

Management of an Asian Mega City: Dhaka

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Governance brings about a myriad of different problems and issues to be confronted and dealt with. Urban growth management if to be successful needs to face squarely the problems of rigid central control, lack of coordination, inadequate financial resources and lack of direct citizen participation. The said problems are more evident in a mega-city setting like Dhaka with high population growth rates.

Introduction

One of the most important developments of the last fifty years has been the rapid increase of urban population in the largest cities of the world. The rate of urbanization in developing countries is much faster than that experienced historically by developed countries (Renaud 1981: 5). Of the world's 21 projected megacities with more than ten million people, 18 will be in developing countries (Samad 1993: 1). It has been estimated that by the end of the year 2000 there will be nearly 414 cities with more than one million population each, of which 264 will be in the developing countries (Shivaramakrishnan and Green 1986: 4). More importantly, among these cities, some 60 are expected to have populations in excess of five million by the year 2000 and 32 of them will be located in South and East Asia (Shivaramakrishnan and Green 1986: 4). The implications of such massive increase in populations of cities have many dimensions including managerial. One of the key concerns is how best to manage cities inspite of the innumerable problems faced by them. Hence the emphasis is on urban management.

This paper intends to develop a conceptual framework by utilizing the concepts of governance and urban management to understand the managerial and institutional problems of Dhaka; highlight the major problems and how Dhaka is managed; and recommend measures to improve the capacity of Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) to face the challenge of urban growth in the future.

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Conceptual Framework

Governance

Governance is not a new term. But it is now being given increasing importance in view of the failure of traditional concepts to satisfactorily account for the complexities and interrelationships pertaining to the state, groups and citizens. The overbearing position of the state is not only seriously questioned but downsizing its activities is advocated. Roles of organized groups and individuals are emphasized. Not surprisingly, some organizations privately organized and sustained are performing functions in the areas and sectors where the state has either failed or not ventured at all.

Many definitions of governance are available (Khan 1994). Those which are useful in this context have been provided by Halfani and his collaborators. In fact their definitions are interrelated—one a broad one, the other a synthesis of it.

Governance, broadly speaking, refers

to the system of government, concentrating on effective and accountable institutions, democratic principles and electoral processes, representative and responsible structures of government, in order to ensure an open and legitimate relationship between the civil society and the state (Halfani *et al.* 1994: 4).

For Halfani and his colleagues the relationship between the civil society and state assumes a significant place. This emphasis differentiates governance from government. Studies on government make almost no mention of the existence and role of the civil society. The credibility of politicians and governing institutions is crucial in this relationship. Halfani and his collaborators strongly feel that improvements in credibility and legitimization of government can be achieved through accountability, transparency, responsiveness, real participation and consultation. The discussions lead them to provide a rather short yet meaningful definition of governance: "a system of governing which is concerned with the nature of the relationship between rulers and the ruled, the state and the society, the government and the governed" (Halfani *et al.* 1994: 5).

Urban Management

The concern for urban management is not new. The administrative problems facing metropolitan cities were identified as early as 1969 in a study of thirteen cities of the world. The study pointed out five categories of administrative problems restricting the ability of the public sector to respond to the urban issues:

- Inability of tradition-bound bureaucracies to cope with continuously shifting demographic, social, and economic factors of life in large cities;
- Inability to augment public expenditure, particularly capital expenditure at rates commensurate with rising needs for public investment in urban areas;
- Inadequate skills and manpower to deal with the increasingly technical and complex job of managing a large and rapidly growing city;
- Strain on organizational arrangements ill-suited to new tasks and to broadening geographic and functional requirements of government; and
- Inadequate time perspectives in urban planning, budgeting, financing and decisionmaking (Walsh 1969: 9-40).

In the mid-eighties the tasks of urban management which some have preferred to term as metropolitan management centered around the delivery of essential services, projects programming, promotion of employment and improvement in incomes, spatial planning and identification and institutionalization of more appropriate managerial processes compared to the past (Shivaramakrishnan and Green 1986: 23-33).

In the 1990s it is increasingly felt that urban management needs to be viewed from a broader perspective and in relation to civil society. It is not surprising that many urban scholars advocated

more attention to what local government can support and encourage with citizen groups, community organizations, cooperatives, NGOs, business groups (The Editors 1991: 6).

But the question remains why there is so much attraction for urban management and what it actually means. The attraction has been explained in two ways.

First, a certain level of dissatisfaction with the prevailing approach (in the eighties) which focused on the provision of large-scale shelter projects. The second source of support for improved management in urban areas arose from coming together of two ideas that earlier had been ideologically incompatible: public administration and management (Stern 1991: 10-11).

