Community Governance During COVID-19: Case Studies from Rural Areas of Bangladesh

Working paper

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1. Introduction

Globally COVID-19 triggered a massive public health crisis leading to the deaths of millions of people and causing disruption to the social and economic equilibrium. The impact was more devastating in the low-income countries where the state had limited capacity to reach the peripheral population and provide services at the grassroots levels. In the absence of the state or public sector, the private sector plays an important role in providing services. However, the perplexing nature of the pandemic caused markets to fail in many sectors, like health and tourism, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, thereby limiting its ability to complement the state (Williams, 2020; Williams et al., 2021). The inability of states and markets to address local needs and manage a crisis gives rise to community initiatives—undertaken by non-state and non-market actors like self-help groups, social institutions, and non-profit organizations—which provide immediate, practical solutions to community concerns (Boonstra et. al., 2022). Such efforts have been seen in the aftermath of floods (Kunene et al., 2021), earthquakes (Shrestha, 2021), and public health crises like Ebola (Fallah et al., 2016).

A similar trend of community-driven initiatives emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent literature documented community initiatives undertaken in high- and low-income countries both in urban (Carlsen et al., 2020; Engbersen et al., 2020; Marston et al., 2020; Mishra & Rath, 2020) and rural contexts (Ahmad et al. 2022; Kakati, 2021). Zaman et al. (2022) studied the emergence of community governance in urban informal settlements of Bangladesh during Covid-19. The work of Ahmad et al. (2021) studied the same in a rural context and illustrated how informal actors, such as elder leaders, religious leaders, volunteers, and community members, organized local-level initiatives when national and local governments failed to manage the COVID-19-induced crisis. Shu and Wang (2021) focused on the rural collective initiatives during COVID-19 in China with a concentration on the role of collaborative leadership; however, the study did not provide a comprehensive illustration of the rural community governance dynamics.

Community initiatives that emerged during a crisis to meet specific needs often face challenges to sustain. Once the crisis is over, returning to "business as usual" threatens their long-term sustainability (Boonstra, 2020). Moreover, since community initiatives evolve, they face significant governance challenges, which also limit their durability (Fox-Kämper, 2018). Discussions on the sustainability of community initiatives beyond a crisis period, especially from a community governance perspective is not a well-researched area. Moreover, both Zaman *et al.* (2022) and Ahmad et al., (2021) works illustrated that there are many nuances associated with both urban and rural contexts in Bangladesh. The nuances can include simple, implicit factors such as intangible motivation for action, which is often cited as an account for the success of community initiatives (Edelenbos et al., 2021).

This study aimed to conduct case study research on community initiatives undertaken in response to COVID-19 in the rural areas of Bangladesh that sustained beyond the pandemic. The study attempted to understand the preconditions of collective actions, the emergence of community-level governance during a crisis, mobilization of the community, and sustainability of the initiatives beyond the crisis period. The study was supported by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), on behalf of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), under the COVID collective initiative. The previous study supported by the same initiative examined the context of urban informal settlements (see Zaman *et al.* 2022), while this study focused on the rural context. The insights from these studies are expected to create new knowledge and understanding of community governance mechanisms in low-resource areas. The knowledge can be utilized for designing durable emergency interventions to

make communities more resilient to recurrent crises; it can also provide opportunities to address long-term development problems (Kerr, Tacoli, & Landesman, 2022).

2. Community Governance: A Conceptual Framework

A shift in attention from government to governance emerged in the 1990s. Government—the state's official institutions—operates within legislative and administrative frameworks with the help of the state's hierarchical power. However, solving myriad and complicated challenges of the modern world is beyond the ability of the government or any other individual player (e.g., the corporate sector, the non-profit sector, etc. (Sehested, 2003). A collaboration, thus, becomes essential between different actors (Hambleton 2004) that shifts the focus to governance. Colebatch (2014) argues that government is grounded in the implementation of directives while governance is based on the interaction of self-organizing networks. A process-oriented approach shifts the emphasis from 'government actor(s)' to 'action which creates governing'(ibid); from individual actors to the process of negotiation across government and non-government actors, bringing out the dynamic interaction of the actors involved in service delivery (Katasura, 2011; Colebatch, 2014).

The community is viewed as an important stakeholder in the governance process "because they address certain problems that cannot be handled either by individuals acting alone or by markets and governments" (Bowles and Gintis 2002: p.5). However, the term "community" is elusive and widely used to describe a group of individuals who feel a sense of shared responsibility, support, and identity (Kenny 1994 cited in Adams & Hess, 2001). There can be two types of communities: 1) territory-based, characterized by spatial proximity, and 2) territory-free communities, e.g., business communities (Theodore, 2005). Territory-based communities defined by their clear geographical boundaries, can plan, manage, and carry out actions and are characterized by a sense of belonging, shared values, the ability to act as a group, and relationships built on trust and reciprocity (Adams & Hess, 2001; Theodore 2005). Thus, community governance, implicitly or explicitly, is almost always associated with territory-based communities (Totikidis, Armstrong & Francis, 2005) such as rural communities.

Community governance is defined as "community-level management and decision-making that is undertaken by, with, or on behalf of a community, by a group of community stakeholders" (Totikidis, Armstrong and Francis, 2005, p.3). It entails people's ability to cooperate and work together, trust one another and, organize themselves to overcome problems related to risk, information, and skills to mobilize and manage resources, resolve conflicts, and network with others (Halsall, et al., 2013). In the process, the community remains at the centre, whether they undertake the management and decision-making process independently or with the support of external actors. (e.g., NGO) (Totikidis, Armstrong and Francis, 2005). There are two critical elements in community governance: first, groups have to develop rules for self-governance and second, the groups need to be embedded in the existing social organization (Halsall et al., 2013). However, collective mobilization as a response to the shortcomings of the state also gives rise to informality (van Wyk & Reddy,2022).

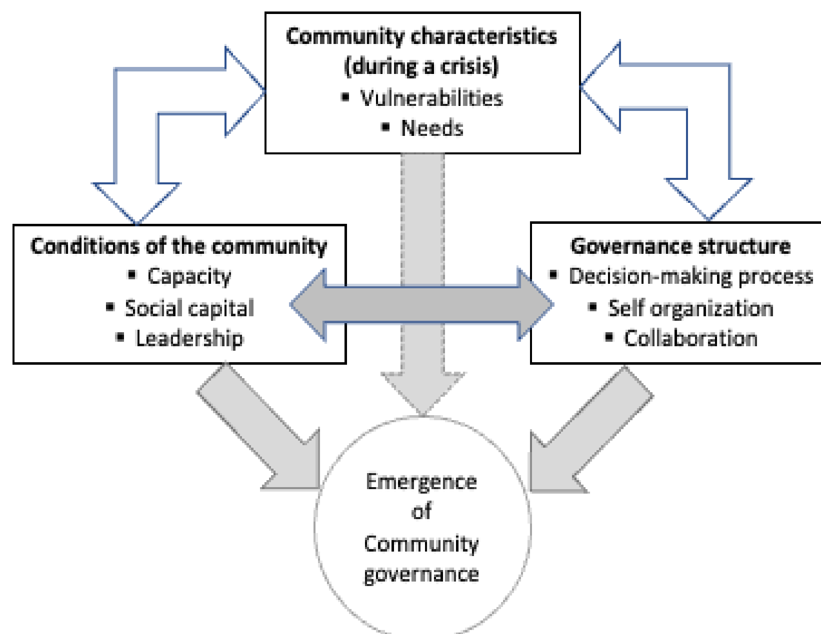
The rules and existing social organization dictate the degree to which community members are involved in the decision-making process or what is commonly referred to as citizen or community engagement (Totikidis, Armstrong and Francis, 2005). Community governance requires collaboration as the issues that communities deal with are usually complex, which cannot be solved by any one person or sector alone. Collaboration and marshalling of the social capital and resources bring together a broad range of stakeholders—community residents, elected officials, businesses, civic, faith, health and human service, and professional services (McKieran et al., 2000). Networks, norms and trust — these three features enable communities to work together more effectively to pursue shared objectives (Fransen, et al, 2022). In the process, bonding facilitated by leadership, cohesion,

kinship, and trusted communication channels are created (Alonge et al. 2019; Poortinga 2012). Consequently, communities gain social capital and bridge with and link to actors outside the community to access resources and support for long-term sustainability (Igalla, 2019).

