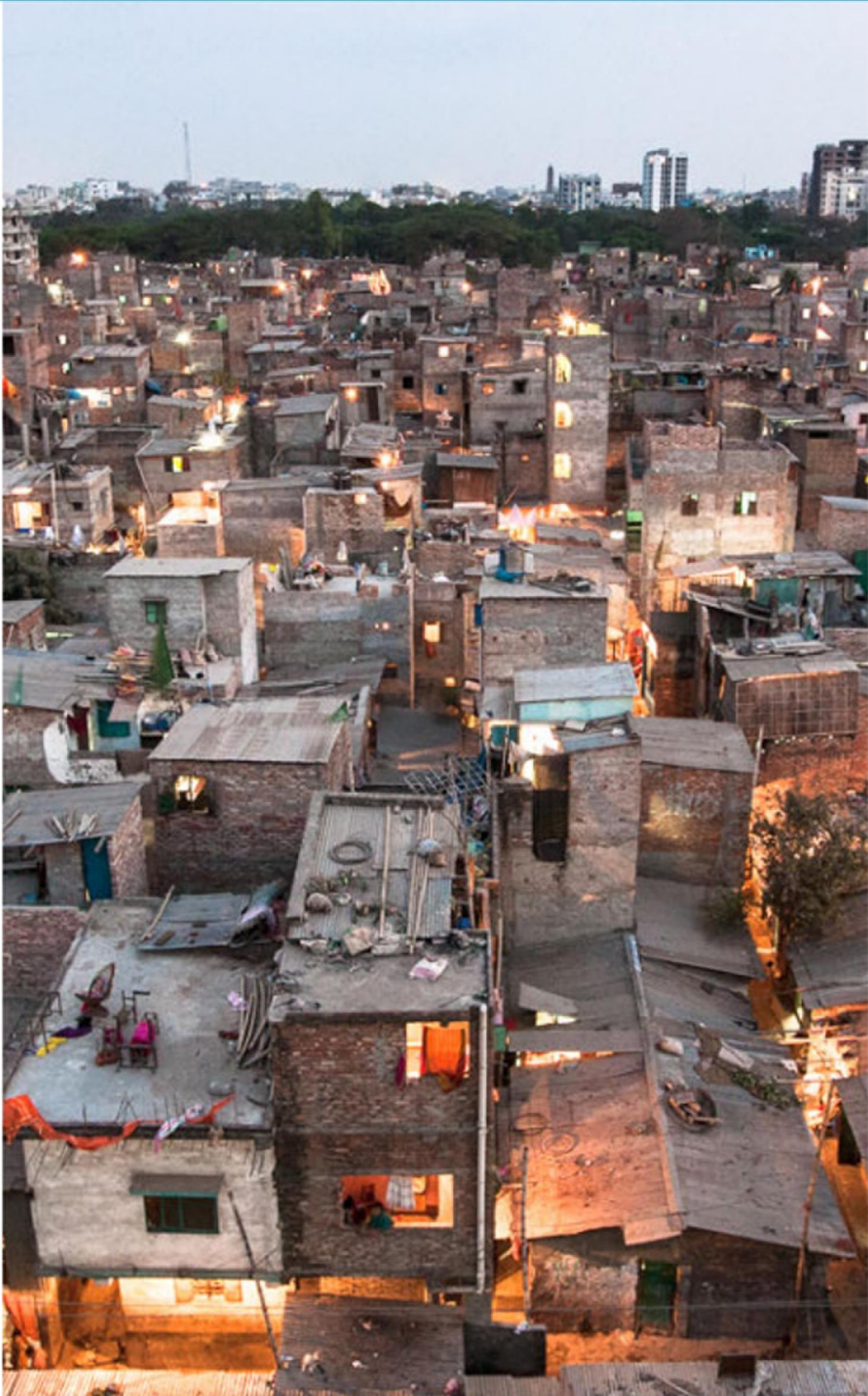




Community-Led Development of the Urdu-Speaking 'Bihari' Camps

Phase I Report: Focus group discussions, social mapping and workshops
October 2019 - March 2020

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Contributors:

Hannah Sholder
Rabeya Rahman
Khalid Hossain

Photos:

