

Research aims

The study was undertaken as part of the EDULINK Urban Health and Poverty Project (henceforth EDULINK Project (2010)). The EDULINK Project aims to gain knowledge on the life of slum dwellers in three slums of Accra, Ghana: Agbogbloshie, James Town, and Ussher Town. The aim of the present study was to analyse slums in the context of urban poverty. It aimed specifically to investigate the interface between the composition of the slum in terms of migrants and indigenous groups of people and the livelihood strategies that residents of the slum engaged in. Connecting these two themes is the political economy of the community and the opportunities its residents have to generate income. The research is a comparative study of the livelihood strategies among residents of an indigenous community, James Town, and a migrant community, Agbogbloshie, in Accra. The main research question was: What impact does the composition of the slum settlement have on the type of livelihood strategies adopted by its residents?

Three related questions were investigated to assess the livelihood strategies adopted:

1. What is the political economy context of the livelihood strategy in Agbogbloshie and James Town?
2. What are the livelihood strategies undertaken by individuals in the two communities?
3. What are the livelihood aspirations of residents in the two communities and how do these compare?
- 4.

Rationale of research

It has been estimated that in 2001, 924 million people, or 31.6% of the world's urban population lived in slums. The majority of the urban population residing in slums was in the developing world. An estimated 869 million or 43% of the less developed regions urban population resided in slums while almost 140 million or 78% of the least developed countries urban population resided in slums (UN-Habitat 2003:246). Rapid urbanization is currently taking place around the world, but more specifically in developing regions, namely Africa and Asia (Ibid). In Africa, it is the result of natural population growth and migration into urban centres.

Urbanisation of poverty and Millennium Development Goal 7

The problem of urban poverty came to international attention following the drafting of a specific Millennium Development Goal (MDG) to address the challenges of slums. The specific target on slums in the United Nations (UN) Millennium Development Declaration aims to significantly improve the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers (UN-Habitat 2003:vi). The goals that are important for research on the urban poor are UN MDG Goal 1, eradicating extreme poverty and hunger and UN MDG Goal 7, ensuring environmental sustainability (United Nations Millennium Development Goal 2010). Addressing the livelihoods of urban slum dwellers should be at the centre of slum policies. Consequently, any policy geared towards addressing the challenges of slums should be viewed through the

Livelihood strategies among the urban poor: a comparative study of two slum communities in Accra, Ghana

lens of poverty reduction. Therefore, for urban development policies to be effective, they should support the livelihoods of the urban poor. The livelihood conceptual framework proposed by the Department for International Development (DFID 1997) to research poverty was applied in the study to understand the livelihood strategies adopted by residents in two slum settlements in Accra, Ghana.

Sustainable livelihoods framework

Livelihood is a means of securing a living. The sustainable livelihood framework is a people centred concept comprising of people, their capabilities and their means of living. The key elements of the sustainable livelihood conceptual framework include: assets, livelihood strategies, livelihood context and factors making livelihood susceptible to shocks and stresses. The utilisation of livelihood assets is known as livelihood strategies. Livelihood strategies are the various activities and decisions made by and or undertaken by people so that they can attain their livelihood goals. The opportunities and constraints under which they are operating largely define the livelihoods of the urban poor.

Data

Research on livelihoods utilises qualitative and quantitative data and this practice was followed in the study. Data for the study primarily derived from the EDULINK Project survey conducted in three slum communities in Accra (2010) as well as the Ghana Demographic and Health Survey (GDHS 2008) and analysis of field data collected in August 2011 from two slum settlements (Agbogbloshie and James Town) in Accra. Furthermore, published data by the UN agency for human settlements was consulted to gain estimates of slum dwellers in Accra and the urban profile of the city.

Methodology

The livelihoods framework is participatory as it is centred on people. It ‘views the world from the perspective of the individuals who are pursuing livelihood strategies in volatile and insecure conditions and with limited assets’ (Rakodi 2002:19). To accomplish the specific research aims, mixed methodology was applied which is the integration of qualitative and quantitative research within a single research project (Bryman 2008:603). The use of mixed methodology such as the descriptive analysis of survey data, in-depth interviews, participant observation and walking interviews formed the basis of a participatory method.

