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Slum-dwelling Children Community Engagement by Tertiary Sociology Students of Rajshahi University: A Beneficiary Approach to Learning Enhancement

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ABSTRACT

The study has focused on the condition of children in the community, initiatives of tertiary sociology students for successful engagement, changes of the slum-dwelling children, and attainment of graduate and professional skills. A mixed-method of social survey, FGDs (Focus Group Discussion), and participant observation with close and open-ended questionnaires, face-to-face interviews, checklists, and Likert scale techniques have been used to collect primary data. The findings of the study show that students’ engagement helps to meet children’s educational, socialization, health care, and co-curricular needs and rights and some other needs of community people. It brings benefits for engaged students building stronger relations with graduate institutions, different organizations, and job providers, and attaining several graduate and professional skills, and abilities to become successful in personal and professional life.

INTRODUCTION

Where the global number of poor people is decreasing, urban slum dweller is increasing (Kielland, 2015). According to the Global Report on Human Settlements (2017) almost 880 million people, or 32 percent of the world’s urban population, live in slums, the majority of them in the developing world. In Bangladesh, there is about 35.86 percent of the total population lives in urban areas (WB, 2019). Among these urban dwellers, 2.23 million people live in slum areas of Bangladesh (BBS, 2018). The slums are typically lack of proper sanitation, safe drinking water, or systematic garbage collection; there is usually a severe shortage of space inside the houses where the children live, and no public spaces dedicated to their use (Chatterje, 2012).

Slum-dwelling children are frequently deprived of a standard of living adequate for their physical, mental, spiritual, moral, and social development (Raju & Sharmin, 2011). They play on

rough, uneven ground, taking on multiple roles in everyday life, and sharing responsibilities with adults in domestic and public spaces (Chatterje, 2012). Children too often fetch water; watch over younger siblings and sick household members (d’Allant, 2017), and are subjected to physical, mental, psychological, or sexual abuse in their workplace and their house as well (UNICEF EAPRO, 2012). Women and children are also supposed to trafficking and drug drilling (ILO, 2015) extensive criminal networks make substantial profits by engaging children in commercial sex work, smuggling, stealing, and the distribution of drugs and weapons (Raju & Sharmin, 2011).

Children can’t attend school rather involve in household chores and other income-generating activities and because of parental perception, cost of education, late admission, frequent migration, lack of birth certificate (Tsujita, 2009) discriminatory look, and teachers’ biases in favor of well-off children (Cameron, 2010). Community engagement

by graduate schools helps to meet these slum-dwelling children's educational, socialization, healthcare, co-curricular needs, and some other needs of the community people. Students get a reciprocal opportunity to make their academic work relevant to the community, acquire knowledge (Russell and Slater, 2011), develop formal and informal university-community partnerships, and elevate the university's public image (Nicotera *et al.*, 2012). It also helps to bear academic credit, address societal issues, and enhance their personal and professional skills (McIlrath, 2012). Students get fields for social sciences research and assistance during internships, programs, and chance better careers in the future (John, 2017). They become an agent of change-makers of the society and connected contributors to the region and beyond (Spowart and Tripp, 2013). For successful engagement students' need to develop and follow some strategies to develop a partnership, formulate plans, *set up* goals, gather knowledge about the community's culture, economic conditions, social networks, political and power structures, norms and values, demographic trends, history, experience and overall community's perception for a long-term commitment (CDC/ATSDR, 2011).

However, this study has tried to find out the answer to the question 'does community engagement carry out benefits for slum-dwelling children, community people, and engaged students?' and tried to understand the types of services tertiary students provide to make their engagement successful and changes of the children and attainment of skills. Department seeks quality graduates, the community seeks services and assistance and students seeking graduate and professional skills to collaborate among this study is a rationale. It will work as a baseline for further research and help national, international organizations, and governmental agencies to design and formulate effective policies and programs for the betterment of children's world.

Community engagement involves a series of transactions (Bernardo *et al.*, 2011) which is incorporated into a course or series of courses by way of a project (Bandy, 2019) or pedagogical approach that enables to develop of links and partnerships between educational institutions (schools, colleges, universities) and the wider community creating opportunities for mutual gain

(McIlrath, 2012) and beneficial exchange of knowledge (McIlrath and Tansey, 2013). It may local, provincial, national, regional, and international (Jacobs *et al.*, 2015). It bears academic credit, addresses societal issues, and enhances students' personal and professional skills (McIlrath, 2012).