Noor Hossain
Shabnoor
Sonu

Design Layout & Drawings:

Rabeya Rahman

Project Partners:

Council of Minorities
Global Land Alliance

Funded By:

World Habitat
Ahmed Family Foundation

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Community-Led Development of the Urdu-Speaking 'Bihari' Camps

Project Overview

Background

In Bangladesh approximately 300,000 members of the Urdu-speaking linguistic minority have been living in 116 internal displacement camps (called Bihari Camps) since 1971. In 2008, the long-standing question of the camp-dwelling Urdu-speaking community's national identity status was resolved, when the Dhaka High Court reinstated their Bangladeshi citizenship. Now that they no longer are considered 'internally displaced' their rights to stay on the camps lands is in question. For example, in Mirpur there are active evictions given the value of the camp lands, and numerous proposals have been made by the government to redevelop Geneva Camp's land (the largest and most politically central camp).

Approach

This project seeks to catalyze the community into action so that they can not only have a say over their future but indeed actively shape it. With this in mind, the project will be quite long term, and is therefore broken down into phases. Phase I, which has already been completed, is discussed in this report. The other phases are previewed further in the 'Next Steps' section. The two camps that were chosen out of the 116 to be the pilots for this project, namely Geneva Camp and Adamjee Camp, were selected given their political centrality and amenable land rights situation respectively.

Phase-I: Raising Awareness and Preliminary Mapping
(October 2019 - March 2020)

Phase-II: Building a Network of Allies, Organizational Development, and Detailed Mapping
(April 2020 - March 2021)

Phase-III: Land Negotiations, Training for Community-Led Development, Master Planning
(April 2021-December 2022)

Phase-IV: Upgrading, Titling, and Social Campaigning
(January 2023-December 2024)

Team

The project is being hosted by Council of Minorities (COM), a human rights NGO in Bangladesh focused on the rights and development of ethnic, linguistic, religious and other minority communities across the country. In particular they have focused on the rights of the Urdu-speaking linguistic minority since being founded in 2012.

The core team is composed of the following individuals, with youth from Geneva and AdamJee Camps, working as part of the project team to carry out the field work:

- Hannah Sholder, Urban Planner, Former Fulbright Scholar in Bangladesh (2009-2010); Principal Investigator
- Khalid Hussain, Attorney, Executive Director of COM; Community Organizer
- Rabeya Rahman, Architect; Project Consultant

It is hoped that through this project a new nonprofit community land trust will be created to both hold the camp land titles and support the development of the infrastructure and housing in the camps. This entity could be fiscally sponsored by COM during its formation but it would have a separate governing board, with 2/3rds of board being camp residents.



Pictures of Geneva Camp FGDs



Pictures of Adamjee Camp FGDs

Focus Group Discussions

As the first step of Phase I, focused group discussions (FGDs) were conducted in both Geneva and Adamjee camps with youth, elders and leaders to inform various stakeholders about different options for their rehabilitation and seek their involvement in the process. The FGDs were conducted separately (as compared to the workshops where it is planned for the different groups to sit together) to ensure that everyone felt comfortable voicing their opinions i.e. amongst peers).

The discussions in Geneva camp were conducted on 23rd Nov and that of Adamjee camp on 30th Nov, 2019 (Note that the leaders from Geneva Camp were unavailable for the FGD. The summary of the discussions are as follows).

