

## Planned Urban Decentralization for Sustainable Development of Bangladesh

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### **Introduction**

The present trend of planning practice is mostly oriented towards planning of cities and towns in Bangladesh. This involves huge amount of financial allocation/grants every year for the development and improvement of urban facilities and utility services for only 25% of the country's population living in the urban areas. In absence of appropriate planning and guidelines regarding the planned development of small urban centers at the local and regional level, the important cities specially the major divisional headquarters (such as Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna, Rajshahi etc.) along with other important district towns of the country are experiencing tremendous pressure of urbanization for the last one and a half decade. Moreover, the rural to urban migration which is increasing at an alarming rate in search of shelter and occupation mainly, is acting as a big threat to the planned growth of the major divisional cities. As a consequence, urban dwellers living in the major cities are facing problems like overpopulation, unemployment, lack of utility and services, traffic congestion, lack of housing and recreational facilities etc. as a part of their everyday life. Ultimately the cities are becoming overcrowded and dirty. As a result air, water and noise pollution is taking a devastating shape in the urban areas of the country. Hundreds of city dwellers specially the rickshaw pullers, drivers of different vehicles, regular road users and small children are becoming prey to various diseases like- blood pressure, headache, eye infection, heart diseases, problems in the respiratory system, various skin diseases, cancer etc. So, decentralization of the urban activities among the upazila and district headquarters can be very effective in getting rid of the present trend of unplanned and haphazard urbanization in the country. Proper initiatives can also be taken to develop small townships with respect to the region's own potentials providing necessary administrative, economic/industrial

activities, health, educational, recreational, housing and infrastructural facilities within the same town boundary.

### **Decentralization and Sustainable Development**

Decentralization is the process of redistributing or dispersing functions, powers, people or things away from a central location or authority. The meaning of decentralization may vary in part because of the different ways it is applied. Ideas of liberty and decentralization were carried to their logical conclusions during the 19th and 20th centuries by anti-state political activists calling themselves "anarchists", "libertarians and even decentralists. Alexis de Tocqueville was an advocate, writing: "Decentralization has, not only an administrative value, but also a civic dimension, since it increases the opportunities for citizens to take interest in public affairs; it makes them get accustomed to using freedom. And from the accumulation of these local, active, persnickety freedoms, is born the most efficient counterweight against the claims of the central government, even if it were supported by an impersonal, collective will." (UNDP, 1999)

Sustainable development is that type of development that meets the needs and aspirations of the current generation without compromising the ability to meet those of future generations. It can also be defined as development which enables individuals and communities in underdeveloped regions of the world to raise living standards through profitable products, consistent with minimizing adverse environmental effects.

### **Dimensions of Decentralized Planning**

There are four major dimensions of decentralization: (i) Functional, (ii) Financial, (iii) Administrative, and (iv) Political.

#### *Functional Decentralization*

In the functional decentralized planning some functions are transferred from the national or state level to the regional or sub-state level. Selection of such functions is done very carefully. A random transfer of functions results in inefficient and undesirable discharge of those functions at the lower levels. Such fear arises because the competencies available at the lower level may not be adequate to do justice to those functions. Similarly, some powers needs to be delegated to the lower level to discharge those functions. If these powers are not delegated along with the functions then there will be a mismatch between the two and the functions cannot be executed.

### *Financial Decentralization*

Planning at any level without the necessary financial authority and resources is meaningless. In our country, like in other countries, most financial resources are mobilized by the Central government, which then distributes them to the lower levels. Different criteria are adopted for the allocation of development funds from the Centre to the regional levels. Some of the socio-economic considerations are the following: (i) area; (ii) population size; (iii) degree of relative backwardness, (iv) measure of tax effort, (v) special locational or social characteristics, (vi) commitment to major national schemes etc.

### *Administrative Decentralization*

Administrative decentralization is also known as *deconcentration*. It means deconcentration of functions and some powers from government departments and agencies to their field offices. However, the “command” remains at the top. Administrative decentralization involves taking a number of administrative actions, some of which are: Setting up offices at regional and local levels to move closer to the people; Designating the decentralized functions for each level; Making necessary delegation of powers; Assigning adequate finances; Posting adequately qualified persons through deputation or fresh recruitment; Establishing work procedures and framing departmental rules and regulations for coordinated functioning; and Providing technical guidelines to field officers and establishing a time-bound programme of activities to fit into the national planning process.

