

The Process of Community-Led Development at Gabtoli City Colony: A Framework for Community Engagement and Social Resilience

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Abstract.

About 15 years ago, due to the Hatirjheel Development Project, 472 families were relocated from Gulshan, Dhaka, to Gabtoli City Colony. Gradually evicted from different parts of the city, today, about 800 families are living here. Colony residents are mainly employed as cleaners of the Dhaka City Corporation, but some are involved in small recycling-waste businesses. In 2020, a collaboration among Platform of Community Action and Architecture (POCAA), Co.Creation.Architects (CCA), and Grambangla Unnayan Committee (GUC) introduced the project “Dhaka Process: Citywide Solutions to the Land and Housing Problems of Excluded Communities in Dhaka City” in this community. This paper aims to document the community engagement process adopted in this project. The community engagement process started from the first field visit. The main objective of this project was to explore various participatory strategies to engage the community in the whole process from inception to construction. To achieve this goal, the first step was to create a community profile and understand the need of the community. The most urgent need was identified as the dilapidated houses in vulnerable conditions. The residents then selected sample dwellings. The next step was to form a savings group to help fund the construction or retrofitting of the existing houses. Thirteen residents came together intending to improve their houses and formed a saving group called “Shapla Bosoti Unnayan Samity (SBUS).” After that, the researchers conducted a detailed investigation of the homestead to understand their lifestyle, dreams, and needs. Different approaches, such as model making, drawing with chalk on the site, measuring based on the number of bricks, etc., were adapted for efficient communication. The house design was finalized through on-site workshops with the active participation of the community. The design and construction were based on the local mason's skill to reduce costs. The materials were salvaged from the previously dilapidated houses (Brick, CI Sheet) or bought from the second-hand house material market (Stair, reinforcement, door, window, wood/board for split level). Others were readily available materials (Brick, cement, sand, etc.). The owners of each home participated in the process in various ways, starting with managing their allocated funds to find masons to build the houses. During the Covid lockdown, the community began to communicate with the stuck-at-home research team through video calls and continued the construction. The whole process helped to empower the community and achieve social resilience. This project spawned other activities, such as a school for children, engaging children in productive

gardening, etc. The paper narrates the methods used in this process. In conclusion, the authors reflect on the result of this process and discuss the framework of carrying out community-led development in other excluded communities of Dhaka city.

Keywords: community engagement, low-cost housing, community architecture, community empowerment, participatory approach

1. Introduction

Gabtoli is situated in the north of the capital Dhaka (Google Maps, n.d.). Standing on the edge of the central city and low-lying flood-prone land by the Buriganga River, it used to be a developing area with minimal human settlement and many informal, industrial, and small business activities. Despite the majority of land belonging to different government agencies, many occupants took possession illegally and forcibly, including some informal settlements or slums over the years. Almost all the slums in the area had very poor social, health, and environmental condition. Later, due to the establishment of one of the largest intercity bus terminals and rapid land use transformation, the area of Gabtoli kept developing unprecedentedly, and the informal community living on the fringes kept serving the growing population. During the realization of the Hatirjheel Project, one of the mega projects undertaken by the Bangladesh government, Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) relocated about 472 families from Gulshan Colony to a reserved land at Gabtoli. From then, the community was known as the ‘Gabtoli City Colony.’ Today more than 800 families live here.

Figure 1: Location of the community (Left), Houses of the community (Right)



Source: Google Map (Left), POCAA (Right)

1.1 Community Background

According to the residents, when they first moved here, the area was a landfill and riverside low land filled and elevated by garbage dumping. No road, accessibility, or other infrastructures was present to serve them. They were given a 15'x12' plot to build their houses with whatever they had. Many residents mentioned methane gas emitting from the bottom of their house floors or surroundings, which created health hazards and posed life threats and risks. With time, they managed to improve the condition to some extent. They got roads, water facilities, drainage infrastructures, and shared toilets from government subsidies and financial aid from NGOs. However, there has not been much change in the residents' living situation and house conditions. At present, there are 15 lanes (6-7 feet wide) in the colony, and 16 families live on both sides of these lanes. Eight to nine families share

one toilet. These toilets and water collection points are situated at the eastern end of the colony. On the western end is a local market with groceries and various convenient shops and stores run by the community residents.