	Geneva Camp	Adamjee Camp
Youth	i) don't like the gov's original plan for 40 high rises as the allotment is not enough space for their future / expanding families. ii) in reaction to the gov's new plan to relocate them to Keraniganj (ex-urban area) they were upset because they realized they would lose their livelihoods; although some argued they could continue their jobs in any location (e.g. handicrafts, rickshaw pulling, barbery, butchery, kebab restaurants are needed everywhere). iii) the youth emphasized the need for a comprehensive survey and mapping so that we could plan for the future.	i) they reported that camp size is 39 acres. However, RAB (Rapid Action Battalion) and EPZ have taken away 2 acres of this land. In total there might be approx. 1,200 families (later survey suggests 2,400). A survey was done by DC recently and they might hold the data, but they also suggested a survey done by themselves would be useful. ii) they prefer to stay on the camp land since this is where they were born and are accustomed. iii) main problems for camp youth involve getting jobs, going to school and getting married as there is still much social discrimination (similar issues for GC youth, however, housing is much more insecure than in AJ camp and thus on the top of their minds).
Elders	i) Majority have invested in their homes in the camps (and consider themselves owners of the structures) - they are therefore opposed to both gov. proposals. ii) Some said they would be OK if given land elsewhere which they could own and develop incrementally, such as in Bosilla. No to Pakistan. iii) They worried about their own jobs (many work as domestic servants in wealthy Dhaka households) if they were to move to Bosilla. iv) A few have built their own indoor toilets, but don't have access to water in the house.	i) They all prefer rehabilitation on the camp land, but incrementally, not with the gov. building them small apartments that they can't expand. ii) No desire to go to Pakistan either. iii) Main problem is toilets, especially at night since it is dangerous for them to go to the communal toilet areas alone at night. iv) They believe that cooperation between the gov, camp residents, and NGOs would produce the best results for rehabilitation. v) The streets are also hard to walk in due to above ground sewage canals.
Leaders	Adamjee only: i) Similar to Geneva Camp, the government's original plan was to construct multi-storied buildings on the site of the camp and provide the residents with 2-bedroom flats of 600sqft. The Chairman and the leaders opposed it and took action against it. Every 2 to 5yrs the DC does a survey. ii) They conveyed their wish to the government officials that after living here for so long they have certain rights over the land they are occupying. So instead of getting apartments they'd want the government to give them one or two katha each of the camp land, since overtime their families will extend and they'll have the option to expand vertically. iii) Similar to Geneva Camp, there was another government proposal of relocating them to Nilfamari (outskirt of Dhaka). The community leaders have stopped it by filing a case. They realise that the government, NGOs and camp residents need to collaborate to develop the camp.	

Social Mapping

Infrastructures and facilities identified and mapped by the community in Geneva camp, Mohammadpur and Adamjee Camp, Narayanganj are- the major road networks, facilities such as toilets and water-points, garbage disposal, schools, clinics, religious structures, various types of shops, markets and bazaar etc.



— **National Parliament House and the surrounding complex**

Geneva Camp, Mohammadpur, Dhaka

Geneva Camp is located at the heart of the city, in an area called Mohammadpur (residential area) which is adjacent to the National Parliament House complex. The camp land is spread across an area of approximately 13 acres and is owned privately (99 year land lease from the government) by the Liakat Ali Society. The camp is divided into 9 blocks (A to I) and at present an approximate of 4800 families resides in this land.



Various structures and facilities spread across the camp were identified by the residents which are described and illustrated as follows.



i. Toilet Facilities:

The public toilet facilities (some of which were built by UPPR) are in a cluster of 8 cubicles of toilets along with a tube-well and shower-space.



Toilet cubicles (8 nos) in Block-A



Tube-well adjacent to the cubicles



Shower area in the toilet cluster

ii. Water-Points:

Community people use these points for collecting water for household purpose eg-cooking, drinking, washing. These points are located in a room consisting, of four to five water-taps and sometimes even consists of tube-well.

iii. Garbage Disposal:

Garbages are dumped at various locations within the camp which are collected by the city corporation.



Water-points in Block-C



Garbage overflowing in Block-F



Garbage being cleared in Block-H

iv. Religious Structures:

Most camp dwellers are Shia by religion and therefore religious structures includes Mosques, Madrasas and Imambara/chalk.

