

BUSINESS

New EcoPoor project starts in Dar, Dhaka

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AN EcoPoor project on lowincome urban people's access to basic services such as safe water and sanitation in Dar es Salaam and Dhaka, Bangladesh was launched over the weekend.

The project will identify institutional practices that can ultimately benefit over five million urban poor in the two cities, and tens of millions elsewhere.

Speaking in Dar es Salaam during a participatory exercise with communities at Hananasif and Manzese Uzuri suburbs, Dr Riziki Shemdoe of Ardhi University and Dr Manoj Roy of Lancaster University in the UK, said the project involves gathering information on how poor communities access basic services.

"This is a unique project involving South-South cooperation and which will involve communities in generating core knowledge for the research," said Dr Roy.

Professor Ferdous Jahan from BRAC University in Dhaka will pair with Dr Shemdoe as co-Investigators. The project also involves top UK social and natural science experts namely Professor David Hulme, Professor Clive Agnew and Dr James Rothwell of University of Manchester as co-investigators.

Dr Roy pointed out that co-production and collective action are viewed as essential building blocks of the institutional arrangements needed to sustainably expand access to basic services for the poor.

"This research will explore these institutional arrangements, focusing on services derived, and disservices resulting, from two important ecosystems - urban green and water structures - in low-income settlements in Dar es Salaam and Dhaka," noted Dr Roy who is the project's principal investigator.

The UK scientist further pointed out that the overall aim is to identify a set of policyrelevant design principles for the institutional arrangements necessary for producing and distributing ecosystem services that promote sustainable improvements in the wellbeing of the urban poor.

"Our research will also involve the media from the onset because we want developments on the ground to be delivered to policy makers," the Lancaster University scientist stressed while noting that often it's more important to invest in poor people's social services like water supply than other forms of direct aid.

Commenting on the uniqueness of the project, Dr Shemdoe said, observations made on the ground during the past week have shown that low-income communities of Dar es Salaam live in poor neighbourhoods with limited basic social services.

"The ultimate beneficiaries of our research are poor urban residents in Bangladesh and Tanzania. This includes the current over five million poor urban population and the tens of millions who will move to urban areas in the next few decades," he revealed.

Dr Shemdoe noted that researchers will co-produce knowledge about how their wellbeing strategies are linked to accessing quality services from urban green and water ecosystems, and the ways in which policies and institutions support or hinder such strategies.

"Ultimately, our target is policy makers who need to take action and address such shortcomings which will improve health and livelihoods of the poor urban population," said Dr Deusdedit Kibassa who is a key member of the Ardhi University team.

Under the project which will last the next two and a half years, involvement with grassroots and thinktank organisations in

both cities will be an important component of our impact strategy.

The project is funded by the UK government through the Ecosystem Services for Poverty Alleviation (ESPA) research programme. ESPA aims to provide evidence of how ecosystem services can reduce poverty and enhance well-being.

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