The residents of the community are mainly employed as cleaners in DNCC. However, many have diversified their income streams through secondary sources such as fish trading, small enterprise, vehicle repair, day labor, construction, etc. They usually live in joint families, sometimes having several generations under one roof, and almost every member is involved in various income-generating activities. However, the average income of the families is not enough to meet the gross living cost in the city. As a result, the residents are forced to live in old, dilapidated houses, increasing the health risk manifolds. When POCAA appeared before the community with the concept of “Let’s Co-Create Our Community (Doshe Mile Boshoti Gori) – Dhaka,” it promised growth and improvement. The community acknowledged and appreciated the idea of social upgradation and financial solvency through community empowerment.

1.2 The Dhaka Process

“Let’s Co-Create Our Community (Doshe Mile Boshoti Gori) - Dhaka” is a participatory community development process that began with collective housing upgradation and expanded to placemaking activities for living conditions improvement in some of Dhaka's low-income communities. The project is a part of the "Five Model Cities" project funded by ACHR-Selavip (ACHR e-news, 2020). Its main objective is to integrate urban slums and communities’ initiatives with the city's core housing policy to solve urban housing problems by supporting city-wide networks of low-income settlements.

To achieve the objective of the "Five Model Cities" project, POCAA started the ‘Dhaka Process,’ which included funding two unique housing projects and other small-scale tangible and intangible interventions in some of the city's low-income neighborhoods. “Let’s Co-Create Our Community (Doshe Mile Boshoti Gori) - Dhaka” is the first project where thirteen houses were rebuilt in the Gabtoli City Colony, along with renovating and repurposing one house as a school and a community garden designed, built, and maintained by the community children. Co.Creation.Architects (CCA), an architecture firm based in Jhenaidah, was an advisor in this process. Gram Bangla Development Committee (GUC), a non-profit, non-political, and non-governmental organization, collaborated as a local partner to implement the housing process, manage the legal procedures, and work with people (Grambangla, n.d.). Shapla Boshoti Unnayan Shomiti (SBUS), a small group of women from Gabtoli Colony, formed a savings group and has been involved in all the stages, from mapping the community to purchasing materials and supervising construction. The project received widespread support from local and national authorities and the private sector. The Housing and Building Research Institute, HBRI of Bangladesh, contributed technical resources on material and construction technology. Local community, political leaders, and ward administrators intervened to resolve conflicts and find mutually acceptable solutions. Finally, private design and development firms in Bangladesh, such as Marina Tabassum Architects and Suvastu Developers, volunteered their structural engineering knowledge and expertise to the communities.

By engaging a group of young and energetic people and co-creating various design and design tools with these communities, POCAA created a framework for elevating the practice of community architecture with the motto "Let people be the solution" as the heart of their philosophy (Florian, 2022).

2. Methodology

To achieve the aims set for this project, it was deemed essential to gather a deep understanding of the community, capture the diverse perspectives of community members, and generate valuable insights that can lead to meaningful change and improvements in the community's well-being. For this purpose, qualitative methodology was employed, and several participatory strategies were adopted from the inception to the implementation of this process. At first, national and international case studies were studied to gather insights about effective strategies, best practices, and lessons learned from community-based approaches. After that, representatives from POCAA, GUC, and a group of volunteers formed a team and surveyed several low-income communities in Dhaka city. After careful consideration, Gabtoli City Colony was chosen for piloting the project. The team organized an ice-breaking session in the community in collaboration with a community representative to establish rapport. Community residents then accompanied the team to a maiden transect walk to understand the layout of the community. In the following meetings, a community profile was created through focus group discussions to understand the problems faced by the community. The lack of healthy housing and the dilapidated condition of existing houses emerged as the most pressing need. Following established criteria set by the team and the community, thirteen households were selected to be developed as healthy houses. Family representatives of these households formed a group named “Shapla Boshoti Unnayan Shomiti (SBUS)” (Shapla Household Development Group). They teamed up with architects of POCAA to document the condition of the houses. The joint effort resulted in the preparation of house profiles using methods such as semi-structured interviews, sketches, furniture profiling, photographs, video recording, and observation. Data analysis allowed the identification of appropriate design strategies, with decisions presented to support groups and project partners at each step, incorporating their valuable feedback. The design of the selected households was finalized through several participatory workshops with the community, such as dream home model-making, interactive discussions with physical models, cost estimation, cost-cutting strategies, and material procurement workshops. People of all ages, young and old, actively participated in these workshops led by the women folks from the colony. The workshops played a crucial role in determining the cost of the houses. Subsequently, members of SBUS applied for loans with assistance from GUC. Local masons led the construction of the houses in collaboration with the architects. Once the selected households were completed, the community focused on addressing other identified needs outlined in the community profile, working collectively to tackle these challenges.

