

Food Security in Dhaka: Between Global Risks and Local Vulnerabilities

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Abstract

Food security is a central issue in the numerous megacities of the global south. However, basic knowledge lacks about how food supply and distribution currently work in these agglomerations. Drawing on recent research in Dhaka, Bangladesh, in this contribution, the supply and distribution channels of rice are outlined. It is clarified how rice is produced, how the goods pass from the fields to the city and how they are distributed within the city. The contribution concludes by discussing the current situation of food insecurity of Dhaka's poor citizens.

Keywords

Food security • Megacity • Rice supply • Distribution • Accessibility

Megacities can be regarded as new focal points of an emerging global risk society. A main challenge in these agglomerations is feeding the urban population. Hunger is a chronic feature of life for the poor population living in marginal settlements. Nevertheless, little is known of how food supply and food distribution in megacities work. This will be examined in the present contribution, based on a case study conducted in the capital of Bangladesh.

Hardly any other city in the world has grown as rapidly during the last decades as the capital of Bangladesh. In 1951 Dhaka had a population of 336,000 (Islam 2005, p. 13), today there are roughly 14.2 million (Islam 2010, p. 6): 42 times more inhabitants than before! Thus, Dhaka has joined the ever-growing list of megacities and now stands at number nine among the largest

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cities of the world (cf. UN 2008). Like other megacities, Dhaka is marked by extreme contrasts in close proximity, hence challenging city planners and politicians in unprecedented ways. Dhaka is the seat of government, the centre of political power, and – with most of the garment industry concentrated in and around the metropolis – the centre of one of the main industries that keep the economy running. With its vast university campus and a number of private universities, as well as museums, exhibitions and art performances, Dhaka is also the cultural heart of the country.

Despite Dhaka's centrality, however, 30–40% of the population of the city live in marginal, partly illegal, settlements and under conditions of extreme poverty (cf. World Bank 2007). Providing basic amenities like drinking water and sewerage systems for all inhabitants is beyond the capacities and will of the city's administration (cf. Siddiqui et al. 2000, 2004). As Castells (1996, p. 403) has emphasised, size alone is not the dominant risk factor in a megacity. Along with other megacities, Dhaka is experiencing the clash of a multitude of actors with very divergent interests, unequal positions in the social arena and different possibilities of acting. Life in Dhaka offers great potential for innovation and financial wealth for some of the city's inhabitants; for many others it primarily means risk and a daily fight for survival (cf. Kraas 2003, 2007; Etzold et al. 2009).

The food system of megacities has been studied very little, save a few exceptional cases (Pryer and Crook 1988; Gertel 1995; Koc et al. 1999; FAO 2001; Bohle and Adhikari 2002; Keck et al. 2008; Gertel 2010). The present contribution aims at showing how the supply of Dhaka with rice and its distribution within the city functions. How much food is necessary to meet the daily demand of the population in a megacity like Dhaka? Where do all the food supplies come from? What is the structure of the supply chain and how is it functioning? Which city dwellers are most vulnerable in terms of insecurity of food supply? And how is the access to food negotiated from day to day?

5.1 Dimensions of a Megacity: Demand for Food

After its official founding in 1610 by *Islam Khan Chishti*, Dhaka prospered as the capital of Bengal Province within the Mughal Empire. Following the annexation of Bengal by the British in the eighteenth century, however, it lost its importance and decreased in size, while Calcutta became the seat of colonial power. The number of inhabitants fell from 200,000 (some sources even speak of 900,000) to only 40,000 in the early nineteenth century; the first population census in 1872 counted 70,000 inhabitants. With the partition of Bengal in 1905, Dhaka became the capital of the new province of East Bengal. This enhanced status was short-lived, as the British soon reunited Bengal; the whole region suffered from the transfer of power to Delhi in 1911.

As a regional centre of trade and education (Dhaka University was founded in 1921), Dhaka had slowly reached a population of around 250,000 by the time colonial rule ended in 1947. It became the capital of the Pakistani province of East Bengal and later of East Pakistan. The city expanded rapidly, the number of its inhabitants increased sixfold during Pakistani times. After Bangladesh had gained independence in 1971, growth accelerated with annual growth rates reaching 10% a year in the mid 1970s (Siddiqui et al. 2000, pp. 2ff; Islam 2005, pp. 6ff.). Today, more than 14 million people live in Dhaka (Islam 2010).

Without a steady stream of food supplies from outside, life in the megacity would not be possible. Gigantic quantities of cereals, fish, vegetables, meat, fruit and spice, amounting to more than 9,000 tons, have to be brought into Dhaka City (cf. Fig. 5.2) every day (Keck 2012, p. 130). On average the citizens of Dhaka meet their caloric demand to 65% by eating cereals; with 378 g per person and day, cereals (i.e. mostly rice) are the most important staple foods for Dhaka's and Bangladesh's population (cf. BBS 2007). In this way the old Bengali proverb still holds true that the people in Bangladesh were

made of rice and fish (*Machhe-Bhat-Bengali*). Even today a good meal in Dhaka has to consist of rice with lentil sauce (*dhal*) and – for all who can afford it – fish or meat.