Community-based projects energized the participants to make their academic work relevant in communities by breaking out traditional academic reward structures and elevating the University's public image (Nicotera *et al.*, 2012). Community engagement knowledge is transferable from generation to generation which promotes and measures healthy early childhood development and creates resilient children and family opportunity, stability, and protection (Emarita and Chase, 2015) but needs to combine university knowledge with community experience (Laing, 2016). Facilitator groups can engage in the community through diverse issues such as education, health, disaster crisis issues, National day's events (Engage East Midlands, 2001), and recreational and social activities (O'Mara-Eves *et al.*, 2013).

Community participation in education encourages free and compulsory basic education from 6 to 14 years of age (Tsujita, 2009) and enables parents to acquire knowledge, skills, and confidence for better parenting and take part in the academic success of their children. It can transform the life of a child, give them social identity and independence. They become physically strong, intellectual, moral, and sensible. It helps to narrow the performance gap between children in high and low-income settings (Abuya, 2017) but needs to generate new knowledge in assessments of children (Emarita and Chase, 2015) and strike a balance between syllabus, curriculum, books, and co-curricular activities (Gupta, 2018). Insecure land tenure (Kajerfors, 2007), high population density, pollution, health problems, malnutrition, unemployment, or informal income-generation strategies are common features in slum areas (United Nations Human Settlements Program, 2010).

Children are the most vulnerable portion of the urban slum population. Their existence is not recognized, as neither their births nor their deaths are registered (Usmani and Ahamed, 2018). They live in a very unhygienic and dirty place, play in

debris, rough, and uneven ground and can't attend schools rather pass their time doing household chores and looking after their toddler (Chatterje, 2012). Children grow up faster rather than normal life children and treat as informal solutions meeting their daily necessities, livelihoods, or maintenance of family (d'Allant, 2017). Children are physically (child death and corporal punishment), sexually, emotionally, and verbally abused, fall victim to neglect, exploitation (through child labor, commercial sex), and trafficking (UNICEF EAPRO, 2012). Children are 'virtually excluded' (attending school but not learning), and not able to make the transition to secondary because of teachers' biases in favor of children of the well-off; discouragement and undermining children's self-esteem were seen as a common problem (Cameron, 2010).

Shortage of teachers, lack of infrastructure, equipment's, communication gap between teachers and students, geographical area, lack of parent's education or awareness, involvement in homework, irregularity of attending to school, and many more effects hampered the achievement level of education (Aggarwal and Chugh, 2003). Delivering services in slums of Bangladesh found a host of an obstacle to the donor agencies (Cameron, 2010) but collaboration and support of GO, NGOs, politicians and pressure groups, and constitutional commitment (Tsujita, 2009) can improve the standard of living of urban slum-dwellers (Miller and King, 1999). Evening classes, the creation of voluntary schools, social work, and a mandatory reserve of 25 percent of seats in schools may be the solution for slum-dwelling children's education (Bhagwan, 2017). University-community partnerships can also enhance community children's learning. Students become the agent of change-makers of their society (Spowart and Tripp, 2013). It helps to develop their character with a strong sense of identity and a passion for learning who will become self-confident, connected contributors to the region, and beyond (John, 2017). It creates opportunities for students to work with the organization or job providers (Wintrup *et al.*, 2013) and aids them to develop skills such as leadership, communication, creativity, decision-making, cooperation, service, and others. It helps to develop better time management and organizational skills, creates a relaxation of academic studies, improve learning,

discover new talents, increase self-esteem, and overall personality and assist during internships or programs and enhance careers in the future through making a huge difference among high numbers applying (John, 2017).

The study has focused on the condition of children in the community, initiatives of tertiary sociology students for successful engagement, changes of the slum-dwelling children, and attainment of graduate and professional skills.

