Urbanization and Urban Governance in Bangladesh*

By

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I Introduction
Ours is now an urbanized world with more than 50% of the planet’s population living in officially defined urban areas. Urbanization, as it is very well known, is a manifestation of economic, technological, social and political forces. Urbanization is itself a process with its impacts on environmental, economic, social and political structures of a society. The relationship between urbanization and democracy is historical. However, this relationship is extremely complex. Evolution of efficient and aesthetically beautiful cities have been seen in the western democratic system, in the socialist system as well as in other political systems. Even within the same political-economic system, there are very efficient and highly livable cities and also very inefficient and unlivable cities. Bangladesh has a long urban history although its level of urbanization still remains low but currently experiencing rapid growth. It is a low income country with a developing economy and a political structure based generally on western style democracy, but at a nascent and rather confused stage.

II. The Process of Urbanization
Historically, the level of urbanization in Bangladesh has been low but it is urbanizing rapidly now. At the beginning of the last century, in 1901, only 2.43 percent (or about 0.7 million) of the total population of present Bangladesh areas of British India lived in urban areas. During the first half of the century urban population growth was almost static. In 1941, less than 4 percent of the population lived in urban centres, the total urban population was 1.54 million. Urbanization received impetus after 1947, when the Indian subcontinent became independent of the British rule and Bangladesh, then East Pakistan, earned a new political status. Since then a change has been observed in terms of the growth of urban population and also of urban centres.

The total urban population rose from 1.83 million in 1951 to about 2.64 million in 1961. The important factor responsible for this rapid growth was a large scale migration of Muslims from India after 1947, who mostly settled in urban areas. A phenomenal growth took place during the 1961 to 1974 period, the increase being as high as 137.6 percent. The growth rate was 6.7 percent per year during the period as against 3.7 percent per year in the previous decade. This rapid urban growth is largely due to migration of people from rural to urban areas. The rural push factors, caused by economic impoverishment following the liberation war in 1971 and environmental disasters in the following years contributed significantly. Rate of Natural growth of population was also quite high.

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In 1974, urban population increased to 8.9 percent from 5.2 percent in 1961. In 1981 this rose to 15.5 percent. The inter-censal change during this period (1974-81) was 110.7 percent with annual growth rate of about 10 percent (Table 1). Like the previous decade both migration and natural growth partially contributed to this growth. But the most important contributory factor for the 1974-81 period was the redefinition of urban places. The extended definition of the urban area with the inclusion of all 460 Upazila Head Quarters as urban accounted for 30 percent of the total increase in urban population during this period. This indicates the role of political administrative decision in shaping the quantitative demographic status of urbanization rather than quality of urbanism. During the 1981-1991 period - a slower growth of urban population, 5.4 percent, has been observed compared with the previous decade. At about 20.0 percent level of urbanization the total urban population was 22.45 million in 1991 and that at 23.1 percent level, the total urban population rose to 28.6 million in 2001. Only the total population figure is available so far for the 2011 census, this (in the revised count) has been stated to be 150.4 million. With an estimated level of urbanization to be 28 percent the total urban population would be approximately 42 million.

Table 1: Growth of national and urban population in Bangladesh 1901-2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total national population (million)</th>
<th>Annual growth rate of national population (%)</th>
<th>Total urban population (million)</th>
<th>Urban population as % of total population (level of urbanization)</th>
<th>Decadal increase of urban population (%)</th>
<th>Annual (exponential growth rate of urban population, %)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>8.87</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>31.65</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>14.96</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>33.25</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>8.85</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>35.60</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>22.20</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>41.99</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>43.20</td>
<td>3.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>44.17</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>4.34</td>
<td>18.38</td>
<td>1.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>55.22</td>
<td>2.26</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>5.19</td>
<td>45.11</td>
<td>3.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>76.37</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>8.87</td>
<td>137.57</td>
<td>6.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>89.91</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>13.56</td>
<td>15.54</td>
<td>110.68</td>
<td>10.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>111.45</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>22.45</td>
<td>20.15</td>
<td>69.75</td>
<td>5.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>123.1</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>28.61</td>
<td>23.10</td>
<td>37.05</td>
<td>3.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The rate of growth of urban population is likely to fall to some extent in the future, but would still be quite high. The UN (2004) projection for urban population of Bangladesh for 2030 was 86.5 million. No projection for urban population in 2050 was, however, given. The proportion urban would possibly cross the 50% mark by 2040 and the 60% mark by the year 2050 when the total urban population would rise above 100 million.

