WOMEN AND CHILD-FRIENDLY URBAN SERVICES:

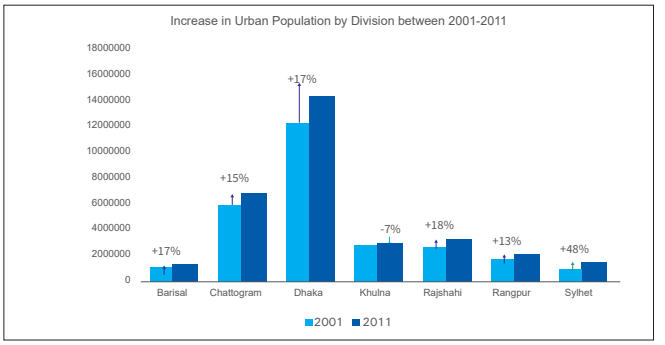
THE GOVERNANCE CHALLENGE

Bangladesh is rapidly urbanizing, but faces a critical challenge of transforming its cities into drivers of equitable economic opportunities and quality living. This emerging urban landscape is particularly challenging for women and children, who face endemic structural and social inequities in their access to urban services, as well as in their routine social and economic existence. The governance challenges in improving urban services are both entrenched and poorly comprehended. An innovative governance framework, and the juxtaposition of beneficiary and provider perspectives, can serve to identify the promising pathways for women and child-friendly urban services.

A CHANGING URBAN CONTEXT

As in much of the developing world, Bangladesh is rapidly urbanizing. Projections show that its urban population will be approximately 65 million by 2031.1 A great majority of people will be living in slums and low-income settlements, with concentrations in the metropolitan centres of Dhaka and Chattogram.

Figure 1

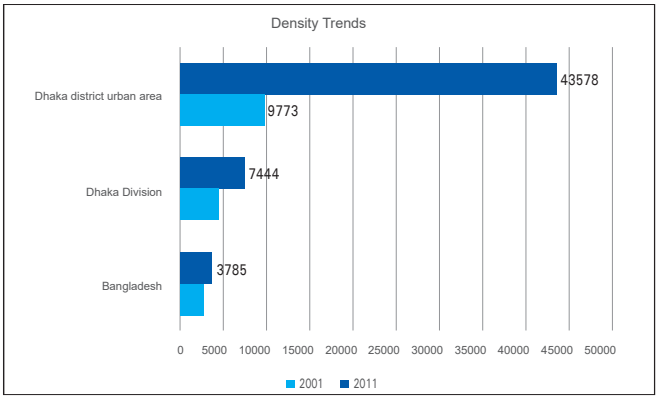


Source: Bangladesh Population and Housing Census 2011: National Volume 3: Urban Area report

Rapid urbanization is also occurring within an overall situation of extreme land scarcity. Average density rose from 2,731 persons per sq.km in 2001 to 3,785 persons per sq.km in 2011. The urban areas of Dhaka district saw a nearly five-fold increase in population density between 2001 and 2011 (Figure 2)[2].

Can such densities be sustained if the service needs of the burgeoning population, particularly women and children, is to be meaningfully met? Will land become a binding constraint on services within such densities?

Figure 2



Source: Bangladesh Population and Housing Census 2011: National Volume 3: Urban Area report

1 Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), 'Population Projections of Bangladesh: Dynamics and Trends 2011-2061', 2015.
2 Ibid.

This emerging urban landscape is particularly challenging for women and children who face endemic structural and social inequities in their access to urban services, as well as in their routine social and economic existence. Policy documents such as the government's 7th Five Year Plan, Draft Urban Policy, the National Social Security Strategy, and UNICEF's Urban Strategy (2017-20) have begun to acknowledge these complexities, and the need to improve urban governance for social services - particularly for women and children. A comparison of 6th and 7th FYP show that there has been a markedly clear progress in the focus on 'urban' in the 7th Plan compared to the preceding 6th FYP. There is also a recognition that urban governance represents a complex reality of overlapping jurisdictions and multiple actors, spanning central and local government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and social actors.

REALITY CHECK ON URBAN SERVICES

Various urban services delivered to the people can be broadly categorized into three groups:

- Infrastructure services are considered a major function of a municipality or city corporation. These include drainage and waste management, water supply, electricity, gas/fuel, transportation, and economic infrastructures such as market-places. For most of urban Bangladesh, the city infrastructure services are relatively limited, and the inadequacy is more prevalent in low-income areas.
- Social services include basic education and health facilities, as well as social protection activities. With the rapid urbanization and growth in urban population, there has been an increasing demand for social services, with needs more acute in low-income areas.
- Regulatory services include security, grievance redressal, registration and licensing. Key regulatory institutions such as the judiciary and police, are not under the purview of the urban local governments, but centrally controlled.