This project developed a comprehensive community engagement and improvement framework, focusing on social, environmental, and economic challenges. The methodology employed can potentially be replicated in other low-income communities within Dhaka city. Detailed accounts of the community-led development process in Gabtoli City Colony are provided in the following sections.

3. Community Engagement Process

POCAA, in collaboration with a dedicated team of enthusiastic volunteers, visited various low-income communities in Dhaka city to assess suitable sites. These communities were previously engaged by the local NGO partner, GUC, which helped to speed up the process. During the site visit, the team investigated demographic data, livelihood conditions, land ownership, housing unit condition, rent fee, quality of life, condition of roads and pathways,

water collection points, washrooms, environmental conditions, socio-cultural aspects, scope for improvement, and community's willingness to participate.

3.1 Community Selection

Selection of a community proved challenging as the communities had diverse needs. Moreover, several intangible forces at play can lengthen the implementation process indefinitely. In Gabtoli City Colony, the presence of these adversaries was minimal. Moreover, the households and the community spaces required urgent upgradation, and the community residents agreed with the term and conditions of the project. After a comprehensive investigation, Gabtoli City Colony was deemed the most suitable community for piloting the project.

Figure 2: Ice-breaking session at Gabtoli City Colony



Source: POCAA

3.2 Community Visit

After selecting the community, a team of architects from POCAA and representatives from GUC hosted an ice-breaking session with the community residents. During this session, the team communicated the aim and objectives, anticipated outcomes, scopes, and benefits of the project. The session enabled open discussion, helping the team gain the community's confidence. Breaking down initial barriers and encouraging interaction helped establish a foundation for ongoing engagement and collaboration among community members (Fig. 2). After that, a few participating members took the team on a community walk, providing an on-the-ground perspective. It also helped to understand the community's spatial, social, and cultural dynamics. During the next visit, people came together to create a community map with the help of the POCAA team. The mapping facilitated dialogue between residents and architects, enabling more inclusive and informed decision-making processes. It also served as a visual representation of community needs and aspirations, aiding in developing targeted interventions and solutions.

3.3 Community Profile

While community mapping helped to gather insights about the community layout and its spatial aspects, creating a community profile was instrumental in understanding socio-economic factors, cultural dynamics, and diverse challenges. POCAA, CCA, and GUC worked together to develop a comprehensive community profile format. Simple diagrams and icons accompanied the questionnaire to ensure an engaging and interactive profiling process. The community members received colorful crayons to fill out their options, making the process enjoyable (Fig. 3). At the end of the profiling process, they were asked to rank the problems faced in the community and share their opinions. This ranking exercise was a collective effort, enabling the community to identify the most pressing concern: improving

houses with fragile conditions that may not last in the coming monsoon. After completing the documentation, feedback was sought from the community members to improve the profiling process further. A copy of the community profile was then shared with the community, empowering them to make informed decisions.

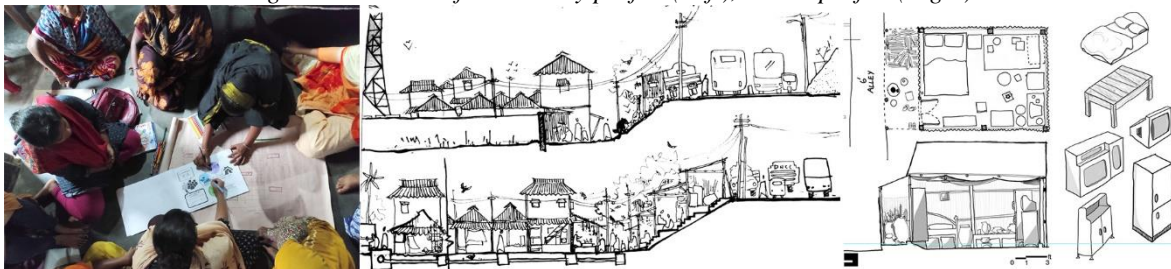
3.4 Household Selection

The criteria for selecting households were based on factors such as the house's environmental and structural condition, the family's need for more space, their vulnerability and capacity for disaster risk reduction, and their willingness to collaborate. These criteria were set by the POCAA team and supported by the community. Community residents identified thirteen households in need of urgent action. Representative family members from these households formed a saving committee named “Shapla Boshoti Unnayan Shomiti (SBUS).”