METHODS

A mixed-method of both qualitative and quantitative approaches of social survey, FGDs (Focus Group Discussion), and participant observation have been used through interview techniques of semi-structured questionnaires with close and open-ended questions, Likert scale questions, and checklists to collect primary research data. Secondary data has been collected from different research documents like books, journal articles, research publications, etc. I have purposively selected the railway slum-dwelling children community located between the rail line and north boundary of Rajshahi University campus Ward no. 30. I have collected data from mothers of children of Shishu Niketon (a voluntary school operated by Sociology Youth Group, Department of Sociology, University of Rajshahi). There are 63 children from 55 households. All households have been taken as a research population. Frequency distribution table with percentage cross table, are used to process, tabulate, and analyze the primary.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Condition of the Railway Slum-dwelling Children Community People

There are about 300 people with 55 households lived in the railway slum at the Rajshahi university area. They lived with inadequate everyday insecurities. Their house is mainly made of Tin and Bamboo at *Khas* land which is controlled by Bangladesh Railway. Only one or two rooms with 5-8 members including children live in the house. They collect water from a shared tub well which is set by NGOs and not adequate for their use. People of the community receive a very poor health care service. They buy medicine from pharmacy actually not going to doctor and take

Kobiraji treatment. People are engaged with diverse earning activities for continuing their survival.

Table 1. Occupational Diversity with a Monthly Income of Family Heads

Monthly income (in BDT)	Types of occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Income range: ≥5000-11000	Day labor	30	54.55
	Waiter	3	5.46
	Mason	3	5.46
Income range: ≥11000-14000	Carpenter	2	3.63
	Satari Mistri	3	5.46
	Small Business	9	16.36
	Barber	2	3.63
Income range: ≥14000-17000	Auto driver	2	3.63
Income range: 17000+	Computer assistant	1	1.82
Total		55	100

Research data shows that most of the family heads 54.55 % (n=30 out of 55) occupation is day labor, waiter and mason and their monthly income is ≥5000-11000. About 16.36% (n=9 of 55) are engaged in small businesses with ≥11000-14000 income range along with Carpenter, Barber, and Satari Mistri. Auto driver and Computer Assistant income are a little higher than the slum-dwellers

(table 1). Women also work at mess and hotels with multiple roles such as cooking food, washing clothes, cutter of cooking items, washing plates, and others. Large amounts of earned money they expend meet their food, clothes, and health care needs. They can't afford enough money for their child's education. Educational status is also very poor among the slum dwellers.

Table 2. Educational Qualifications and Age of Marriage of the Mothers' Children

Education levels	Frequency	Percentage	Marriage age of Mothers	Frequency	Percentage
Nil/Signature	11	20	No idea	3	5.45
Class 1-5	31	56.36	12-13	5	9.10
Class 6-10	8	14.55	14-15	39	70.91
SSC pass	4	7.27	16-17	8	14.54
HSC	1	1.82	18+	0	0
Total	55	100	Total	55	100

Our study shows that a greater number of 56.36% (n= 31 out of 55) of the mothers' educational qualifications is only class five or less of it. Only 14.55% (n= 8 out of 55) has studied up to class ten or less. 7.27% (n= 4 out of 55) of family heads completed SSC degrees only. One of the family heads completed HSC education. No one has a bachelor's degree. No education or only has the signature ability of about 20% (n= 11 out of 55) of

the study population (Table 2). Most of the mothers 70.91% got married (14-15) years of their ages. About 9.10 % (n= 5 of 55) of the mother of children were married only they were 12 – 13 years old. Children are also falling victim to child marriage. Only 5.45% (n=3 of 55) married in recognized age (Table 2). It reflects the unconsciousness, illiterate, or immobile picture of the SDCC community.

Table 3. Conception about Child Rights of the Community People

Response	Before Engagement		After Engagement	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	10	18.18	48	87.28
No	45	81.82	7	12.72
Total	55	100	55	100

A very few people of RSDCC 18.18% (n=10 of 55) know child rights. On the contrary, a majority of the respondents 81.82% (n=45 of 55) said that they have no conception of child rights before the engagement of SYG students. But after the engagement of the SYG students at DSRU the picture has been changed and about 87.28% (n=48 of 55) of the respondents confessed that they have come to know about child rights. Still, 12.72% (n=7 of 55) of the respondents don't know child rights (Table 3). Hence, it is clear that SYS students have been able to make the change of the ideas and conceptions of the people.

The Situation of the Children in the Railway Slum

Children are the more vulnerable of the RSDCC. They lived with enormous everyday livelihood adversities such as food, shelter, education, healthcare, and other needs. Frequently they are given marry at very early ages, harass, used, and abused by family members and others, caused by neglect and violence, and engaged with household chores and earning activities that's why their sound development be hampered. Children's enrollment in education is very poor in the community. Though numbers of children firstly go to schools they gradually dropped out from schools after very few years of their enrollment.

