

Bangladesh Knowledge Exchange and Advocacy for Effective Local Government
(P161694 - ASA)

A. General Context

1. The purpose of the Advisory Services and Analytics (ASA) entitled “Bangladesh Knowledge Exchange and Advocacy for Effective Local Government” is to contribute to the creation of an enabling environment to advance urban policy reform in Bangladesh through advocacy, coalition building, capacity development and technical assistance to urban local government institutions (LGIs). As such, it builds on the analytical work conducted under the 2016 World Bank flagship report on “Leveraging Urbanization in South Asia: Managing Spatial Transformation for Prosperity and Livability” and more recent findings from the 2018 World Bank report entitled “Toward Great Dhaka: A New Urban Development Paradigm Eastward.” The key highlights from these reports are summarized below.

2. According to the “Leveraging Urbanization in South Asia: Managing Spatial Transformation for Prosperity and Livability” report, South Asian countries are struggling to realize the potential that urbanization provides to transform their economies. Rapid and unplanned urbanization has placed a tremendous strain on infrastructure, basic services, land, housing and the environment. This has led to the low level of livability in the region’s cities and limited the benefits that accrue from the agglomeration of economic activities. For Bangladesh, the major implications from the study are as follows:

- Rapid economic growth has enabled Bangladesh to reach lower middle-income country status by 2015. To move up the middle-income bracket, Bangladesh will need to remove the barriers to higher growth posed by low access to reliable and affordable infrastructure, limited availability of serviced land, rapid urbanization and extreme vulnerability to climate change and natural disasters, among others.
- Bangladesh has experienced faster urbanization than South Asia as a whole during the 2000 and 2010 period.
- According to the Agglomeration Index, in 2019 the share of Bangladesh’s population living in areas with urban characteristics was about 46 percent. This compares to an urban share of the population based on official definitions of urban areas of almost 28 percent, suggesting the existence of considerable hidden urbanization.
- Bangladesh’s expanding urban population creates a major affordable housing challenge. Under the best-case scenario in which urban population density remains constant, the amount of developable urban land will have to increase by almost 45 percent between 2010 and 2050.
- In 2010, about 21 percent of Bangladesh’s urban population lived below the national poverty line, while almost 62 percent of the urban population lived in slums.
- Dhaka accounts for a third of the urban population in Bangladesh, with approximately 18 million people. The success of Dhaka, one of the megacities of the world, is critically important for the economic and social development of Bangladesh. It makes a vital contribution to Bangladesh’s economy—a fifth of national GDP and two-fifths of urban jobs.

- However, Dhaka’s failure to adequately address flooding, congestion and chaotic urban development has resulted in disproportionate urban costs. Moreover, it has been noted that the country’s most important industry – its garment industry – has been moving out of the city’s core and into its districts neighboring the city. While the information and communications technology sectors are an emerging cluster within the city, it remains small and has not yet filled the void left by the garment industry.

3. The 2018 World Bank report on “Toward Great Dhaka: A New Urban Development Paradigm Eastward” lays out a strategic vision for the city to unlock its development potential. Up to now, urban growth has taken place mainly without adequate planning in the northern part of Dhaka and expanded westward after the catastrophic flooding of 1988. If properly managed, the development potential of East Dhaka is massive since it is located mostly in a rural area with some parts in close proximity to the city’s most prosperous neighborhoods. According to the study, pursuing a strategic approach to the development of East Dhaka would make Greater Dhaka a much more productive and livable city. It recommends three interventions: (a) building the eastern embankment along the Balu River to controlling flooding; (b) developing transport links and public transit to ease congestion; and (c) creating a world-class business district with sound policies to attract firms and residents eastward.

B. Purpose and Methodology

4. As stated above, the purpose of the ASA Project on “Bangladesh Knowledge Exchange and Advocacy for Effective Local Government” is to contribute to the creation of an enabling environment to advance the urban policy reform agenda that would help unleash the potential of urbanization to propel Bangladesh to middle-income status. It will do this through: (a) the dissemination of findings from key analytical work; (b) urban policy consultations; (c) coalition building and advocacy; (d) capacity building and knowledge exchange or peer-to-peer learning¹; and, (e) technical assistance to urban local governments (LGIs). The Center of Excellence for Urban Development (CEUD) will play an instrumental role in carrying out these activities.

5. The project is divided into two parts. Part 1 establishes the rationale and lays the foundation for the CEUD. It includes the following: (a) formation of the CEUD Working Group composed of representatives from the Bangladesh Institute of Planners (BIP), Institute of Architects of Bangladesh (IAB), Institution of Engineers Bangladesh (IEB) and Municipal Association of Bangladesh (MAB); (b) signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between this group and the World Bank to further advance the objective of formalizing the CEUD; and, (c) organization of a national conference with a broad range of stakeholders to assess and validate the demand for the learning and knowledge services envisaged under the CEUD. Part 2 will focus on the operationalization of the CEUD and will cover activities related to its formal registration and staffing, business and financial sustainability plan; training needs assessment and capacity development strategy; and implementation and regular evaluation of capacity building and technical assistance activities.