3.5 Shapla Boshoti Unnayan Shomiti

The group's objective was to formalize the financial and operational procedures and conduct weekly meetings, workshops, and other sessions for sharing updates regularly. An executive committee was elected among the family members to take responsibility for the formal activities. The committee also issued a joint bank account to run financial transactions. Each family received 150000-180000 BDT as a loan from POCAA as part of financial support from ACHR-Selavip. The committee, with the consent of each member of the savings group, decided to repay the loan within 52 months by paying 3000 BDT monthly installments. The community also created a saving scheme where each member saves 300 BDT per month. The savings from this scheme were intended for later use in community development works. The committee was responsible and liable for managing these financial transactions and building trust among themselves. The committee also worked as a bridge for communication between the community and the technical team. All the agreements and policies between the parties had to be communicated and sanctioned through the committee.

Figure 3: Process of community profile (Left), House profile (Right)



Source: POCAA

3.6 House Profile

The architects from the POCAA team embarked on a mission to gather in-depth information about each selected household. They conducted semi-structured interviews carefully designed to extract vital information about the households, such as the number of family members, their ages, occupations, and educational backgrounds. These interviews were the foundation for creating detailed family profiles, offering a holistic understanding of each household's dynamics. The architects documented the existing situation of the houses through architectural sketching, photograph, and video recording. The layout documentation revealed that all the families had four walls enclosing a small monospace with poor ventilation and devoid of natural light. The common aspect of these houses was their size

(15' by 12'), but each family's need was diverse. They used their limited space creatively, assigning multiple uses to available areas. In addition to documenting the houses' physical aspects, the architects noted the condition of various building components, identifying elements that could be repurposed or reused. They went a step further and created furniture profiles for each house, meticulously accounting for the possessions within and estimating the required storage spaces (Fig. 2). As the architects engaged with the families, they also took the time to listen to their stories. These narratives revealed tales of struggle but also carried within them the reflections of their dreams. Through this process, the architects and the community began to form a profound bond. The transparency of the entire process created an environment of trust, allowing the family members to open up and share their honest opinions.

4. Housing Design with Community

During the documentation of the house profile, the main problems identified by the architects were inadequate space, lack of natural airflow, lack of sunlight, water leakage from the roof, lack of kitchen ventilation, lack of protection against driving rain, and lack of pest control (Fig. 4). The family members wanted a healthy house that could help them to grow. To overcome the challenges, efficient and innovative design solutions were necessary.

Figure 4: Interior view of the houses



Source: POCAA

4.1 Design Prototypes

The community agreed that some guidelines are necessary for improving their households as well as the communal spaces of the community. Together with the architects, they formed some guidelines to be followed while designing the houses. The guidelines can be summarized as-

- Limiting construction within the 15'x12' plot on the ground floor. This allowed them to give back encroached spaces to the community alleys improving accessibility and communal spaces.
- Ensuring cross ventilation and allowing natural sunlight. This helped to decrease electricity consumption and provided a healthy environment.
- Compact kitchen solution.
- Using standard-sized doors and windows and stairs with comfortable slopes.
- Building roofs adequately built to prevent water leakage. The roofs had gutters to prevent water from spilling into adjacent plots. The families also agreed to make additional

arrangements to ensure protection from runoff water from adjacent house roofs.