Every year the people of Dhaka consume almost two million tons of rice (BBS 2007). Moving these quantities into and within the city is a considerable logistical challenge. The transport into the city requires a large number of trucks; if they were put in a queue, it would extend for 1,600 km. The rapid growth of the city's population must also be taken into account. At the present growth rate of 3.5% (World Bank 2007, p. 22), around half a million people must be added every year. This means that an additional Dhaka the size of city in 1950 has to be supplied with the respective quantities of rice every year.

Because of the ongoing rural-urban migration this trend will not change too fast. Important reasons for migration to the cities are the lack of employment in rural areas and the loss of arable land because of floods and erosion. The migrants dream of finding a job in the “city of hopes” and of getting access to basic public services, especially to education and healthcare (ibid., p. 23).

5.2 Rice Production and Import in Bangladesh

Although 11% of Dhaka's working population are still employed in agriculture (ibid., p. 14), food is mainly produced outside the city. The country's rice granaries are located in the north-west and north, in regions such as Rajshahi, Bogra, Dinajpur, Mymensingh and Rangpur (see Fig. 5.1). There, numerous small-scale farmers (*krishok*) with cultivation areas of less than 2.5 acres (1 ha) each grow rice with up to three harvests a year. The seedlings of *aman* are usually broadcasted in March and April, transplanted during monsoon in June and July and harvested in November and December. Winter rice, *boro*, is planted in December and January and harvested in May, just before the beginning of the monsoon rains. *Aus* is planted in March and April and harvested in July and August (Ahmed 2001, p. 2;

Dorosh et al. 2004, p. 14). In the fiscal year 2006/2007, 55% of the total rice production stemmed from the *boro* season, whereas *aus* lost its importance and plays only a marginal role now with hardly 6% (FPMU 2009, p. 1).

After being harvested, rice starts its journey along the supply chain. The peasants thresh the sheaves on the farm and sell the paddy (*dhan*) to middlemen. Grain merchants purchase larger quantities of rice, transport them to the markets in district towns (*mokam*) and sell them to millers. In the rice mills, the paddy is preboiled. After the grain has been dried in the sun on large concrete yards (*chatahs*), it is milled. First, the husk (*tush*) is separated from the grain; in a second step, the brown membranes (*kura*) around the grain are peeled off. Whereas the husk is used as fuel for boiling the paddy, the thin membranes are fed to the livestock. After this two-day procedure, the rice (*cal*) is put into 50–85-kg sacks, loaded onto trucks and transported to Dhaka. In the course of a day, dozens of grocers, hawkers and restaurant owners roam Dhaka's markets and bargain over prices. Once the price is fixed, the rice sacks are loaded onto rickshaws, push carts and pickups to be delivered to the kitchen markets, retail shops, canteens and street food stalls all over Dhaka. Here, the journey of the grain ends, after the cooked and prepared rice (*bhat*) is consumed by the city dwellers.

Bangladesh has been a net importer of rice throughout the last decades. Since around 1999, 1 year after severe flooding devastated the country, the rice production has been able to, at least in theory, meet the national demand. New technologies such as high-yielding varieties and mechanised irrigation systems, an improved infrastructure in terms of roads, telecommunications and electricity networks and market development through new financial service providers helped to make Bangladesh more or less self-sufficient in rice production (Dorosh et al. 2004, p. 13f.). However, production is still volatile. Extreme weather events, such as floods and cyclones, both devastating Bangladesh in 2007, are likely to cause severe crop losses.

The government of Bangladesh tries to counteract the effects of poor harvests by maintaining