All these population figures for the future seem nightmarish for a country of the size of Bangladesh. The urban population, at 42 million today, already poses a huge challenge, to think about double or triple of such size is very difficult. Indeed, the whole of Bangladesh is likely to transform itself into an urbanized country, a megalopolis of over 200 to 250 million people with a huge megacity in the centre and hundreds of other cities and towns spread all around (Fig. 1).
The Urban System: the Hierarchy

The urban system in a country is composed of a hierarchy of urban centers by population size, such as from the Mega/ Metro City to a small hamlet. Although urban geographers would prefer to classify urban centres in Bangladesh in 7 size classes (Islam & Hossain, 1976) the classification given by the Bangladesh Census Commission is a combination of population size and administrative or governance structure. The Commission has classified the urban centres into four categories; such as the Megacity, Statistical Metropolitan Areas (SMAs), Pourashavas and Other Urban Areas. It recognized some 522 urban centers in the country in 2001.

A metropolitan city with population of more than 5 million was termed as Megacity in the census of 2001. There is only one Megacity in the country, Dhaka, with an estimated current population of about 14 million. Even in 2001, Dhaka Megacity was not a single city, but an agglomeration of several, including Dhaka City Corporation area, six Pourashavas and numerous Union Parishads or villages. In 2011, two new City Corporations (Narayanganj and Comilla) have emerged, through merger and up-gradation of Pourashavas. Such administrative changes require new urban governance system. Dhaka Megacity (or Dhaka Capital Region) in future will demand a very different governance structure. Governing the megacity region is complex and difficult because of multiplicity of agencies involved in planning and implementation of different services to the people of the megacity region.

Statistical Metropolitan Areas are the City Corporations and their adjoining areas with urban characteristics. On the basis of this definition BBS (2003) identified three Metropolitan areas in the country in 2001, namely Chittagong (3.38 m), Khulna (1.34 m) and Rajshahi (0.7 m), besides Dhaka,
which is a Megacity. These three cities had total urban population of 5.42 million, or about 19 percent of the national urban population in 2001. The Megacity Dhaka and the three Metropolitan Cities together absorbed about 56.44 percent of the total urban population of the country. Metropolitan Cities are given the status of City Corporations. The next category of towns is the Pourashava. The areas declared by the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives as Municipal Towns or Pourashavas have the formal urban status with local governments. During the Census of 2001, there were 223 Pourashavas in the country. In the same census, 11 Pourashavas were parts of the four largest cities - Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna and Rajshahi. The remaining pourashavas, 212, had a total population of about 9 million, or 31 percent of the national urban population. Currently the number of Pourashavas is about 315.

*Other Urban Areas* are upazila headquarters or big market places in the rural areas which have not yet been declared as Pourashava during the census operation. The areas which conform with urban characteristics were considered as Other Urban Areas (OUAs). OUAs nearly, about 200, absorbed less than 4 percent of the national urban population.

In Bangladesh the urban local governments are elected bodies and have their own distinctive governance system, and have varying degree of autonomy by municipal status (such as, Class A, Class B and Class C categories of Pourashavas and the City Corporations).

### III. Municipalization in Bangladesh

Although the level or degree of urbanization in Bangladesh remained very low throughout the British period (1757-1947), growth of some individual cities and towns was of considerable significance. The British had felt the need for introducing some sort of municipal local governance even in the early 1820s, but a formal beginning was made with the establishment of one of the first municipalities in the present day Bangladesh region in Dhaka in 1864, through the Bengal Municipal Act 1864. The municipal council was however predominantly composed of officials. Dhaka then had a population about 50,000 and was still the largest urban the centre of the region.

An interesting development in municipalization was the holding of a huge public meeting in Dhaka in 1882 by the Dhaka People's Association which made demand for an elected municipal council. This civil society initiative resulted in the democratic representation of the elected members to the municipal council, along with appointed members for Dhaka in 1884. Since then there have been many changes in municipal management or governance.

The 1932 Bengal Municipal Act was a landmark development as it provided for greater participation of elected representatives in the municipal bodies and also in widening the powers and functions of municipal bodies. The system continued well into the first decade of the Pakistan period, but following the imposition of Martial Law by General Ayub Khan in 1958, and his introduction of Basic Democracy, municipal governance also took a similar twist. Instead of direct election to the posts of Municipal Councilors, indirect, step wise (such as through Ward Committee and Union Committee) representations, was introduced. Subsequent changes came after the independence of Bangladesh, in 1971, alternatively giving more importance to members of the National Parliament, then to Government Officials and again to elected local representatives between 1972 and 1976.

The governance of the Capital City Dhaka underwent several changes since liberation. The Act of 1974 (Act 56), designated Dhaka as the Dhaka Municipal Corporation. But in 1983, it was raised to the status of a City Corporation. Chittagong City Corporation was, however, formed in 1982. Four
other cities (Khulna, Rajshahi, Sylhet and Barisal) were also given City Corporation status between 1984 and 2001. (Committee for Strengthening Local Governance Institution, Local Government Division and LGRD Report, Vol. 1, 2007). Smaller cities and towns are known as Pourashavas (or municipalities). Prior to 1994, the City Corporations were managed by Mayors appointed by the government. In case of Dhaka often the Minister in charge of Local Government was given the additional responsibility of the Mayor.