Table 4. Enrollment Status of the Children of RSDCC

Age	Class of Study	Drop-out		Enrolling	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
6 -10	Class-1	6	21.43	17	23.61
	Class-2			14	19.44
	Class-3			12	16.67
	Class-4			14	19.44
	Class -5	10	35.71	6	8.34
Total		16	57.14	63	87.5
11 – 15	Class-6	7	25	3	4.17
	Class-7	3	10.72	1	1.39
	Class-8	1	3.57	3	4.17
	Class-9-10	1	3.57	2	2.77
Total		12	42.86	9	12.5
Grand Total		28	100	72	100

The table presents the drop-out and enrolling status of the community children. About 57.14% (n=16 of 28) of the children's year of schooling was up to class 5 who were aged 6-10 and 25% (7 of 28) children's year of schooling was class 6. Only 3.57% (n=1 of 28) of the children's year of schooling was class 9-10. It is noticeable that none of the children of the community has completed the Secondary School Certificate. About 35.71% (n=10

of 28) completed primary education up to class-5 (Table 4). Children are mostly about 87.5% (n=63 of 72) are enrolling up to class 5 and that has belonged to primary education (6 -10) years of their age. After that aging families thought of them as efficient for earnings and sends them to the workplace without sending them to school. Hence the enrollment is decreased and children are drop-out from the light of education.

Table 5. Engagement in Household Chores and Earning Activities at School Running and Non-School Running Time

Responses	Household chores		Earning activities	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	37	67.27	12	21.82
No	18	32.73	43	78.18
Total	55	100	55	100

In the SDCC about 67.27% (n=37 out of 55) of children work as helping hand in their house. They collect wood/leaves for fire, grass for cattle, and look after sick elderly and siblings and helping hand of fathers at a small shop. For this reason, frequently they miss school. The table shows that about 21.82% (12 out of 55) of children engaged in

earning activities. Families push them to earn without sending them to school. Almost 78.18% are not engaged in earning activities (Table 5). If children were involved in earnings at school running time they missed the school and gradually dropped out.

Table 6. Age of Marriage of the Children

Age (Year)	Frequency	Percentage
12-14	11	52.38
14-16	8	38.10
16-18	2	9.52
18+	0	0
Total	21	100

The total number of respondents was 55. Among them, 21 family's children were married. Our study shows that 52.38% (n=11 of 21) of the

SDCC children were married at only 12-14 years of age that shows and 38.10% (n=8 of 21) were married at only 14-16 years of their age (Table 6).

Table 7. The situation of Children in the SDCC

Response	Yes		No	
	n/55	%	n/55	%
Enough safe places for playing	7	12.73	48	87.27
Completion of vaccination	55	100	0	0
Getting enough time for playing	31	65.36	24	43.64
Tortured or ill speech by family members or neighbors'	9	16.36	46	83.64
Sate of sexual harassment by family and other relatives	0	0	55	100
Problem facing in admitting schools	0	0	55	100
Regularity of going to school	52	94.55	3	5.45
State of the child loss and trafficking	0	0	55	100
State of tortured by school teachers and others	17	30.91	38	69.09
Engagement in the begging of the children	0	0	55	100
Knowledge marriage age of children	55	100	0	0
Affordability of providing educational equipment	4	7.27	51	92.73
Children relation to exchange of drugs	0	0	55	100

The total respondents were N= 55. n= response frequency among the 55 respondents. The table

represents the situation of the children in the slum-dwelling community. Only 12.73% (n=7 of 55)

respondents said children get a safe place for playing but a huge number of the respondents 87.27 (n= 48 of 55) said that children don't get enough place for playing. Children have to play in a hazardous place and on the rail line it is a threat for the children. All 100% (n=55 of 55) of the respondent said that they completed their children's vaccination (Table no. 7). About 16.36% (n=9 of 55) of the respondents said that they torture their children and say an ill speech. It happens while children don't hear their parent's instruction or order but about 83.64% (n=46 of 55) said that they don't torture or say an ill speech to their children (Table 7). All the respondents 100% (n=55of 55) said that their children were not harassed by family members or relatives (Table 7). Parents don't face any problems while admitting their children to schools and about 94.55% (n=52 of 55) respondents confessed that their children go to school regularly. But only a few 5.45 % (n=3 of 55) is irregular to school (Table 7).

