

MEETING THE TRANSPORT AND ACCESSIBILITY NEEDS OF LOW INCOME COMMUNITIES IN GLOBAL SOUTH CITIES · DHAKA, BANGLADESH

ABOUT INTALINC

Our mission is to provide the evidence to ensure that *every human being has a basic right to affordable, safe, clean and reliable mobility resources, with a particular focus on meeting the needs of low-income populations and excluded communities.*

Since January 2017, the International Network for Transport and Accessibility in Low Income Communities (INTALInC) has worked to build collaborative, cross disciplinary partnerships in eight African and Asian cities. The University of Asia Pacific in Dhaka, Bangladesh is one of our case study partners.

The main aim of these collaborations is to develop a better understanding of issues impacting on mobility and accessibility in Global South cities, with a specific focus on the needs of the residents of low-income settlements and especially for vulnerable population groups, such as children, women, older and disabled people.

RESEARCH RATIONALE

- Transport is a key component of economic, environmental and social wellbeing, and increasingly so within the context of developing cities
- Due to a fundamental lack of access to transport services and resources, low income populations are often excluded from key, life-supporting activities, such as education, work, healthcare, social networking and leisure
- Where new transport systems are introduced, they do not take account of the needs and financial circumstances of the poorest citizens, and can worsen rather than improve their current travel conditions
- Little attention is given to transport poverty within the social welfare policies of developing nations, so that its consequences for social development are not adequately considered in the planning of cities or provision of public services

WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES

- To draw attention to the mobility and accessibility constraints faced by female garment workers living in slum settlements in Dhaka, and the vulnerabilities of female commuters more generally
- To explore with transport engineers the role quantitative research datasets and advanced transport modelling methods in understanding the specific travel and accessibility needs of low income women and female commuters
- To raise participants' awareness of community participation and co-investigation and qualitative studies as an important evidence-base, especially when used in combination with models
- To promote the use of mixed-methods approaches to build a stronger evidence base to identify the needs of vulnerable female populations and women workers from slum settlements
- To develop networks and coalitions across academics, policymakers and practitioners to develop a research into policy agenda for low-income female commuters in Dhaka

DHAKA STUDY CONTEXT

Bangladesh is projected to be one of the fastest growing economies in the world by 2050. Dhaka, the capital has a population of around 9.3 million and is Bangladesh's main commercial centre. Gender equality is as a key Sustainable Development Goal for Bangladesh, which has already achieved parity in school enrolment.

Low-income female garment workers are significant drivers of the country's economy, constituting around 85% of the 10 million workers in Dhaka's 5000 garment factories. They work shifts, often walking to work from Dhaka's slum settlements in which they live. Pedestrian infrastructures and facilities across the City are negligible, and so walking is unsafe and unpleasant. Pedestrian accident risks are high, pollution levels are well above World Health Organisation standards, despite conversion of the rickshaw fleet to concentrated petroleum gas, and exposure to street crimes and violence is an everyday threat.

Traffic organisation in Dhaka is chaotic, with virtually no traffic management, regulation or rule enforcement, leading to a lack of safe transport systems and walking infrastructures for everyone. However, female garment workers are disproportionately affected because they have no travel alternative other than walking.

Studies show that Bangladeshi women and girls cannot access the same life opportunities as men, partly due to the patriarchal, cultural constraints dictating their movements and activities. Women and girls are not encouraged to drive, cycle or ride motorbikes, despite the efforts of various campaign NGOs to empower women to claim back the streets.

Women and girls also face significant levels of harassment whilst travelling. The congestion on the City's arterial streets leads to excessive bus waiting and travelling times, overcrowding, and safety and security issues, adding to the vulnerabilities of female passengers.

The imbalance of supply and demand for public transport leads to heavy reliance on motorised and non-motorised rickshaws, adding to the traffic chaos, although rickshaws serve an essential accessibility function for middle-class female commuters, as well as a providing the primary source of income for their male drivers.