The exploration of community-driven initiatives during a crisis is relatively new. Fransen *et al.* (2022), while exploring community resilience initiatives during the COVID-19 pandemic in urban areas, identified self-governing informal bottom-up initiatives as one of the important ways to combat the impacts. They pointed out two elements that play decisive roles in the contexts of natural disasters and health crises—the social capital available within the community and the broader governance context within which the initiative is conceived (ibid). Zaman et al.'s (2022) ethnographic study demonstrated similar initiatives and emphasized the importance of the community's self-governing capacity in the absence of state or market interventions. Community resilience during a crisis, thus, not only includes a set of networked adaptive capacities—in relation to, for example, information and communication and economic development initiated during the crisis but also more nuanced cognitive processes such as feelings, attitudes, needs, desires, beliefs, and values, mutual aid, etc. (Bowels & Giants, 2002, Ahmad et al. 2022) that form a sense of community and commitment, especially during a crisis period.

It may be concluded that while community governance is firstly about community management and decision making, the concept also leads to addressing community needs and well-being, improving social capital, and building community capacity (Totikidis, Armstrong and Francis, 2005, Halsall et al., 2013). The conceptual framework suggested by Fransen et al. (2022) for urban resilience can be useful to adapt for examining community governance in the rural context of Bangladesh.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework (Adopted from Fransen et al., 2021)



As illustrated in Figure 1, community characteristics during a crisis motivate the community to take actions which are influenced by the existing condition of the community and the governance structure.

Literature from the Global North on local governance and public administration views community governance as an avenue to enhance citizen participation in the governance process (Pillora & McKinlay, 2011). The governments determine when and how citizens should participate and collaborate (King & Cruickshank, 2012). Such interpretation intrinsically undermines communities'

ability to self-organize and manage their problems with greater autonomy. Perhaps, the capacity of the government in the context of the North varies from the Global South. The limited capacities and centralized nature of the states in the South make it difficult to meet local needs; in the absence of strong state surveillance, the people tend to assert greater autonomy (Bayat, 2013). Therefore, the distinctive features of the Global South warrant the study of the self-organizing aspect of governance for a more contextualized understanding of the community's conditions and governance structure.

3. Aims and objectives

The study Community Governance During COVID-19: Case Studies from Rural Areas of Bangladesh aimed to identify collective actions by the rural communities as responses to the pandemic and to understand the mechanism of governance from below in initiating and sustaining those initiatives beyond the crisis period. The study used two cases in Bangladesh—a bazar and Hand Washing Station (HWS)—with an ethnographic approach to understanding rural communities' collective agency and activism during the pandemic. The study had the following objectives:

- To identify the pre-conditions and immediate reasons for a decision or a set of decisions taken by a community during an emergency.
- To map the series of collective actions taken before, during, and after to implement of those decisions.
- To identify the stakeholders, their motivations, and the results of those initiatives.
- To examine the necessary and conditional relationships that explain the reasons for the initiatives to sustain or perish in the post-emergency period.

4. Methodology

The study employed a case study approach involving various qualitative and ethnographic methods. Unlike traditional ethnography, this study conducted focused ethnography with short-term fieldwork and specific research questions that required researchers' prior knowledge of the community (Knoblauch, 2005). The study relied heavily on the narrative inquiry (NI) method, which involved collecting data by listening to individuals recount consequential stories about their lives in their own words and worlds (Ntinda, 2020). NI approach enabled an intimate study of participants' experiences over time and context; it also allowed capturing the complexities and nuanced understanding of their significant experiences (Clandinin and Caine, 2013; Ntinda, 2020). The approach demonstrated how individuals assign meaning to their experiences through the stories rather than attempting to establish a cause-and-effect relationship (Bruner, 1986, Slevitch, 2011). To minimize the limitations of the approach, the information was triangulated by asking questions in different ways, examining documents, and interviewing similarly related participants.

4.1. Study areas

The first case is the Corona bazar located in the Domar upazila (sub-district) of Nilphamari district. It was a serendipitous discovery by the researchers during fieldwork carried out in the same area for the Historicizing BRAC project. Local people spoke highly about the bazar as a community initiative. The initial visit led to further exploring the case through a community governance perspective. Hand washing stations (HWS) provided by BRAC, an NGO, were taken as the second case. BRAC had installed HWS across the country, and Sonargaon upazila of Narayanganj district was chosen as a representative of rural areas. Four studied HWSs were located in public places including a *ghat* (a

river landing station) in Pachani, a bazar (local rural market) and union parishad (Rural council) in Baradi, and a school in Horihordi of Sonargaon Upazila. These four HWSs were chosen considering their geographical location, characteristics of associated institutions, functionality, management, and usage patterns.

Corona Bazar

Holholiya is a small village in Domar, Nilphamari. The villagers of Holholiya used to go to the nearby Okrabari village's bazar to buy their daily commodities before the pandemic. During the spread of COVID-19 virus, the local government authorities identified a neighbourhood of Holholiya as a danger zone with rumours of presence of infected persons, locked it down demarketing with red flags. Later, an older resident from another neighbourhood of Holholiya was humiliated in the Okrabari Bazar as suspected COVID carrier. These incidences created both a desperate need and rage among the villagers of Holholiya. Subsequently, they took an initiative to establish a bazar in the village. Although the bazar was a response to the lockdown and isolation by neighbouring villages, it continued to operate and flourished under community management. Some locals called it the new bazar; however, it became popularly known as "Corona Bazar" for its history of initiation.

In Bangladesh, public administrative authorities such as the district commissioner, upazila nirbahi officer (UNO), and union parishad (UP) chairman are usually responsible for setting up and maintaining bazars. However, in the case of Holholiya, the local rural communities took initiatives to set up the bazar to meet their demand for daily commodities, organized a supply chain mechanism, negotiated with service-providing authorities for power connection and a tube-well from rural local government. Moreover, they established a bazar maintenance committee without the intervention of the public authorities. Thus, Corona Bazar is taken as an intrinsic case of governance from below for the sustained community initiative taken during a crisis.

Hand Washing Station (HWS)

BRAC installed hand washing stations in 20 sub-districts for public use and to raise awareness of COVID-19 as part of their Hygiene and Behaviour Change Coalition (HBCC) Project. BRAC initially funded and supported these stations for a year, they formed HWS committees with 9 to 11 local community members including local leaders or elites for managing the stations. These committees were responsible for maintaining the HWS after BRAC withdrew their support when the project ended. Thus, financially solvent community members were purposefully included in the committee to support the maintenance expenses.

Many NGOs took initiatives to set up handwashing facilities; however, BRAC's initiative, especially in rural areas, emerged as a unique case of NGO-induced community initiative in Bangladesh. Some of the HWSs installed during COVID-19 discontinued functioning; nevertheless, some remained operational with the active participation of communities. HWS in rural areas is taken as a case to examine the necessary and conditional relationships that explain the reasons for the initiatives to sustain or perish in the post-pandemic period.

4.2. Research tools

The study used different research tools to understand the community's condition, characteristics, and governance structure from the daily life of rural communities. These tools were guided by the principle of data saturation, ensuring all possible relevant information was obtained.

In-depth interviews (IDIs) were conducted primarily with the users of the Corona Bazar and HWSs to learn about their experiences, feelings, and views about these particular cases. The inquiry was designed to gather information on their participation as initiators, users, or community members. A

total of 29 users, traders, and maintenance workers were interviewed from both locations. The participants varied based on gender, age, income, and social group.

Key informant interviews (KIIs) were carried out with individuals who had affiliation and involvement with the functioning of the two cases, such as committee representatives, the contact person of each HWS, local leaders, and land owners involved in the initiatives. Representatives from the local government and staff from non-governmental organizations were also interviewed. The KIIs focused on capturing their perspectives and the role they played. A total of 12 Key Informants were interviewed for two cases.

Focus group discussions (FGDs) attempted to gather the experiences and perspectives of the users and community members involved in the maintenance of the initiatives. Six FGDs were held in three different locations of Corona bazar with both male and female participants to understand the variations in motivations and usage patterns. Similarly, FGDs were held in four locations for the HWSs with both male and female users from the communities as participants. A total of 16 FGDs were conducted for two cases.

Participant observation was systematically planned and recorded to watch behaviour, objects, events, and occurrences and note physical characteristics of the bazar and HWSs in their natural settings at different times of the day and night. This tool was used to gather detailed and in-depth information about the functioning of the initiatives, as well as the community's involvement in them. Finally, data gathered through observation was triangulated with other sources.