C. Center of Excellence for Urban Development (CEUD)

6. The CEUD has emerged as a response to the demand from urban LGIs for a more formalized, coordinated and sustained source of knowledge, learning and technical support from professional organizations involved

¹ A useful reference is the 2013 World Bank publication on “The Art of Knowledge Exchange: A Primer for Government Officials and Development Practitioners.”

in the urban sector. Under the on-going World Bank Municipal Governance and Services Project (MGSP), the Bangladesh Institute of Planners and Institute of Architects of Bangladesh (, together with the Urban Development Directorate (UDD), assisted several city corporations and municipalities to prepare multi-year capital investment plans (CIP). This successful collaboration helped to raise awareness of the value of providing coordinated technical support to urban LGIs to improve urban management. The Municipal Association of Bangladesh (MAB) and professional associations, such as the BIP, IAB and the Institution of Engineers Bangladesh, expressed strong interest in extending this support to a larger number of urban LGIs in the country.

7. In response to this demand, the World Bank convened a meeting with the aforementioned organizations to discuss the formation of a center of excellence as a collaborative platform for delivering sustained and coordinated capacity building and technical support to local governments. The coordination of capacity building activities is particularly critical given the potential for overlap, gaps and duplication among multiple training providers and funding sources which can lead to inefficiencies in the use of scarce resources and lack of a strategic coherence across activities. The meeting concluded with an agreement to form a CEUD Working Group composed of representatives from MAB, BAP, IAB and IEB. This Working Group has met regularly to discuss the steps necessary to formally establish the CEUD.

8. On October 4, 2017, the World Bank signed a Memorandum of Understanding (attached) with MAB, BIP, IAB and IEB. In it, the parties agreed to collaborate on activities to improve the capacity of urban LGIs by providing sustained learning and technical support to urban LGIs through the establishment of the CEUD. The MoU stated that collaboration would focus on several areas, including: (a) advocacy on urban planning and decentralization; (b) capacity building and knowledge exchange; and (c) technical assistance to urban LGIs.

D. Conference on “Building Knowledge Networks and Partnerships for Sustainable Urban Development in Bangladesh (October 28-29, 2017)”

9. With funding from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, the World Bank organized a conference on “Building Knowledge Networks and Partnerships for Sustainable Urban Development in Bangladesh” in Dhaka on October 28-29, 2017. The conference aimed to: (a) raise awareness of global good practices and solutions to pressing urban problems; (b) enhance participant knowledge in urban planning and management; (c) promote networks of professional associations; (d) strengthen coalitions, such as the mayors forum for city corporations and municipalities; (e) promote a collaborative platform, such as the CEUD, to facilitate the provision of knowledge services to urban LGIs; and (f) provide a vision for a longer-term program of continuing knowledge exchange on priority urban issues. The event was attended by more than 650 participants, of which 250 were mayors. Other participants included senior representatives from the relevant ministries, technical experts, civil society stakeholders, and professional institutions. The complete program, proceedings and World Bank press release are herewith attached.

10. The conference began by setting the policy and urban context for the event. Drawing on past analytical work, it offered a venue to discuss key findings and recommendations from the 2016 World Bank flagship report on “Leveraging Urbanization in South Asia: Managing Spatial Transformation for Prosperity and

Livability.” The discussion highlighted key ingredients needed to transform cities in Bangladesh²²: (a) leadership and vision; (b) informed and thoughtful planning along with strategic investments; and (c) community engagement.

11. Large cities, like Dhaka and Chittagong, will need to prioritize processes and systems to promote sustainable metropolitan-wide solutions, over discrete and fragmented physical investments. This will require: (a) a cross-cutting platform for metropolitan transformation; (b) detailed analysis and planning; (c) quick demonstrable results; (d) getting the right policies and institutions in place; and (e) transformative investments in critical infrastructure. The recommendations for secondary cities are to: (a) improve connectivity from secondary cities like Comilla to Dhaka and Chittagong, to attract private investment and diversify economic activity; (b) invest in connective infrastructure to help expand opportunities in lagging regions and reduce disparities in living standards; (c) increase local autonomy and capacity to deliver urban services, to improve living standards and mitigate the “push factors” of highly concentrated urbanization; and (d) enable small and medium-sized cities to build on their comparative advantages and open up new paths of innovation and growth. These policy recommendations, for both large and secondary cities, are critical to unleash the potential of urbanization to propel Bangladesh to middle-income status and beyond.

