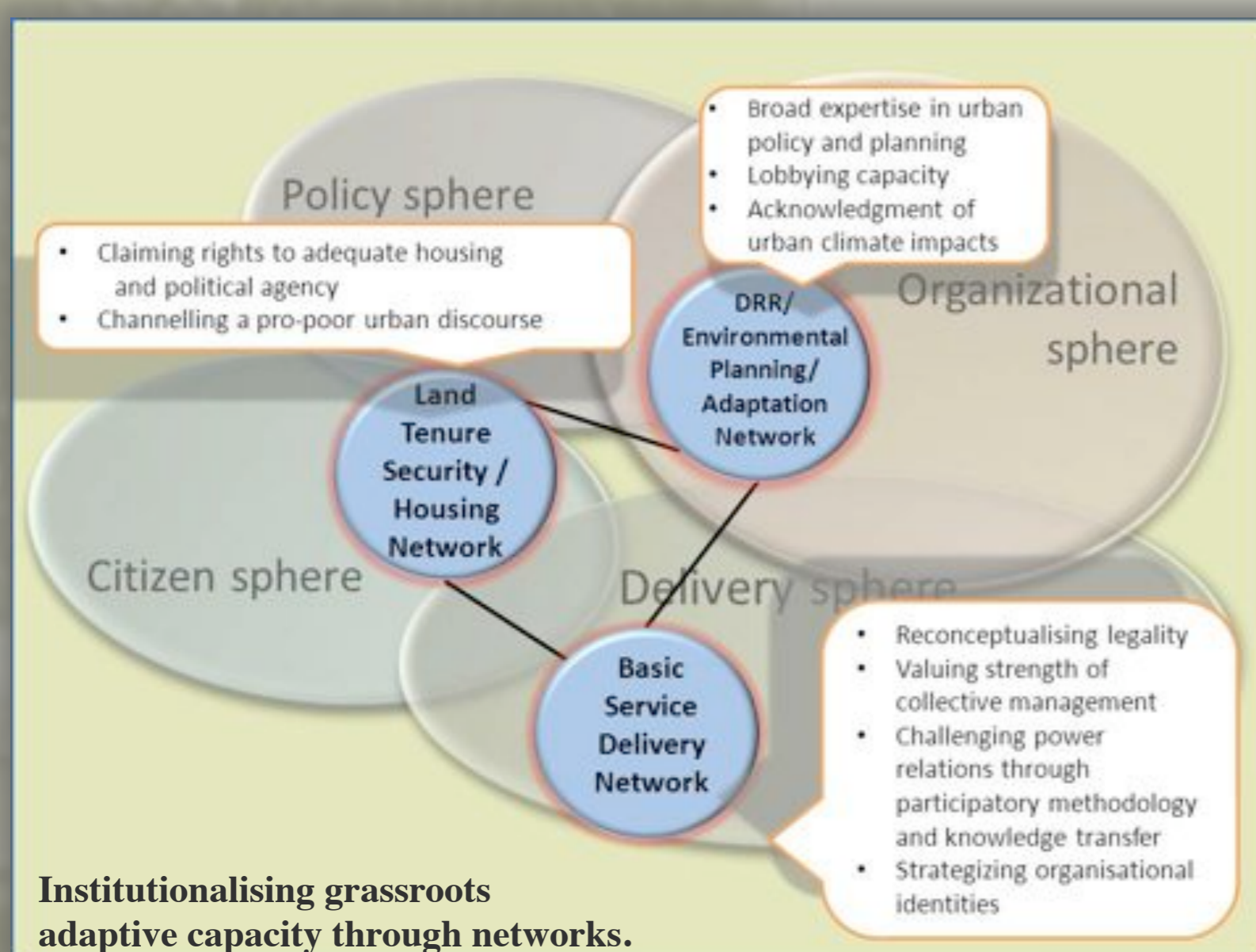# Negotiating Urban Resilience through Urban Networks
Learning from Institutionalisation of Grassroots Adaptive Capacity in Dhaka.