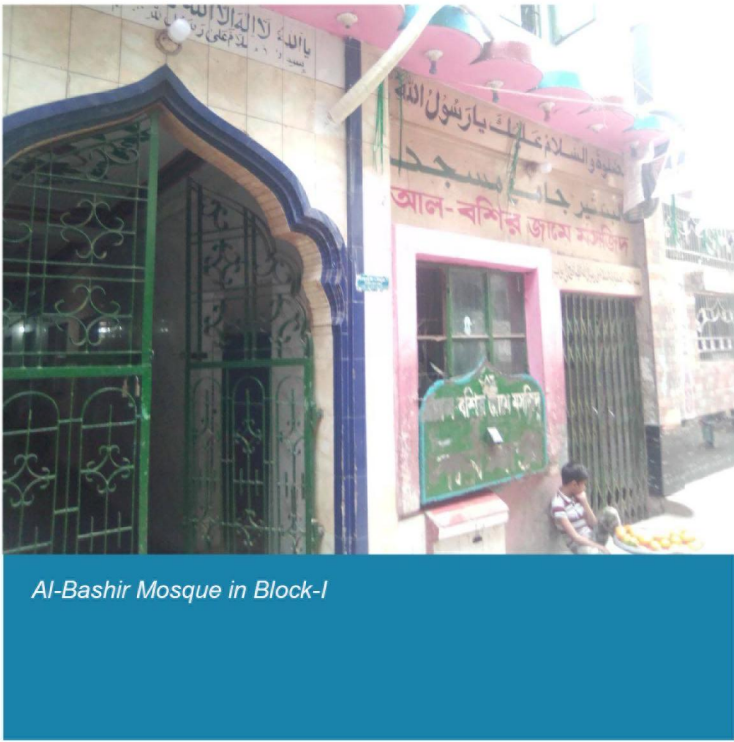
v. Clinic:

A local organization, Al-Falah runs the only clinic in the camp which is availed by camp dwellers who cannot afford treatments elsewhere.

Table: Types of shops in Geneva Camp	
Types of Shops	Numbers
Art/ and Banner Stores	1
Barber Shops/ Saloons	11
Cosmetic Shops	3
Jewellery Shops	3
Dry cleaner	1
Decorator shop	1
Electronic & Mobile shops	79
Video Shop	1
Embroidery Shops	12
Fabric / Cloth Shops	83
Bedding Stores	1
Fruit Shops	2
General Stores	33
Butcher Shop	4
Coconut Shop	1
Biriyani Shops	4
Restaurants	11
Pharmacys	3
Stove Shop	1
Cycle Shop	1
Carpet repair Shop	1
Cement Shop	1
Welding Shop	1
Hardware Shop	1
Mechanical and repair workshop	42
Total Shops	302

vi. Livelihood Options:

The camp dwellers are engaged in various business and trades. Joinal hotel is very renowned in the camp and therefore serves as a landmark which divides block-D and E. Various trades include selling items such as food, snacks, fruits, groceries, clothing, electronic items. Many camp dwellers are engaged in occupation such as butcher, metal work, embroidery work etc. The camp market road and the road that runs parallel to block-C (on the periphery) forms the main hub of the camp bazaar consisting of hundreds of shops. All of these various enterprises not only serve the camp dwellers themselves but also the neighboring Bengali community. An approximate count of shops and storefronts (home-based embroidery enterprises have not been taken into account) have been listed on the table on the right.



