

Urban Fringe Management and Role of Good Governance: Integrating Stakeholders in Land Management Process

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Key words: land management, urban fringe, good governance, stakeholder participation, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

SUMMARY

Urban fringe is a dynamic area which changes with span of time. Presently its management has been a complicated issue for a fast growing city, especially in developing countries. Focusing on the case of Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, the study concludes that land management problems are multidisciplinary and not confined to planning problems. Therefore, the paper promotes the idea that for effective land management there should have multidisciplinary approach with special focus on good governance because often in the field of land management the importance of good governance is ignored. Based on the analysis the research argues that there should have proper controlling on planning and its implementation through stakeholder participation.

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1. URBAN FRINGE AND ITS DEVELOPMENT

The term 'urban' and 'rural' is not new in literature. There is no confusion in the concepts and differences between these two. The sharp distinction between urban and rural settlements generally assumes that the livelihood of rural area is agriculture based whereas the urban area is manufacture and service based. But the recent research suggests that at certain part (generally the edge) of the city there is simultaneous existence of two sectors – rural and urban which are neither totally urban nor rural in character. Rather, combination of both, which is often called as 'urban fringe'.

The term urban fringe has many different manifestations in the literature in terms of its definition, characteristics and delimitation. A study of available literature reveals that the term urban fringe was introduced by Smith (1937) to describe *built up area just outside the corporate limit of the city*. Later the concept of the 'rural-urban fringe' was formulated by George Wehrwein in 1942 as *the area of transition, between well recognized urban land uses and the area devoted to agriculture*. After the notable scope of study on urban fringe the term rurbanization was introduced by Balk in 1945.

Urban fringe development is not only a process of transition of land from its rural use to urban use, rather, it is a complex process that involves many concerns such as change in landownership pattern, land transfer process, types of development, regulatory measures and their enforcement. The process of fringe development is not monolithic and may be taken place either by rural actors or by urban actors, may be in formal way or in informal way.

Problems of urban fringe in developing countries are quite often and very similar in nature. Most of the developing countries experience spontaneous development pattern rather than planned growth. Therefore, the most daunting problem associated with urban fringe in most developing countries is development of land in informal way where associated land development activities take place without conforming state rules and regulations. Due to high demand of land low lying areas are also being filled up for various development purposes without considering any environmental impact. The emphasis is only on accommodating the increasing population, not to ensure better living standard. Therefore, the newly developed fringe areas are seldom provided with adequate facilities. All the phenomena are nothing but the reflection of poor urban fringe management.

2. GOOD GOVERNANCE SHOULD BE CORE PRIORITY: EXPERIENCES FROM DHAKA

2.1 Urban fringe management in Dhaka: Present situation

Dhaka is regarded as one of the largest growing cities in the world. Especially after independence of Bangladesh in 1971, Dhaka received more than hundred thousand people every year. Dhaka, alone with its metropolitan area has a population of over 13 million, making it 11th number of mega city in the world. This exploding population creates extreme shortage of serviced land for housing to meet the growing demand. As a result, urban fringe in Dhaka is experiencing now daunting population pressure.

Due to rapid pace of population growth in Dhaka, for City Development Authority (RAJUK) with its limited capacity to manage the urban spatial growth and to meet the growing demand has been a prime task and main challenge. Though to increase the supply of developed land government as well as private sectors are taking different initiatives to form new towns in fringe area, often these initiatives are taking place in form of ‘urban sprawl’ and are concentrated mainly for the benefit of middle and higher income groups. Informal land development is merging this gap through providing shelter, especially for the poor but ultimately this land is also going to the hand of middle and upper income groups. As a result, the prospect for the poor’s access to land is getting bleak.

Presently Bangladesh government has neither sufficient technical and financial capacity to deal with urban fringe problems, nor has sound institutional arrangement and willingness to manage urban fringe growth. The reality is that urban fringe management problem is not a single problem which can be solved overnight through a single solution. Rather, manifold problems are integrated with that which needs multidisciplinary approach. Therefore, it is emphasized that there is a need to understand possible different paths of land management and also the importance of good governance which can better cope with current pressure on land development in Dhaka.