Participatory mappings involved mapping exercises with community members to identify the coverage area, accessibility, infrastructure, resources, construction materials, and techniques. Each group consisted of six to eight members. A total of five mapping exercises were conducted across the four HWS locations and the bazar.

Stakeholder mappings helped to understand the role of different actors involved in the implementation and maintenance of the initiatives. The mapping exercise included identifying and categorizing the stakeholders based on their level of involvement and the type of influence they had on the cases. A total of five stakeholder mappings were carried out for the two cases.

Document analysis involved examining relevant documents such as announcements, agreements, banners, leaflets from the community and NGO, etc. to understand the timeline of events and the circumstances, stakeholders, and governing mechanisms involved.

Table 1: Matrix of the tools used for data collection

Tools	Number	Participants
Corona Bazar		
IDI	16	Customers, Traders
KII	6	Committee members, Landowners, NGO Staff, UP member
FGD	8	Male and female customers and traders
Participatory Mapping	1	Customers and Traders
Stakeholder Mapping	1	Customers and Traders

Tools	Number	Participants
Document Analysis		
HWS		
IDI	13	Users, Maintenance workers
KII	6	Focal person, Headmaster, UP member, Institution staff
FGD	8	Male and female users
Participatory Mapping	4	Users and local community members
Stakeholder Mapping	4	Users and local community members
Document Analysis		

4.3. Data analysis

Data analysis of findings from the IDIs, KIIs, FGDs, Stakeholder Maps, Participatory Maps and documents were retrieved. All interviews and discussions were recorded and later transcribed. They were triangulated and discussed with the research team. The team analysed the data and coded them into themes through a rigorous process of thematic analysis using a web application — Dovetailapp.com. The participants' names were replaced with pseudo names. The final findings combined field data, researchers' observations and reflections, and multiple levels of discussions among the research team members.

5. Findings of Case 1: Corona Bazar

Image 1: Bazar during the early morning

Image 2: Bazar during the night

Source: Authors

5.1. Phase 1: Pre-initiation

Daudiar ghat: A Fallow land

Holholiya village has a population of 7,500 primarily engaged in agriculture and working as seasonal migrant laborers. It has several neighbourhoods or *paras.* The village was situated at the boarder of a stateless enclave called Dohola Khagrabari, an Indian territory within the boundary of Bangladesh, resulting in a land without a state affiliation. The closest village to Holholiya is Okrabari located within the enclave area. The residents of Okrabari were deprived of basic rights and facilities provided by the government of Bangladesh. Moreover, the statelessness status of the enclave made the bordering areas a safe haven for criminals, causing in a decline of land value. Daudiar Ghat, an old river station of a died river, was situated at the intersection of these two villages. The area was not worthy of any productive use other than for cremation. Thus, Daudiar ghat remained as an undesirable location for the residents of both villages.

Post-enclave-exchange developments

Okrabari and surrounding areas started to change with new development initiatives carried out by the government of Bangladesh after the Bangladesh-India enclave exchange agreement in 2015. A new bazar and high school were established in Okrabari. The construction of a new bridge in Daudiar Ghat in 2018 improved the connectivity between Okrabari and Holholiya. Children from Holholiya went to high school and villagers went to the bazar in Okrabari for their daily necessities. The residents of these two villages maintained close relations despite being administratively divided.

After the construction of the bridge, Rafiq, a landowner on the eastern side of the bridge and adjacent to the crematorium in Holholiya, saw the potential of his land to develop as a bazar for its improved connectivity and increased movement of people between the two villages. He filled up the lowland and bought a half-built house to convert as shops on the land with open spaces around. However, the shops remained incomplete. Most villagers did not share his vision until the outbreak of COVID-19.

Consequences of COVID-19 outbreak

In March 2020, migrant laborers of the village returned from Dhaka after the government imposed nationwide mobility restrictions due to COVID-19. They were quarantined in a school for three days; however, one person managed to escape, tried to travel to another district, and fell sick during the trip. His co-traveller informed the family, and soon it became big news in the village. The local authorities came with the magistrate and police, brought ambulance and health professionals. They imposed a lock down for *Colony Para,* the origin of the person, for 14 days to isolate it from other neighbourhoods of the village. The authorities created barriers at the paths, hoisted red flags, and assigned village police to restrict any movement to and from the neighbourhood. The incidence created panic and fear among the villagers.

During that time, confusing and ambiguous information was circulating in the media: TV channels often dramatized their presentation, and the social media was overflowing with rumours and claims about the coronavirus, leading to further confusion and fear. All of them contributed to the infodemic, making it difficult for people to separate fact from fiction and make informed decisions (Zaman et.al, 2020). With spreading rumours about *Colony para,* all of the residents of Holholiya village were barred from entering surrounding villages and bazars, including Okrabari. The situation worsened when a few men from Okrabari humiliated an older, respectable man from Holholiya while he was trying to go to Okrbari Bazar. These incidences created frustration and anger as residents of these two villages considered themselves close. Moreover, life became challenging without access to bazar for daily necessities. The residents of Holholiya with businesses in Okrabari Bazar also lost their livelihood.

Spontaneous reaction at the individual levels

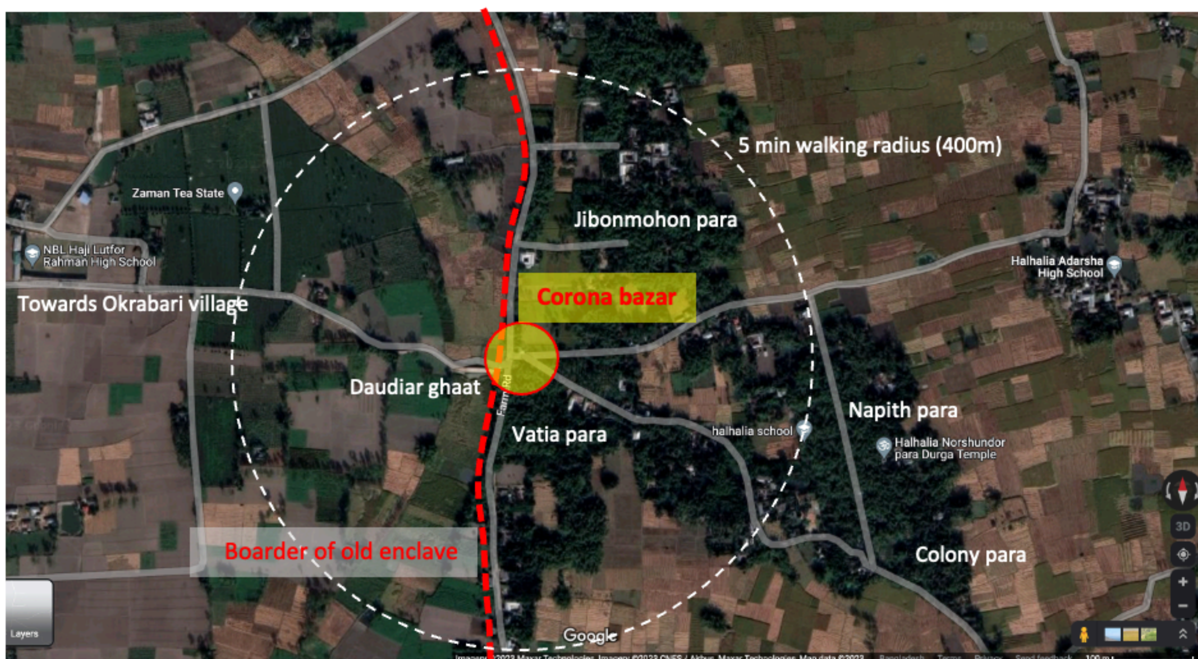
One day, Habib, a fish seller and resident of Holholiya, bought fish from a wholesale market outside the village early in the morning. However, the locals of the wholesale market expelled him when he tried to sell to the customers there; later he attempted to open his shop in Okrabari without luck. Without any alternatives, he returned to his village and started selling in front of a grocery shop in *Vatia Para* in Holholiya. All his fish were sold quickly. Habib promoted the idea of starting a bazar to everyone he met that day, and it gained popularity. Villagers began discussing among themselves; subsequently, the *Murubbis* (elite village elders) and young leaders organized a meeting in the evening.