The Household Income and Expenditure Survey and census data indicate that while the urban poor have access to economic opportunities (as indicated in the marked improvement in income poverty), corresponding improvements in social poverty indicators such as education, health, and nutrition tend to be much weaker[3]. The contradictory realities of economic opportunity and social exclusion highlight the policy priority of well-governed urban services, as evidenced in Sustainable Development Goal 11. This aims to make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable for all urban residents, especially women and children.

As against the desired standards set for women and child-friendly cities, where does Bangladesh stand in terms of the starting point for crafting an agenda for change for the 8th FYP? The 2016 BBS-UNICEF Child Well-Being Survey of Urban Areas of Bangladesh provides a useful snapshot.[4]

3 PPRC, 'Policy Brief on Urban Poverty: Towards a Holistic National Strategy',2016

4 BBS & UNICEF, 'Child Well-Being Survey of Urban Areas of Bangladesh', 2016

Table 1

Women and child well-being in urban areas (city corporations), 2016

Dimension	Indicator	Slums	Non-slums
		%	
Nutrition	Underweight (under-5 children)	30.8	17.7
	Stunting (under-5 children)	40.4	25.2
	Wasting (under-5 children)	11.6	7.3
	Children ever breastfeed	97.8	97.2
	Early initiation of breastfeeding	66.9	58.2
	Exclusive breastfeeding under 6 months	62.3	57.5
	Introduction of solid, semi-solid or soft foods (age 6-8 months)	75.1	68.1
Child health	Full immunization coverage	72.1	92.1
	Care-seeking for children with acute respiratory infection symptoms	78.5	79.4
Water, sanitation and hygiene	Use of improved drinking-water sources	98.0	99.0
	Use of improved sanitation facility not shared	18.9	51.3
	Access to defined handwashing facility with soap/ cleansing agent	35.4	67.1
Maternal & new-born health	15-49 pregnant women with four antenatal care (ANC)	36.0	61.0
	Skilled attendant at delivery	55.5	73.6
	C-Section	23.9	46.6
	Post-natal check for new-borns	64.8	83.9
	Post-natal check for mother	61.4	80.3
Education	Early childhood care and development (ECCD)	23.8	30.4
	Literacy among young women (15-24)	59.0	83.7
	Net intake rate in primary education	40.5	66.9
	Net secondary attendance ratio	33.3	62.0
	Primary completion rate	73.1	77.4
	Gender parity index primary	1.01	1.05
	Gender parity index secondary	1.14	1.22
Social problems	Child labour (5-17)	23.1	12.0
	Early marriage (before 15)	28.1	20.0
	Early marriage (before 18)	66.4	53.3

Source: BBS-UNICEF, Child Well-Being Survey, 2016

This picture highlights some encouraging achievements in the areas of gender parity in primary and secondary education, use of improved source of drinking water, awareness on breastfeeding, and post-natal maternal and new-born checks. However, there are also formidable gaps and challenges: Under-5 stunting is higher in slums (40.4 per cent), EPI coverage is lower (72.1 per cent), a high prevalence of child marriage, low net secondary attendance (33 per cent), poorer access of slum children to ECCD, a lower rate of birth registration, and a higher incidence of VAW, etc.

CITIZEN PRIORITIES ON URBAN SERVICES

Effective policy responses to the agenda of urban services need to be anchored in an understanding of the perspectives and expectations of the urban citizens. The government has rightly adopted a 'whole society' approach with regard to provision of services, so it is important to understand service needs of both the poor and middle classes. Consultations by the PPRC with groups of urban poor and middle-class women showed where citizen priorities on urban services lie (Table 2).

Urban Poor Urban Middle Class

- EPI, nutrition and childcare
- Healthcare
- Education
- VAW protection and justice
- WASH
- Utilities
- Economic participation
- Financial services
- Community facilities
- Childcare including after-school
- Women's health & counselling
- Women/Child friendly public spaces
- VAW protection & justice
- Women-friendly transportation
- Economic participation