2.1.1 Planning has failed to guide urban fringe development

Since the early 1950s RAJUK (Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha – The Capital Development Authority) has been responsible, no plan has been fully implemented. There is always a gap between regulatory framework and its enforcement and only paper based plan without implementation has collapsed the spatial planning system in Dhaka. The first master plan was drafted by RAJUK (the then DIT) in 1959. The plan was approved and partially implemented. But it took 40 years against the stipulated 20 years. In 1980, the Planning Commission undertook a full-scale planning exercise for the Dhaka Metropolitan Area through a British consulting firm. The product was quite good, but it never received Government approval and thus was not utilized (Islam 1998, p. 79). Therefore, there was no master plan after the master plan 1959 was dropped. But during that time development went on and buildings continued to emerge. Finally Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan (DMDP) was approved in 1997 but has not been taken it seriously. The Detailed Area Plan, the most important part of DMDP

was scheduled to be completed within one year of the formulation of DMDP. But the city developed authority has failed to do it even after 11 years.

The development plans in Dhaka are always inappropriate and ineffective because of inefficiency of RAJUK, coordination problem among concern agencies, inadequate resources and manpower, government's reluctance, corruption and bureaucracy. 'Extension of time' has been a common phenomenon in preparation and implementation of any plan. Therefore, till now Dhaka City has neither any clear zoning policy nor any concrete master plan. This situation leads to develop the city in sprawl manner with low services and facilities, some times without having any service and facility.

2.1.2 Wetland development has been a common phenomenon

Though the favorable government policy has encouraged the formal private sector to expand their range of urban fringe development activities still their target is higher and middle income groups and motivation is speculative in nature. To get approval land developers use political influence and personal contact with RAJUK (approval giving authority) employees as well as bribes. The experiences show that due to bureaucracy and political practice at RAJUK it is very difficult to get permission for land development projects without pursuing of powerful political leaders. All these problems are caused due to corruption and weak administration and centralized system of RAJUK, lack of proper policy and improper implementation of policies. This ongoing phenomenon is paving the way of grabbing public and private land and wetland encroachment.

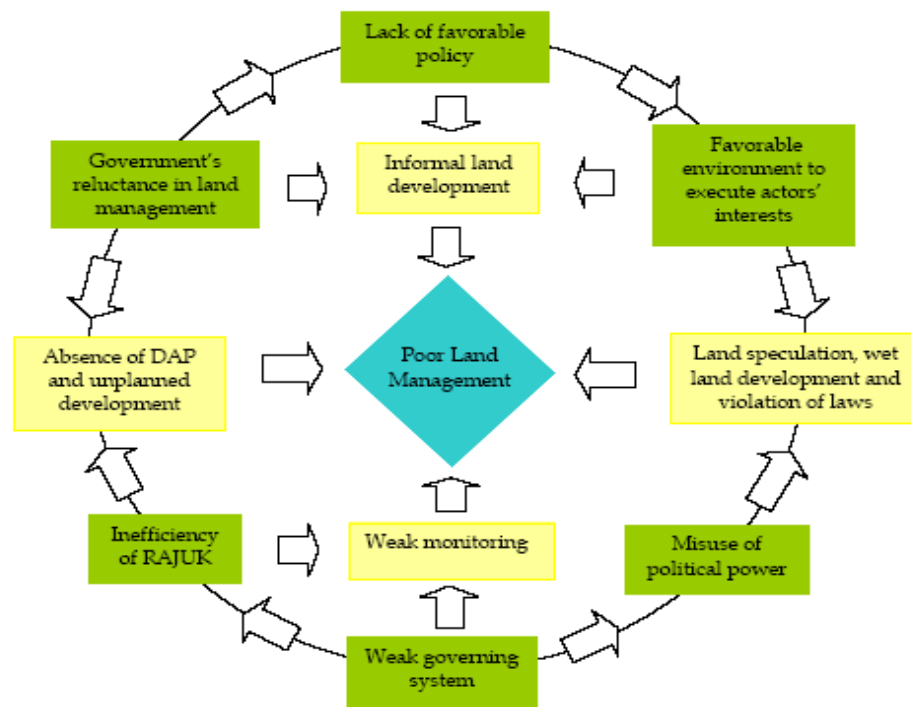
In Dhaka around 49 housing projects without approval have been identified to be inside the flood plain zones and plain sub-flood plain zones earmarked in the DMDP covering around 9,241 acres of land (The Daily Star 2007, February 18). In Dhaka, yearly rate of loss of wetland during 1989-1999 periods was 1.23 percent whereas during 1999-2003 periods the rate has been 5.67 percent. Dhaka is still left with 19.3 percent of wetland. If the current rate of loss of wetland continues, by the year 2037 all temporary wetlands of Dhaka will disappear (Islam, Israt 2006).

