

Policy Dialogue Series

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Title of the presentation: Towards a National Urban Sector Policy



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Introduction:

Sustainable urbanization is crucial for achievement of sustainable development. The concept of sustainable urbanization is a dynamic, multi-dimensional process and it embraces relationships between all human settlements.

Several policies associated with national planning already exist in the context of Bangladesh:

- National Housing Policy
- National Land Use Policy
- Urban Sector Policy

In light of Bangladesh, the first National Development Plan was established in 1973 and had comprehensive coverage of urban sector. Following that, document of the PRSP did not have adequate coverage of urban planning and development.

At present, urban dwellers constitute about 26% of the total population of the country. Their contribution to GDP is approximately 50% indicating that the productivity in urban areas is much higher than that of rural areas. However, there has been a tendency to underplay the role of the urban sector.

In 1976, Bangladesh took part in the Vancouver Conference on Human Settlement and Habitat. In this conference, the policies towards urban sector were highlighted. In 1993, the Bangladesh Urban Sector National Programme Document, facilitated by UNDP was compiled. A draft of National Urban Policy was concluded in September 2006.

In Bangladesh, cities and towns are playing a crucial role in national development although there have been adverse socio-economic and environmental consequences resulting from rapid growth of these urban centers. Even at 26% level of urbanization, the total population of Bangladesh is growing at a rate of 4% per annum while the capital city-Dhaka and port city-Chittagong are growing even faster. Such growth has been taking place mainly due to migration of the rural population to urban areas, most of these migrants being the poor.

A National Urban Sector Policy has already been drafted which will provide a framework for social, economic, cultural and political-institutional sustainability. The policy envisions strengthening the beneficial aspects of urbanization and at the same time, effectively dealing with its negative consequences in order to achieve sustainable urbanization. It aims to work towards a decentralized and participatory process of urban development in which the central government, the local government, the private sector and the civil society have their roles to play.

Bangladesh is a densely populated region however; it has developed in terms of telecommunication and transportation sectors. The country will have radical and revolutionary changes in the future. There will be an urban Bangladesh where people, living in the same places as they are now, will have access to the services. Therefore, Bangladesh needs to form a policy covering spatial, economic, social, cultural, aesthetic and environmental aspects of urban life directed towards achieving an urban reality that can ensure freedom from hunger and poverty; capacity to live a healthy life, access to education, shelter and basic services and security.



The major objectives of National Urban Sector Policy for Bangladesh will aim to:

- Ensure regionally balanced urbanization through **diffused development** and hierarchically structured urban system.
- Facilitate economic development, employment generation, reduction of inequality and poverty eradication through appropriate **regulatory frameworks and infrastructure provisions**.
- Ensure optimum utilization of land resources and meet increased demand for housing and urban services through **public-private and other partnerships**.
- Protect, preserve and **enhance urban environment**, especially water bodies
- Devolve authority at the local urban level and **strengthen local governments** through appropriate powers, resources and capabilities so that these can take effective responsibility for a wide range of planning, infrastructure provision, service delivery and regulatory functions
- Involve all sectors of the community, in **participatory decision-making** and implementation processes
- Ensure **social justice** and inclusion by measures designed to increase the security of poor people through their access to varied livelihood opportunities, secure tenure and basic affordable services.
- Take into account particular needs of women, men, children, youth, the elderly and the disabled in developing **policy responses** and implementation.
- Assure health, safety and security of all citizens through **multifaceted initiatives to reduce crime** and violence

- Protect, preserve and enhance the **historical and cultural heritage** of cities and enhance their aesthetic beauty
- Develop and implement urban management strategies and **governance arrangements** for enhancing complementary roles of urban and rural areas in sustainable development
- Ensure good governance by enhancing **transparency** and establishing **accountability**.

Major dimensions of the policy:

1. patterns and processes of urbanization
2. local urban planning: at present, only four cities have their own planning commissions
3. local economic development and employment
4. urban local finance and resource mobilization
5. urban management: this is needed since currently Bangladesh lacks effective management systems
6. urban housing
7. urban poverty and slum improvement
8. urban environmental management
9. infrastructure and services
10. urban transportation
11. health and education
12. social structure
13. gender concerns
14. urban children, ages and the disabled and the scavengers
15. urban recreation
16. cultural and aesthetic development
17. rural-urban linkage
18. law and order
19. legislation
20. urban governance
21. training
22. research and information

Key Issues:

- **In Bangladesh, cities and towns are playing a crucial role in the national development.**
- **At present, urban dwellers constitute 26% of the total population and their contribution to GDP is more than 45%.**
- **Sustainable urbanization is crucial for sustainable development in Bangladesh.**
- **Urbanization in Bangladesh is also characterized by a spatially unbalanced pattern.**

- **A National Urban Policy aims to strengthen the aspects of urbanization and at the same time effectively deal with its negative consequences in order to achieve sustainable urbanization.**
- **Each city of Bangladesh should have its own economic planning systems.**
- **There is need for decentralization of power from central to local government.**
- **There is need for capacity building in the governance areas of the country.**
- **Accountability and transparency of governance should be ensured.**
- **Conversion from agriculture land to non-agriculture land should be discouraged.**
- **Policies need to have clear operational guidelines to be effective.**
- **Links between urban regions and economic growth needs to be made stronger.**
- **Although considerable efforts are gone into strategy formulation, there is a lack of effective marketing.**
- **Providing settlement for the poor should be a top priority for policy makers.**
- **Diffusion of urbanization and rural-urban linkages is an important issue.**

Way forward:

One key aspect of effective urban planning is through efficient governance:

- There is need for decentralization of power from central to local government. Local government lack adequate administration and decision-making power.
- Capacity building is needed for effective functioning of local and central government bodies.
- Transparency and accountability needs to be ensured at all levels.
- Decentralization of authority and power is required as now all the power is vested on the mayors. The right kind of people with the right kind of scope need to be placed in the planning processes.
- Formation of National Urban Development Committee is needed.
- Restructuring of local government is important
- Committees should exist between wards, zonal and cities consisting of government, non-government and civil society members.
- Each city should have a committee at zonal, ward and neighborhood level.



Q & A Session:

Q1) Does the concept of enhancing service delivery exist in the document?

Nazrul Islam (NI): Participation of the people is crucial for effective service delivery. The people need to pay back to the society for whatever welfare measures have been undertaken for them.



Q2)What are the policies taken for effects of river erosion?

NI: In Bangladesh, 300,000-400,000 people are evicted due to the erosion of rivers. Since river erosion is a major crisis in this country, there needs to be a policy formulation to handle this.

Q3) What is the state of transportation at district level?

NI: The districts in Bangladesh are very eco-friendly and beautiful and thus their environment must be protected. Since the streets are narrow, special types of vehicles maybe permitted to enter the districts.

Q4)Is there a lack of allocation in budget for planning?

NI: The allocation made in budget for planning is not utilized properly and effectively. This is mainly due to problems within the systems like malpractice, corruption and wastage of resources.

Q5)What are the provisions for rural-urban linkages?

NI: Rural urban linkages are extremely important and we need to make regional planning. However, integration of these are very difficult to do and therefore, a diffused urbanization strategy maybe better to implement. One approach maybe to formulate a "Human Settlement Policy" in Bangladesh.