Descriptive analysis of the EDULINK (2010) survey data was undertaken to understand the extent of urban poverty and the main occupation in Agbogbloshie and James Town. The latter information informed the sampling in the study. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 18 was used to analyse the EDULINK survey (2010). The survey

Livelihood strategies among the urban poor: a comparative study of two slum communities in Accra, Ghana

data was analysed to present summary statistics on employment as well as demographic background statistics pertaining to the characteristics of the two slums.

The secondary analysis of data was followed by field work from 06th-13th August 2011 at the two case study sites. Theoretical sampling based on the analytic criteria of place of residence, occupation and sex, was employed. The sample size for the field research was ten. Five individuals were recruited from Agbogbloshie and James Town, each. In-depth interviews, walking interviews and participant observation were utilized to understand the livelihood asset that the participants possessed and had access to within the settlement. Ethical approval for the field research was obtained from the University of Southampton Ethics Committee. The recordings from the in-depth interviews and walking interviews were transcribed using Express Scribe v5.30, a software for storing and transcribing interviews. Interview transcripts and participant observation field notes as well as the visual documents were analysed using NVivo 9, a software package for the analysis of unstructured information and qualitative data.

Summary research findings

Livelihood strategies among participants in Agbogbloshie and James Town

A number of livelihood strategies were pursued by residents in both communities which maximised the assets that they had access to. In Agbogbloshie, the participants were self-employed and out of the five, three were traders in food. The work required them to utilise their human capital. The skills, knowledge, ability to labour and good health of the participants were all very important because they were self-employed and relied on customers to generate income. Comparatively, in James Town, three of the participants had entered their occupation through a reflected decision, meaning a livelihood chosen through education and or migration.

Political economic context of the livelihood strategies in Agbogbloshie and James Town

The political economy context of livelihood strategies in Agbogbloshie was manifold. Firstly, Agbogbloshie has a large commercial function as it is located among and surrounded by markets in the Central Business District of Accra such as Kantamanto, Makola Market No.2, and Kaneshie market. The geographical dynamic of Agbogbloshie might explain why the main livelihood activity was trading. Comparatively, James Town is a coastal community which was less commercialized than Agbogbloshie. Its colonial history and deterioration over the years has seen the gradual disappearance of key employment sectors which in turn has resulted in the decline of a viable livelihood strategy for residents in the community.

Livelihood aspirations within Agbogbloshie and James Town

The participants in Agbogbloshie had aspirations that were related to the lack of financial capital as well as the detrimental impact of manual labour on their health. However, there were difficulties in accomplishing the desired occupation. It should be noted that the majority

Livelihood strategies among the urban poor: a comparative study of two slum communities in Accra, Ghana

of the occupations that participants aspired to were still in the informal sector and required self-employment. The theme of laborious occupations and ill health was found among participants in James Town as well. However, in contrast to the older participants, the younger participants were interested in having access to vocational skills training which in turn would enable them to earn more and be financially secure. The difference between the responses of the younger and older participants in aspiration was more important than between the two communities. It emerged that the older participants were concerned about their health and the fact that they were growing old. They did not mention access to vocational training. Their focus was on having less laborious work which at the same time generated sufficient income for them to survive.

What was gauged from the responses to questions about aspirations was the difficulty in accessing financial capital as well as vocational skills training among the participants that wanted to participate in a financially secure employment. Furthermore, there was a desire to change occupations due to health concerns. The study shows that ageing participants and those who participated in manual labour wanted to change their occupations due to issues related to health. The younger generation wanted to change their occupation but asked for skills training. In sum, in both Agbogbloshie and James Town, participants aspired to change occupations. However, there was a distinction between the younger and the older generation. The young people highlighted the importance of education for their desired occupation and the need to access financial as well as physical and human capital whereas the older participants in both communities made reference only to accessing financial capital to start a trade for health reasons.