### *Political or Democratic Decentralization*

In its perfect form, the concept of decentralization becomes the same as democratic decentralization. Now all people take part in the planning process. When only the elected representatives of the people take part in the process, it is called “partial decentralization”. When all sections of the population are empowered to take part in local affairs of the community, it is called “total decentralization”. There are three major components of political decentralization: Local autonomy, Devolution and Political Participation.

### **Urbanization, Urban Planning Practice and Education in Bangladesh**

Between 1974 and 2001 the country’s urban population grew from 6 million to 30 million, and it is expected to double or even triple by mid-century, with the highest growth rates (up to 7% per year) found in urban slums. The rapid growth of

Bangladesh's urban population is the result of a high natural population growth combined with in-migration from rural to urban areas by poor populations in search of jobs and economic opportunities.

Bangladesh's urban population has been growing at a yearly average rate of 6 percent since independence, at a time when the national population growth was 2.2 percent. As a result, urban population has grown six-fold, compared with a 70 percent increase in rural population (World Bank, 2007). As per recent UN data, approximately 25 percent of Bangladesh's current population currently lives in urban areas. Of this urban population, more than half lives in the four largest cities: Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna and Rajshahi.

With a population of almost 12 million, Dhaka is the capital and largest city in Bangladesh. It is also the 11th largest city in the world. At the same time, it is consistently ranked as one of the world's least livable city. Like many other Asian developing countries, an increasing share of population of Bangladesh migrates to urban centers in search for employment opportunities outside agriculture and into industrial enterprises or the services sector. Holding the prospects for better income opportunities than most parts of Bangladesh, rapid migration is causing Dhaka's population to grow much faster than the rest of the country. This fast urbanization is putting pressure on the city's limited land, an already fragile environment, and weak urban services. The population density is now believed to have reached around 34000 people per square kilometer, making Dhaka amongst the most densely populated city in the world. Poor city management and low efficiency are exacerbating the problems. Urban traffic has reached nightmare proportions, often causing huge delays in covering small distances with associated productivity losses. Water and air pollution from poor waste and traffic management poses serious health risks. The already acute slum population is growing further, contributing to serious human and law and order problems (Zaman et al. 2010).

Cities of Bangladesh are ill-equipped to absorb population influx as a result of outdated, ineffective, and poorly implemented urban planning. Only the four largest cities of Bangladesh have development authorities responsible for the city planning, and these plans have been poorly implemented due to a lack of political will and institutional capacity.

Senior planners in Bangladesh mainly come from architecture or engineering background and so, most of the professional jobs in town planning in Bangladesh are occupied by civil engineers or architects with or without having any planning education. Still today, the planning profession in Bangladesh is not well recognized

and has to compete with other parallel professions for wider recognition. A consequence of these arrangements is that the perceptions of the planners working in Bangladesh are narrowly focused on physical and technical criteria. Planners seldom advocate for the urban poor or disadvantaged groups. Due to difficulties in planning enforcement, current practices and policies cannot manage the cities of Bangladesh. Besides, in their profession, planners have to face both an administrative and a political labyrinth. Often they cannot practice their expertise because of conflicting power relations among different urban institutions.

Town Planners, Architects and Engineers are among intellectual professionals of Bangladesh. They are mainly working in the Development Authorities, City Corporations, Municipalities, Urban Development Directorate, Public Works Department, Local Government Engineering Department, Department of Architecture, Roads and Highways Department, Bangladesh Power and Water Development Boards and some other relevant government organizations. Their major roles and responsibilities are preparation and implementation of Master Plans or Urban Area Plans through controlling master plan landuses, designing buildings and establishments, development of infrastructures and ultimately providing utility service facilities to the urban people of the cities and towns. The roles and responsibilities of the Town Planners, Architects and Engineers have been specified in their respective charter of duties, laws, by-laws, policy documents and urban area plans. In spite of these, the cities of Bangladesh are facing a number of problems i.e. traffic congestions causing wastage of man time hours and fuel energy, accidents etc.; unplanned and unauthorized constructions; collapse of buildings and fire hazards; water, air and sound pollution; inefficient solid waste management; waterlogging, drainage congestion and poor sanitation; encroachment of rivers, canals and water bodies; disappearance of parks, open space and playgrounds etc. There is immense scope of making the cities of Bangladesh planned, safe and environment friendly if the Town Planners, Architects and Engineers work together maintaining their respective professional ethics, sincerity, commitment, devotion and patriotism (Roy, 2011).