DELIVERING URBAN SERVICES: THE GOVERNANCE CONUNDRUM

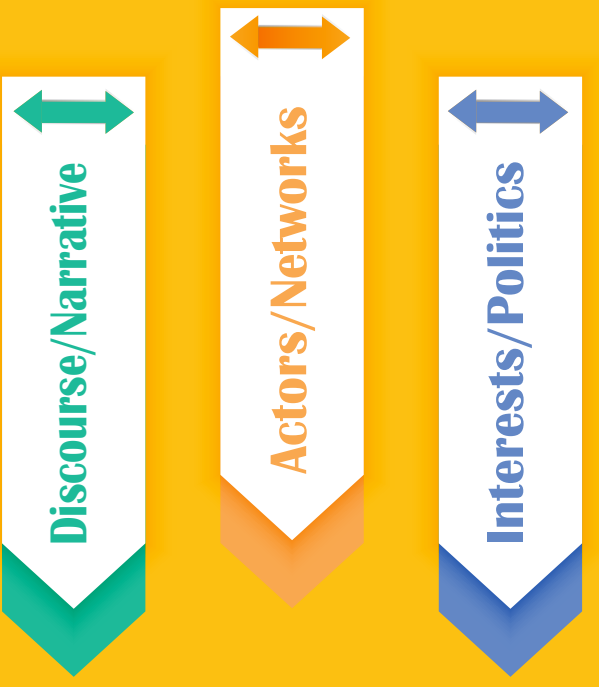
Policy and governance are central to addressing burgeoning urban services needs highlighted in citizen perspectives. Governance structures have formal and informal norms and rules of functioning that may not be obvious from formal descriptions of structures. The PPRC research underscores the value of an analytical framework constituted of a governance triangle (Figure 3) combining a) discourses and narratives -- what and how issues and policies are being framed and prioritized; b) actors and networks -- not only the range of stakeholders but their levels of knowledge and awareness of the issues, as well as their attitudes and practices in translating policies into action; and finally c) interests and power dynamics -- whose interplay define the political boundaries for action and shape the eventual policy and governance outcomes, as well as jurisdictional conflicts among institutional actors that have a strong bearing on urban services solutions.

Table 2

'Whole Society' Approach: Citizen Priorities

Urban Poor	Urban Middle Class
▪ EPI, nutrition and childcare ▪ Healthcare ▪ Education ▪ VAW protection and justice ▪ WASH ▪ Utilities ▪ Economic participation ▪ Financial services ▪ Community facilities	▪ Childcare including after-school ▪ Women's health & counselling ▪ Women/Child friendly public spaces ▪ VAW protection & justice ▪ Women-friendly transportation ▪ Economic participation

Figure 3
Governance Triangle



Conceptualization by Hossain Zillur Rahman, 2020

As Figure 3 underscores, multiple actors with both competing and complementary roles shape the governance outcomes with regard to the provision and regulation of urban services (Table 3).

Table 3
Urban governance: An actor-role matrix

Agency types	Roles played
Government agencies	Infrastructure, service-provision, security and monitoring
Local governments	Political representation, justice, protection, service delivery, catalyst for local economy promotion
NGOs	Service-delivery, mobilization of the poor and advocacy
Community capacities/Community-Based Organizations	Voluntarism, dispute resolution, power issues and value creation
Political parties	Demand articulation, protection, social mobilization and power issues
Private sector	Service-delivery and economic growth
Support institutions	Capacity-building and catalyst for local economic development
Think tanks	Agenda formulation and progress monitoring

GOVERNANCE IN OPERATION: KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDE AND PRACTICES

A KAP (knowledge, attitude, practice) survey of a cross-section of governance-relevant stakeholders shed important light on governance in operation. A vital objective of the survey was to understand similarities or differences in the list of governance issues seen as priority by different stakeholders. This allows us to go beyond only a 'technical' assessment of governance priorities, as is usually done through expert analysis, and bring within consideration an 'experiential' assessment by stakeholders actively engaged in the governance process itself.

The top three urban governance issues from the view of the governance stakeholders are coordination, corruption and accountability. However, there is some variation in issue prioritization when looking at the disaggregated answers. This new research finding allows us to go one step further towards the formulation of an analytical typology of urban governance priorities (Table 4).

The top-ranked analytical category of urban governance challenge is institutional functionality. This encompasses the issues of coordination, accountability, capacity gaps and overlapping roles. Closely following is the analytically second-ranked challenge of political governance, which encompasses the issues of corruption, political pressure and lack of autonomy of urban local governments. Finance and data make up the other two analytical categories that complete a holistic analytical model of urban governance.

