authority denied them because they did not fill in the application properly, or they did not deposit the money on time, or the applicant was incapable of showing the appropriate residence form.

Later, the Land Ministry decided that those who had deposited money would receive flats in the new building during the 3rd phase. The government also resumed work on the project, and the Land Ministry built the remaining eight project buildings with the advance deposits of clients. In March 2015, the MOL proposed constructing twelve more buildings, three smaller buildings (432 flats), and nine larger buildings (864 flats). The senior Secretary accepted this on August 11, 2015. This third phase was not yet initiated, even in 2021.

Table 2: BRP Project Plan and Implementation Schedule

Project Implementation	Period
1st plan proposal	July, 1998
1st phase construction work started	June 2003
1st phase by the NSPDL (10 buildings)	December, 2010
2nd phase proposed by the MOL	June 2011
2nd phase completed by the ministry (8 buildings)	December 2013
3rd phase proposed by the ministry (12 buildings)	March 2015
3rd phase proposal accepted	August 2015
3rd phase construction work did not start yet	Until 2021

Source: Fieldwork, 2017-2018

During fieldwork in 2017, I found three (3) Bhashantek evictees as flat owners who considered themselves to be poor. According to a MOL bureaucrat, the price was fixed by calculating the construction and ancillary costs. He said that those who could not afford flats at such a low price would not survive in this project later. I cross-checked this information with both NSPDL and BRP chief. It was clear from their interviews that the flat was priced for those who could afford to buy a flat in installments and live here permanently while maintaining a minimum living standard.

'Development' Prescription and the Reality of BRP

The BRP project was created, using a top-down approach; it was prepared by bureaucrats, architects, engineers, consultants, but the residents were not consulted about their needs. The BRP's development project initiated a "vision" to provide housing to the urban poor, who are characterized as "Vagabond migrants." I discussed in the previous section that how the state did not pay attention to housing inclusion of its poor citizens. Also, the state did not monitor how developers and other elites became beneficiaries of this housing project. This section will discuss how the project was based on an exclusionary construction in the interactions within the project itself.

The respondent said that since the project has been built here by demolishing their previous settlement, many have been forced to stay in BRP due to their children's schools and other conveniences. As a result, they had to spend a lot of money on flat rent and utilities at the end of the month. However, the following discussion explores how these poor people have been deprived of social life despite living in the BRP as flat owners and tenants. Aleya Begam, who used to live in Bhashantek before eviction, now staying here in the project in a rented flat, said,

The housing project office (under the supervision of the Land Ministry), instead of distributing these flats among the Bhashantek residents to provide low-cost housing, was sold to the people of upper strata of the society who were able to pay more money. For example, my flat owner is a businessman who has two more flats here. Moreover, he

lives in an elite residential area in his own flat. I don't know how he could be an urban poor?

Rahela, a street food seller, said, though the NSPDL, the developer company, told them that when they demolished Bhashantek, they would build a housing project for them. According to Rahela, “they build it for the upper class who have enough money to buy, not for the poor like us.” Naimul, who worked in a shopping mall, said that “elite people bought these flats and now they rented to us. They didn't even come here for collecting rental money, we have to deposit it at their account, or their caretaker or assistant collects from us.” As many Bhashantek inhabitants moved to the project as tenants, they realized a change in their situation. At Bhashantek, many of them used to gain low-cost utilities from their house owners due to the nature of informalities. This was not the case at BRP due to its formal rules and regulation.

Some respondents stated that this development project excluded them from gaining flats and deprived them of enjoying their social life due to the bureaucratic management's constant surveillance. In BRP, after the cancellation of the government's contract with NSPDL, the Ministry of Land set up an office inside the BRP compound to manage it; this is called the project office. Shahidul, a respondent, said, "Those who come from the Bhashantek, we are leveling as “poor,” “vulnerable,” “slum dwellers,” “criminals,” etc. Whenever any bad occurrence happened here, police came at our flats first with the presumption that we are “slum dwellers,” so we might be involved with this crime."

The BRP residents had a less developed neighborhood social life due to the domination of BRP management. For example, BRP residents could not use NGO networks or community participation projects for any service like Bhashantek residents. Moreover, BRP residents did not have the opportunity to conduct political, organizational activities due to bureaucratic restrictions. For example, during Bhashantek eviction, they were engaged in the process of resistance. The Bhashantek residents had a sense of consciousness of the potential change of their identity. A comparative analysis between their identities at Bhashantek informal neighborhood and BRP housing made them aware

of the disadvantages of relocation to rehabilitation project. However, the BRP residents were not allowed to organize protest against the BRP office. Data found that the BRP management systematically ignored and sometimes actively silenced those flat owners who spoke. Tenants cannot lodge complaints because of their irregular status; this has weakened their ability to hold their owners to account.