Dhaka's transport budget is primarily focused on road building, which serves only the minority, car-owning middle-class. One exception to this is the development of Dhaka's Metro and Bus Rapid Transit systems, which have considered barriers to female mobility in their design, although physical coverage is limited within the city centre and the actual implementation of components devised for ensuring equal access for women is unclear.

STUDY TOUR

Some workshop participants visited a local bus stop and observed the bus station environment and waiting and boarding activity of female passengers and the bus drivers. Others took motorised rickshaws trips around the city to better understand the safety issues and conditions of female commuters using these vehicles.

WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

The Dhaka workshop was attended by over 40 academics, policy makers and transport practitioners. Over the course of two days, they contributed to discussions with local and international stakeholders, conducted fieldwork looking at transport options for working women in the city, and listened to academic and stakeholder presentations.

Participants included:

- Researchers and students from the University of Asia Pacific, Bangladesh
- Researchers from the five UK Universities in the INTALInC partnership – Leeds, Durham, Oxford, Manchester, UCL
- Partners from overseas universities – Lagos State University, Nigeria; Cape Coast University, Ghana; Makerere University, Uganda; Centre for Economic and Social Studies, India
- Researchers from North South University, Bangladesh; Islamic University of Technology, Bangladesh; Shahjalal University of Technology, Bangladesh; Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology; University of Aberdeen, UK
- Policy officials from the Dhaka Transport Coordination Agency, Dhaka
- Representatives from non-government organisations (NGOs) – Work for a Better Bangladesh; Health Bridge; ARK Foundation
- A representative of the British Council in Bangladesh

INTALInC's research in Bangladesh was coordinated by University of Asia Pacific and University of Leeds



KEY FINDINGS

- Transport infrastructure in Dhaka is not designed with women in mind. Ground level pedestrian crossings have been replaced by bridges, which women are reluctant to use for security reasons
- Women's security concerns have a significant impact on their bus and rickshaw use and walking experiences
- Buses do not stop completely at bus stops, reducing access for passengers, particularly women who are generally less forceful when boarding. Men often take the seats on the public transport network that are allocated for exclusive use by women.
- Women who walk, many of whom are female, garment shift-workers, are regularly subjected to male harassment, or 'eve-teasing' as it is commonly referred to. This reinforces the streets as places that are unsafe for women to use
- A conservative and patriarchal culture means that women generally tend to be less vocal about their needs and rights. A number of NGOs are working with women to reclaim their rights to the public realm
- The vast majority of low-income, female commuters travel by walking, but walking does not currently feature in Dhaka's Strategic Transport Plan
- Although many slum settlements are located close to the city centre, they are physically isolated and cut-off from the city by walls, and so there are significant barriers to accessibility
- The needs of slum settlements are generally not recognised within city planning, nor are their populations counted in surveys. As such, the transport and accessibility needs of slum dwellers are not included in the future planning of transport in the city

Link to full report: <https://intalinc.leeds.ac.uk/media/asia/>



FUTURE ACTIONS

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| For research | Gather evidence to enable policymakers to draw better conclusions about the mobility and accessibility challenges faced by working and low income communities, and the women who live in them, in order to facilitate changes on the ground <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local academics should engage in activities that allow greater public dissemination of their research results to increase their policy impact, and to work with NGOs to undertake more grassroots coproduction of research with low-income communities |
| For policy | There is also a need to evaluate existing transport policy to understand how it addresses the needs of women, and most urgently to investigate the problems experienced by female bus users to inform the design of the planned BRT system to make it more inclusive <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A culture of pre-post and evidence based evaluation of transport projects and policies in Dhaka and other major Bangladeshi cities should be encouraged, to assess their contribution to meeting the needs of women |
| For practice | The net of research needs to be broadened to include cities other than Dhaka, and more interdisciplinary research between planners, policy makers and social scientists to break the technology and infrastructure-focused culture of transport studies in Bangladesh <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There should be a formal evaluation of existing NGO programmes for women's confidence building, leading to developing education programmes focusing on issues affecting women and directed at the |