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INTRODUCTION

The project sought to explore the institutionalisation of grassroots adaptive capacity in the context of the political ecology of cities in developing countries. Adaptive capacity is central to urban resilience. It is understood as a process in time, developing through a negotiation of myriad institutional relationships which are formalised in organisational networks. Networks allow for contextualised action which is responsive to the needs, experiences and ambitions of a diversity of actors, including the urban poor. Over time, they reinforce the agency of urban poor to respond to gradual and systemic processes of socio-environmental change. We examined three networks in Korail, the largest inner-city informal settlement of Dhaka. These networks focus on land tenure security, basic service delivery and disaster risk reduction/environmental planning/climate adaptation. The case study demonstrates the significance of these domains in underpinning institutionalisation of urban adaptation to climate change.

Institutionalising grassroots adaptive capacity through networks.

Adapted from Levy, C (1996) "The Process of Institutionalising Gender in Policy and Planning: the 'Web' of Institutionalisation", DPU Working Paper. University College London.

METHODOLOGY

The capacity of networks to support institutionalisation of grassroots adaptive capacity was examined through three criteria:

❑ To what extent do networks reflect the climate related collective realities, needs and ambitions of urban poor across a wide institutional landscape;

❑ What are the conditions and processes through which opportunities for network action expand by means of convergence of past initiatives and through collective learning among the networked actors;

❑ How does collective action across networks result in transformation of urban policy and discourse, allowing for further institutional and social transformation.

The *Web of Institutionalisation* developed by Levy (1996) encompasses processes of grassroots adaptive capacity across four spheres of the urban institutional landscape. The framework of *Strategic Action Planning* (Levy, 2007) brings an actor dimension to the *Web* and emphasises collective action as key for achieving a socially and environmentally just urban development.

FINDINGS

Land Tenure Security & Housing Network
< CBO, urban think tank, NGO coalition >
Network partners engage in policy advocacy across a broad range of issues in housing, urban planning, and poverty reduction. Key policy draft documents have been put forward making a strong claim for an environmentally just pro-poor development.
Both the acquisition of voting rights for urban poor and greater protection against forced evictions has allowed communities to organise and demand adequate resettlement and housing conditions. Institutional capital acquired across the network is now strategically utilised by CBO members. Actively engaging in CBO-led saving schemes, organised communities pursue long-term planning aiming at resettlement with improved environmental conditions. Confidence in collective action and planning and a new political agency of urban poor results in claims for a new local municipal and climate governance.

Basic Service Provision Network
< CBO, national multi-stakeholder programme, NGO, Dhaka municipal gov. >
Provision and quality of basic services in informal settlements are highly climate sensitive and constitute a source of the residents' hardship and low environmental health status. Active CBO management of basic services reflects an appreciation of the value of collective management. Reassured by the CBO's financial and service management capacity, public service providers reconceptualise and formalise the status of CBO users and design organization structures to facilitate service provision. Collective learning within and across networks results in diffusion of novel ideas of socially just and climate responsive urban development and changed perceptions of environmental risk. CBO leaders strategically juggle organisational identities to maximize leverage and to engage in new partnerships exploring environmental and climate adaptation issues. Participatory planning tools, traditionally employed in environmental risk assessment, augment the urban poor's knowledge capital.

Climate Adaptation/ DRR/ Env Planning Network
<professional planning bodies, academia, think tanks, government departments >
This network is currently in its early formation and has limited direct connection with communities of urban poor. It comprises organisations, programmes and initiatives relating to sustainable urban development, environmental planning, disaster management and climate change adaptation. It holds a pivotal role in the emerging debate on urban climate adaptation.

CONCLUSIONS

Diversity of experiences and knowledge across networks encompasses a multiplicity of key adaptation concerns. A shared vision of a sustainable and just urban development constitutes a base for collective intent among network partners. Jointly, they challenge a biased discourse which currently disregards the climate vulnerability of urban poor. Positive outcomes of community organisation and convergence among networks offer a powerful push for more just and climate responsive urban governance structures.