Respondents also said that they missed their previous social life, which they used to enjoy in Bhashantek. Shahidul said, "we became isolated, cracked down from our own sociopolitical life. Most of the Bhashantek residents didn't get flat. So we became friendless, and here now people see us again as slum dwellers." Respondents, on their part, argued that the project was at a gated place, which meant commuting to other places could be difficult for them and under surveillance. Data found that during the eviction, the Bhashantek residents were opposed to the closing down of their accommodation and did not want to move to a rehabilitation project.

Data finds that the state did not pay attention to the evictees, and besides, a handful of “developers” did not have a relationship with the majority of the beneficiaries. Indeed, they have contracted various intermediaries with program beneficiaries; it is the intermediaries, not government officials, who visit BRP whilst community people are rarely consulted to the protected housing project. On a practical level, there is very little initiative to establish lasting connections with the poor; on a pragmatic level, to have intensified relationships would turn them into a local guardian. In the case of BRP, the Land Ministry makes claims for a formalized connection with the poor, which is described as "private- public partnership" in its objectives, and is largely mediated by the developers, has contracted to carry out its housing project. Indeed, by adhering to the international discourses of "urban development" and "helping the poor to help to house" via partnership, access to flats, and so on, their project aims ultimately at exclusion. Within city development discourse, the ultimate aim and proof of project success is the state's ability to disconnect, withdrawing themselves from the operation of the project they have initiated: this is the essence of "inclusion."

House ownership in Bangladesh is associated with political connection, especially to get housing in the development project like BRP. For example, three political leaders who moved from the old settlement, they all have had strong political connection and they all possessed multiple flats in the BRP, whereas common residents of Bhashantek neighborhood did not get a flat. They were active in local party politics and on the political committees. Among them, two flat owners possessed multiple flats and were politically powerful. Respondents reported that an elite businessman from a different area with political background owned eight flats in different buildings; however, he sold some of them after the media reported on it. Moreover, they usually had a cordial relationship with the BRP management. Some flat owners had to reach informal agreements with BRP management because they are renting flats informally; therefore, they must abide by any decision or accept corrupt practices from BRP management.

The significance of political connection became clearer when I met Nazma, who was the only woman among the 18 respondents, received flat by her name from the Bhashantek settlement. She was widow and politically active in local level and well connected. She herself admitted that if she did not have political connectivity, she would never been able to gain flat in the BRP. She added that having political connections as well as economic affordability was essential for acquiring flat ownership. Although the government had announced the project for the poor, it had been implemented in such a way that to gain a flat was beyond the affordability of the poor.

The majority of the respondents of BRP also reported that the primary obstacle to achieving housing inclusion was the lack of finance and individual savings due to poverty. After spending more than 25% - 30% of their income on their housing, and other expenses, including food and utilities was unaffordable for them. If a person received a flat in the first phase of the project, a buyer needed to deposit 10,000 taka ($118), and then 1,666 taka ($20) monthly installment.

This was not possible for some poorer respondents struggling to make ends meet. It was expected that a significant number of evictees would be allotted flats after the Ministry of

Land took responsibility for the project during the second phase. On the contrary, many respondents said that it became more impossible to buy a flat as the Ministry doubled prices. In BRP, affordability was as important as a political network to get a flat. Respondents who lived in small flats in the BRP had an annual income of around 100,000 taka ($1183), while larger flat respondents had an annual income of over 350,000 taka ($4,142). In BRP, the small flat owners or tenants had to earn at least 10,000 -12,000 taka ($118 - $142) per month as they had to pay house rent of least 6,000 - 7,000 taka ($71 - $83) excluding utilities. Some respondents said that sometimes if the income was less than 10,000 taka, they borrowed money from friends or acquaintances to pay rent.

Although the evictees from Bhashantek rarely received apartments, they lived in BRP as tenants. It was convenient to workplaces and children's schools. Therefore, they found it a good place to live, even with high rent. They said that their cost of living, including rent, almost doubled compared to the old neighborhood. Some BRP flat owners were forced to sell their flats when they could not pay. As I discussed before, those with a monthly income higher than 10,000 taka ($118) per month, can afford to rent in BRP. In the case of tenants, BRP residents need to pay within the first 10 days of the month, which creates pressure on them.