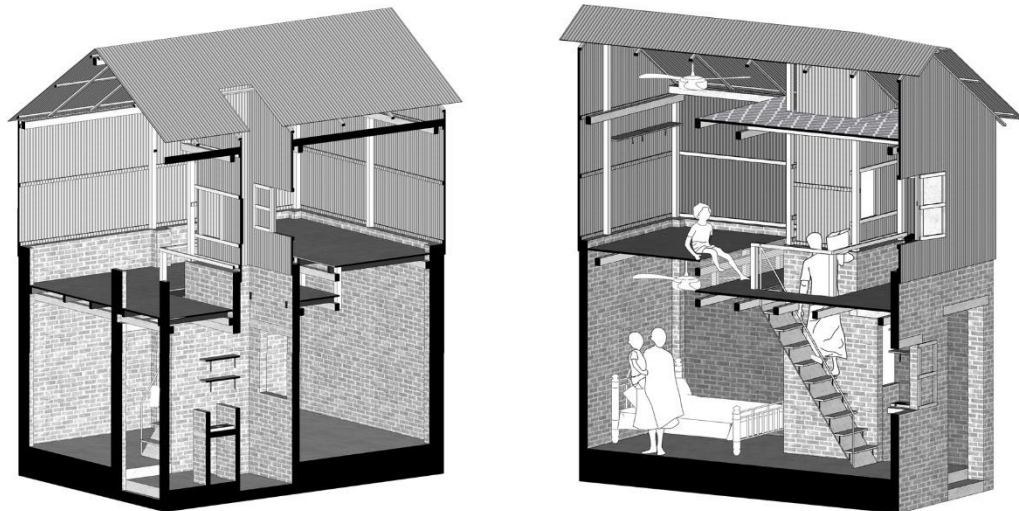
- Hazard-resistant design (Fire, pest infestation, earthquake, strong wind, etc.)
- Innovative but achievable through the skillsets of the local masons.
- Prioritizing cost-cutting strategies to retain financial independence.

Following the guidelines, the community and the architects developed the house prototypes below.

4.1.1 Alo-ghor (The Lightened House)

In this prototype, a 3'x3' small open-to-sky courtyard was created. This open space extended towards the first floor and was circled with windows, openings, or aperture. This space essentially worked as a light well and air shaft that increased air and light permeability inside the prior damp and gloomy houses of Gabtoli. The ground floor was made of brick structures and hosted most daily activities. The upper floor was split into two levels (1.5' height variation). The split level allowed the warm air to move upstairs and be carried outside by cross ventilation. It was constructed with wooden beams and reused plywood. The "Split-level" was introduced for better inter-floor light and ventilation, and the elevated plane could also be used as built-in furniture, which cut the cost and the risk of bringing a new one (Fig. 5). The stair connecting both levels was placed inside, connecting both levels and creating a duplex design. The first house was built following this design.

Figure 5: Sectional view of Alo-ghor



Source: POCAA

4.1.2 Interior Kitchen

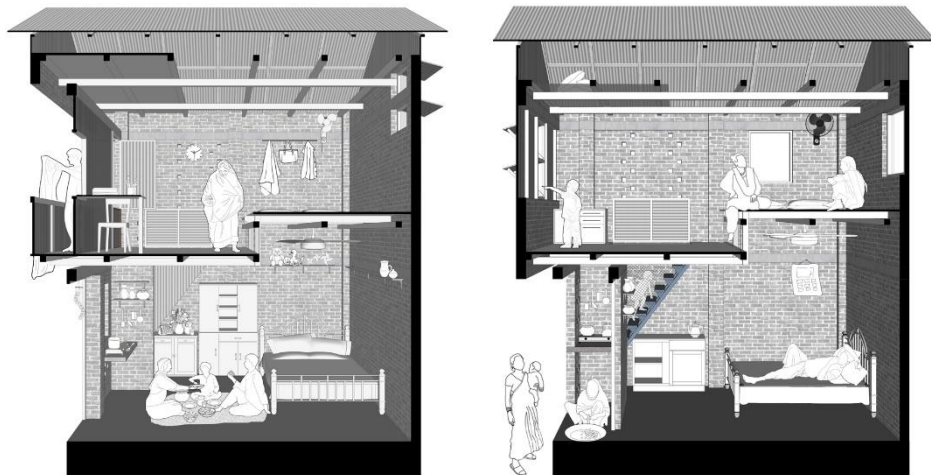
As families wanted to adopt a healthier cooking system, they wanted to shift from the previous coal-stove cooking system to LPG or Induction stove. This allowed the architects to design a prototype with an interior kitchen unit. The design of this prototype included small, niche kitchen units inside the houses with storage shelves under and above the stove. This solution ensured better cooking posture for the women cooking for their families. The upper floors were designed with split levels and a verandah in front (Fig. 6).