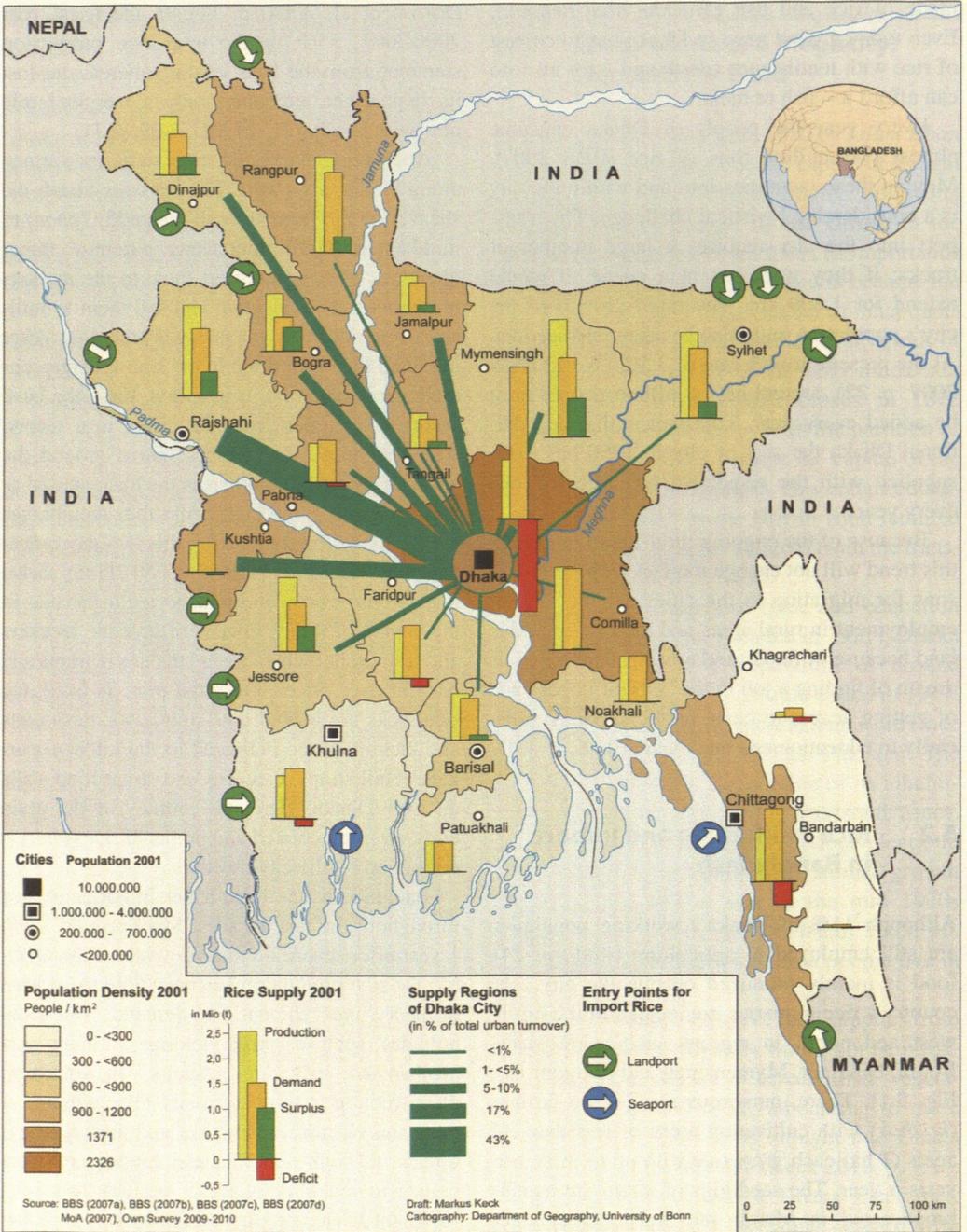


Fig. 5.1 Rice production in Bangladesh and supply of the Megacity Dhaka

public grain reserves, importing rice and wheat flour and selling food grain at subsidised rates, often supported by foreign food-aid programmes.

Since the beginning of market liberalisation in 1994, private food imports have started to play an important role (Zingel 2006). Bangladesh's

market liberalisation coincided with India's removal of its export restrictions. Once markets had been opened, India started to dominate the rice imports to Bangladesh, thus becoming more important than Thailand (Dorosh and Murshid 2004, p. 109). Rice imports increased from 233,300 tons on average during the 10 years from 1984 to 1993 to 838,100 tons during the 10 years from 1994 to 2003 (FAO 2008a).

Buffer stocks, government procurement at home and abroad and opening the borders even for private traders helped to protect the urban consumer against minor production shortfalls. The sudden rise of world market prices, however, limited the government's ability to come to the rescue of the urban consumers. In the second half of 2007, the world market price of rice doubled within a few months. As the global market for rice is much smaller than that for wheat or maize, small cutbacks of the leading rice-exporting countries Thailand, India, Vietnam, USA, Pakistan and China led to significantly increasing world rice prices (FAO 2008b, p. 7). Experts identified several factors as being responsible for rising prices such as the increasing world energy prices (of oil and gas) that raised the prices of major agricultural inputs, like fertiliser and water (via diesel for pumps and tractors), an increasing demand for rice in China and India, more land used to grow fuel crops, the weak US dollar and massive price speculation in agricultural commodities. As a consequence of the beginning world economic crisis, food prices went down again from mid-2008 onwards. These events have shown how vulnerable Bangladesh still is – and even more so the urban poor – as long as the country has to rely on the world market in times of production shortfalls (Zingel et al. 2011, p. 305).

5.3 Entry Points and Main Markets for Rice in Dhaka

Dhaka is not a junction of the national railroad network, and even inland waterways play a marginal role as far as the transport of rice is concerned. At least 80% of the rice consumed in Dhaka reaches the megacity by truck. Aged vehi-

cles and poorly maintained roads make transportation risky; long waiting times at ferries and bridges add to the inefficiency of the system and, thus, to the consumer's costs.

Dhaka's wholesale markets are mainly located along three entry axes (see Fig. 5.2): Rice from northern regions arrives via the Dhaka-Mymensingh Highway and enters the capital at Tongi; rice from the northwest as well as imported rice from India is transported on the Dhaka-Aricha Highway and enters the capital at Gabtuli; at Jatrabari, rice coming from Bangladesh's major sea port, located in the southeast of the country, enters the city by the Dhaka-Chittagong Highway. Nearly 50% of the quantity of rice consumed in the megacity is traded at the seven big rice wholesale markets, that is, Babubazaar/Badamtuli, Krishi Market, Kochukhet, Mirpur 1, Jatrabari North, Malibag and Mirpur 11 (see Fig. 5.2). In order to avoid even more traffic congestion during daytime, trucks are only allowed to enter the city at night, between 8:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m.; thus, the megacity's stocks are replenished at night (see Text Box 5.1).