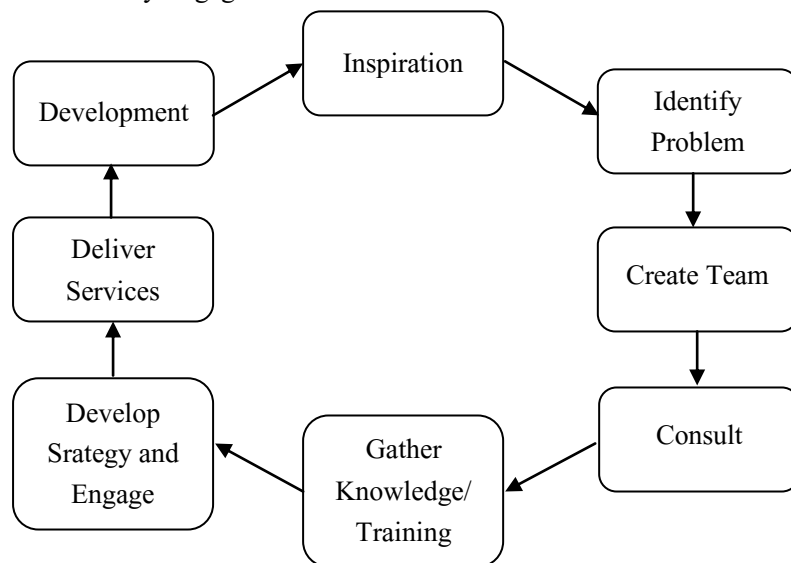
All the respondents 100% (n=55 of 55) said that none of their children were lost from their house or fall victim to trafficking (Table 7) but the respondents 30.91 % (n=17 of 55) said that their children are tortured by the school teachers and other individuals. Immense numbers of 69.09 % (n=38 of 55) respondents said that their children don't confront such kinds of torture by the school teachers and other individuals. Children are not engaged in begging for activities. People have a conception about child marriage but they don't abide while marring their children. Only 7.27% (n=4 of 55) of the respondents said that they can

fulfill the essential logistics needed by their children for their study. But a remarkable number of the respondents 92.73 (n=51 of 55) said that they can't fulfill the needs of their children's educational equipment (Table 7). All of the respondents 100% (n=55 of 55) of the SDCC said that there is no relation of their children to such kinds of activities (Table 7).

Community Engagement Activities and Services of Tertiary Sociology Students'

The concept of community engagement developed among tertiary sociology students' after receiving training from Save the Children and INCIDIN Bangladesh on UNCRC. Students were motivated by their social liabilities and department. They wanted to meet children's educational, socialization, and co-curricular needs. For this, they find a suitable community and consult with the community members. They select the Railway slum-dwelling children community beside the North boundary of Rajshahi University. To provide services they created a group named Sociology Youth Group (SYG) and opened a voluntary school named ShishuNiketon. For successful engagement, they connected with different voluntary organizations and some national and international NGOs such as Rajshahi University Sociology Alumni Association (RUSSA), Save the Children, INCIDIN Bangladesh, Bangladesh Regeneration Trust UK (BRTUK), Global UnnayanSebaSongstha (GUSS), Inner Wheel Club (IWC), Prothom Alo Bondhusova, and Rotary Club Rajshahi Metropolitan and so on.

Figure 1. Students' Community Engagement Model



Services and Benefits Provided by SYG students to SDCC

1. Education services through tuition
2. Education logistics such as bag, pen, pencil, notebook, rubber, eraser, scale, color pencil, art paper, etc.
3. Healthcare services for children and mothers.
4. Clothes for children and parents. Warm clothes, school dress, Eid dress, Shari and Lungi, etc.
5. Foods on different occasions such as KorbaniEid, Ifter, National children day, chocolate, etc.
6. Toilet, tube-well, and help for getting an electricity connection.
7. Socialization (morality, language, behavior, etc.) and co-curricular needs (drawing, music, dance, single-acting play, poem recitation, picnic, etc.) of the children.

- a. Celebration of different days such as National Victory Day, Independence Day, Shaheed Day/ International Mother Language Day, Hand-washing Day, National Children Day, etc.
- b. Awareness development about child marriage, child labor, dowry, family planning, drug addiction, etc.