The first meeting

About 60 to 70 villagers from all neighbourhoods, except *Colony Para*, came to the meeting. They included general villagers as well as clan leaders, politicians, landowners, teachers, business owners, and elderlies. The attendees agreed that without a bazar all were suffering; moreover, they felt disrespected by how the villagers of Okrabari treated them after years of a close relationship. People were unwilling to go back to Okrabari bazar even if they were allowed. Thus, a unanimous decision was made to establish a bazar in their village out of the need and rage.

The choice of location needed further consideration as the place where Habib sold his fish was not big enough for a bazar. Rafiq, the landowner beside the bridge of Daudiar ghat, seized the opportunity and proposed to use his half-built shops; he even offered not to take any rent till the bazar became fully functional. The half-built shops meant reduced time to develop the necessary infrastructure and an immediate start. There was an overwhelming agreement on the choice of the location as it was connected to multiple neighbourhoods (*para*), illustrated in Figure 2. People could walk within five to ten minutes from *Colony para*, *Jakkau para*, *Jibonmohon para, Napith para, Sing para*, and *Vatia para* with the networks of roads.

Figure 2: Location map of Corona bazar and adjoining neighbourhoods



Source: Drawn by authors using Google Map satellite image

5.2. Phase 2: Initiation and expansion

Individual initiatives

The very next day, a religious ceremony locally known as *Milad* was held to officially inaugurate the bazar and to seek God's blessing on it. The half-built shops were not ready for use that day. Nevertheless, Habib began selling his own-produced vegetables in the open space instead of fish because there was a greater demand for vegetables. Another resident brought fish from his pond. These led to an increase in the number of people served by the bazar as well as an increase in sales. Later that day, four or five sellers who owned businesses in Okrabari bazar joined Habib. The new businesses included cigarettes, betel leaves, and groceries. The bazar kept functioning in open spaces while the half-built shops were being ready. Habib handed over his vegetable business to another

person who could supply more vegetables. Habib reported his motivation to be, "*bajarta to lagate hobe*"(meaning the bazar needs to keep functioning).

A storm of hype

Once the bazar was established, it generated excitement both within the village and in the nearby villages. It quickly reached its peak in terms of sales and crowds for several reasons. Higher demands from the returnee migrant workers contributed to increasing sales. A sizable number of customers came from nearby villages out of curiosity. Most importantly, the government by then had imposed restrictions in all bazar under their supervision while Corona bazar, being newly established and remote location, flourished away from the local law enforcement authority's knowledge, served those customers.

Image 3: Different traders of the bazar (Scrap seller, Carpenter, Broiler chicken seller)

Source: Authors

5.3. Phase 3: From spontaneous to organized

Committee formation

New traders joined as the bazar grew, both from within and outside the village. A trader from a distant village ran a vegetable shop. A villager (Sumon, son of another landowner Jalil) found out that he was selling vegetables at a price nearly double that in the nearby Okrabari bazar. As a resident, he felt it was his duty to encounter the trader about his inappropriate behaviour. The trader challenged Sumon's authority and started arguing. In the meantime, Sumon's elder brother joined him and beat the trader before expelling him out of the bazar. Later, the trader tried to negotiate with Sumon and his brother through a member of Sumon's family but was unsuccessful. This incident was an informal local disciplinary mechanism initiated by the residents out of their sense of ownership.

Small incidents like this raised concern for the landowner (Rafiq), and he discussed with Shaymal (a local political leader) the need for forming a committee. The need for a formal management body became more apparent when the UP Chairmen advised that to request any services—for example, solar lamp posts or tin for the mosque's roof in the bazar—the request must come through a committee rather than an individual. Local political leader Shaymal facilitated forming the committee with the participation of the landowner, traders, and leaders/influential persons from each neighbourhood. He was elected as the president unanimously while Jalil's name was proposed as a secretary of the committee. Jalil felt a position in the bazar committee was incongruent with his position and rather nominated his son Sumon as the secretary. During an interview Sumon explained the benefit and power of a committee:

> *"I have power in the bazar area. No matter how insignificant I am, I have the power. If the chairman comes (to resolve a conflict) and finds out someone has overridden the decision of the secretary of the Bazar, he will be severely punished for the disobedience (Male, KII 02)".*

Resolving conflict and enhancing security

One of the committee's roles was to prevent and resolve conflict. They appointed a security guard in the initial phase. An incident occurred shortly after the formation of the committee. Jalil was the owner of a carom board in the bazar. Local youths used to play carom, and the owner would charge a fee for each game. A trader's cousin who worked in Rangpur played a match one day and refused to pay the fees right away. This sparked an argument between him and Jalil, dividing the bazar into two groups. The groups also shoved each other, intensifying the urgency of the situation. The committee president came and rebuked Jalil for offering a carom board in exchange for money. The conflict was resolved through a *"Salish"* in which both parties, including committee members and local leaders, were present. Hasan, whose cousin was involved in the incident, reported,

> *"Our (UP) member resolved it (dispute). There were two members. One was our previous member and the other was the current member. In addition, the murubbis of the neighbourhoods were present. They sat together and reconciled. Then we said that we accepted their judgment. We are open to accepting everything. No matter whether we make the mistake or not. (They also announced that) No more games will be played in the market using that board. The board has been banned ever since (Retailer, IDI P2)"*

Initiatives for attracting customers and traders

After the initial hype faded away, several initiatives were taken to retain and draw more customers by traders and the committee. Traders realized that they had to offer competitive prices and diversify their products to keep customers. Azmal, one of the first traders, convinced a scrap seller to start a shop in the bazar to attract more customers. Sumon started providing mobile financial services through his personal account instead of agent services because it was more profitable and convenient. In addition, some traders offered home delivery and monthly credit purchases to families of migrant workers. The traders also started connecting with the distributors to widen the range of products. These attempts for products diversification were often regulated by social contracts and relationship for restricting competition among fellow traders. For instance, when a trader started selling dry fish, even though there was already a floating trader selling the same product, local residents reprimanded the new trader, fearing that competition would discourage the floating trader from continuing to do business in the bazar.

The committee president, Shaymal, became elected as a member of the Union Parishad with support from Jalil's clan and the traders of the bazar. As a token of appreciation for his supporters, he organized a musical event to attract customers and energize the traders. Although Shaymal made a major financial contribution, the committee also contributed some amount in organizing the event. Later, the committee celebrated the country's victory day with a cricket match for men, a musical chair game for women, and an award ceremony accompanied by an outdoor dinner. These arrangements were made by young traders while elders donated money. The ruling party leaders were present at the event. The upazila female vice chairman funded the winner prizes and promised to continue supporting the event as long as it is organized (see Image 4).

Image 4: Banner of the victory day celebration with pictures of the organizers

Source: Authors

During the data collection phase in 2022, the bazar committee organized a festival with more than 200 community members on the eve of the world cup football final match. Each participant gave a certain amount toward the cost of food and other arrangements. The event was organized by Sadikur, a member of the ruling political party and the other son of Jalil (landowner). Even though the committee president Shaymal didn't receive any invitation, he sent a contribution of 1,000 takas (approx. USD 9.5) for the event. Sadikur refused to take the contribution; rather he invited Shaymal's opponent, a former UP member. Thus, an event meant for recreation and attracting crowds became part of political power dynamics.

5.4. Infrastructure and services development

The bazar required services such as water and electricity, toilets, and a prayer room as the number of customers and traders increased. When the tea shop and the restaurant started to operate in the bazar, they needed safe drinking water. Subsequently, the Union Parishad installed a tube-well after receiving an application from the bazar committee. Once the tube-well became dysfunctional, the landowners, Jalil and Rafiq, installed two tube-wells to serve their tenants.

Access to electricity was provided in an informal process at the beginning. Rafiq (the landowner) gave a connection to the shops as an extension from his house via an existing meter. The traders complained about paying bills at a higher rate as the unit rate increased with a higher cumulative usage amount, a result of supplying electricity to all shops through a single meter. Later the landowner obtained permission for a second meter from the Power Development Board (PDB). Yet, the higher demand was not met for an uninterrupted power supply. Sumon, Jalil’s son who ran a computer shop, was facing difficulties. He collaborated with a few Okrabari households to obtain an

electricity connection from the Rural Electrification Board (REB). They negotiated with an intermediary (an REB staff) who demanded 11,000 takas (approx. USD 100) for all the services.