Bangladesh was governed by undemocratic dictatorial regimes during 1975 to 1990. Parliamentary democracy was restored in 1991, through continuous struggles and agitation by the political parties and the people.

The democratic process of electing the Mayor and Ward Commissioners through direct voting came into practice only in 1994, in Dhaka, when Mr. Md. Hanif was elected the Mayor through the Local / Government Act 1993. Similar development took place in the other City Corporations and Pourashavas. Further progress in the democratization process was achieved in 1999 when direct election of Women Commissioners for reserved seats was introduced.

In 2008, all Pourashava Chairman came to be known as Mayors like City Corporation Mayors and Ward Commissioners as Councilors.

Urbanization in Bangladesh today has become a very strong political, economic, social and cultural force. The population of some of the major city corporations or municipalities is very large, even larger than any district population. The population of an electoral constituency to a seat of the Parliament is many times smaller than the constituency of the Mayor of Dhaka or Chittagong or the other city corporations. The Mayors of these large city corporations have great political significance.

A basic element in a democratic process is the election of representatives to lead and govern the citizens. The people of Bangladesh in general participate in all elections with huge enthusiasm, voter's turnout being almost always over 50 percent and in many cases even over 85 percent. Municipal elections are equally popular and participatory. Municipal (or local government), elections have been held on a non-party basis, while the elections to the Parliament are held on party identity. However, most candidates in municipal (or other local govt. units) have party identity and are indirectly supported by one or the other established political party. In fact, the election to the position of the Mayors of such cities as Dhaka or Chittagong, are very much dominated by party affiliation and in turn exert huge influence on the elections of the Parliamentary seats. The candidature of the city Mayor is therefore a very critical issue in major political parties. So far the candidates chosen for the mayoral elections specially in the larger cities have been party stalwarts. The Mayor of Dhaka City Corporation enjoys the status of a Cabinet Minister. While the other city Mayors have a State Minister’s status.

Recently a number of Pourashavas (single or in combination of two or three) have been upgraded to the status of city corporations. These include Narayanganj (with Siddirgonj and Kadam Rasul Pourashavas amalgamated) and Comilla. Gazipur (with Tongi Pourashava amalgamated) and Rangpur are likely to be declared City Corporations soon. Election to the Narayangonj City Corporation was held in November, 2011. The new Mayor Dr. Selina Hyat Ivy, assumed office on 1 December, 2011. Election to the Comilla City Corporation was held on 5, January, 2012. The election to these CCs have been positive developments in municipalisation. That the democratic process in Bangladesh has achieved a reasonable level of maturity is evident from the fact that all elections held since 2008 have
been considered free, fair and credible by both neutral observers and the people.

Although municipal governance in Bangladesh is based on direct vote, the urban local governments (City Corporations and Pourashavas) do not enjoy adequate power, authority or autonomy. These are also heavily dependent on the central government for funds and personnel. Their functional jurisdiction is also very limited. This is more true for the large City Corporations such as Dhaka and Chittagong, since such functions as town planning and urban development, water supply and electricity supply services have been taken away from them and given to separate autonomous but unelected authorities under the central government.

However, despite the truncated functional power, the Mayors do enjoy enormous power within their own municipal administration. Decision making within the organization is highly centralized in the hands of the Mayor although there is a system of decisions to be processed upward to the Mayor through a number of subject based Standing Committees chaired by Ward Commissioners. Almost all financial authority is vested in the Mayor.

Geographical or area based decentralization is very limited. All City Corporations and Municipalities are composed of Wards but the Wards do not enjoy any worthwhile financial power. They seriously lack in personnel. The Ward Commissioners have to address demands of a large constituency (sometimes of over 100,000 people, in Dhaka) almost single handed. He does not have a committee to advise him.

In case of Dhaka, some degree of geographical decentralization was introduced through the formation of 10 Zones in the early 90s (Islam et.al, 2000). These zones oversee some of the municipal services and also collect revenue or property taxes for the city corporation. The zones are administrative offices and headed by a Zonal Executive Officer and are directly under the Mayor's office, rather than under the control of the local Ward Commissioners. The Zonal officers come on deputation either from the Central Civil service or the army, and stay in the City Corporation only for a limited period.

Municipal elections have been held more or less regularly since the 1990s, except for Dhaka, where the last Mayor (Mr. Sadek Hossian Khoka) elected for a period of 5 years, was in fact well into his 10th year of office before he was removed through amendment in the corporation’s legal status in November 2011. A similar situation occurred during the regime of the previous Mayor (Mr. Md. Hanif) who stayed in office for nearly 8 years in place of 5 years.

