

অন্তর্ভুক্তিমূলক উন্নয়ন ও ন্যায্যতার লক্ষ্যে নাগরিক এজেন্ডা

Providing Public Utilities and Services in the Backdrop of Unplanned Urbanisation

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Policy Briefs: Origin of the Initiative & Process of Preparation

The initiative of the Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh, to prepare a set of Policy Briefs builds on a wide range of activities undertaken over the past two years (2022-2023). These activities sought to capture the views of the country's left-behind stakeholders at the subnational level regarding Bangladesh's dominant development narrative.

The Citizen's Platform's engagements in this connection included stakeholder dialogues, citizen's consultations, focus group discussions, perception surveys and consultations with media. Further, Public Hearing was organised at the national level to create opportunities for disadvantaged people to voice their concerns and aspirations in the presence of policy elites.

It emerged from this exercise that a significantly large number of citizens and certain communities have continued to remain vulnerable to various risks, which relegated them to the "left behind" position in the revealed process of economic development.

However, the Leave No One Behind spirit of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) requires that all citizens are ensured an equitable share in the country's development outcomes. Arguably, appropriate actions are needed to address these overarching national concerns to advance the interests of the country's vulnerable citizens and communities.

Accordingly, through a country-wide interaction with the spokespersons of the stakeholders, Citizen's Platform has identified 11 themes requiring urgent attention for immediate action.



Policy Briefs: Origin of the Initiative & Process of Preparation

Now a series of Policy Briefs has been prepared with a set of recommendations in each of the identified areas underpinned by the context and contestation concerning the articulated theme. In each of these cases, the concerns and interests of the vulnerable groups informed the suggestions for reforms.

Each of the Policy Briefs of the series has been prepared by a dedicated team of experts of high national and international repute. Each Policy Brief Team had an eminent personality as the Chair to lead the process recognised professional as a Penholder to prepare the successive drafts. Each team got together several times, reviewed the notes of the sub-national discussions and FGDs, and consulted relevant resource materials. A 19-member Advisory Committee, which included eminent professionals and leading personalities, provided guidance to the Policy Brief initiative.

The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), as the Secretariat of the *Citizen's Platform*, provided all necessary support for the smooth functioning of the initiative.

The Policy Briefs will be brought out as a collected volume. To follow up on the recommendations, the *Citizen's Platform* will hold media briefings under three clusters of issues, viz Economic, Social and Governance. The recommendations will be shared continuously through various media to inject them into the electoral debates. Efforts will be made for the inclusion of the issues in the election manifestos.

The *Citizen's Platform* plans to hold dissemination meetings across the country and a National Public hearing subsequently.



Policy Briefs: Origin of the Initiative & Process of Preparation

Issues for 11 Policy Briefs

Economic

- Transforming agriculture for an inclusive and diversified economy
- Providing decent employment for youth in view of domestic and overseas market
- Providing public utilities and services in the backdrop of unplanned urbanisation
- Affordable and clean energy for all

Social

- Reducing out-of-pocket expenditure to improve universal access to quality health care
- Triggers to ensuring quality primary education
- Dealing with the manifestation of localised vulnerabilities of climate change
- Promoting universal social protection system and the need for targeting disadvantaged groups

Governance

- Effective implementation of laws and judicial process for eradicating gender-based violence and discrimination
- Access and justice for ethnic and religious minorities
- Giving voice to the 'silent' and establishing democratic accountability



Section 01: Context

- Unplanned urbanisation in Bangladesh is a major challenge in achieving the SDGs in alignment with the spirit of Leaving No One Behind (LNOB).
- Dhaka, the main urban centre, covers only 1% of Bangladesh's total area, but is the home of 13% of the country's total population, and accounts for almost 21% of the nation's GDP (The World Bank, 2023).
- Bangladeshi urban areas are regularly found to be among the least liveable cities in the Economic Intelligence Unit's Global Liveability Index. Dhaka is currently listed as the 7th least liveable cities.
- In Bangladesh, growth of urban population is high because of three broad reasons: (i) high natural increase in the urban population; (ii) territorial expansion of the urban areas; and (iii) high pace of rural-to-urban migration.
- Urban residents, particularly the low-income groups, are the major victims of poor urban public service - only about 11-16% of the low-income households are covered by formal water supply of Dhaka WASA and majority of them pay 7 to 14 times higher for services than the households with formal access to water (BIGD, 2019).
- With a threefold increase over the last 15 years, and with only 31% recycle rate, plastic use has changed as the biggest threat for the urban centres of Bangladesh as they pollute cities, clog drains causing urban flooding (World Bank, 2021). Dhaka's pollution rate is one of the worst in the world.



Section 01: Context

- Rapid & uneven urbanization creates pressure on utilities and services, various amenities, natural resources, the living environment and public health - deteriorating Quality of Life (QoL) in Bangladesh's urban areas.
- With an average of 55% solid waste remaining uncollected, solid waste management remained a very challenging job in urban areas of Bangladesh (Asia-Europe Foundation, 2021). Only 14% of medical waste is properly managed (Brac, 2020). E-waste is growing at 20% per annum (Asia-Europe Foundation, 2021).
- The unplanned and rapid urbanisation poses serious challenges particularly in viewing LDC graduation by 2026, aspiration of becoming a middle-income country by 2031, and realising the vision to become a developed nation by 2041.
- The present policy brief primarily focuses on unplanned urbanisation. The seven key areas of concern which have been considered in this backdrop are: 1) water & sewerage, 2) transport, 3) gas, 4) electricity, 5) waste management, 6) common space, and 7) housing.
- The perspectives of gender, special-abilities, and older adults, who are often marginalised, have also been kept in the perspective in putting forward the recommendations to ensure inclusive and sustainable urbanisation towards achieving the LNOB aspiration of the SDGs.