2.1.3 Fringe development in informal way

Informal land development represents an effective mechanism through which low-income people get access to land in Dhaka. Presently in Dhaka 30 to 35 per cent of population live in slums which have been developed in informal way. The study on informal land development on Dhaka reveals that the regulatory framework which specifies the planning and building standards, regulations and administrative procedure makes constraints for low-income group to conform to official requirements. The formal process of dealing with land is complex, time-consuming and extremely expensive. Total cost does not confine within the amount given by the plan approval authority as bribing also costs a high amount without which the application for approval cannot be proceeded. As a result, to avoid this complexity and expenses the lower income groups are compelled to develop land and construct buildings without

conforming rules and regulations. The paper argues that informal land development in form of slum formation is not just a manifestation of demographic and structural change due to urbanization. It is also a result of absence of favorable laws for formal land delivery system, especially for lower income group and it reflects the lack of political willingness.

Figure 01: Land management problems in Dhaka



2.1.4 Urban fringe is not only for poor

There is a common understanding that urban fringe in developed countries is a fashionable suburbs for higher income group whereas in developing countries it is populated by poor residents arrived recently from rural areas (Browder et. al. 1995; Daniels 1999; Adesina 2007). But the paper taking the example of Dhaka argues that there is no hard and fast rule that in most cities in developing countries lower social class is invisibly related with distance from the city and contrast is applicable in developed countries. Urban fringe in Dhaka in spite of being a part of developing world is being mainly developed for higher income group. The fact revealed from the paper is that as established and renowned private developers are comparatively in favorable position to use political influence and personal contact, their

opportunity to grab urban fringe is much higher than that of poor, even middle income group. Therefore, for Dhaka prevailing governing system and policy has been the determining factor to decide the prospective residents in urban fringe.

2.2 Need for good governance

The present situation in Dhaka depicts that there is a big gap between land management strategies and way of its implementation as prescribed and its actual practices in reality. Improper governing system is the main reason behind this gap. For effective urban fringe management there is need to ensure good governance before bringing any change in management process. The paper recognizes that presently there is no good land management in Dhaka. The term 'land management' is still a theory which is far behind from its practical implementation due to poor governing system. This is the indispensable fact which is affecting urban fringe development in Dhaka in negative way.

3. GOING FORWARD WITH GOOD GOVERNANCE AND STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION

The paper suggests that irregularities in land management can take variety of forms and their extent depends on the governing system in respective country. For a sound land management a sound governing system is a primary driver where stakeholders should work in an intergovernmental system. But in developing countries like Bangladesh where governing system is very weak there is a very slim chance to implement any land management plan. Moreover, the over centralized system and absence of stakeholder participation creates the problems further. To overcome these problems land management should appear as more than a technical style where good governance criteria should be incorporated into management process.

Since the 1990s, the concept of 'good governance' has taken center stage in development thinking and practice (Resnik and Birner, 2006). UN HABITAT governance campaign defines good governance as characterized by sustainability, subsidiarity, equity, efficiency, transparency and accountability, civic engagement and citizenship and security. It recognizes that the quality of urban governance is the single most important factor for prosperous cities (2002, p. 11) and it has been a key factor for sustainable development. The term good governance includes a number of characteristics and when these good governance perspectives are adopted in land management the whole concept becomes more comprehensive and creates a link between state and stakeholders operating outside its sphere. Stakeholder means individual, group of individuals or organization who affects or can be affected by a certain activity. Therefore, the paper is focusing on stakeholder participation rather than broader public participation.

Focusing on Dhaka the paper empirically demonstrates that the weakness of the planning institutions is not the only cause; but rather more is centralized and poor controlling system

which actually calls for good governance. The experiences of Dhaka indicate that land management activities must be accompanied by good governance around the rule of law, consensus, effectiveness and efficiency, transparency and responsiveness (Box 01). Similarly, the voice of various stakeholders should be taken into account which will ultimately imply the rule of law, transparency and accountability. This political dimension of social relations entails a shift from a ‘technical’ role of land management to a ‘normative’ role of land management where it brings a better appreciation on interaction between land, distribution of power and society. Therefore, the important decisions regarding land management should start within the function of good governance through a ‘government-stakeholders network’ and continue it in the systematic managerial process. Through this governance-managerial process the land management objectives will be established, achieved and monitored (Figure 02).

Box 01: Application of the indicators of good governance in the Land Management

Responsiveness: All the management activities (i.e. execution of master plan) will be done within a given time framework. For example, there will not be any unnecessary delay in the implementation of master plan.

Transparency: Any decision in land management will be done followed by rules and regulations without any biasness.