Al-Bashir Mosque in Block-I



Al-Falah Clinic in Block-E



Imambara in Block-I



General Store adjacent to Block-C



'Joinul' Hotel dividing Block D and E



Metal Shop making kitchen utensils



General Store in the camp

2

Social Mapping 2.1 Infrastructure and location

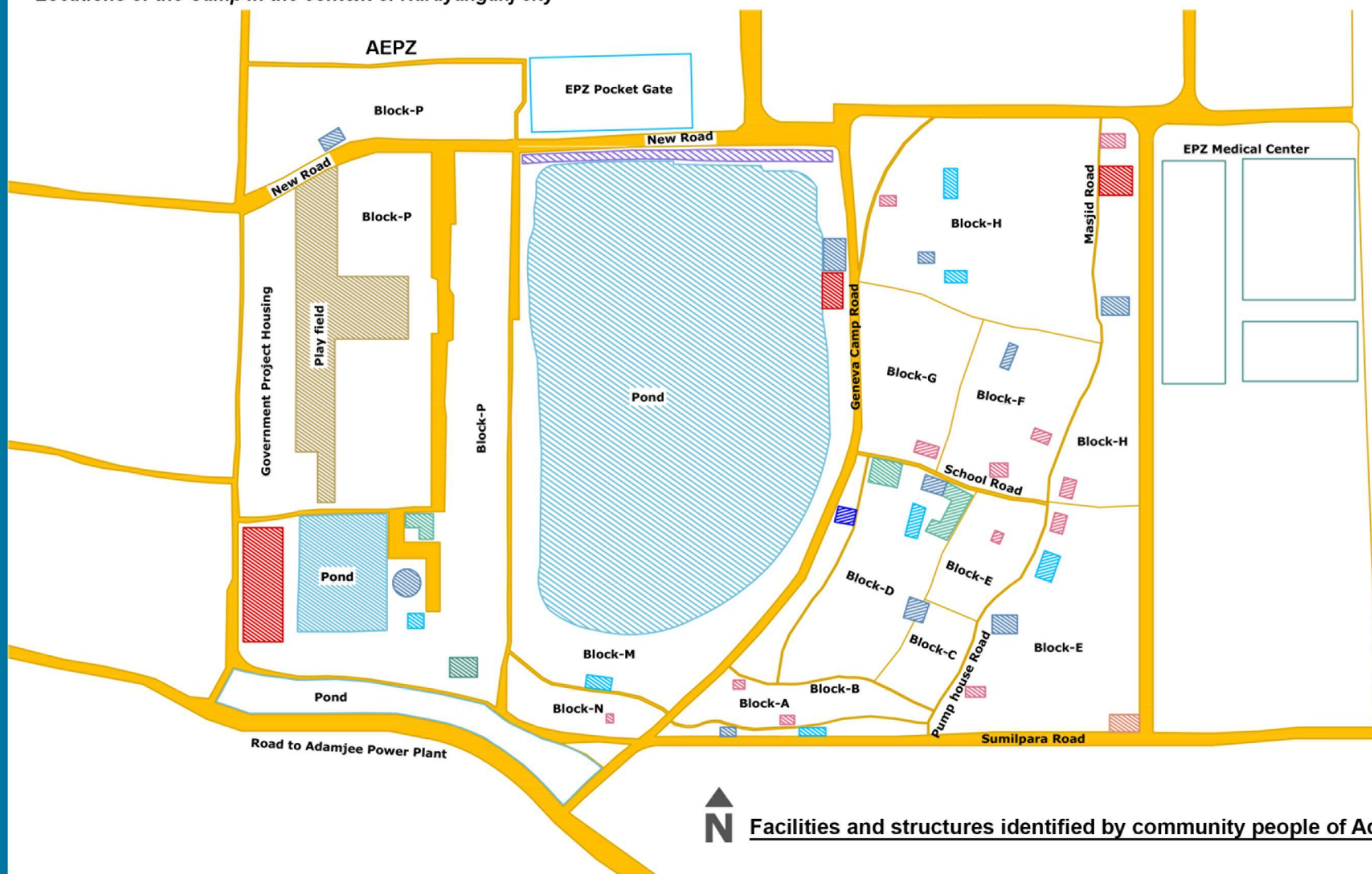
Adamjee Camp

Adamjee camp is situated on government land and is adjacent to the export processing zone (EPZ). The camp is said to spread over 37 acre of land. At present approximately 1800 families reside in single storied dwellings.



Export Processing Zone (EPZ)
Adamjee Camp
Shitalakha River

Locations of the Camp in the context of Narayanganj city



Facilities and structures identified by community people of Adamjee camp



Map of Adamjee Camp

Map of Adamjee Camp

Legends:

- | | |
|--------------------|------------|
| Mosque | School |
| Chalk / Imambara | Pre-school |
| Water-Tank | Shops |
| Toilet and Dustbin | Playfield |



Smaller pond in front of the mosque



Larger pond separating block-P from rest of the camp



Mosque



Imambara

The community volunteers took pictures of some of the key features of the camp which are illustrated below. To begin with, the camp consists of two ponds, the largest pond divides block-P from rest of the camp blocks and a smaller pond is in front of the mosque. (See the map on the previous page and the picture below).

The internal road of block A to H are still earthen while the roads around block-P are newly constructed. There is no designated dustbin for garbage disposal within the camp as a result garbage are dumped in piles in various locations.

Other significant facilities and structures includes the water-point, mosque and imambara (also known as chalk).