Section 2: Recommendations

1. Strengthen Local Government Institutions

- Empower local government institutions to be able to deliver public services effectively at local level. Deal with coordination gaps among service providers at local level for more effective service delivery.
- Provide capacity-building support and allocate resources to enhance their ability to manage public utilities and services efficiently.

2. Revise and Amend Policies, Laws and Reform Institutional Setup

- Prepare, amend and update policies and laws so that urban people's rights to public service are given legal cover.
- Generate proper reliable data. Ensure openness and availability of data
- Allocate primary responsibility for public service delivery to a relevant single authority to ensure coherence in implementation of policies and programs.

3. Ensure Proper Decentralisation and Devolution of Power

- Decision making and implementation processes should reflect institutional restructuring as recommended by the Detailed Area Plan (DAP) by the Rajuk.
- A performance-based budget allocation approach needs to be put in place for optimum use of resources, which would promote balanced urban development.



Section 2: Recommendations

4. Establish Local Monitoring Groups

- Create ward-level informal/semi-formal monitoring groups, following successful examples from other cities, to improve accountability and service efficiency.
- Engage citizens in monitoring service provision and reporting concerns.
- Conduct awareness campaigns to change mindsets and encourage community involvement in disseminating good practices for sustainable urban development.
- Establish community forums to promote dialogue and feedbacks between citizens and policymakers.

5. Promote Stakeholder Engagement

- Implement best practices from other cities to designate specific areas and time slots for street vendors, considering the needs of vulnerable populations.
- Encourage community participation and feedback mechanisms to address inclusivity issues effectively.

6. Ensure Equitable Service Provision

- Hold the government responsible for providing city services and utilities, or if private measures are taken, ensure equitable access for all citizens at affordable prices.
- Implement robust monitoring mechanisms to ensure service delivery is consistent and accessible.
- Formulate and implement social safety nets for urban disadvantaged groups.

Section 2: Recommendations



7. Align Urban Development with SDG Targets and other Global and National Goals

- Integrate SDGs into urban planning to ensure inclusivity and expected quality of public utilities and services.
- Establish clear check and balance mechanisms to monitor progress and prioritise the needs of vulnerable groups.

8. Put Emphasis on Waste Management and Limit Single Use Plastic

- Take a multi-stakeholder and multisectoral approach to ensure circular economy through policy and regulatory reforms, manufacturers responsibility, economic instruments, deploying appropriate technology and infrastructure, awareness generation, informed pesticide usage, behavioural change communication, and capacity building.
- Following the National Action Plan for Sustainable Plastic Management set a target of recycling 50% of plastics by 2025, phase out targeted single-use plastic by 90% by 2026 and reduce plastic waste generation by 30% by 2030 from the 2020-21 baseline.

9. Address Data Availability

- Invest in building data collection systems to ensure availability of disaggregated and high-quality data for evidence-based policymaking and planning. Foster collaboration with research institutions and civil society organisations to bridge data gaps.
- Take initiatives to monitor changing patterns of urbanisation through disaggregated data.



Section 2: Recommendations

10. Formulate & Implement Long-Term Planning

- Address medium to long-term concerns in city master plans. Avoid expensive ad hoc solutions.
- Collaborate with relevant stakeholders and experts to plan sustainable urban growth.

11. Engage Local Philanthropic Organizations

- Recognize and activate local philanthropic organisations to enhance public-private collaborations for the effective delivery of public utilities and services.
- Leverage their capacity and expertise to address specific community needs.

12. Regulate Informal Practices

- Formulate and implement policies to regulate informal activities in urban/peri-urban areas. Issues concerning street vendors and rickshaws should be dealt with sensitivity. Ensure that measure to deal with urban informal activities strike a balance between formalisation and preserving livelihoods.



Section 2: Recommendations

13. Address Skills Gap Issues

- Develop and implement comprehensive vocational training programs that focus on equipping concerned people with necessary technical skills for delivering public utilities and services effectively.
- Establish specialised Urban Service Academies which will offer specialised courses in urban planning, management, and administration.
- Establish a culture of continuous learning and professional development involving urban service employees. Encourage skill upgrading on a regular basis for public service employees through workshops, seminars, and online courses.



Section 3: Conclusion

- Urbanisation in Bangladesh is now at a crossroads. Policymakers will need to understand that without realising the full potentials of urban centres Bangladesh's dream to be an upper-middle income country by 2041 will not be feasible.
- Addressing the challenges of providing public utilities and services in the context of unplanned urbanisation requires a comprehensive and pragmatic approach. Such an approach must keep the interests of disadvantaged population groups at the centre of focus.
- By implementing the recommended actions, Bangladesh can make significant progress in providing the required public utilities and services for the disadvantaged population groups.
- Bangladesh's urban and peri-urban centres are growing fast. In a few decades majority of people will live in these places. The aspiration of transforming Bangladesh into a liveable, environment friendly and inclusive country, will hinge on well-governed cities with delivery of high quality public utilities and services.

Thank You



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