Changes among the Children and Community

Children’s learning, educational attainment, behavioral patterns have been changed remarkably and parents’ attitudes beliefs and motives have been changed. Social awareness, integrity among the slum-dwellers, understanding have also been developed and improved. SYG students daily observe children’s clarity through checking of nail cutting, dress; oil on the heir, and haircut, use f sandals while coming to Shishu Niketon.

Table 8. Changes Happened among the Children and Community

Changes among the children	Frequency	Percentage
Hygiene/ Clarity improved	40	72.73
Eagerness of study	55	100
Language development	32	58.18
Academic results	51	92.73
Health improvement	48	87.27
Respect to the elders	55	100
Co-curricular participation and achievement	36	65.45
Discipline	25	45.45
Food habit	40	72.73
Dress up	32	58.18
Attitudes and Behavior	55	100

The total number of the respondent is 55. Multiple responses are considered. The table shows that about 72.73% (n=40 of 55) of the respondents confessed their children’s hygiene and clarity and about 100% (n=55 of 55) respondents said their children’s eagerness of study has improved. A total of 58.18% (n=32 of 55) respondents said that their children’s linguistic development happened. Children use very little odd language compared to before. About 92.73% (n=51 of 55) of respondents said their children are doing better in the academic results than before. About 87.27% (n=55 of 55) of

mothers confessed their children have become less ill than before. SYG students’ of DSRU be able to establish a positive and vital impact on children’s academic learning of the SDCC. Children's respect for the elders has improved. About 65.45% of the respondents (n=36 of 55) said that their children were not eager for attaining in co-curricular activities but when they started to come to Shishu Niketon they participate in all the programs and co-curricular activities (Table 8). Discipline, food habit, dress up, attitude and behavior have changed and improved among the children remarkably (Table 8).

Table 9. Satisfaction Level of the Community People

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Extremely satisfied	50	90.10
Satisfied	5	9.90
Neutral	0	0
Dissatisfied	0	0
Extremely Dissatisfied	0	0
Total	55	100

A greater number of respondents 90.10% (n=50 of 55) said that they are extremely satisfied with the engagement of SYG students to their community and 9.09% (5 of 55) respondents said that they are satisfied. The SDCC people are very concerned and happy with the engagement of the SYG students to their community (table no. 9).

Students’ benefits from community engagement

Community engagement offers several benefits for engaged students through developing graduate skills and creating working opportunities with different kinds of organizations and associations.

Skills development

Students attained numerous graduate and professional skills through providing some specific services and activities to the community. Their presentation, teaching, and linguistic skills are developed while they meet the educational needs of the community children. Teamwork, leadership, event management, communication, time management skills, and ability to work under pressure and adaptive capacity have developed when they arranged events, competitions, and programs for the children and community people. Public speaking capacity grows when they anchoring at any event. Networking skills are developed when they contact with different charitable organizations. Negotiation and acceptance mentality, problem-solving skills, creative and critical thinking skills have developed when they negotiate children’s quarrels and puzzles. Organizational skills develop when they managed the team and school activities. Their fundraising capacity developed while collecting funds for events. Some other skills developed when they engaged with the slum-dwelling children community. Students become able to design and monitoring project. They find out social problems and solutions to solve an analytical problem. They become confident to be an entrepreneur.

Other benefits

Besides skill development students gets numerous opportunities to enrich themselves and become successful in their practical and professional life.

1. A stronger relationship with the department and national and international NGOs.
2. Letter of recommendation for scholarships
3. Find fields for academic research
4. Preparation for the competitive job market and increased employment opportunities
5. Students become more professional in their approaches
6. Application of theoretical knowledge
7. Improved social responsibility and citizenship skills
8. Physical, mental, and emotional refreshment
9. Increase productive hours
10. Finding out personal strengths and weakness

CONCLUSION

Slum-dwelling children community engagement is beneficial both for children, the community, and engaged students. It meets children’s educational, socialization, healthcare, and co-curricular needs, and community people attain better knowledge on child rights, child education, child health and hygiene, a bad side effect of child marriage, child labor, drug addiction, and child abuse. Students can enrich their academic learning and attain graduate and professional skills and abilities. They get knowledge about diverse cultural traits and practices. In while department gets quality graduates and students get a better chance of employment according to their quality. However, for successful community engagement collaboration among university-community, graduate students, and charitable organizations are very monumental. Above all, it can be said that all students should engage with such kinds of communities from their

specialized discipline to uplift the community, their educational attainment, and skills.

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