Considering the amount and the possible beneficiaries, Jalil convinced Rafiq to join and bear two-thirds of the cost while he would pay the remaining one-third. Later Rafiq renegotiated to contribute only half the cost. Jalil agreed because the proposal was still profitable for him. Of his contribution of 5,500 takas, Rafiq paid 2,000 takas (approx. USD 18) out of pocket and borrowed the remaining 3,500 (approx. USD 32) from Bakhtiar, a tenant of Jalil. When he did not repay his debt, the tenant complained to Jalil. Rafiq agreed to repay within 15 days but kept on delaying, which prompted mediation from the UP member. Rafiq eventually paid when Jalil threatened to disconnect lines to all the shops he rented out.

Though the bazar now had access to electricity, power cuts interrupted activities after dark. Thus, the members of the bazar committee reached out to the UP chairman through the committee president, with a request of installing two solar lamp posts; However, their request has not yet been materialized.

> *"Chairman wanted to provide (the lamp posts). We have applied twice. We don't know our faults and why we did not get them. The list has been sent twice so that they provide two lamp posts on both sides. … We sent the list to MP sir (Local member of parliament). Many leaders make promises during the election which they do not fulfil later (Male, KII 04)".*

The growing number of bazar users necessitated prayer facilities. Initially, traders would organize "*Jamat*," or group prayer, on the nearby bridge. The absence of a prayer facility influenced the customers' choices and they preferred Okrbari Bazar with a mosque over Corona bazar. The committee took an initiative to build a mosque and proposed constructing the mosque on land owned by Jalil's clan. However, he declined to give the land due to the complications of co-ownership. Later the committee members approached Rafiq, and he agreed to donate a small piece of land for the mosque. Remarkably, the committee members did not involve the president of the committee in these initiatives, as he was a Hindu. The committee later organized several meetings soliciting donations from shopkeepers, community members, and outside donors. Protyasha, an NGO, offered to build an ablution room for the mosque. Local political leaders also helped with the construction as described by a participant:

> *"One day, chairman candidate Babu Bhai came and donated a bun (six/seven pieces) of tin for the mosque. However, he could not become the chairman. Many others have given a lot. Hai member (former Union Parishad member) donated a tube-well for the mosque (Participant 4, FGD, JM 01)".*

Several traders reported that the absence of a toilet was a major issue in the bazar. Shop owners and traders spending long hours and people traveling from a distance suffered the most. The adjoining mosque committee initiated building a toilet within the mosque compound and raised donations for purchasing building materials. Jalil had collected the money and kept it to himself; he wanted the toilet to be open for all bazar users. On the other hand, Rafiq wanted it to be used by only *musolli* (worshipers) of the mosque and mentioned exerting pressure on Jalil to get the money back. The power struggle between the two has halted the construction of this essential infrastructure.

Image 5: The new mosque and abandoned tube-well, which was built by the UP

Image 6a: Signage of the NGO in ablution space Image 6b: Ablution space

Source: Authors

5.5.Sustainability beyond the crisis period

Community members of Corona bazar expressed their sense of ownership for sustaining the bazar beyond the crisis period. The bazar has become a symbol of the community's dignity. One of the female users from *Vatia para* defended the necessity of maintaining the bazar mentioning:

> *“Won't they (people of Okrabari) laugh? They will say that after we went there again after running our Bazar for only three days (figuratively). The market should be kept running at least to protect our dignity” (Participant 09, Female, FGD 1).”*

The sustainability of the bazar beyond the crisis period stems from not only the community members’ sense of dignity but also its utility. The villagers went there for easy accessibility that saved their time, effort, and money. It also became a market for locally produced goods (e.g., fresh milk), and the bazar enabled farmers to diversify their livelihood by running shops in the evening. The bustling place became a place for recreation and entertainment and seeking medical care from a village doctor. A female villager expressed,

“Shall we shut down the bazar now? You gave birth to this child; can you kill this child? That's the child (market) we gave birth to. We will wait to live on its earning and to see it getting old. (Female user, IDI 15)”.

6. Findings of Case 2: Hand Washing Station (HWS)

6.1. Phase 1: Initiation

Before the pandemic, the available number of hands washing stations in outdoor public places, especially in rural areas, was insufficient. Even the existing standard facilities had limitations. They were not designed to be used without touching the faucet, which became a major concern in the context of COVID-19. As a result, there was a demand for innovative hand-washing facilities that would allow users to wash their hands without touching a shared faucet. BRAC introduced an innovative hand washing station, where a user could operate the faucet using a paddle (and thus without touching faucet) from tanks containing soapy and clean water. The sinks had different heights so that it could serve diversified groups of population. The stations became popular with increased risk awareness due to the rising number of illnesses and death in the communities.

BRAC initially communicated with influential local leaders and staff and committees of local institutions e.g., mosque and school. BRAC intended to install the HWS on the institutions' property and use their existing water supply line; therefore, decided the location of HWSs in consultation with the local leaders and the institution’s committees. BRAC assigned a caretaker and a contact person for each station for operation and maintenance. Typically, these individuals, often two different persons, were chosen from among the staffs or leaders of the host institutions. Their names and phone numbers were posted at the stations. The caretakers received a small payment as a token of appreciation for the first few months. BRAC also provided detergents in several instalments over a year to each HWS and entrusted the supplies to the contact persons and institutions' staff. BRAC also took care of any repair work during the first year.

BRAC formed a committee for each HWS comprised of institution committee members and staff, local leaders, and residents. They signed a contract for a year with the committee. However, these committees did not function as separate authorities; rather, the institution’s leaders and staff who were also HWS committee members oversaw the operation and maintenance activities.

Image 7: Hand Washing Station at Baradi Bazar

Source: Authors

6.2. Phase 2: Handover to the community

After the end of the contract period, the decision to continue the stations was left to the community. Accordingly, BRAC’s staff informed the caretaker at the Horihordi school and the Pachani ghat

mosque about discontinued support. But the stations in the Baradi Bazar mosque and UP office premises did not receive the information. The focal persons of these stations realized the discontinuation when they did not receive any supplies. As an alternative, BRAC installed donation boxes in all the stations as indicated by the secretary of the Pachani Ghat mosque:

> *"He (the Program Officer) left for good. After he left, another person came and installed the red box. After installing it, he said, "we are not looking after it (HWS) anymore. We are not responsible for it, continue the HWS using (the money collected from) the donation box (Male, Contact person, KII 02)".*

6.3. Phase 3: Post-Handover

The usage of HWSs decreased gradually over time, largely due to the relaxation of COVID-19 restrictions. As the infection rate decreased, the institutions' enthusiasm for enforcing hygiene practices naturally diminished, resulting in decreased usage. Although community members and pedestrians utilized the stations, the types of users varied by institution. In the *Pachani ghat* HWS, a major share of current users were non-residents of the area who used the *ghat* as their transit to cross the river. The worshipers of the mosques and shopkeepers of the adjoining bazar primarily used the HWS at Baradi Bazar mosque whereas, in the school, students and their parents represented the largest user group.

The usage pattern of the four studied HWS evolved. The convenience of using the stations played a role in the changes. The station was designed to be used while standing. Unlike ablution spaces in mosques, users did not need to remove their shoes, which was a convenience for non-mosque users. Continuing of the operation of HWSs also significantly depended on the availability of soap. Baradi Bazar HWS stopped filling up the soapy water tank as it was not big enough to meet users' demand and needed to be filled several times a day. The mosque management of *Pachani ghat* HWS discontinued filling up the tank after finding out that some children were drinking the soapy water after failing to distinguish its difference from plain water. They replaced soapy water with soap in an attached soap case. As they were already buying soaps for their existing washing facilities, they just needed to extend the service for the HWS. A user from the mosque reported,

> *"The HWS and the ablution room are adjacent. If the soap is kept in one place, it can be used in both places, and for this reason, it has survived. Because of this, everyone has taken care of it (FGD 03, Male, User).*

The mosque fund covered the cost of the soap. Furthermore, community members frequently gave soap to the mosque as a charitable donation, though the donations were not specifically intended for the HWS. A user from *Pachani Ghat* described the community-based financing process for soap as follows:

"We are all brothers and uncles here. If someone provides soap today, another person would provide it on the other day. Say, I noticed that there is no soap in here, I would give money or I ask the Muaajin to buy it. Or uncle (secretary) noticed that (absence of soap) and provided a soap. Or uncle has a good relationship with a nephew and requested him to donate five soaps. The nephew also provided it. Again, it also happened that I asked Muaajin to use money from donations for the mosque to buy soaps and put one in here." (FGD 03, User, male)

Image 8: HWS with soap case

Source: Authors

Unlike mosques, schools did not provide soap for the station. The maintenance worker Asad spent his own money on soaps for a few days. The institution's head cited bureaucratic procedures for the unavailability of soap. The school's restrooms had soap for students and teachers, suggesting the headmaster's lack of interest as the reason for its discontinuation rather than his inability.