The above discussion emphasizes the importance of housing affordability and increased incomes; however, this pressure makes the BRP people more vulnerable. This discussion explored that how the lack of political connectivity and affordability excluded the urban poor to gain housing ownership in the city and how a top-down approach based project helped elite citizens to gain inclusion. In what follows, I will discuss in more detail.

Concluding Remarks

People can be included if they have access to secure housing, basic utilities and socio-economic services, participate in important decisions about their lives, and face the challenges of deprivation and opportunity. It is also important to build networks with state agents and other powerful actors and be able to organize in their interest. People can become more included if they can develop strategies of political action that compel

authorities to provide services and pressure policymakers to address their problems. Inclusion need not always be the result of formal structures; when people manage to obtain secure housing, basic utilities, and services through informal means, they may become more included. Socio-political relations, the presence of discrimination, the feeling of personal and communal safety and security, socio-economic networks, and political participation, can also be factored into critical dimensions of inclusion and exclusion.

In contrast, exclusion is any disadvantage that endangers or weakens inhabitants' everyday socio-economic and political activities. These disadvantages may threaten them with loss of education, health, jobs, money, shelter or services. They may face difficulties in maintaining formal or informal businesses, or face challenges in getting jobs, education, and secure housing. Exclusion disrupts normal life and can lead to social inequalities.

The BRP neighborhood is a government-initiated project to house the urban poor. It replaced the Bhashantek informal neighborhood, built on government land. This housing project involves contradictory objectives. Whilst the state does not provide entitlement rights, another involves the expectation that the urban poor will be given housing in the form of public displays of gratitude that enhance the state's international reputation. Moreover, Bangladesh has subscribed to international conventions, including SDGs, MDGs, etc., that the government should follow. Part of this contract involves an expectation by the Ministry of Land that through their housing rehabilitation project, a certain sort of "development" will emerge, in which urban poverty and housing shortage are solved, which aims to create via "the BRP," a neglected floating population of self-reliant housing.

I have highlighted the specificities in the BRP housing development project and the manner in which it led to exclude the low-income groups, but at the same time place this project as a test case of urban relocation system in city development. I have argued that BRP residents' relationship with BRP authority involves degrees of relationship. As I

have shown it closely, it would be clear that the power dynamics did not involve two clearly defined monolithic groups. As such, the events in this case study cannot be explained through the prism of a dualistic model of the power struggle between two monolithically constituted social groups. I have found that the true motive behind the urgency to find a solution to the housing problem lay in the economic interests of the intermediaries, including political leaders and bureaucrats themselves. Many of them were builders, landlords, politicians, and many other intermediaries and attempted to influence bureaucracy directly or indirectly. Amidst these divergent interests and voices, a vested interest group has gradually emerged which excluded the migrants from their entitlements as the primary occupants in this low-income tenement housing project.

The BRP is an example of creating housing projects for the urban poor as per the state's intent, as opposed to the development of informal settlements as an unintentional policy consequence due to the high-cost housing rent and land development policy in the city. The background helps to situate how and why the low-income groups entered the discussions in the housing project. The task of beautifying Dhaka city and constructing new buildings was entrusted under the rubric of BRP created specifically for this purpose. The project's policy aimed to distribute flats to the poor. Also, the project was assigned to advise the government on alternative living arrangements for inhabitants of low-income housing. This paper provides evidence by showing in the context of BRP that the project's activities caused a huge rise in the prices of flats. Consequently, the rehabilitation of the urban poor was denied, largely because of the concentration of flats in a few hands and forcing beneficiaries to pay high prices. The failure of the project to distribute flats at an exorbitant rate became a nightmare.

In many cases, poor owners were forced to sell their flats and were evicted on default of payments. Thus, the BRP, along with certain other developing companies, emerged as the biggest landowners in the BRP project. In 2014, the Land Ministry realized what a bureaucratic nightmare the project had become. Therefore, it put a lid on it and undertook a new project that intends to build houses for the low level of government service-holders. Therefore, the downtrodden urban poor have been perpetually buried under the

surface. The Bhashantek neighborhood was a by-product of the state's aim to establish a development project, which necessitated the relocation of the "poor citizens." The state had tried to rehabilitate the people of Bhashantek and bring it under its overt jurisdiction but failed. Scott examines how the authoritarian state attempts to produce its projects and offers a powerful critique of why these attempts are destined to fail. In BRP, too, the state's strategy of allocating flats in different ways, corruptions of the bureaucrats and developer company, fixing the high price - all these factors exclude the Bhashantek evictees of getting flats, which ultimately prevents them from the process of inclusion in the city.

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