Modern means of telecommunication connect Dhaka's wholesalers (*arotdar*) to the price mechanisms of the world market and help integrating the market; today, price information can be gathered from all over the country within a few minutes by mobile telephone. Wholesalers respond to harvests, price changes and interruptions in transport immediately, thus, securing the megacity's rice supply (and realising profit at the same time). Our investigations revealed that rice and fish wholesalers in Dhaka operate only a small number of exchanges via formal market ties, while the majority of transactions is organized through informal business relations. These latter relations are characterized by the sharing of more detailed information and a higher degree of mutual knowledge among business partners. This leads gradually to an ever growing versatility of the relationship, which brings up flexibility, options for action, and an atmosphere of mutual trust. This trust, in turn, leads to joint problem solving activities and mutual support among the traders and their suppliers in times of adversity and crisis. Even though short-term efforts to bail

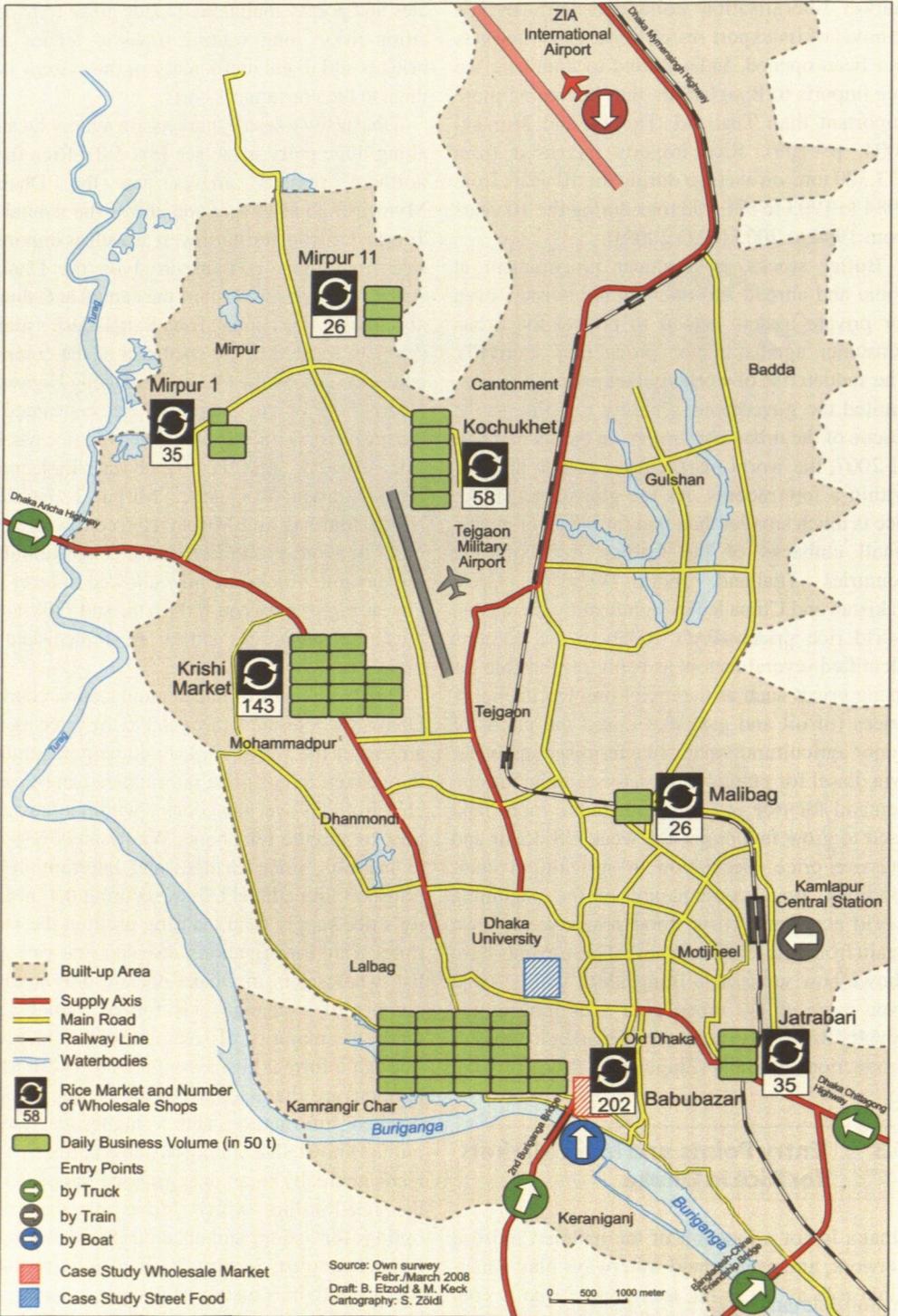


Fig. 5.2 Rice wholesale markets in Dhaka and daily turnover

Text Box 5.1 (continued)

Photo 5.1 Mohammad Shaiful Khan and his rice wholesale business (Source: Markus Keck)