Before the HWSs were installed in the mosques, anyone who wanted to wash their hands had to use the ablution facilities, irrespective of their need for ablution or simply washing hands, e.g., after using the mosque bathroom. And to do so, they had to remove their shoes and sit down. However, many users were reluctant to take off their shoes before using the ablutions facilities, resulting in increased maintenance efforts. After the installation of the HWSs, people who simply needed to wash their hands started using it instead of the ablution facility. The HWS faucet was high enough for standing users to wash their hands without removing their shoes. With fewer users using the ablution facilities without taking off their shoes, it became easier to keep the ablution facilities clean. Thus, HWSs at mosques offered clear incentives to both the users and the institution authority. i.e., mosque.

Image 9: Integration of HWSs and ablution space

Source: Authors

One staff reported working for "*Sowab*" (spiritual gain as intangible motivation for action) at the HWS. Another staff of Baradi Bazar mosque reported the need for cleaning:

> *“Whenever excessive dirt piles up, we clean it. Since musolli (worshippers) visit here, it is necessary to keep it clean” (IDI 03, Maintenance worker).*

6.4. Sustainability beyond the crisis period

With the exception of the HWS at UP, all other HWSs remained operational even after the pandemic. Multiple factors contributed to the decision of whether to continue or discontinue each HWS, and these factors varied among the different locations. The station in the schoolyard was still active due to the efforts of the caretaker and contact person, Asad. His commitment to maintaining the station earned him the respect of the community as an intangible motivation for action. Although he held a small position at the school, his connections with an NGO for maintaining the station gave him a greater role and recognition. He took care of the station when needed as he described,

> *“A boy broke the pipe. I brought all of his family members to the school. After they came, I threatened them. I told them, "BRAC had called me and told me a case to be filed against you (in the court)". I scared them and asked for reparations. Later, they begged pardon, saying that they were poor. However, we did not take the money. We called a technician and fixed it within 100 Taka. But I scared them to prevent such occurrences” (IDI 1, Contact person and maintenance worker.*

In *Baradi Bazar*, when the flat bar connected to the paddle in the HWS was not working, one of the staff members wrapped a piece of scotch tape around the bar shortening the distance between the bar and the tip of the faucet to make it functional. He also lubricated the spring.

Image 10: A wrapped flat bar to shorten the distance between the bar and the tip of the faucet

Source: Authors

The mosque's secretary and staff in Pachani Ghat and Horihordi School, respectively, sought the assistance of local plumbers to repair the damaged water pipelines. The plumbers did not charge any fee for their services. Another important factor in the sustainability of the HWSs was the ability of the caretaker and other stakeholder to maintain the station. Despite efforts to repair the HWS in Baradi Bazar, the spout became inoperable after prolonged use. A staff of the mosque tried to find a replacement for the spout, but the required component was not available in the market.

> *“The mosque can continue it (HWS). We used to support it as much as we could, but now the water faucet is broken. Even if we provide soap, it will not work. So,*

we have stopped providing it. And your (BRAC's) provided water faucet's mechanism is different from the usual. If it was available in the local market, we could have looked for a replacement. If we needed money, we could take it from the mosque's fund. But we cannot locate (this type of) faucet" (IDI 5, male, Sonargaon, maintenance worker).

The design and operation of the HWS were unfamiliar to the local maintenance workers. This led to difficulty in identifying the root cause of the malfunction, as stated by one of the FGD participants,

" We do not understand the issues with the machine and where it was damaged. We couldn't catch the problem with this machine. If we could understand the problem, it could be serviced. This machine is new to us, so we can't figure out where the problem is (FGD 06, Male)".

Failure to repair the damaged faucet reduced the utility of the HWS, resulting in reduced motivation to maintain. As one maintenance worker stated,

"I used to clean and maintain it frequently, but now I see that water is not coming out. As the water not flowing, I do not clean it with the same enthusiasm." (IDI 05, Maintenance worker)

It was evident from the previous section that the sustainability of HWSs beyond the crisis period depended on whether the station satisfied any pre-existing need in the location. For example, the school had pre-existing washing facilities for the students and their parents', emphasizing a focus cleanliness; however, the facilities did not have sinks or drainage systems. The installation of an HWS, with a sink and drainage system, offered a convenient solution for the children. Similarly, the station at Pachani Ghat became a source of drinking water, washing face to cool down during the hot summer while waiting for the next boat. The mosque's ablution place that the *ghat* users previously used remained locked most of the time.

A *khadem* (mosque's maintenance staff) said,

"Our responsibility is to make sure a comfortable experience for the worshipers".

The Baradi Bazar mosque had a variety of washing facilities in the ablution area except for a mirror. As observed, after using the mosque's other washing facilities, a large number of individuals used the HWS's mirror to examine their appearance and attire. The extensive use of mirror further strengthened the usability of the HWS in the community, leading to greater appreciation for the HWS among its maintenance staffs and users.

In comparison, the UP-office premise HWS did not satisfy any pre-existing need for a water source, which ultimately resulted in the discontinuation of the station following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Another issue that impacted the sustainability of the function of the HWSs was the availability of resources for maintenance such as a fund for buying soaps and the cost of repair, when needed. An institution staff in the UP-office premise HWS during the interview commented that

"The chairman gave instructions. I asked him if detergent has run out, and BRAC has not been showing up, should we keep it on? Then he asked if there is anything left in the stock bought from our funds for providing relief. I said, "yes, there is some wheel powder (detergent) or hand wash. He instructed me to use them in

the HWS and said that if there is any problem, they (BRAC) will come" (KII 01, Male, UP staff).

Some *"musolli"* (worshippers) of the Pachani Ghat mosque demanded the mosque committee shut down the station due to higher water bills resulting from the wastage of water. The mosque secretary disregarded their opinion and persuaded the *"murubbis"* (elderly elites) of the society to continue the HWS by emphasizing its benefits for the community. The community members were not just taking advantage of the mosque's initiative without any contribution. The mosque's secretary, Habibullah, said, the mosque's donation box located next to the HWS received three to four thousand takas a month, mostly from the passengers of the *ghat*. Therefore, the mosque had the intention to make the passengers feel welcome. The Baradi bazar mosque also received donations from its worshipers, which was not the case for the school or UP. However, it is worth mentioning that none of the HWSs received any donations through the donation box provided by BRAC. According to a staff from Baradi Bazar mosque, worshippers did not associate the donation box installed at the HWS with the mosque, which might have discouraged them from donating money for spiritual gains.

7. Discussion

The two cases of this study—Corona bazar and HWS—developed from community needs during the COVID-19 crisis. These initiatives followed bottom-up, informal, networked pathways (Fransen et al., 2021) where the main stakeholders and leadership remained with the community and community members. The bazar developed informally with spontaneous community initiative while an NGO initiated the HWSs in collaboration with the community. In both cases, different activities were carried out by, with, or on behalf of a community by a group of stakeholders within the community (Totikidis et al., 2005) as discussed in previous sections. Some of the initiatives were sustained, while some did not. Over time, the needs and usage of these initiatives have evolved, leading to changes in operation and management structure. This section discusses the sustainability of the two case studies in terms of a) community characteristics during the crisis, b) the condition of the community that motivated actions, and c) the governance structure that facilitated the implementation.

7.1. Community Characteristics

Vulnerabilities and needs

The global vulnerability to the COVID-19 outbreak with socio-economic impact was equally true for the rural areas of Bangladesh. The measures taken to control and mitigate the pandemic created a major socio-economic shock, threatening the livelihoods of rural communities. Among many other measures, isolating the infected persons was imposed and public hygiene through hand washing in both indoor and outdoor settings was encouraged by the state.

In the case of Holholiya, although the government-imposed mobility restrictions and lockdown with the rumour of a person being infected, the community played a key role in supporting and actively implementing the lockdown imposed by the state. The presence of police, magistrates, and ambulances with red flags, along with the house arrest of the residents, to impose lockdown in the *Colony Para* caused the surrounding villages to ostracize the entire village of Holholiya. Other than imposing a lockdown, the representatives of the state did not take any other measures to ensure food supply or alternative livelihood for the villagers who had businesses outside the village. The problem reached a proportion that was not possible to be handled either by individuals acting alone or governments—a favourable precondition for giving rise to bottom-up informal community initiatives.