New Urban Planning would be proactive, with up to date strategic plans that make land available for development without trying to micro-manage land use. One problem in places like Bangladesh is that the legislation and institutions of planning are not attuned to the development realities of rapid urbanization and the urbanization of poverty. Perceptions about planning amongst political leaders and bureaucrats need to be challenged. Until then, planning and planners will be part of the problem, not part of the solution, and cities like Dhaka will find it increasingly difficult to compete economically with Asian cities that have made the connection between urbanization and modernization (Islam, 2011).

The importance of urban planning for a developing country like Bangladesh can hardly be over emphasized. Bangladesh has a shortage of planner. With its limited land capacity and high population density, all the cities of Bangladesh show rapid urbanization. Moreover, during the last few years, urban growth rates and the number of municipality have increased noticeably. Without proper planning, this growth trends and newly established municipalities will create more serious social, environmental and other problems, which may lead to the urban areas inhabitable situations for the city dwellers. Increased number of planners needs to be produced with options of their work in Bangladesh in order to promote the planned development of all the urban areas. For this reason, urban planning education has been effective and introduced in Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), Khulna University (KU), Jahangirnagar University (JU), Chittagong University of Engineering and Technology (CUET), Khulna University of Engineering and Technology (KUET) and Rajshahi University of Engineering & Technology (RUET).

### **Problems of Decentralization**

Though decentralization has numerous advantages, sometimes it may bring some problems. According to the report of the World Bank Group 2001, the problems are like of the followings:

- It can result in the loss of economies of scale and control over scarce financial resources by the central government.
- Weak administrative or technical capacity at local levels may result in services being delivered less efficiently and effectively in some areas of the country.
- Administrative responsibilities may be transferred to local levels without adequate financial resources and make equitable distribution or provision of services more difficult.
- Decentralization can sometimes make coordination of national policies more complex and may allow functions to be captured by local elites.
- Also, distrust between public and private sectors may undermine cooperation at the local level.
- Decentralization creates special problems particularly when the enterprise faces number of uncertainties or emergency situations. The decision-making process gets delayed and even correct decisions as per the changing situations may not be possible.

### **Advantages of Decentralization**

Decentralization has some potential advantages. According to the report of the World Bank Group 2001, the advantages of decentralizations are like of the followings:

- Decentralization helps to improve the quality of decisions/decision-making at the top level management.
- Decentralization facilitates diversification of activities.
- Decentralization encourages development of managerial personnel.
- Decentralization improves motivation.
- Decentralization makes decision-making quicker and better.
- Decentralization provides a positive climate where there is freedom to make decisions, freedom to use judgment and freedom to act.

### **Issues to be Addressed for Successful Decentralization**

Although politics are the driving force behind decentralization in most countries, fortunately, decentralization may be one of those instances where good politics and good economics may serve the same end. The political objectives to increase political responsiveness and participation at the local level can coincide with the economic objectives of better decisions about the use of public resources and increased willingness to pay for local services. At least five conditions are important for successful decentralization:

- The decentralization framework must link, at the margin, local financing and fiscal authority to the service provision responsibilities and functions of the local government - so that local politicians can bear the costs of their decisions and deliver on their promises;
- The local community must be informed about the costs of services and service delivery options involved and the resource envelope and its sources - so that the decisions they make are meaningful. Participatory budgeting is one way to create this condition.
- There must be a mechanism by which the community can express its preferences in a way that is binding on the politicians so that there is a credible incentive for people to participate;

- There must be a system of accountability that relies on public and transparent information which enables the community to effectively monitor the performance of the local government and react appropriately to that performance- so that politicians and local officials have an incentive to be responsive; and,
- The instruments of decentralization --the legal and institutional framework, the structure of service delivery responsibilities and the intergovernmental fiscal system-- are designed to support the political objectives.