Garbage dump



The newly constructed road of block-P



Earthen pathway in other parts of the camp



Water-points

Geneva Camp

I. In 1962-1965 a group of the Shamshi community - a mainly Urdu Speaking Business Community- called the Liaquat Housing Society (LHS) got a 99-year land lease for the land currently constituting Geneva Camp.

II. This land remained undeveloped and in 1972, after Bangladesh's war of independence, representatives of LHS approached the ICRC and made an agreement with them that they could use the land for crisis management (i.e. set up a temporary camp for their fellow Urdu speaking people who were to be held in safety in the camps and then be 'repatriated' to Pakistan). LHS did this also as a way to protect their asset, as the land would have otherwise been confiscated by Bengalis after the war.

III. It is unclear how long or in what capacity the land was sub-leased to ICRC (to be interrogated further in Phase II), but in 1980 LHS filed a petition with the High Court of Bangladesh to reclaim their land.

IV. The case has remained open in the court ever since, as the current governmental position is that a 'solution' should be made for the rehabilitation of the camp-dwelling communities before they are evicted. That said, this is not enforced across the 116 camps - and evictions have already occurred in camps in the Mirpur district of Dhaka.

V. Geneva Camp is located on highly valuable real estate (as it is within a kilometer or two of the Parliament building) and so eviction pressure is immense. At first, in 2010, the government (Dhaka City Corp.) created¹ a plan to rehabilitate the camp residents in 40 high-rise towers on the camp land, but it was proved through a financial feasibility assessment² that this was a scam - as the units would have cost Tk. 13,000 a month (more than the income of almost all of the camp residents).

VI. The latest proposal by the government is to evict the camp residents and move them to the outskirts of Dhaka in other high rise structures. Not only is this again financially unfeasible, it will also jeopardize the camp residents economic stability as they would be far from the city core where their jobs are located.

¹"Govt to build multistoried apartments for Biharis". (4 Mar 2010) The Daily Star. <https://www.thedailystar.net/news-detail-128637>

² Sholder, H. (2014). Physical Rehabilitation and Social Integration: The Camp Dwelling Urdu-Speaking Community in Bangladesh. UC Berkeley: College of Environmental Design.

Adamjee Camp

I. After independence from British India, a man named AdamJee set up a jute mill in the area south of Dhaka that now encompasses AdamJee Camp. It is said that he owned approximately 300 acres of land, but that in 1971, during the war, he escaped to Pakistan and his land and factory was then taken over by the government owned Bangladesh Jute Mill Corporation (BJMC).

II. BJMC stayed in operation, employing in part some residents of the camp, until 2002. At this time, the factory was closed and the land was turned into an Export Processing Zone (EPZ). Apparently, Bangladesh's special police force - the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB)- has also begun to occupy some of the former BJMC site as well.

III. The current plan by the government is to allow the camp residents to occupy 12 of the 37 acres that they currently occupy (although it is unclear whether part of these acres constitute one of the nearby lakes - further mapping will be done to verify exact acreage in Phase II). It is unclear whether the local government will help 'rehabilitate' the camp residents on this land and/or turn over title (via a 99 year lease to them). In 2019, they appear to have conducted a household survey to assist in this assessment process.

Legal precedent

Bangladesh

Adverse possession may apply in Bangladesh after 12 years of occupation if the rightful owner does not bring eviction proceedings within this period³. This may not apply in the case of Geneva Camp, but could apply in the case of AdamJee.

Pakistan

Like in Bangladesh most land is owned by the government; the closest form of ownership by residents is with 99 year land leases. These leases are inheritable and transferable and can be used as collateral for loans. Under the Sindh Katchi Abadi Act (1978) the Orangi Township was formalized with the residents being given 99 year leases, as well as government support to develop external infrastructure to their neighborhood, while the neighbors self-financed and managed infrastructure within their settlements with the support of the Orangi Pilot Project (OPP). Notably, Orangi Town at this time had a large influx of 'Biharis' from the camps in Bangladesh, this it is the relatives of some of the current camp dwellers who experienced this form up formalization and upgrading.

India

Under the Odisha Land Rights to Slum Dwellers Act (2017) slum dwellers were granted title to land they occupied unless unfit for shelter due to environmental conditions. Their title is heritable but not transferable. The land may be mortgaged for the purpose of accessing loans and finances, but it can only be put to residential use. Livelihood activities taken up along with residence is also considered as residential use. The certificate is also acceptable as evidence for proof of address.