On the other hand, BRAC's intervention in introducing HWSs can be seen as a networked initiative. BRAC as an NGO was one of the main stakeholders and took the leadership role to collaborate with communities. Despite, the state's highest intention to create hand washing facilities, the market did not see any incentives; thus, the NGO was motivated to take action with the participation of the community to address their vulnerabilities and needs. Furthermore, BRAC intended to transfer the operation and maintenance responsibility to the community after a year, to empower the community so that they can address their vulnerabilities by capitalizing their own capacities and resources.

7.2. Condition of the community

Capacity

In both cases, the existing capacities of communities, namely a sense of community—the recognition of shared circumstances based on the mutual experience of suffering and dishonour—commitment or a sense of ownership and motivation, and access to resources (Chaskin, 2001) facilitated taking action considering their vulnerabilities and needs.

Stigmatization of villagers of Holholiya impacted their neighbourly bond with the residents of Okrabari. The friction led to a reconstruction of their sense of community, creating the ground for community members to work for a common goal and allowing them to develop a strong sense of ownership towards the bazar. The community's sense of ownership towards the bazaar was so deep that they often compared it to their own children. This played a significant role in their assumption of individual and collective responsibility for sustaining the initiative. It is evident from the example of the fish seller who transferred his business to the person who could supply more to keep the bazar functioning. Landowners' and traders' tangible incentives, such as increased land value and profits, were complemented by their intangible motivations demonstrated through their offer to use their existing resources - suitable land with half-built infrastructures without rent in the initial period, and the transfer of vegetable business to a more appropriate trader to keep the bazar functioning.

While the sense of community was reconstructed in Holholiya during the crisis, the communities involved with HWSs were already organized as institutions based on a shared usage of facilities such as schools or mosques. Nevertheless, the sense of community varied across institutions, it was stronger in social institutions such as mosques and weaker in formal institutions such as school and Union Parishad. Both community members and maintenance workers considered the HWS as part of the institutions for their locations and common members in the management committees. Interestingly, the maintenance workers demonstrated more ownership in comparison to the other committee members for their desire for intangible benefits, such as spiritual gain and altruism or the attainment of respect and appreciation as well as tangible incentives such as reduced workload and their access to resources.

However, the access to resources was not similar across institutions; it was harder for schools in comparison to mosques.

Social capital

The initiation and expansion of Corona bazar demonstrated the community's strength in capitalizing their bonding, bridging (Putnam, 2000), and linking social capital (Szreter & Woolock, 2004) in attaining their desired outcome. For instance, individual traders like Habib (the fish seller) and Azmal (an initial trader) used their bonding with other traders to convince them to start businesses in the new bazar; Jalil (a landowner) bridged with a group of residents from the other village (Okrabari) to bring electricity connection, and the bazar committee received a tube-well, tin, and ablution facilities for bazar mosque by linking with external institutions such as local government and NGOs.

In the case of HWSs, BRAC also used community networks as a means to introduce innovation to meet public health needs during the pandemic. BRAC followed its proven method of linking with local leaders and influential persons as well as community institutions such as mosques, schools, and UP office premises. Working with these institutions ensured water supply to the stations. BRAC also leveraged the bonding capital in forming the management committees with representatives from the affiliated institutions, local leaders, and residents. Community networks were also used to maintain the HWS after BRAC stopped supporting the community. For instance, Asad, the contact person of HWS in the school, utilized his social capital as a source of power by referring to his affiliation with BRAC to scare those who caused damage to the HWS and used his bonding with local technicians to fix the damage free of cost.

Leadership

Individual initiatives responded to the immediate need in the bazar; later, local informal leaders of different neighbourhoods and clans responded by organizing the community to collectively find solutions. The idea of a new bazar was overwhelmingly accepted in the first meeting; however, many of the essential resources (e.g., land) required for the initiative could only be accessed through the

existing leaders. Among the three leaders, Rafiq (a land owner) came up with the vision as demonstrated by his early recognition of the suitability of the land for a bazar. He also gave additional land recognizing the need for a prayer facility for customer retention and actively networked and facilitated the formation of the committee as a regulatory authority. The other land owner Jalil, as a locally respected clan leader, used his networks to bring an uninterrupted electricity connection. Their vision and motivations served their interest. Nevertheless, they contributed to the collective good as the bazar served the community by providing essentials, creating livelihood opportunities, and making it a place for entertainment and social gathering. The leadership of these landowners made fundamental changes; however, their non-intersecting interests also caused power struggles as noted in the case of toilet construction.

Crisis often creates opportunities for new leadership to emerge. Shaymal, a political leader, played different roles in the initial phases of the bazar. He acted as a mediator and a conflict resolver and connected the bazar committee with the local government and members of the parliament. Thus, he positioned himself as a bridge between the external actors and the local community, exhibiting a boundary-spanning leadership style. His position won him to be elected as a Union Parishad member. In the later period Sadikur, the son of a landowner, with the backing of political support started challenging Shaymal as was evident from organizing the event during the football world cup. He started using the support of the traders of the market.

In the case of the HWS, each station was supervised by one or two persons from the host institute, for example, mosque secretary and school caretaker, who were members of the HWS committees. They were active in the operation and maintenance of the stations. Apart from them, the contact person of each station had a major role in the continuation of the HWS beyond the crisis period. For instance, in Pachani Ghat, he negotiated with the members who opposed the continuation of the HWS and took measures to secure the station from damages. The leadership, in this case, was not only limited to the local elites, people working in lower positions, such as the school staff, also sustained the station with greater commitment and responsibility. However, sustainability significantly depended on the interest of the institution's senior leadership as in the case of the mosque and UP. A change in leadership in the UP and his lack of interest demotivated the maintenance workers; hence, when the water supply pipeline was damaged, the station did not sustain beyond the crisis period.

7.3. Governance structure

Decision-making process

Different community members and local leaders of Holholiya were involved in the decision-making process of the Corona bazar, as illustrated in the findings about the first meeting. Although it can be argued that local leaders and elites dominated the process, the intention was to address a common need. Therefore, non-elite villagers (such as the fish seller) also found their voice reflected in the process resulting in a greater acceptance of the decisions.

Community leaders were also involved in the location selection and committee formation in HWSs; thus, there was some participation in the installation decision-making process. Yet as a prototype to be installed in rural areas across the country, there were limited provisions for the local community to be involved in the design of the stations and use local materials and techniques. Consequently, when the stations were damaged after the first year beyond the BRAC’s maintenance period, replacing faulty or broken components became challenging, as illustrated in the example of Baradi bazar HWS.

Besides, the handover process from BRAC to committees after a year was ambiguous. The discussions in the four locations revealed that concerned persons of the two locations were formally informed while the other two realized when supports were discontinued. The time and process of the handover were decided solely by BRAC. Thus, communities had little say on the timing and the process of handover, raising question about the exit strategy of NGOs in NGO-led community initiatives.

Self-organization

The establishment of the bazar led to the emergence of a self-organized order shaped by complex and non-linear interaction between the local actors based on a shared goal (Nederhand, Bekkers, & Voorberg, 2016). Although at the initiation stage, the coordination was informal, carried out through communication and mutual adjustment of behaviour, certain management-related incidences necessitated forming the bazar committee. This committee was primarily a community initiative to bring an organized structure to the market, as such structures are necessary to access state benefits and assert the power to resolve conflicts. The committee operated through informal social processes (e.g., *Salish,* a form of traditional dispute settlement mechanism) in carrying out its activities in the bazar.

The power structure in rural society in Bangladesh is formulated through *gusti* (lineages), kinship, landownership, networks, and political affiliation that often determine the formation of village-based committees (Lewis & hossain, 2007). As was evident, Shyamal, the local political leader and later UP member became the president while the son of Jalil, the landowner and local influential person, became the secretary – the two top management positions of the committee. However, the bazar committee embedded within the village power structure facilitated the sustainability of the bazar by enforcing stakeholders to cooperate; thus, ensuring collective action.