The most recent development in the governance of Dhaka City has taken place with passing of the Local Government (City Corporation) Amendment Bill 2011 on 29 November, 2011 by the National Parliament (Daily Star, 30 November, 2011) and ratified by the Hon’ble President on 1 December, 2011 (Daily Star, 2 December, 2011).The Amendment has caused the division of Dhaka City Corporation into two city corporations namely North Dhaka City Corporation and South Dhaka City Corporation. The incumbent Mayor who was in power for over 9 years was removed following the amendment. An Administrator in each of the two City Corporations has been appointed and two City Corporation offices have started to function. The new act demands that elections to the two City Corporation Council including that of the Mayor, will have to be completed within 90 days of the appointment of the Administrator. Implementing the two tasks, managing the division of DCC into North DCC and South DCC and holding of the elections, within 90 days at the same time proved to be unrealistic. The Parliament has amended the Act again allowing 180 days in place of 90 days, for holding the election. Thus the municipalization process in the capital city has been greatly disturbed.
It will be interesting to see how the process moves and whether it facilitates democratic urban governance in Bangladesh. There has also been some change in the structure of Pourashavas as incorporated in the Pourashava Act of 2009. Of particular significance is the formation of the Ward Committees each of 10 members of which 40% would have to be women. The committee would be chaired by the Councilor of the Ward. This has enhanced greater participation of citizens in municipal management. In addition, a practice of instituting Town Level Coordination Committee (TLCC), with civil society representatives, have also been introduced in the Pourashava.

IV. Some Issues in Urban Governance

Municipal Governance is of course not merely the function of the Municipality or City Corporation alone, rather it is the function of a complex combination of many organizations - governmental, autonomous, para-statal bodies as well as the private sector, the civil society, the community and also now a days, increasingly development partners and international agencies. All these different types of organizations and institutions have their roles to play in establishing functional, efficient and progressive urban governance system. The prime role of course should remain with the municipal administration or the office of the Mayor and his / her leadership.

Good urban governance demands attention to a number of key indicators, such as transparency, accountability, responsiveness, authority, rule of law, democratic participation, decentralization, coordination, efficiency, and leadership. In the following sections, some discussion is presented on participation, transparency and accountability, coordination and roles of the key stakeholders in urban governance.

With greater participation of the citizenry and people of different walks of life, greater degree of transparency, accountability and responsiveness may be achieved. However, the degree and quality of participation will in turn depend on the charisma and commitment of the leadership as well as on the legal mandates of the municipality. Participation also depends on decentralization and devolution of power and authority. In urban governance it implies decentralization from Central government to the city level, and also from the city level to the ward or community level. Participation of all stakeholders, specially, the citizens, in urban development planning, financial management and service delivery is important. Some of these issues are discussed below:

Participation in Urban Development Planning

We have seen that urbanization, urban growth and urban expansion are taking place in Bangladesh at rapid rates. For sustainability, these require proper planning, which implies preparing technically sound urban plans (Master Plans, Details Area Plans etc), with adequate participation of the citizens and stakeholders. Such plans are being prepared in Bangladesh for cities and towns of all size categories from the Capital or Megacity Dhaka to a medium to a small size Pourashava. In the four large cities (Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna and Rajshahi) urban plans are prepared by City Development Authorities (like RAJUK, CDA, KDA and RDA), with some degree of participation. In case of Dhaka, civil society groups and professional bodies have compelled RAJUK to allow greater participation in plan preparation. The government at one stage respected the opinions of such bodies and passed necessary administrative decision such as the Detail Area Plans (in 2009), but subsequently yielded to pressure exerted by powerful real-estate groups. This illustrates the complexity of participatory governance in urban planning. Level of participation in urban planning is considerably lower in other cities, specially in Pourashava, where plans are prepared under supervision of central government agencies like the Urban Development Directorate or the Local
Government Engineering Department. However, exceptions are also there. The Master Plan for Cox’s Bazar is being finalized after adequate participation of all concerned people.

Ideally, the responsibility of preparing the plan or any other development plan of a city should rest with the local urban authority, such as the city corporation or the Pourashava. These bodies are also legally mandated to perform the planning function. But in the early fifties, Dhaka Improvement Trust (DIT) was created to take exclusive responsibility of developing Dhaka, then Capital of East Pakistan, in a planned manner and with this the planning function of Dhaka Municipality was suspended. Similar development took place in the other three large cities at that time. Dhaka Municipal Corporation, however, got a full-fledged Urban Planning Department in 1990, but without the authority of preparing a Master Plan. Instead, the Department could only undertake small scale site plans, like shopping centres, or parks. It could however maintain liaison with Rajuk in its Master Planning or Detail Area Planning exercises. No other city corporation or Pourashava had their own Urban Planning Department or unit until about the year 2000. Such units have been established gradually in all A Category Pourashavas, basically as obligatory conditions under Urban Governance and Infrastructure Improvement Project (UGIIP) supported by the Asian Development Bank. This and other externally funded projects, have indeed brought back some essential functions to the Pourashavas, but not yet to the large city corporations. The projects like UGIIP, also inspire greater participation of people in the planning process.