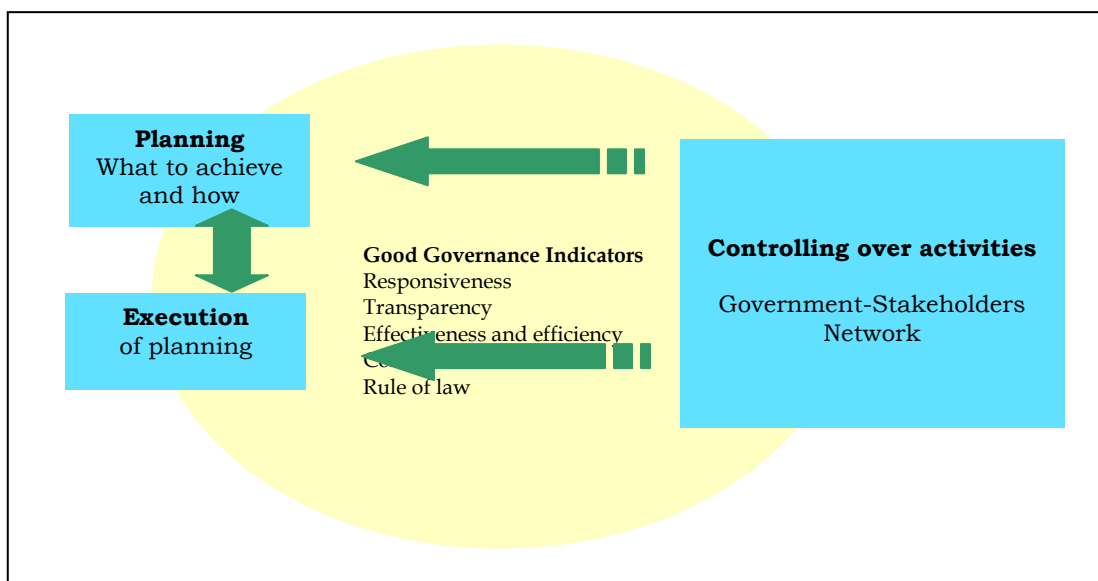
Rule of law: Land management activities will be controlled through legal framework. For example, it will not overlook the poor’s right to the access to land.

Accountability: Government as well as stakeholders will be accountable for their decisions and activities in land management sector.

Consensus orientated: Any land related laws, policy or spatial planning strategies will come into force after receiving the consent from stakeholders.

Effectiveness and efficiency: Land development laws, rules and regulations and spatial planning will be sound enough from social, economic, cultural and environmental perspective and it will also protect human rights.

Figure 02: Stakeholder participation and good governance in land management



Stakeholder participation in land management can start from passive dissemination of information to active engagement in decision making. These different levels of involvement are likely to be appropriate in different country context depending on land management goals and activities and the capacity of stakeholders to take part in the activities. A decentralized framework is a promising mean to strengthen or create the platforms where stakeholders can easily participate in decision making for land management at local level because local level decisions mostly directly affect them. This reshaping the relationship between state and stakeholders is not merely about distribution of power. It is much more concerned with bringing fundamental relationship between state and stakeholders because stakeholders are no longer only subjects or clients but more and more partners (Magel, 2003). Stakeholder participation through decentralization can create a new opportunity for secure and equitable access to land and its management as it reduces the gap between 'land governor' and 'land user'. But decentralization is not the only panacea and it does not always confirm the good governance if there is an insufficient transfer of power from central to local institutions or if stakeholder participation at local level is inadequate or little compare to elite power. Therefore, to sum up it is fair to say that strong political support and capacity building of the participants are the pre-requisites for successful participation of stakeholders.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Stakeholder participation can make a fertile ground for good governance and can be a potentially useful vehicle to enhance the quality of governing system in land management. But in practice to establish a functional structure to involve stakeholders is really a challenging task. Because land management process takes place within a country context influenced by historic and legal tradition, nature of administration, political ideology, legal and institutional framework and above all land management goals. All the factors play determining role of how management process is to be built and this set of factors can

encourage or constrain stakeholder participation. Therefore, extent of success or failure of stakeholder involvement depends on nature of the process – role of government, institutional framework for state and stakeholder interaction, form of stockholder involvement and local capacity and resources. For many corruption prone countries there is also a risk of turning the ‘state-stakeholder’ relationship into ‘patron-client’ relationship which will prevent genuine stakeholder participation. This paper finally argues that to overcome many of its limitations, stakeholder participation must be institutionalized and needs to be encouraged through making aware of its benefits. No doubt, bringing the stakeholders under the umbrella of good governance can offer an opportunity of sound land management.

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