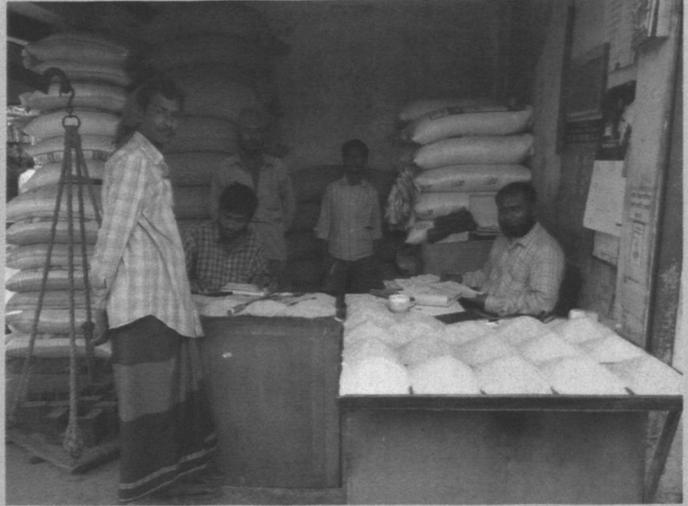
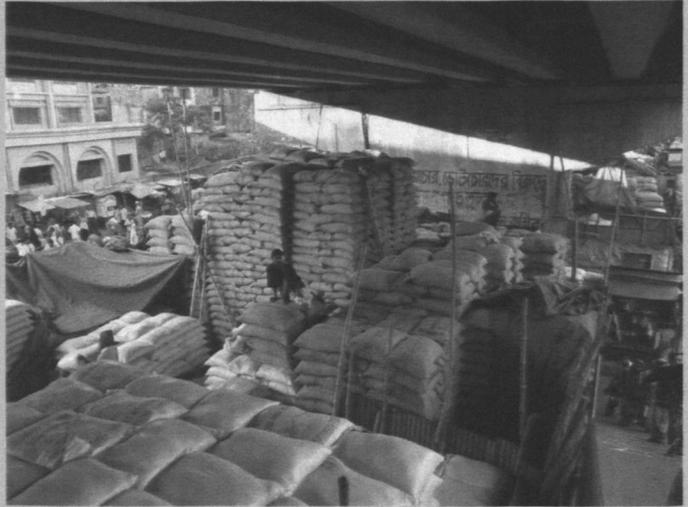


Photo 5.2 Informal rice warehouse under the Buriganga bridge (Source: Markus Keck)



One of his closest staff members is Iqbal, his elder brother's son, who works as shop accountant. The business is run by them together. In a couple of years, Iqbal is going to become the manager (see Photo 5.1).

During the day, Shaiful stays in his tiny showroom, where he displays samples of the varieties he has to offer. His storage is not at the same place. After the 2nd Buriganga Bridge was built in 2001, the merchants of

Babubazaar, Badamtuli Market and of the shops located in the building complex of the Bangladesh Inland Water Transportation Corporation (BIWTC) reached an agreement with local authorities to use the space under the bridge as a warehouse (see Photo 5.2). Shaiful is happy to have access to one of the plots, even though he is aware of the fact that Dhaka City Corporation can evict him from this informal warehouse at any time.

(continued)

Text Box 5.1 (continued)

Photo 5.3 Restocking of rice warehouse at Babubazaar at night (Source: Markus Keck)



Every morning at around 8:00 a.m., he opens his shop and welcomes his customers, who usually come before lunch. The majority of them are floating customers; even though with some of them long-term business relationships exist. In the afternoon the number of customers decreases, so that Iqbal has time to do the bookkeeping from 4:00 p.m. onwards. He documents the number of rice sacks, the varieties and prices per kg and works out which varieties of rice are selling well and which are not. Later, he contacts his suppliers in the countryside to place orders on the basis of these notes.

Two permanently employed workers are responsible for carrying the heavy rice sacks weighing up to 85 kg from the storage to the showroom and to the customers' vehicles. In contrast to Shaiful, their work is not finished at 6:00 p.m. After dinner, they both stay in the showroom the whole night, sleeping on the ground while waiting for the shelves to be restocked (see Photo 5.3). Around 10:00 p.m. the first trucks arrive at the market with the

rice sacks that were ordered the day before. Sometimes the workers have to wait until 2:00 a.m. until they can start unloading. Then Babubazaar awakes for the second time that the day. Trucks queue up and dozens of day labourers hope to find work.

Usually the permanent labourers employ day labourers informally in order to operate the unloading smoothly. For a rate of 0.04 Euro per sack, the workers carry the heavy load on their heads to the store. Each of them is given a small wooden stick at the truck's loading platform which he drops in front of the shop when unloading the sack. Thus, the supplier guarantees that every wholesaler receives the number of sacks he has ordered. These informal workers with low salaries, no legal contracts and no coverage of expenses in case of illness or injury – in other words, the most vulnerable city dwellers – have to be considered as the fundamental pillar of Dhaka's entire food system. Under enormous physical strain, they literally carry the rice supply of the megacity on their shoulders.

a partner out of his misery are usually asymmetric, eventually, they cause both business partners stable and long-term returns. As such, informal

business networks add to the merchants' adaptive capacities and help Dhaka's food supply to be guaranteed (Keck et al. 2012, p. 55).