Although the Bazar had an ordered structure, the majority of the initiatives, cooperation, and coordination were taking place informally driven by a sense of ownership and a desire for incentives (e.g., profit). As was evident in the case of a trader inviting other traders to diversify shops, and in the case of a community member reprimanding a trader for selling the same product that was being sold by a floating trader. More importantly, these informal, decentralized small acts were all aligned towards the better functionality of the bazar. However, the alignment did not arise randomly, rather, a shared vision emerging from the crisis made everyone act in a way that is intrinsically coordinated in nature. Therefore, the combination of these informal acts happening on an individual level was able to address a major share of the governance needs of the bazar instead of creating chaos, while the committee took care of the more critical issues that involved a formal dimension, such as conflict resolution and linking with external actors.

However, as the bazar grew, the power structure became more dynamic as evident by excluding the president and UP members from the world cup finale festival and inviting his opponents. Although other neighbourhoods protested the decision, the dominance of a clan leader's son, due to his political affiliation, the protest was unsuccessful. This indicates that the committee was losing its decision-making power and the decisions were less reflective of the community perception, making the bazar more of a platform of village politics of the local leaders. Similarly, informal practices of distributing electricity in the market at a higher rate indicates to the emergence of power politics.

The self-organization around the HWSs was comparatively more explicit than the bazar. The HWS was installed within the land of the institutions and utilized their water and human and economic resources. Consequently, community members, institutions staff, and leaders considered the HWS as a part of the institutions. This led to the management of the HWS integrated into the institution's existing governance structures. Initially, the institution committee dealt with critical issues such as

collaborating with BRAC and negotiating on land, water supply etc. Even though an HWS committee was formed, the institution committee remained the key decision maker as they supported the stations with the majority of the resources (water, land, electricity for water supply etc.), making the HWS committee rather irrelevant from the beginning.

While the institutions' committee dealt with critical issues and formal actors (e.g., BRAC), individual actors also took charge of the routine maintenance and monitoring of the HWSs from a commitment towards the institutions. Thus, the maintenance of the stations consisted of many small actions carried out informally at an individual level that did not have any centralized coordination. As was evident from the maintenance person fixing the damaged spout or the community members monitoring the HWS usage. These actions driven by a sense of ownership in combination with tangible and intangible incentives led to the emergence of a synchronized management mechanism, consisting of informal individual-level initiatives, based on a shared understanding of the changed benefits of the HWS in the post-pandemic context.

Various social agencies, including customers, traders, and land owners who are part of the same social network, facilitated the emergence and sustainability of bazar. Consequently, a social market structure emerged. The way all the users interacted and built relationships with each other had a significant impact on the expansion trend of the bazar. One trader invited others engaged in diversified business, and a local youth started giving MFS service from his account to attract more customers and make profits. This social market structure often reinforced the distribution of power and resources that already existed (McKague et al., 2015). Rafiq and Jalil, two of the land owners, worked together when needed, for example, bringing electricity while the general users negotiated with both to get land for the mosque. A UP Chairmen candidate donated building materials for the mosque in the hope of increasing his visibility.

The social structure of the bazar was shaped by the local context. The seasonal migrants who worked as laborers in nearby cities, including Dhaka, left their families behind for a certain time of the year. During those times migrants' households became dependent on the bazar for the proximity and ease of the female household members. Also, during those times shop owners often sold their products on credit based on social relationships and trust as money was tight for many. Traders kept records of credit sales, and some customers paid their bills remotely using mobile financial services. It was also observed that some customers made credit purchases on a weekly or monthly basis. Thus, the case of Corona bazar illustrates that markets are shaped by the thoughts and beliefs of the participants which challenge the traditional view that markets are purely asocial (Biggart & Beamish, 2003).

Collaboration

The two cases demonstrated collaboration between the community and external actors. In the case of Corona bazar, once it started to grow, local government collaborated by providing a tube-well for the mosque. Local political leaders and public representatives established a connection with the bazar with an intent to satisfy the voters by donating tin for the mosque and consistently financing and supporting the events organized by the committee. Later, a relationship with an NGO helped in constructing an ablution space in the mosque with the bazar. Meanwhile, distributors or suppliers established a relationship with the sellers, which strengthened the supply chain of the bazar. Thus, it became a collaborative relationship with external actors including local government, non-government organizations, political leaders, public representatives, and the market to better access external resources and opportunities, while external actors became interested in the bazar realizing its potential to aid their interest.

Yet these collaborations required negotiations. The bazar had inadequate community facilities such as toilets and solar lamp posts etc. Landowners invested in constructing shops but not in such support services. On the other hand, land for making a mosque became available while negotiating

with the two landowners; a donation from shop owners and local communities through multiple meetings helped the building of the mosque. An NGO came forward to construct the ablution space. Yet when it comes to the toilet in the mosque, two conflicting interests emerged—one intended to make it accessible to all while the other wanted to restrict them to only the worshippers. As the president of the bazar committee was not invited to the inauguration of the mosque's construction for being Hindu, it is only natural that facilities associated with the mosque may not be accessible to all.

As for the HWSs, BRAC followed their proven methods to collaborate with the communities for establishing them. They reached out the local leaders and influential persons as well as community institutions such as mosques schools and UP office premises. Working with these institutions and creating programmatic relationships with the local people ensured water supply from the community to the stations. BRAC formed the management committees with representatives from within the organization from which the water connection and station site was taken. BRAC continued to provide soap and technical support for a year to develop the operation and maintenance system and prepare the community to take responsibility later. Other wealthier members of the community were included so that they could support the resources needed when BRAC moved out.

8. Conclusion

The study intended to explore the collective agency and activism of rural communities in Bangladesh during the COVID-19 pandemic. It took a case study approach while using qualitative and ethnographic methods. The focus was on community governance to analyse activities and the nuances associated with different contexts to bring out insights into community governance. The contexts of the crisis period and beyond helped to unpack the motivations and instigators of self-governing and community-driven initiatives through the community's condition, characteristics and governance structure.

Examination of the community's condition during COVID-19 and post-pandemic situations illustrated that the community's perception and experience of vulnerability and needs were formulated by their access to information and awareness of risks. The initiation of the bazar resulted from hyped rumours and risk awareness of the adjoining villages while awareness of individuals and institutions accepted the innovative solution for handwashing. A crisis situation did motivate communities to take spontaneous actions or adapt innovative solutions. However, the sustainability of the bazar beyond the crisis period depended on the socio-economic needs of increasing livelihood opportunities rather than health vulnerabilities and any pre-existing need for a water source sustained by the HWSs.

The decision-making processes reveal that community members came forward spontaneously during the pandemic to reduce the initial vulnerabilities. Meeting those localized needs was beyond the capability of the state prompting communities to assert greater autonomy and practice their agency to initiate activities. However, individuals were not as closely associated with an initiative taken by an NGO as in the case of the bazar. The power dynamics of the rural context were reflected in the operation of both these cases. Combined with the sense of community, ownership, incentives, and access to necessary resources, an efficient manoeuvring of the community's existing capacities determined the extent of success of the initiatives beyond the crisis. While these capacities set the ground for the community to act collectively, leadership aided the initiatives by organizing and sharing additional resources and networks, the social capital as leveraged by bonding within the community, bridging with other communities and linking with external institutions interplayed with community capacities.

Together, they formed the community governance characterized by a hierarchical structure embedded within the informal rules, norms, and values. The structure emerged from the multimodal, non-linear, and informal interactions of the individual actors synchronized by a shared vision or understanding, in the absence of a centralized coordinating authority. Thus, it enabled individual actors to meet a range of their governance needs with greater efficiency. However, the informal mechanism was insufficient when there was a need for uniform decision-making, as an informal dimension of governance does not a have strong mechanism to enforce cooperation. The cases demonstrate that the formal structure resolved these issues by utilizing accumulated power achieved through the ordered structure. The governance structure was not static, rather dynamic and evolved through time. The cases conform with the argument that "informality is not opposed to governance, but rather has the capacity to strengthen governance systems" (van Wyk and Reddy, 2022: p.6) demonstrated especially during the pandemic.

The findings of this study remain consistent with the earlier findings from the study on urban community governance (Zaman et al., 2022). The rural community governance strived for achieving permanency while the urban initiatives were more focused on momentary solutions. This difference may be due to the lack of resources in urban areas, such as an abundance of private land, which, coupled with legal uncertainties of the settlements, may have limited their ability to strive for

long-term sustainability. Nevertheless, both studies demonstrate that local, adaptive, and informal forms of community governance in the face of crisis can deliver much-needed public services.

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