4.1.3 Exterior Kitchen

The family composition of the selected families, as well as their needs, was diverse. During family profiling, it was revealed that sometimes one plot is shared between two family units.

For example, young couples live with their in-law's families, or siblings live together with their partners and children. That is why another prototype with an exterior kitchen unit was designed. This prototype placed the kitchen unit and the stair connecting the ground floor to the upper level outside. This helped the extended families to share the cooking space and retain privacy in their separate levels. This prototype was popular with extended families.

Figure 6: Sectional view of Interior Kitchen (Left), Sectional view of Exterior Kitchen (Right)

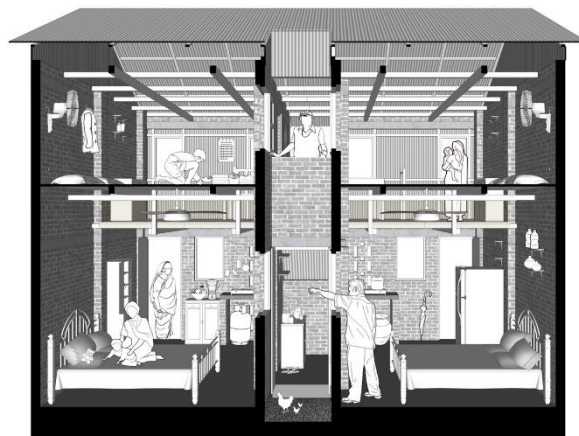


Source: POCAA

4.1.4 Joint House

Among the selected families, a brother and sister shared two adjacent plots. This posed an opportunity to create a joint house prototype (Fig. 7). The siblings decided to build a common stair and share walls leading to the efficiency of space use. The shared features helped them cut costs and create a healthy environment. This prototype set an example in the community and inspired adjacent plot holders to consider joint development.

Figure 7: Sectional view of Alo-ghor



Source: POCAA

4.2 Design Workshops

In different stages of implementation, several workshops took place. The workshops were integral to building community resilience as they created awareness, fostered collaboration,

and promoted engagement and participation. The community built their dream home models in the “Dream house model-making workshop” and communicated their aspirations. The design of the house prototypes was finalized through multiple “Design development workshops.” The architects communicated their ideas through small-scale physical models of the houses. Later the family members would use the models to communicate the design to the masons. The physical models became an excellent tool for communicating ideas and engaging the community. After finalizing the design, several “Cost estimation workshops” were held with local masons. These workshops provided scopes for negotiation and creative freedom to develop cost-cutting strategies (Fig. 8). Lastly, through the “Material procurement workshop,” some members of SBUS formed a procurement group that would go around the local market and buy building materials at the best price they could find.

Figure 8: Community participation in the workshops



Source: POCAA

5. Outcome of Community Engagement Process:

After several workshops and discussions with the community, the construction of the first two houses was set to start in November 2020. These two houses were built to demonstrate the design and cost-effectiveness. After that, the parallel construction of the remaining houses began. Two-three houses were built at a time.

5.1 Construction Process

The residents were well aware of the construction challenges. Their dedication and unwavering spirit made the seemingly impossible task much more manageable. Each homeowner played a significant role in the process, such as managing their allocated funds and seeking out local masons. The children eagerly assisted the masons, tirelessly gathering bricks near the construction site. Women, with great diligence, helped in producing brick chips. Working men and women carefully managed their job schedules to lend a hand to the masons while the elderly diligently supervised the entire process. Even other members of the community offered their support in various forms. They stored materials, provided temporary accommodations for families during construction, cared for the children, and graciously offered the masons and architects refreshing cups of tea. The community's collective effort and their family members' support minimized costs and accelerated progress. The atmosphere felt vibrant, akin to a joyous mini-festival. Once their houses started taking shape, a sense of accomplishment enveloped the community. It was a testament to their perseverance, resourcefulness, and unwavering unity (Fig. 9). The construction period was also very interesting for the POCAA team. The team had expertise in design and drawings, and the local masons had expertise in their craft; both came in a common platform to learn from each other.