5.4 Urban Poverty and Access to Food in Dhaka

While the supply of major food staples is guaranteed in Dhaka, it must be emphasised that the food security of the growing urban population largely depends on how these people are integrated in the labour market. How people get access to food is crucial, because only people with a regular income can afford to buy food in sufficient quantity and quality, as long as food prices do not rise (c.f. Bohle and Adhikari 2002). The majority of the population can actually find work in Dhaka, although very often only under highly precarious working conditions. In 2000, about 84% of men and 33% of women in working age – that is, older than 10 years in Bangladesh – were integrated in the megacity's labour market (World Bank 2007, p. 13). The majority of these workers, that is, 69%, are employed in the service sector, in particular in retail, in transport and in catering. The numerous garment factories and the manufacturing industry employ about 20% of the workforce. Official sources state that 49% of all jobs are classified as informal (ibid., p.14).

Thus, the crucial role of the so-called informal economy in Dhaka must be emphasised again and again. Whole economic sectors of the megacity, such as food trading and food distribution, are largely organised informally and rest almost completely (and literally) on the shoulders of day labourers, employees without secure working contracts and unregistered street vendors (cf. Etzold et al. 2009). Above all, the urban poor who work in the so-called 3D jobs (dirty, dangerous and demanding) are subject to poor working conditions and severe health risks. Working as a waste collector, as a labourer in the plastic recycling and processing industry (Kulke and Staffeld 2009), as a rickshaw puller (Begum and Sen 2004) or as a day labourer on construction sites (Daniels 2004) or on Dhaka's wholesale food markets is extremely demanding, both physically and psychologically.

Furthermore, the majority of these workers are highly vulnerable to food insecurity. The poorest households have to spend the largest portion of their income on food. According to the

poverty line that has been drawn on the basis of food consumption, 28% of the population of Dhaka are poor, while 12% are considered to be extremely poor (World Bank 2007, p. 3). The poorest quintile of the megacity's inhabitants spends 62% of their income on food, on average. In stark contrast, the richest quintile only needs to spend 32% of its income for a sufficient supply of food (ibid., p.9). People with casual income or no income at all can afford only two full rice meals a day. A highly vulnerable minority of old or disabled persons, divorced or widowed women or street children have to live on only one meal per day. According to estimations, about half of the population living in slums is chronically undernourished (c.f. Pryer 2003).

5.5 Food on the Streets

In Dhaka most people do not go home for their lunch due to the high costs in terms of time and transport. They therefore depend on food being directly delivered to their workplace. As the great majority of the population prefers to eat a good, home-prepared meal, there is a large demand for supply services – just as in other Asian megacities. Shortly before lunchtime, thousands of rickshaw pullers and carriers deliver food to their customers' workplaces in metal carriers (tiffins) (see Photo 5.4). Thus, the working husband can enjoy fresh food that was prepared by his wife. Depending on the distance, this service only costs 1–3 Euros per month.

For those who cannot use these services, there are numerous small restaurants and canteens that offer rice meals in different price categories. However, considering the great demand, the number of food stalls, where good-quality food is available at a decent price, is rather small. Street vendors who sell rice meals, snacks, bakery products, fresh fruit, drinks and sweets often fill this niche.

Small tea and food stalls on pavements and more mobile vendors selling from baskets, pushcarts or rickshaws at the roadside are a common sight in Dhaka. This ready-to-eat "street food" (Tinker 1997, p. 15) is available everywhere, and the poorer parts of the population can also afford it.

Photo 5.4 A rickshaw puller brings food to his customers (Source: Benjamin Etzold)



Therefore, street food plays an important role for food security in Dhaka. In particular, physically hard-working day labourers and rickshaw pullers depend on small but nutritious snacks in between. Consuming fatty snacks, white bread, biscuits, bananas and sweet tea and chewing betel leaves drive out hunger during the day. Despite being tempted by light snacks such as pastries filled with meat or vegetables (*singhara*, *samosa*) or taco shells filled with chickpea-potato mash, cucumber, onion and chillies (*fuchka*, *chatpoti*), the middle class and the elites of Dhaka usually refrain from eating food from the streets. In particular, full rice meals sold outside are considered to be unhygienic and unhealthy.

Selling street food is an important self-employment opportunity for the urban poor. The street vendors make up a significant share of Dhaka's informal economy. With their flexibility they contribute in a perfect way to the megacity's food supply (c.f. Etzold et al. 2009). However, in contrast to many other developing countries where the street food trade is largely organised and maintained by women (c.f. Tinker 1997; Nirathron 2006), the majority of street food vendors in Dhaka are male. This is mainly due to traditional Muslim values, according to