Table 4

*Urban governance challenges: A typology**

TYPOLOGY OF GOVERNANCE CHALLENGES	ISSUE	COMPOSITE RANK
INSTITUTIONAL FUNCTIONALITY	Coordination	1
	Accountability	
	Capacity gap	
	Overlapping roles	
POLITICAL GOVERNANCE	Corruption	2
	Political pressure	
	Lack of autonomy of urban local government	
FINANCE	Lack of resources	3
	Lack of incentives	
DATA	Data gap	4

**Typology developed by Hossain Zillur Rahman, 2020*

URBAN GOVERNANCE CHALLENGES: THE SECTORAL SCENARIO

Beyond the macro understanding of urban governance challenges, it is important also to identify challenges specific to the sectoral priorities identified in citizen consultations. The sector-specific governance challenges are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5

Urban governance challenges: The sectoral scenario

Sector	Governance challenges
Nutrition	▪ Capacity gap ▪ Service interruptions ▪ Awareness gaps
EPI and childcare	▪ Lack of monitoring ▪ Tokenism on establishment of quality and affordable day-care centres ▪ Service interruptions ▪ Poor information dissemination
Women's health care	▪ Price monitoring ▪ Maintenance of public and school toilets ▪ Service interruptions ▪ Mis-targeting
Violence Against Women (VAW) & justice	▪ Lack of gender sensitivity training ▪ Lack of monitoring ▪ Manipulation of justice system
Economic participation	▪ Workplace safety ▪ Corruption ▪ Capacity gaps ▪ Lack of monitoring on policy implementation on women empowerment programmes ▪ Wage discrimination
Financial services	▪ Anti-poor bias
Education	▪ Cost burdens
Water supply	▪ Lack of price and quality monitoring ▪ Spatial disparities
Utilities: Electricity and gas	▪ Spatial disparities ▪ Lack of price monitoring
Community facilities	▪ Access barriers ▪ Misuse of facilities
Transportation services	▪ Safety concerns for females ▪ Lack of gender sensitivity trainings ▪ Lack of enforcement of female quota on public transportation
Urban emergencies	▪ Climate change vulnerability ▪ Safety hazards such as fires ▪ Lack of safety nets against economic shock

Figure 4

SOCIAL NORMS: A CROSS-CUTTING BARRIER FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND ACTION PLAN

Policy implications and action plans are analytically grouped into three broad clusters:

Table 6

Recommendations: Overcoming governance weaknesses

Time-frame	Action Plan
Short-term	• Dissemination of health & justice service delivery information (schedules, locations, contact info, pricing) needs to be strengthened • Standardizing admission fees, examination fees, etc. in public and private schools • Operationalizing citizen charters to increase beneficiary demand and promote local government accountability • Produce strong evidence on wage gap among professionals to inform policies
Medium-term	• Monitoring of pricing of health services such as vaccinations and ANC delivery care in private, NGOs and public hospitals • Establishing a regulatory body to monitor gender-specific workplace regulations in both public and private sectors, including maternity leave, flexible work hours, wage gap, re-entering job sector after pregnancy, etc.
Long-term	• Targeted budget allocation and services for women and children in projects to be monitored

Table 7

Recommendations: Addressing service gaps

Time-frame	Action Plan
Short-term	• Off-hour service availability for working parents • Social campaigns against violence or social barriers for women to participate in the economy, especially in cities outside Dhaka • Workplace counsellors to support victims of workplace harassment • Female-only buses in the cities • Sports facilities for girls and women in schools and playgrounds • Digital literacy programmes to reduce cyber crimes • Expanding women-friendly finances to encourage more female entrepreneurs

Time-frame	Action Plan
Medium-term	• Community water supply, shared toilets and bathing facilities only for women and children in urban slum areas • Gender-sensitivity training programmes for police, doctors, bus owners and other professionals, especially those who deal with victims of VAW, by city corporations • Gender-sensitivity training and counselling for bus drivers, helpers and other transportation workers • Comprehensive health screening or child growth monitoring programme for children, along with expanded program on immunization (EPI) programmes • Disability-enabled community infrastructure
Long-term	• Targeted opportunities for women in the information and communications technology (ICT) or high-tech parks in the outskirts of the cities • Establishing caregiving of children and elderly as a profession by proper recognition, incentives and trainings • Income-earning opportunities for poor women living in cities outside Dhaka (such as Chattogram and Sylhet) • Establishing a regulatory body to monitor administrative exploitation and coaching systems in schools

Table 8

Recommendations: Addressing emerging challenges

Time-frame	Action Plan
Short-term	• Women-friendly transportation schedules • Increased budgetary allocation to scale up skill-based training for women in specialized sectors such as tailoring, parlour, cleaning, etc. • Across-the-board opportunities for women in emerging ICT sector • Road safety programmes in schools • Street lighting
Medium-term	• Mass rapid transit should prioritize integration of women and children facilities • Incentivization of women's participation in STEM • New Meena campaign (around 20-year-old Meena) on themes including gender-based violence, restricted participation in economic activities, sexual and reproductive health and rights, skill development, and respect in the household
Long-term	• Reimagine public space such as community centres, courtyards, mosques that provide day-care, EPI, and growth monitoring services. It can also be a meeting space for specific demographic segments (adolescent, post-menopause, working mothers) and have computer labs, a library, digital centres, etc.

Disclaimer:

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