5.2 Complications due to Lockdown:

The project was carried out during the global pandemic era. The POCAA team took necessary precautions and continued their work in the community. The period from December 2020 to the end of February 2021 saw the lowest rate of infections since the pandemic outbreak in Bangladesh. However, the situation took a turn for the worse as March rolled in. Infection rates began to climb again, prompting the Bangladeshi government to announce strict lockdown measures in April 2021. Amidst this backdrop, a construction frenzy was underway in Gabtoli Colony, where houses were being built, and plots were being demolished to make way for new structures. Caught amid these uncertain times, the community architects of POCAA found themselves confined to their homes, work, and the project's future hanging in the balance. Faced with this challenge, the resilient community rallied together, utilizing the power of technology to bridge the physical distance. They constantly communicated with the stranded POCAA team through video calls and social media platforms. Undeterred by the circumstances, the community became the eyes and ears on the ground, providing daily updates on the construction progress and taking on monitoring responsibilities. This unprecedented collaboration brought the team a newfound sense of connection and purpose. Through their collective efforts, the project continued to flourish, offering a glimmer of hope and demonstrating the power of collaboration even in the most challenging of times.

Figure 9: Community participation in construction process



Source: POCAA

5.3 Other Activities:

The POCAA team developed a vertical gardening system with the children to turn their dream play space into reality. Inspired by the determination of the children to continue their studies, the community, in consultation with the POCAA team, transformed one of the abandoned houses into a makeshift school, ensuring the children had a place to pursue their learning and growth. In summary, the project did not stop at building homes; it continued to engage people in community gardening, community school, and overall community well-being (The Hong Kong Institute of Architects, 2021).

5.4 Continuous Feedback:

The continuous involvement of the POCAA team in the community ensured a continuous feedback system that helped the team to evaluate the project closely. The SBUS members still marvel at the fact that, with a modest sum of money, they managed to construct two-story brick houses. This extraordinary feat had instilled in them a deep sense of empowerment, fostering a belief that they held the power to shape their destiny.

6. Discussion

The “Dhaka Process” approach addressed the power of participation for community development and revealed many of the dormant aspects often disregarded as drive for social resilience. The “Let’s Co-Create Our Community (Doshe Mile Boshoti Gori) - Dhaka” movement derived a community-led framework that crucially involved the community members in the decision-making process, enabling them to tailor development strategies to their specific needs. It also ensured a long-term commitment, active engagement, and belongingness, essential for community empowerment in a city like Dhaka. The outcome of the process framework can be identified in the following aspects.

6.1 Community Empowerment

In today’s civic society, the presence of the low-income community is often disregarded despite their contribution being much higher than many other social entities. To strengthen these communities, they have to come forward to foster their rights and practice their active participation in decision-making. Forming their own executive body, the ‘Shapla Bosoti Unnayan Shomiti’, gave the Gabtoli City Colony a voice to uphold specific needs and aspirations for their home and introduced a democratic and participatory practice. As most of the participating members of the shomiti were women, gender equity was elucidated, and social inclusion was ensured, which used to be a dubious question in such communities. The process created curiosity among all the community residents as they learned how people built their own houses. Many of them were interested to know about the holistic community participation process. They were cordially invited to visit the construction and attend workshops to disseminate acquired knowledge. Soon enough, the Shapla Bosoti Unnayan Shamiti was educating fellow community residents and other interested groups from communities around the city. The saving group members also presented their experiences frequently with international communities involved in the five-city model project. The children in the community were involved in decision-making processes about their school and community garden projects. The spontaneous and energetic participation from the children manifested the seed of mutual understanding, cooperation, and compassion inside their minds.

6.2 Financial Security

Financial security and economic solvency are essential aspects of individual and communal stability in Dhaka city. But due to the nature of the livelihood pattern and income generation, this wasn’t easy for the Gabtoli community. After accomplishing the family’s basic needs, one could hardly save anything. That is why house repair and construction became impossible without external financial aid. Besides, they had no formal involvement with the banking system for various systematic difficulties. When the community first agreed to take a loan at zero interest from the “Five Model Cities” fund, they issued a joint bank account. With official cooperation from POCAA and GUC, they could easily access the banking system and start saving in a joint account. Next, they decided on their preferred loan amount and fixed the repaying terms, including the monthly installment amount. Moreover, they collected 300 BDT extra from each beneficiary to add to the repayment and deposited it in the bank account. So that even after the repayment, they could run the bank account and save money for any future community business or emergency response. In addition to that, as per the agreement, the repaid loan would be spent on building houses in the next community. So, by taking these actions, the community members not only benefitted financially but also preserved the flow and value of money and prepared it for other communities’ benefits.