**Participation in Urban Financial Management**

Urban local authorities, both city corporations and Pourashavas, are themselves responsible for the preparation of their respective annual budgets. By law they are required to solicit participation of the citizens in the budget preparation process. Normally, the people in the authority’s finance or accounts department prepare the draft budget which is then presented to the Mayor and the Council. Generally the budget is prepared along a set structure with some nominal adjustments such as a certain percentage change in each approved head. In recent time, the City Corporations and Pourashavas have invited greater participation of the people. Members of the TLCC also take part in discussions on the budget, but basically there remains little scope for major change.

The urban local bodies are seriously weak in financial strength. Most of the authorities can not raise enough property or holding taxes. Few of them ever try to reassess or enhance property rates for fear of losing popular support. They are also in capable of innovating new sources of revenue earning. However, many of the urban local bodies receive one or more development funds from the central government or development partners and in which citizens have scope for participation.

**Participation in Urban Infrastructure Development**

Major infrastructural projects are prepared and implemented in urban areas by the central government agencies or even by city authorities without much of people’s participation. Such projects normally have financial and technical support of foreign development agencies. These often lack transparency in the process of planning and implementation. Only when a powerful government agency or civil society group raises objection, compromises are made in plans. Opposition by civil society groups may cause delay in implementation of projects even when these projects are legitimate (a good case in point is the plan for the first metro line in Dhaka). Citizens in general show little interest, for or against, even for such mega projects. Political parties, interestingly, remain conspicuously silent on such issues. Major and expensive environmental improvement projects may be taken up, initially on pressure from the civil society, but during implementation hardly any participation of the citizens are solicited, rather more involvement of the army has been ensured. Case in point is the Hatirjheel Lake
Development project, Dhanmondi or Gulshan Lake development projects in Dhaka. Green city movement is not a political force yet. In one exceptional case of health and environmental improvement, had the former Mayor of Dhaka City Corporation, Mr. Sadeq Hossain Khoka, sought and received participation of the civil society. This is in the fight against adese mosquito responsible for dengue fever. The former Mayor of Chittagong, Mr. ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury, had also undertaken some dynamic prjogrammes of greening the city with citizen’s participation.

Transparency and Accountability
Transparency and accountability in the administration of local urban authorities are essential to good governance. The Pourashava Act 2009 make it obligatory for the Pourashavas these days to exhibit Citizen’s Charter openly so that people are better aware of developments in their local authorities. The Commission for Right to Information further empowers people to demand information from their local leadership and authorities. Moreover, the election process in the local bodies and the formation of the Town Level Coordination Committee with participations of representatives of the civil society is another step forward. The various Standing Committees are expected to process municipal decision making. The existence of a comparatively free and vibrant print and electronic media and the watchful eyes of the of the Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) further improves possibility of greater transparency. Despite all these checks and balances, allegations of corruption in urban local bodies is rather common. Mayors of large cities are often charged with serious cases of irregularities. Lack of transparency in development projects and partisanship in appointments to municipal jobs is a common allegation.

Leadership in Urban Governance
Leadership is one of the most significant factors in good urban governance, like it is in any sector of development. Local urban governance depends greatly on the quality of local urban leadership, meaning the elected mayor and his / her council. Visionary, dynamic, innovative, committed and honest leadership can make a city more efficient and liveable. In general, city corporations and Pourashavas in Bangladesh are lacking in such leadership. At least Dhaka was not fortunate in this respect. Chittagong’s former Mayor ABM Mohiuddin was certainly quite dynamic and innovative and got elected three times, but later he committed some serious mistakes and lost the popular support. The present Mayor of Tongi has been elected in four consecutive terms, he understands the urban dynamics but does not seem to be effective of live in the city significantly. It is of course not an easy task, either, given the character of this industrial city.

The mayor of the newly formed Narayangong City Corporation, Dr. Selina Hyat Ivy, was a successful Mayor when it was a Pourashava. She has charisma and commitment. The larger municipal entity will be quite a challenge for her. The new Mayor of Barisal City Corporation has already made his mark in improving the physical appearance of the city. He has been able to win people’s participation in his development initiatives. The Mayor of Feni has also shown dynamism. Such are some examples of good urban governance. There is also greater participation of elected women councilors in Pourashavas although they themselves are not satisfied with their status and privileges.