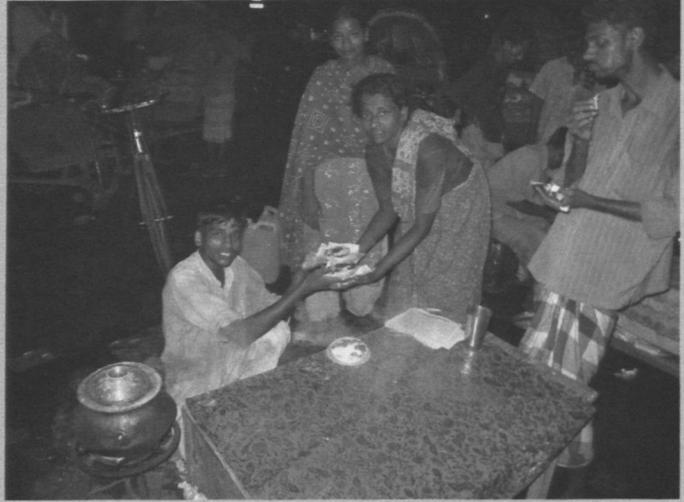
which women should not appear in public (*purdah*). Nevertheless, women play a crucial role in securing the city's food supply, because they cook the meals at home, and also often help to prepare the snacks that are sold by the men on the street.

Street food vendors earn between one and three Euros per day, depending on the products sold, the vending site and the number of customers. This is quite a substantial income compared to the wages of factory workers, day labourers and rickshaw pullers, but the vendors face considerable risks every day. Since their food stalls are put up illegally and since there are no licenses for food hawkers, they sometimes have to deal with being evicted from their vending sites and their equipment being confiscated by the police or by security officers working for companies or public institutions (see Text Box 5.2).

How the street food trade is organised and controlled can be demonstrated vividly using the example of street food vending in front of Dhaka's University Hospital (see Fig. 5.4). In the course of the day, the number and type of vendors as well as their products vary significantly. In the early morning hours, mobile and semi-mobile vendors sell tea, rice cakes (*pitha*), boiled eggs as

Text Box 5.2 Rice Cakes and Restrictions – A Street Food Vendor's Daily Struggle for Survival

Photo 5.5 Mohammad Selim, Nazira and Shazia and their street food shop
(Source: Benjamin Etzold)



Mohammad Selim is 25 years old. Together with his mother Nazira and his sister Shazia, he operates two small street food shops on the campus of Dhaka University (see Photo 5.5). After the death of his father, Selim took over the street food business when he was only 13 years old. For 5 Eurocent a piece, they sell *pitha*, small rice cakes that can be served either sweet or spicy. This snack is particularly popular with students, university and hospital staff as well as with rickshaw pullers and taxicab drivers.

Selling *pithas* from the early morning to late at night, Selim has a business volume of approximately 5 Euro per day. Even though his family manages to make ends meet, Selim stated that it was getting more and more difficult to secure their livelihood. Regularly, the police evict the street food vendors as the university and hospital administrations disapprove of their activities. They argue that food sold on the street is illegal, unhygienic and undesirable. Since the military-backed caretaker government took power in Bangladesh in January 2007, the police have taken more rigorous action against the hawkers on Dhaka's streets. Once, the police confiscated Selim's stove, his pots and a water drum four

times within 10 days. Because of these events, he lost about 80 Euros. In order to continue with his business, he used up his complete savings, thus diminishing his meagre resources even more. When his elder sister got married 5 years ago, he also had to take up a high loan from a money lender to pay the dowry. Since then, his family has been living close to their vending site in a makeshift shelter made of plastic sheets and rags. Every further police raid gets him deeper into debt, thus aggravating his struggle for survival. But making ends meet is difficult enough even without these police interventions: extreme weather events such as heat waves in the early summer or heavy rain in the monsoon season can have serious health consequences. If Selim falls ill, he will not be able to sell his rice cakes, and the only source of income for his family will collapse.

The rapid increase in food prices starting in 2007, in particular for rice, edible oil, vegetables, spices, meat and fish, became an additional burden. In early 2008, the price for rice of medium quality almost doubled from 25 to 50 Eurocent per kg within a few months. Since then, Selim's family can hardly afford to buy vegetables, meat or fish for their meals.

(continued)

Text Box 5.2 (continued)

On some days, when they earn far too little, they hardly manage to cook one full meal per day. But while Selim has to cope somehow with the increased food prices, he is not inactive when it comes to evictions by the police. Together with some other street vendors at his site, he is in contact with an informant who warns the hawkers about upcoming

police raids, of course only for a little tip. Furthermore, like other vendors, Selim has become more flexible. Instead of using his large table, he takes only the really necessary equipment to the site and sells from the ground. In the case of a police raid, he is now able to leave his vending site quickly and without any further losses.