Successful decentralization is closely related to observing the design principles of: finance following functions; informed decision making; adherence to local priorities; and accountability. Country circumstances differ, often in subtle and complex ways; consequently the policy and institutional instruments that establish decentralization needs to be shaped to the specific conditions of individual countries. (World Bank, 2001)

### **Scopes of Planned Decentralized Urbanization in Bangladesh**

There has immense scope of ensuring planned decentralized urbanization in Bangladesh in the prevailing trend of planning and development initiatives. The following aspects can be considered under the scopes:

- Master plans/Urban area plans of almost all urban centers are in the process of preparation
- National level policy programs and donors' policy-guidelines are giving priorities/focus on urban sectors and urban planning
- Planning education in many universities and more planners in Bangladesh
- Possible to ensure planned and optimum utilization of every square inch land of Bangladesh
- Planners are educated and experienced in multi-disciplines or sectors of development namely Urban Planning, Transport Planning, Housing and Real Estate, Municipal Services Planning, Regional Planning, Rural Development Planning, Statistics, Economics, , Land use, Engineering, Architecture and Social Science branches that are very much related and important for sustainable development.

### **Recommendations for Fostering Planned Decentralized Urbanization**

Following recommendations are made for fostering the planned decentralized urbanization of Bangladesh:



*Focusing on Urban Governance Issues:*

- Translate into action of existing policies such as Disaster Management (DM), Water Acts, Urban Policy, Environmental policies to integrate Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)/Climate Change (CC)/Environmental aspects – bring convergence and synergy amongst the policies, especially of Water, Health, Energy, Transport, Industry, Infrastructure sectors
- Recognition of the vital role of civil society participation in urban governance, as non-governmental and grassroots organizations demand greater involvement in local affairs
- Participatory budgeting leads to improvements in infrastructure, services and accountability, but various elements in urban governance are standing in the way.
- Many smaller urban settlements are finding it difficult to achieve development goals, due to inadequate financial, human, institutional and legal resources or frameworks, as well as poor political leadership, but national governments tend to ignore their predicament.
- Reform risk governance
  - Ensure political authority and policy coherence
  - Decentralize, step by step and incrementally
  - Develop a culture of partnership

*Focusing on Sustainable Urban Environmental Issues*

- Create adequate employments and related facilities for the potential Internally Displaced People (IDPs): in and around rural regions (i.e. migrant's home of origin)
- Develop and encourage commuting as an alternative to migration
- Develop small and medium size ( satellite) towns with adequate economic opportunities
- Decentralize urban services and facilities from Megacities to other urban centers
- Strengthen local government institutes with devolution of power
- Create metropolitan government for Mega cities
- Adequate habitat and utility services for the IDPs
- Emergency Management (flood, severe storm, earthquake)
- City dwellers to be motivated to reduce carbon footprint

- Low carbon urban economy / Clean development Mechanism (CDM)/ country gaining from carbon trading
- Implementation of the Urban Area Plans by recruiting more urban planners in concerned urban centers
- Strengthening the capacity of the planning section or department of the organizations
- Preparing master/urban area plans for all urban centers/growth centers that will be turned into urban area in future
- Revision or updating of the previously prepared plans

### **Conclusion**

Planned decentralized urbanization can help reduce rural to urban migration to a great extent encouraging local inhabitants reside in the surrounding villages and engage themselves in the economic industrial activities at the upazila or district headquarter level towns. All the urban centers should have adequate road/rail or water transport as well as telecommunication linkage with the respective district and divisional headquarter at the same time. The existing practice and initiatives of internal decentralization of the Development Authorities i.e. more offices in different locations (existing and proposed in City Master Plans-RAJUK, KDA, CDA etc. ) and of City Corporations (Dhaka North and Dhaka South City Corporation) and municipalities in City Wards within City Corporations and Municipalities are the examples of decentralized planned urbanization of Bangladesh. Planned urban decentralization can ensure a sustainable local development throughout the whole country, which in turn can contribute to the planned and pollution free healthy growth of the existing cities and towns as well as to keep our cities inhabitable and clean.

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