It may be noted that projects like UGIIP, MDF or UPPR have played some role in improving the governance style of urban local bodies, particularly through the emphasis on citizen’s participation in local decision making. Intelligent local urban leaders have exploited the positive elements of such projects effectively.
Coordination is a Key Issue in Urban Governance

A key concept in good urban governance is that of coordination, particularly among the governmental and para-statal institutions that are functionally involved. In case of Dhaka city, for example, as many as 40 different governmental or autonomous organizations are known to have such involvement, many of which are directly so on a day to day basis. There is serious problem of coordination among such agencies resulting in wastage of resources and time, and ultimately causing sufferings of the people (Islam et.al, 2000).

Occasional attempts were made to solve the problem of coordination in Dhaka City. One attempt was made in the mid 1990s, when Mr. Mohammad Hanif was the city Mayor. He infact demanded the formation of a City Government, with the implication that all relevant governmental service delivery and controlling agencies be brought under the single authority of the City Mayor (or Governor, if such a title might be more acceptable). The Government of the time (the party in power being Awami Leugue, Mr. Hanif’s own party) only allowed a Coordination Committee to be chaired by the Minister of Local Government and co-chaired by the Mayor. The arrangement became dysfunctional in no time. A similar situation arose during the regime of his successor, Mr. Sadeq Hossain Khoka, when a high powered Coordination Committee was established under the Chairmanship of the Mayor who enjoyed a Cabinet Minister’s status. It was during the BNP regime. Mr. Khoka was the President of Dhaka Mohanagar BNP. It was formed with over 30 agency chiefs and 5 civil society representatives. The Committee, like the previous one, could not work properly and at the request of the Mayor, the committee responsibility was shifted to the Prime Minister’s office, with the Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister acting as the Chief Coordinator on behalf of the elected Mayor. It worked for sometime, but as it was not constitutionally established, the system was discontinued with change of government, and coordination remains a very critical issue in governance in Dhaka City. It is also a serious problem in other major cities. Attempt has, however, been made to improve Coordination of agencies in Pourashavas, through the Town Level Coordination Committee (TLCC) formed under UGIIP. Civil society representatives also sit in the TLCC.

The Plight of the Urban Poor

Although the Government of Bangladesh has a declared policy of pro-poor plan preparation (for instance, Poverty Reduction Strategy Plan or the Sixth Five Year Plan), the urban poor do not get adequate attention from either the Central Government or the City Government (like Dhaka City Corporation or any other City Corporation or Pourashava), or the city development authorities (like RAJUK or CDA etc). The Centre or Urban Studies (CUS), in a mapping exercise in 2005, found nearly 5000 slums, large and small, in Dhaka with a population of 3.5 million (CUS, 2006). These people live in the city under tremendous pressure, particularly those living on government land as squatters, are in constant threat of eviction. The central government has not been able to draw any comprehensive programme for their rehabilitation or to give them long term tenure security. The city development authority (RAJUK) hardly makes any provision of land or housing for them, NGOs offer them some support. In some cases Mastaans (Extortionist cum care-takers of slums) sometimes serve as protectors from forced eviction. Elected city corporation Councilors also offer some support to the squatters. But in the end, slum dwellers live a life of extreme uncertainty. Some legislators, however, are currently trying to push forward a Bill in the Parliament on evictions, safeguarding the interest of the slum dwellers, but its progress is painfully slow, due possibly to lack of interest of most of the law-makers.

Interestingly, although slum dwellers make a very significant component of the social fabric of any city or town in Bangladesh, the Pourashava Act, 2009 does not seem to recognize this reality. It does
not even mention the term slum dweller or slum although there is a section on social welfare (Article 62) in the Act. However, Dhaka City Corporation has established a Slum Development Department, with some personnel and a small allocation in the annual budget. No other city corporation has any such department. Many of the Pourashavas, however, have projects on slum or urban poor settlement improvement supported by donor agencies. The slum dwellers are important in the democratic process of urban areas, but not considered significant in participatory urban development. However, the Pourashavas if they so desire, can take some freedom under Article 62 which offers scope for slum development or development of specially backward groups (GoB, Local Government (Pourashava) Act, 2009).

There have been some efforts by NGOs to help slum dwellers and other urban poor people improve their economic condition, specially through micro-credit, and also with support in skill development and health and educational programmes. The Coalition of the Urban Poor (CUP), an alliance of over 50 NGOs working with the urban poor, has also been trying to organize the poor to fight for secure shelter tenure and their right to live and work in the city. The Centre for Urban Studies (CUS) has recently helped slum dwellers to form their own NGO known as the Nagar Daridro Bastee Bashir Unayan Sangstha (NDBUS), in order to fight for their rights on their own. UNDP has also begun to support NDBUS with funds in their self-development programmes. Some large NGOs like BRAC, ARBAN and Shakti Foundation also have programmes for the development of the urban poor in Dhaka and many other cities and towns.

