

## Case study: An LIC urban area – Dhaka

Dhaka is the capital city of Bangladesh, one of the poorest countries in the world. The city's population is currently estimated as 12 million, and is forecast to increase to 21 million by 2025.

Dhaka is hemmed in by large river channels and lesser channels thread their way through the site. Its low-lying areas suffer widespread flooding during the monsoon season, June to November. It is on such areas that we find the 'bostis' – the illegal shanty or squatter settlements that have been built mainly by rural–urban migrants. They live there because they cannot afford to live elsewhere and still be close to job opportunities. They also live there because the city authorities have provided little housing to accommodate the huge increase in the city's population. With so many people living in such overcrowded and unhealthy conditions, disease is a major problem. Water pollution and rotting piles of waste dumped beside the bostis are a real health hazard. So too is the smoke from domestic fires and the air pollution from the factories and the traffic on the congested roads. The most common diseases are diarrhoea, tuberculosis, measles, malaria and dengue fever.

As in most LIC cities, the rate of population growth is outstripping the rate at which new jobs are being created. Although willing to work long hours for very low wages, most people are forced to find their own ways of making a living. This may involve selling in the street, shoe-shining, rubbish collecting or scavenging bottles and other types of waste for recycling. Begging, petty crime and prostitution are other, less legal ways of scratching a living. These activities make up what is known as the **informal economy**. In Dhaka, the driving of rickshaws (by pulling, pedal power or motor) is the most common informal activity. With little by way of public transport, rickshaws are an important factor in keeping the city moving. But they also add to the general congestion on busy and inadequate roads. Half a million children are estimated to be involved in informal activities. Most of them work from dawn to dusk, earning on average the equivalent of about 12p per day to help support their families. Their jobs vary from begging and scavenging to domestic service and collecting the fares on minibuses. By working like this, these children are constantly exposed to hazards such as traffic accidents, toxic fumes, street crime, violence and other forms of abuse.

### Case study quick notes:

This account of Dhaka has focused on the worst of its problems. You may wonder why people in their thousands choose to move to Dhaka. Is it that life is so much worse in rural areas? Or is it that most people are optimists and believe that they will have their lucky break. Unfortunately, the sad truth is that relatively few poor people ever escape from urban poverty.