Cambodia

Through a community driven approach to formalization in Phnom Penh, it was determined that selected informal settlements would be granted communal land rights, which would minimize the administrative strain for the Cambodian government [less titling required... from thousands down to 1 per settlement]⁴.

³ Red Cross. (2017). "Housing, Land and Property Law in Bangladesh."

ShelterCluster. https://www.sheltercluster.org/sites/default/files/docs/bangladesh_hlp.pdf

⁴ Payne, G. (2005). "Getting ahead of the game: A twin-track approach to improving existing slums and reducing the need for future slums". Environment and Urbanization. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228751053_Getting_ahead_of_the_game_A_twin-track_approach_to_improving_existing_slums_and_reducing_the_need_for_future_slums



3 Workshops

Workshops

The Workshops have had to be postponed due to the outbreak of Covid-19, a worldwide pandemic that has effectively closed all businesses and forced people to shelter in place. Once the social gathering restrictions are lifted, we will reconvene the workshops; but for now here is the plan:

We will host two separate half-day workshops, one for the participants of the Geneva Camp FGDs, and one for AdamJi. We decided at this early stage not to have these workshops be open to the general camp public, in an effort to coalesce a leadership team. It is this team who will present their ideas to the larger camp public as part of Phase II.

Camp Workshop Agenda

9:00-9:30 Arrival

9:30-10:30 Overview

- > Review map and have them add details (as an ice breaker)
- > Discuss today's objectives
- > Share the plan for moving forward (mapping, draft blueprints, organization formation (Phase II); land negotiations and training (Phase III); community-managed and finance infrastructure and housing upgrades (Phase IV))

10:30-11:00 Break

11:00-12:00 Feasibility Analysis

- > Show slides with different options on and off camps lands & final slide showing feasibility comparison (political, legal, financial, etc) [30min]
- > Show them video of example from Bangladesh [10min]
- > Hear their feedback and discuss - see if we can reach a consensus on the way forward [20min]

12:00-12:30 Lunch

12:30-2:00 Design Charette

- > Present different schemes for rehabilitation on the camp lands [30min]
- > Show them again (visually) the gov's proposal for 40 high rises
- > Show them just the infrastructure upgrades
- > Show them a reconfiguration of the blocks and housing style (e.g. like NDBUS and UPPR did in Milad Camp in Mirpur) -- 3-4 story multi-family buildings with larger floor plan.
- > Hear their feedback and discuss [1hour]



4 Next Steps

Next Steps

Phase II

In this phase our initial goal will be to build a network of allies. The allies will not only help the core team build the nonprofit land trust but serve as ambassadors of the project and the Bihari Community at large - to help build the compassion, understanding and tolerance needed in order for the project to be a success. Detailed social and physical mapping will then be conducted to help inform the planning for upgrades to the camp-based housing and infrastructure. As part of the mapping process the community will also be informed, household by household about the need for a community-led solution to the question of their long-term 'rehabilitation'. Ultimately, the community's leaders will then be trained and invited to form their own nonprofit land trust to hold the camp lands, if part of their strategy is to rehabilitate 'in-place'. For those who wish to rehabilitate outside the camps lands an advocacy plan may be created to help prevent discrimination.

Phase III

During the next phase, once consensus and leadership has been achieved, trainings will be conducted (by Asian Coalition for Housing Rights affiliates including the Orangi Pilot Project) in community-financed and managed infrastructure upgrading as well as design courses for para-architects and masons to learn structurally sound housing upgrade techniques. At the same time, the trust's leaders will engage in negotiations with the government and other land-owning entities in order to secure title to the camp lands (if rehabilitation on the camp lands is desired). Likewise, throughout this Phase detailed construction documents will be made (based on the mapping from Phase II and other feedback from the camp residents) to inform Phase IV.

Phase IV

During this ultimate phase, upgrades to the camp settlements' infrastructure and housing will be made, which are healthy, functional and affordable for the camp residents and their heirs. Official transfer of the land titles will also need to occur during this time.