Defining urban management has usually not been attempted. What has been tried is to investigate what it covers. One scholar's opinion is that urban management encompasses four important elements.

- (1) A concern to situate urban development projects in the context of city-wide and institutional considerations;

- (2) A concern to pay more attention to sources of local finance for a more decentralized municipal government;
- (3) A concern to look at alternative means of organizing and financing urban services such as water supply, public transport, electricity, sanitary services and waste disposal;
- (4) A concern to seek and promote local community and participatory sources of support for urban services and infrastructure (Stern 1991: 10).

One of the logical offshoots of urban management is the Urban Management Programme (UMP). The UMP was initiated in 1986 by the World Bank, Habitat and the UNDP. The programme now focuses on five areas, i.e., land management, municipal finance and administration, infrastructure management, urban environment and alleviation of urban poverty. The UMP seeks to develop and promote appropriate policies and tools pertaining to the five areas already mentioned. At the heart of international activities in urban management lies the UMP.

Urban management is now broadly viewed as a 'paradigm' as its all-encompassing reach includes development and government of urban settlements, be they small towns, cities or metropolitan areas (UNCHS 1993: 4). The focus is on involving the majority of urban population who are poor in urban management. The Habitat's vision of urban management includes assisting the energy, creativity, democracy and sustainability that rests with the urban majority and to persuade the professional and urban minorities to adopt a new style and approach in urban management.

Governance the way it has been defined earlier can be considered a 'paradigm.' The issues relevant to governance are also equally important for urban management. The need for involving the urban poor in planning and decisionmaking, promoting the role of nongovernmental organizations and community-based organizations in alleviating urban poverty, keeping a check on the activities of public officials both elected and appointed by making them accountable to the citizens, and ensuring constant and efficient delivery of essential services are concerns of both governance and urban management. Hence, the fusion of common elements of the two will enhance a better understanding of managerial and institutional issues pertaining to Dhaka, a mega city.

Management of Dhaka

Growth of Dhaka

Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, is one of the mega cities of the world. The city today has over six million people for the larger conurbation or the Dhaka

Statistical Metropolitan Area (DSMA) and 4.5 million people within Dhaka city of Dhaka Metropolitan Area (DMA) (Islam 1994). By the year 2000 it will be a mini megapolis, by 2025 even more pronouncedly so (Islam 1991: 572). The growth of urban population in Bangladesh has been fast, but the growth of Dhaka has been rather striking (Table 1). The rapid growth of population of Dhaka city has been caused mainly by high immigration of people from rural areas, but also by territorial expansion and natural growth of the native city population (Islam 1994). During the '60s and '70s Dhaka experienced one of the highest rates of population growth for any city in the world.

Table 1. Urbanization in Bangladesh and Growth of Population in Dhaka City, 1951-1991

Year	Bangladesh		Dhaka City		
	Total Urban Population ('000)	Percent of Population Urban	Annual Rate of Growth	Population	Annual Rate of Growth
1951	1,820	4.33	1.58	336,928	1.28
1961	2,641	5.19	3.72	556,712	5.18
1974	6,274	8.87	6.70	1,772,438	9.32
1981	13,228	15.00	10.97	3,440,147	9.94
1991	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	6,105,160	5.90

n.a. = data not yet available

Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics; Bangladesh Population Census 1981; and Preliminary Report, Population Census, Government of Bangladesh 1991.

Governance System of Dhaka

Dhaka's governance system includes elements of both national as well as municipal governments. Being the capital city, Dhaka city has the key offices and personnel of the three branches of government. Also, Dhaka is the headquarters of Dhaka Division and Dhaka District, i.e., two administrative field tiers of the national government. The seat of an elected municipal government known as the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) is also located in Dhaka City.

Many institutions are actively involved in the development of Dhaka Metropolitan Area (DMA). These can be broadly categorized into four types, i.e., national, sectoral, special and local (Table 2). A survey found that eighteen ministries and forty-two other government organizations are involved in the

planning and development of urban affairs in Dhaka City and DMA (Mohit 1992). The more obvious responsibility of preparation and implementation of a Master Plan for the city lies, however, with DCC and Rajuk. But other agencies like the Housing and Settlement Directorate (HSD), Dhaka Electric Supply Authority (DESA), Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authority (DWASA), Titas Gas and Transmission Company (TGTC), Roads and Highways Department (RHD) and Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP)—all agencies of the national government—perform important functions in the area of housing, electricity, water and sewerage, gas, intercity road maintenance, traffic management, and law and order.