However, despite such support the improvement in the quality of life of the urban poor is rather marginal. This is because of many reasons. First, all these support by NGOs and international agencies do not address the basic issue of security of tenure and the right of the poor to stay in the city strongly enough. One may even become cynical enough to argue that such supporters may not sincerely wish that the poor be really empowered. No radical movement which might disturb the present class relations in cities is yet visible. Even the left oriented political parties, which themselves however, are very weak, have hardly any programme to take the interest of the urban poor forward. The Government, both central and local, also offer only consolatory programmes for the urban poor.

**Governance in the Informal Sector and the Plight of the Street Hawkers and Vendors**

Like in many cities in other developing countries, the informal sector is a very important sector of the urban economy in Bangladesh. In terms of employment, the sector possibly has more than 50% participation in Dhaka and Chittagong and a much larger proportion in smaller urban centres. Street hawkers and vendors form one of the largest groups of informal sector operators. In Dhaka, the number of hawkers and vendors is anybody’s guess but it is well over 400,000 in the City Corporation area. They run their business with risk and uncertainly, where they have to maintain special relationships with City Corporation officials, the police and the extortionists.

The reality of street hawkers and vendors is not well understood by urban local authorities, or even the planners. Their common attitude towards hawkers is one of negative connotation, as illustrated sometimes by sudden evictions, particularly, when the government is authoritarian. Elected governments are usually soft with hawkers and allow them to operate without discipline, such as by taking over pedestrian walkways, curtailing their rights. That hawkers can also be positively accommodated in the urban economic system is not adequately appreciated.

**Role of Civil Society Organizations in Urban Development and Governance**

Civil society organizations, which include NGOs, CBOs, and professional groups, among others, have
significant roles to play in urban development and governance. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, the Panchayets (neighborhood level social/community institutions) used to contribute significantly to the maintenance of social order in Dhaka. There are now new and different types of social groups performing some such functions. Among these, neighborhood level environmental activist groups in middle or upper class areas or the slum dwellers associations, as well as city or national level civil society groups are parts of the new democratic dynamics of urban development and urban governance (Islam and Mahjabeen 2000). The national level civil society groups such as Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (BAPA), Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA), Consumer Association of Bangladesh (CAB) etc. are now important civil society organizations which raise their voice on urban issues. BAPA for example, has a Task Force on urbanization and offers both analytical discussions and agenda for action. BELA goes for legal action against public or private projects harming the urban environment. Civil society’s urban awareness is much stronger today than ever before, but still not strong enough to stop all kinds of bad projects.

Role of the Private Sector
Dhaka, the megacity with about 14 million people (in an area of 1350 sq.kms, including DCC, Narayanganj City Corporation and other Pourashavas), is becoming distinctive as an unequal city with hardly any evidence of planned effort in reducing the pattern. The private corporate sector plays a strong role in accentuating the inequality. During the past two decades particularly, the private land and housing development companies have primarily invested in luxury residential development rapidly pushing the lower income groups out of the housing market, and to marginal locations of degraded physical environment.

Critical issues in urban governance sometimes arise due to motivated actions of the private sector. In the area of industrial development, the private sector sets up factories which produce chemical effluents which harm the environment. The governmental agencies responsible for maintaining environmental standard are either incapable of controlling the unacceptable activities of the industries or are in alliance with them. The real estate companies, particularly those involved in land development, are mostly, uncontrollable and almost ungovernable. They now have strong lobby in the Parliament as well as friends in the administration. The victim is the environment, particularly the water bodies and rivers in and around Dhaka and other urban areas. The private sector real estate developers are also responsible for illegal hill cutting in Chittagong and Cox’s Bazar. Weak governance in held responsible for such activities. The Government has enacted a number of relevant acts and rules to safeguard the urban environment but poor implementation results in negative development.

Development Partners and International Agencies and Urban Governance
The roles of development partners, which include foreign country specific aid agencies and also international financial and development organizations, have become increasingly significant in urban development and urban governance in Bangladesh since its in recent times. UN bodies like UNDP, UN Habitat, UNCDF and UNICEF have played active positive role in helping to put in physical infrastructure and social support in urban areas, particularly in sanitation, drainage, water supply, waste disposal and income generating activities. The role of foreign development agencies like JICA, Danida, DFID, GTZ have also been significant. Similarly projects like UGIIP of ADB or Municipal Development Fund of the World Bank, have also made impact both on the urban structure and the urban governance system in Bangladesh. The development partners have now their own lobby and insists on participation in the decision making process related to urbanization and urban governance in Bangladesh. The Government of Bangladesh has recognized their role and
ensured their participation in the newly formed initiative known as the Bangladesh Urban Forum (BUF). They have also participated in the formulation of the National Urban Sector Policy, now awaiting government approval. In other words, many of the major urban development decisions will be taken with participation of foreign and international development partners.

Globalization and Urban Development

During the period when the private sector has assumed a prominent position in the structuring or restructuring of physical, economic and social pattern of the large cities, particularly Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet, the impact of globalization has also been evident in these cities (Islam and Shafi, 2010).