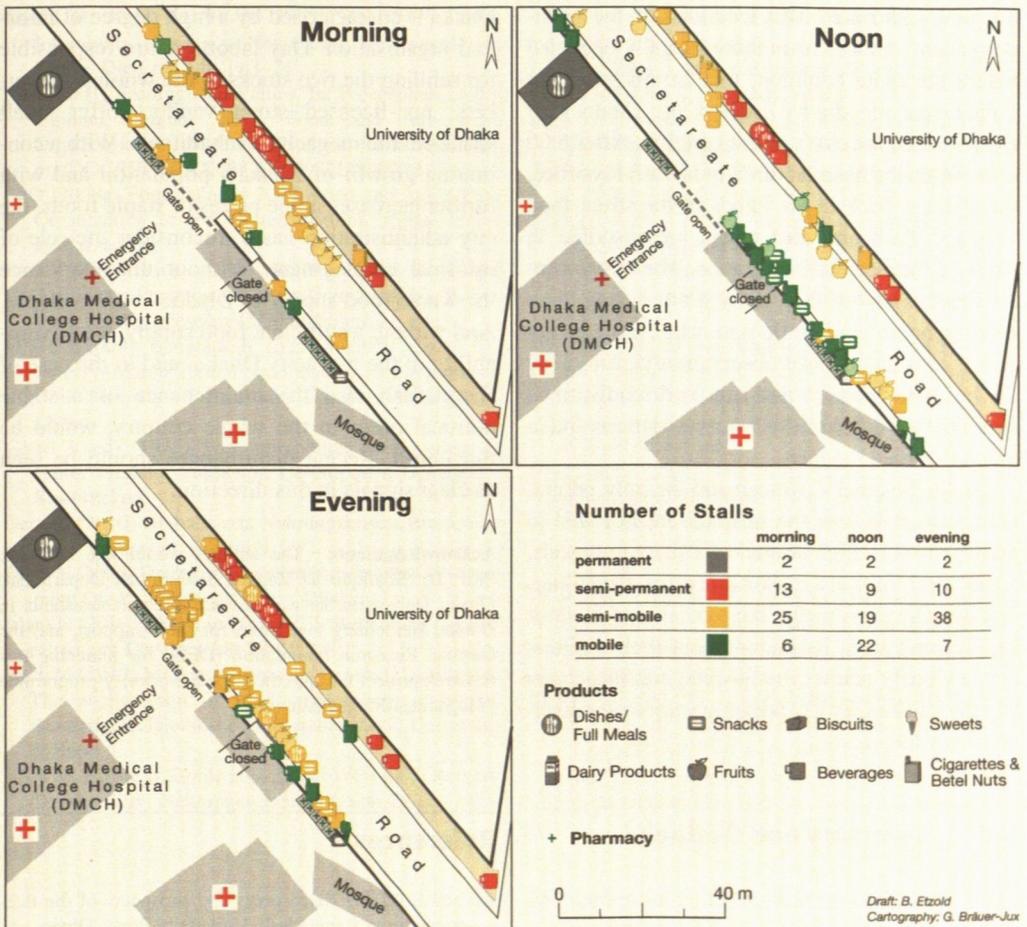


Fig. 5.4 Mobility patterns of street food vendors in front of Dhaka's Medical College Hospital

well as cigarettes and betel from pushcarts and small tables right in front of the hospital's main entrance, where all the hospital's visitors, and thus potential customers, pass by. Shortly before the hospital opens, the vendors are chased away from the gate by the hospital's security guards. From 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., only mobile vendors can do business there, as they are able to run away quickly with their light trays, baskets and flasks, if necessary.

On the other side of the road, the situation is quite different. There, the small food stalls and tea shops are not on the premises of the hospital, and thus their business cannot be disturbed by the hospital authorities. But evictions of the semi-permanent vendors from these illegally occupied places are quite common, too. In this case, the police clear the site by order of the Dhaka City Corporation, the city's administration. After 5:00 p.m., when the hospital director has left his office, the street is back in the hands of the street food vendors. Pushcarts and tables are installed in front of the hospital's entrance. The street vendors make most of their daily profit during these evening hours until 10:00 p.m. when they are not under constant control/observation/vigilance by the hospital direction and can work undisturbed or when they can work without restrictions and in an undisturbed manner.

As the hospital's canteen and the only permanent food stall near the hospital are not able to satisfy the very high demand for prepared meals, snacks and fruits at a reasonable price, the numerous street vendors secure the provision of food for the hospital staff, its patients and their visitors; but obviously neither the hospital administration nor the Dhaka City Corporation want to acknowledge this fact.

5.6 Summary and Outlook

The United Nations estimates that more than 614 million people will live in 59 agglomerations with more than five million inhabitants each by the year 2015. More than two-thirds of these megacities can be found in the countries of the global south (UN 2008, p. 220). In each of these

cities, a sufficient supply of food and an affordable access to it have to be secured. As the example of rice supply in Dhaka shows, a great number of actors are engaged in the chains of production and trade and in the intra-urban distribution system. Global factors like the sudden and unprecedented price increase during the years 2007 and 2008 are as important as national factors like the quality of the transport and communication systems. The urban poor and other marginalised groups are also put at risk by local security forces like the police and other security guards who exert property rights directly and indirectly.

The distribution of food within the city of Dhaka is characterised by a high degree of informal organisation. Day labourers are responsible for refilling the rice stocks in the wholesale markets; non-licensed street vendors offer small snacks to the megacity's inhabitants. With a continuing growth of Dhaka's population and with further increases in the prices of staple foods, the city administration has to reconsider the role of informal employment. Without this workforce the whole food supply of Dhaka would collapse. And without a sufficient food supply, the governability of the megacity Dhaka, and in the case of Bangladesh also the maintenance of a stable political order in the whole country, would be threatened. Recent disturbances should be seen as clear signals in this direction.

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