Table 2. Types of Institutions Involved in the Development of Dhaka Metropolitan Area

<i>Type of Institution</i>	<i>Number (percent)</i>
1. National	4 (9.5)
2. Sectoral	28 (66.7)
3. Special	5 (11.9)
4. Local	5 (11.9)

Source: Mohit 1992.

The Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) is run by an elected Mayor and War Commissioners. Their term of office is five years. They are assisted by civil servants appointed and controlled by the national government. The Mayor and his Council have almost no control over these officials. The responsibility of DCC includes maintenance of roads and provision of street lighting; collection and disposal of refuse, waste and rubbish; provision and maintenance of parks and gardens; and, providing a number of sociocultural facilities (Siddiqui 1994: 146-147). The resource base of DCC is weak. Revenues collected from city residents as municipal taxes are insufficient for it to provide even basic mandated services. Hence the dependence of DCC on the national government is extensive.

Mega City Problems

From institutional and management perspectives the major problems faced by DCC are of four types: lack of coordination, rigid control, lack of direct participation, and related macro problems.

Lack of Coordination. Multiplicity of institutions and overlapping nature of their jurisdictions have created major problems of coordination in city

administration (Khan 1994). Lack of cooperation and coordination between municipal governments (including DCC) on the one hand and special government bodies, special development authorities and special purpose authorities on the other is due mostly to the fact that the former are elected bodies while the latter are national government agencies whose operation and system of reporting decisions are different (Islam and Khan 1995).

There is unanimity of views among elected urban local municipal government chief functionaries, i.e., mayors and top officials of relevant ministries and organizations of the national government that poor coordination and lack of effective authority of the mayors have resulted in rivalry, bickering and blaming of each other for poor services provided by the cities to the clientele. The Minister for Public Works and Housing said in a Round Table on "Save Dhaka":

... lack of coordination among various regulatory bodies and authorities working separately in the capital city was preventing concerted action for the capital's development and planning. Unless we can formulate a good management mechanism and better policy among different bodies, Dhaka is headed for a disaster (*The Independent*, 9 June 1995).

Rigid Control. Governmental control over local urban bodies is extensive as well as rigid (Islam and Khan 1995). In fact, the relationship between the national government and municipal governments approximates that of a superior and a subordinate. The DCC is controlled like other municipal governments by the national government by utilizing a number of mechanisms. Most important of these is the annual financial grant given by the government to the DCC. As has been indicated earlier, without such grant the DCC will be unable to perform even some of its basic mandated functions. Through appointment of key executive officers and other key personnel, governmental control over DCC is further reinforced. The government still retains considerable powers to dismiss elected municipal officials. Also, the powers and functions of key elected public officials like the Mayor and Ward Commissioners as well as appointed officers of DCC have not been clearly spelled out. This situation allows national government to interfere in the affairs of the DCC.

Lack of Direct Participation. Active participation of urban citizens at the grassroots level governance is desirable. But participation of citizens in DCC has been limited to the role of voters in municipal elections (Khan 1994). A study of DCC completed almost a decade back shows how a mixture of urban politics and lack of direct participation by the clientele led to a state where interest groups and the ruling political party in the national government became dominant, instead of public interest, in DCC's decisions (Rajbangshi 1986). Eighty percent of Dhaka City's population comprise the poor. They have no participation in the planning and development of the city, hence no stake in its future. In the process the system of accountability of both elected and appointed officials of DCC considerably weakens and transparency in decisionmaking process takes a back seat.

Related Macro Problems. The 1993 Urban and Shelter Sector Review clearly stated the major problems afflicting the management structure of the urban sector in Bangladesh.

The existing institutional framework (of urban sector) suffers from a lack of financial and human resources, overlapping mandates and a lack of coordination among the many agencies involved. The existing institutional setup reflects outdated perceptions of urbanization, housing and land development that are not only ineffective but sometimes counterproductive (UNDP-UNCHS 1993).

In addition, there is no single body or authority which is responsible for the development of Dhaka at present. This creates confusion of leadership and management.

Mega City Remedies

The problems faced by Dhaka are complex, multifaceted and not amenable to easy solutions. Still, proposals have been put forward by urban scholars with the objective to solve problems faced by the inhabitants of Dhaka.

Facilitating Coordination. Coordination can be achieved if a number of actions are taken. First, an independent city authority should be formed headed by the Mayor of DCC to coordinate the overall planning, development and administrative activities. Second, all government agencies, i.e., DWASA, DESA, T & T, Titas, Rajuk, and DMP whose activities directly affect the lives of citizens of Dhaka City should be brought under the independent city authority mentioned above. Third, attitudinal changes need to be brought about among officials of different governmental agencies and the DCC for them to learn to share information and exchange opinions and views more openly and regularly. Fourth, new urban bodies may be created by reallocating functions of the existing ones with the objective of avoiding duplication of responsibilities.