The global demand for ready made garments opened up opportunity of the apparel industry in Dhaka and Chittagong. At least 5000 factories were established since the 1980s in these two cities employing some 3.5 million workers, mostly females. This one single phenomenon alone has been instrumental in transforming the urban fabric of these two cities and in restructuring the social pattern to a significant degree. The gross sex imbalance in these cities has been somewhat moderated. Demand for certain types of consumer items has been increased. The status of the worker’s rights has also improved, but only to a limited level. The right to form unions in these industries is now recognized. The governance context in globalization is basically understood in the process of industrial location decision and also in the development of the real estate sector, as discussed earlier. The development of the retail trade sector is also partly influenced by the force of globalization. In the industrial sector, the new phenomenon of the Export Processing Zone (EPZ) is a direct response to globalization. EPZ adds a new dimension to the urban structure, and to urban governance.

V Conclusions

Since Independence, Bangladesh has experienced changes in political, social, and economic fields. In the political arena it has swung from multiparty democracy to one party system to be followed by military dictatorship and again move over to multi-party democracy. The quality of governance has also been variable in terms of transparency, accountability, responsiveness, efficiency and equity. Socially, the country has achieved significant progress in indicators of health and education. In the economic field also, there has been reasonable improvement, with an annual growth of around 6 percent, and a lower incidence of poverty although inequity has increased. Structurally, economy has experienced growth of the secondary and tertiary sectors as opposed to the decline in the contribution of the primary or agricultural sector to the GDP. This transformation is physically manifested in urbanization with rapid metropolitization and also growth of existing cities and evolution of rural settlement into urban centers. The rapid growth of urban centres of various (population) size categories also demands appropriate urban management or governance system. For example, Dhaka and Chittagong are no longer single city metropolises rather these are urban agglomerations with multiples centres of municipal administrative. Governance of such agglomerations are quite challenging.

Bangladesh was traditionally known as a rural-agricultural country, but already by now nearly one third of its population has become urban while in another 30 to 40 years it will be predominantly urban. The remaining population will not be purely rural, rather they will be of rural-urban mixed type. Rural settlements will also have a different look, presumably with more pucca structures, even multi-storied buildings and associated developments.
Bangladesh has a unitary form of government, with a declared policy of decentralized administration and strengthening of local governments. The local government system is composed of urban local governments, with city corporations for large cities and Paurashavas for secondary cities and small towns. Many small towns are still outside the municipal governance system. They are administered under the rural local government, such as Union Parishads. As of now there are 7 City Corporations and 314 Paurashavas, although the number of urban centres is over 522. The other form of local governments are the rural (Union Parishads) and rural-regional (Upazila and Zila Parishads) for rural-regional local governments.

The Government of Bangladesh and the various political parties in the country, talk about strengthening the local governments so that these can effectively provide the various services to the citizens. To this end, the Parliament has passed the Purashava Act of 2009 (and also the other local government Acts).

Strengthening or empowering urban local governments demands active participation of both the elected representatives of the Paurashavas and also the citizens. The Purashava Act of 2009 has ensured greater participation of citizens through several Standing Committees, the Town Level Coordination Committee and the Ward Level Committee. Women’s participation in municipal decision making has also been better ensured in the Purashava Act, with provision for Panel Mayorship, and membership in the Standing Committees.

The legal obligation for exhibiting the Citizen’s Charter prominently in the Purashava Office, is also a step towards better governance through better information. Municipal elections have been held more or less regularly except in case of Dhaka, the Capital. Both elections and people’s participation in local municipal decision making are very important for democratization in urban governance.

Improvement in urban local governments also demands financial strengthening of the Paurashavas. This can be achieved through both central government support and easy legal provision for Paurashavas to implement income earning projects with their own initiatives. However, adequate transparency arrangements are pre-conditions for such projects.

Urban local government strengthening also demands both quantitative and qualitative strength of relevant personnel in such bodies. There are serious deficiencies in municipal human resources, particularly in availability of professional urban planners and other technical people. The system of providing bureaucrats and technical persons to the Paurashavas by the central government is also not very welcome by the Purashava authorities since they involve additional financial burdens to the Paurashavas.

Quality of Purashava leadership is also a very important issue in improving Purashava governance. Since such leadership evolves through the election process, there is need for campaign for choosing good leaders. Both the government and non-government organizations can conduct such campaigns. Various development partners and international agencies have undertaken some such motivation programmes, such as the current project on ‘Strengthening Democratic Local Governance’ supported the USAID. Quality leadership is indeed a key to better urban local governance. Similarly ensuring sustainability of urban governance institutions is extremely important. Institutional sustainability obviously depends on the implementation of provisions of the Purashava Act 2009 and other legal circulars.
References


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