

PRCPB Working Paper No. 6: Abstract

Begum, Sharifa, & Sen, Binayek (2004). Unsustainable Livelihoods, health shocks and urban chronic poverty: Rickshaw Pullers as a Case Study. PRCPB Working Paper No. 6. Dhaka/Manchester: PRCPB/Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, CPRC/University of Manchester.

Five ideas constitute the central message of this study. First, urban rickshaw pullers come from a very poor economic background consistent with the characteristics of chronic poverty. Second, rickshaw pulling provides a route of modest upward mobility for those among the rural chronically poor who come to the city for work. Third, the rickshaw pullers are susceptible to systematic health risks. Deteriorating health combined with health shocks can impose a significant burden on the urban poor, dragging down the pace of upward mobility during their lifetime. Fourth, the activity of rickshaw pulling represents an unsustainable livelihood, as the initial welfare gain tapers off with length of involvement in the sector. As longitudinal data is lacking, this story has emerged through an inductive comparison of younger, recent joiners and long duration, older rickshaw pullers, as well as current and former pullers. Fifth, intergenerational mobility of rickshaw puller households is constrained by very limited schooling and the poor range of occupational choices for children. Public policy has an important role to play in mitigating health shocks, as well as supporting targeted education for the urban poor in the informal sector, for sustainable urban poverty reduction.

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