6.3 Environmental Upgradation

The community of Gabtoli made various environmentally aware decisions following the design guidelines they developed with the POCAA and technical teams. The previously encroached area from the alley was given back for widening the space so that not only air ventilation and natural light can enter the alley but also ambulance and other emergency responses can easily access the houses. The kitchen space was designed to be hygienic and healthy. The community opted for designs that allowed cross ventilation ensuring a healthy and livable interior space. The optimization of spaces not only cut the material cost but also reduced power consumption creating a long-term environmental and economic impact. Many forward-looking house owners allowed an optimal space for designing a wind tunnel, double height spaces, or veranda that widely contributed to ensuring thermal comfort inside the houses. All house owners were very interested in their home gardens and left a designated space for gardening and vegetation. The Gabtoli City Colony community was keen to make their community garden. So, the community's youngsters were appointed to create a community garden with the help of the POCAA team, where the elders helped the group passively. The community appreciated the modular gardens which adorned the community's nook and corners. It proclaimed the power of nature that can turn inadvertent spaces into beautiful places and compensate people mentally and physically.

Figure 10: Naturally lit interior and improved features



Source: POCAA

The outcome of the Dhaka process thus carried over the aim of gaining social resilience. Participation, collaboration, and partnership ensured social security, promoted economic opportunities, and enhanced social education and skills. The community network was strengthened by improving infrastructure and recovering civic engagement. Simultaneously, community leadership was developed among the low-income communities within Dhaka city. "Let's Co-Create Our Community (Doshe Mile Boshoti Gori) – Dhaka," accomplished by the Gabtoli City Colony community and Shapla Bosoti Unnayan Shomiti members, has become the first and successful people-led community development framework in pursuit of social resilience and community empowerment for the low-income communities marking one of the citable efforts of Dhaka Process and one of the most appreciated projects among "Five Model Cities."

7. Conclusion

The success of people-led community development projects depends on collective action, active participation, and the commitment of the individuals to render the positive transformation towards the desired goals by working together. The outside forces, acquired knowledge, and financial aid can play a catalytic role in the process. Still, it is the members

of the community with their goodwill that can overcome all the evident drawbacks by fostering a sense of ownership and belongingness.

In the Dhaka Process, the “Let’s Co-Create Our Community (Doshe Mile Boshoti Gori) - Dhaka” movement was a catalyst to light up the profound potential within the people of Gabtoli City Colony and laid the groundwork for an undeterred collaboration, cooperation, and community-driven initiative. But the people and their inherent power towards a positive change add to the project objectives and are expected to extend beyond the project’s lifespan. It was not only the community people who benefitted socio-economically. Everyone involved in the project witnessed the process of community architecture and development through an alternative perspective. They experienced a new aesthetical perception unlikely to any conventional project outcome as the metaphysical outcome of the process is more far-reaching than the physical outcome. The willpower demonstrated by the Gabtoli Community in co-creating their community in Dhaka is truly first-hand evidence of POCAA’s motto of ‘letting the people be the solution’, where people’s ability to receive unique knowledge and tailoring their own experience, efficiency, and empathy into advocating for their rights by influencing policies and establishing a solid partnership, leadership, and network, was overwhelming, praiseworthy and enlightening.

Acknowledgment

This paper is based on the outcomes of the “Let’s Co-Create Our Community, Dhaka” project. It is a part of the "Five Model Cities" funded by ACHR-Selavip. The project was implemented in five South Asian cities between 2020 and 2022. The five cities in the project are Dhaka (Bangladesh), Yangon (Myanmar), Jakarta (Indonesia), Mahalaxmi (Nepal), and Iluilu (Philippines). The project in Dhaka, Bangladesh, is being implemented by the Platform of Community Action and Architecture (POCAA), Grambangla Unnayan Committee, and Co-Creation Architects.

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