Lessening Control. National government's control over DCC and other elected urban municipal governments needs to be considerably lessened. This can be done if the following actions are taken. First, the revenue base of DCC must be substantially enhanced so that its dependence on the government is minimal. For this to happen, tax collection mechanisms of DCC need to be overhauled. Tax rates need to be realistically fixed and taxes collected properly. Second, a Local Government Service (LGS) should be established. The personnel of such a service would work in municipalities and be responsible to chief executives, i.e., mayors of municipalities. Their recruitment would be the responsibility of the Bangladesh Public Service Commission (BPSC) and their service conditions should be clearly laid down. The members would provide all the basic services to municipal governments like DCC in place of national government officials.

Ensuring Active Participation. To ensure active and more meaningful participation of the majority of the residents of the city, the following measures have been recently recommended by a panel of distinguished experts (*The Independent*, 4 June 1995). First, the Urban Coalition Council (UCC) comprising people having expertise in different sectors has been organized to work as a watchdog group. The job of UCC would be to approve major projects, stop those which have negative impact and promote democratic culture in planning in general and city planning in particular. Second, a massive civic awareness campaign has been launched so that each and every inhabitant could participate in running the affairs of the city. All information about the development of the city should be made available to city dwellers on a regular basis. Third, NGOs should be encouraged to be increasingly involved in mobilizing the urban poor. This will enable the poor who comprise 80 percent of Dhaka City's population to have access to primary education, health care, vocational training and credit. All these would strengthen the urban poor's position vis-a-vis DCC and enhance their opportunities for participation in its activities. Fourth, urban planning should be primarily focused on the poor taking into consideration, in the planning exercise, their needs and aspirations.

Related Macro Remedies. The above recommendations mostly concern DCC in particular and other metropolitan governments in general. But the solution of problems of metropolitan governments cannot be considered in isolation. Rather, the solutions must be found within the broader context of the totality of the urban sector. Bangladesh Urban Sector National Programme Document prepared by a team of international and national urban experts put forward a number of timely and appropriate recommendations to improve the management capacities of institutions involved in the urban sector.

An Urban Policy Council (UPC) ... with the Minister for Planning as its Chairman ... will comprise ... all Secretaries of relevant Ministries and agency Heads who are involved in the development and management of urban areas.

The UPC will act as a focal point to discuss proposals relating to urban development and urbanization policies as well as a forum of urban policy dialogue to sort out inter-ministerial disputes and issues. There is a need to establish a secretariat for the proposed UPC whose job would be to articulate and place the issues for discussion and decision of the UPC.

A separate Urban Development and Investment Coordination Division may be set up in the Planning Commission to carry out urban sector programming exercise in parallel with the existing programming of the Planning Commission to adopt a sectoral programming approach.

Appropriate management systems for metropolitan areas must be identified within as short a period as possible because lack of coordinated action, wastage of scarce resources and inconvenience to the residents are increasing with the passage of time (Government of Bangladesh 1994: 21-22).

The above recommendations deserve serious and immediate consideration by the national government. There is a need for a policy framework within which urban problems can be viewed in the broader context of the society as a whole, and for timely and effective solutions of such problems.

Conclusion

Managing a mega city like Dhaka with huge population, small land space, poor infrastructure and severe resource constraints is a difficult task. Literature on governance and urban management contain useful information as how to view urban problems and what can be done to solve them. In this context, the experience of other developing countries can prove extremely valuable.

Utilizing a conceptual framework by combining the 'paradigms' of governance and urban management, examination of the state of affairs of the city of Dhaka has been undertaken. It appears that the city not only faces problems of control, coordination, participation, inadequate resources and personnel which have made governance difficult. It also appears that very few appropriate actions have been taken by the city government to overcome the problems. One of the major reasons is the unwillingness and to some extent the hostility of the national government towards elected political executives of the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), because the national government and the DCC are run by two major political parties of Bangladesh. The relationship between the two topmost leaders of the two major political parties, the Awami League and the BNP, i.e. the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition in the Parliament is cold. To operate even in a modest manner, the DCC needs the cooperation and support of the national government which it is not getting.

The major problems faced by the DCC in governing the city can be overcome if the remedies suggested are adopted. But what is important to bear in mind is that management and institutional recommendations can only be implemented in a congenial political environment. Ultimately, governance is primarily a political act which needs the right kind of institutional and management support.

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