12. The conference also facilitated a robust discussion on local autonomy and decentralization among mayors and national government officials. The government of Bangladesh is highly centralized both administratively and fiscally. Heavy reliance on the central government for key human resources has resulted in personnel shortages and limited technical capacity at the local levels. While advocating for increased devolution of responsibilities and fiscal powers, local governments reflected on the need to build technical capacity at the local level to improve service delivery and, over time, begin to perform a large number of functions, ranging from town planning to infrastructure project development. If not, this would most likely lead to an uneven provision of infrastructure and basic services to citizens. Invited city leaders from other countries (e.g., Brazil and the Philippines) highlighted the important role that associations of cities and towns can play in advocating for urban policy reform. Advocacy is required to ensure sustained support for policy reform amidst shifts in the political economy as a consequence of national elections and changing leadership.

13. The conference convened international and local experts for a knowledge exchange (North-South and South-South) on urban planning, transport and use of technology to improve urban management. Given Bangladesh’s extreme vulnerability to flooding and climate change, there was demand for learning how to strengthen and build resilience into the urban transport network. There was also interest in lessons from the experience of other cities in different countries (e.g., Brazil, Colombia, China and the US) with Bus Rapid Transport (BRT), particularly given Dhaka’s plans to invest in a BRT network. Overall, the key message was that greater priority needed to be given to the integration of transport infrastructure and urban development, and that traditional supply-side approaches to transportation planning are not sustainable and have not delivered expected benefits. To promote sustainability, alternative models were discussed to

²² Derived from the presentation by Balakrishna Menon, Lead Urban Specialist, at the session on “Leveraging Urbanization in Bangladesh” during the Conference: “Building Knowledge Networks and Partnerships for Sustainable Urban Development in Bangladesh” (October 28-29, 2017).

reduce GHG emissions, energy consumption and traffic congestion with the ultimate goal of achieving more livable cities and sustainable urban development.

14. The conference also discussed the growing interest among cities on the use of technology to improve urban governance, service provision and quality³. Some cities are already employing technology and other e-governance tools such as an on-line portal to reduce queuing for services (e.g., Jhenaidah Pourashava). Bigger cities, such as Dhaka and Chittagong, are interested in converting into a ‘smart city’, using technology to help them cope with a myriad of problems, from traffic congestion to water logging during the rainy season. The forum raised awareness of the different applications of technology to tackle urban challenges and stressed the importance of building strategic partnerships between cities, universities and the private sector to undertake research, and design and operate a “smart city” infrastructure.

15. A key goal of the conference was to discuss the role of professional institutions in capacity development and to foster networking among knowledge partners. In other countries, centers of excellence have emerged to provide leadership by advocating excellence in planning and urban management, promoting capacity building and citizen empowerment, fostering peer-to-peer learning, and providing cities with the tools and support necessary to meet the challenges of growth and change. These centers play a vital role in knowledge capture and dissemination, and translation into implementable solutions to urban problems. Professional institutions from within Bangladesh (i.e., IAB, IEB and BIP) and MAB, exchanged their vision and goals with counterparts from the Korean Research Institute for Human Settlement, International City and County Management Association, American Planning Association, League of Cities of the Philippines and the US National League of Cities. The case study of the Institute for Research and Urban Planning (IPPUC) in Curitiba demonstrated how it evolved into a resource for cities worldwide on best practices in integrated land use and infrastructure planning. There was strong enthusiasm to learn more about IPPUC and to explore institutional partnerships among professional institutions at the conference. Joint activities can take place in several areas such as urban advocacy, peer-to-peer learning, mentoring, professional internship, structured learning events, on-line certification programs, international outreach, annual conferences, applied research and knowledge management.

16. An important outcome of the conference was the formal launch of the Center of Excellence in Urban Development (CEUD). It also pioneered the Champion Pourashava Awards program to be administered by the CEUD. The program recognizes innovative practices by urban LGIs. State Minister Mannan, Ministry of Finance and Planning, gave the awards to the first round of winning Pourashavas which excelled in the following categories and can serve as models in these areas: good governance, citizen engagement, financial management and capital investment planning.

17. To conclude, the widely attended conference and the events leading to it, demonstrated and validated the existence of a strong and unmet demand from local governments and urban professional groups for a formal and coordinated platform to deliver on-demand technical assistance; leadership and professional development; advocacy; and knowledge exchanges to share best practices and good policies. No such platform exists today in Bangladesh where rapid urbanization is fast outpacing the ability of local

³ As an example, UNDP Bangladesh organized a ‘Smart City Week 2017’ (Nov. 29-Dec. 5, 2017) as part of a ‘Smart City Campaign’ that brings together government and non-government agencies, city corporations, municipalities, public and private universities, urban experts and social entrepreneurs to present their views and plans for developing smart cities.

governments to plan, much less, manage what the Bank has termed as ‘messy’ growth. Mayors have repeatedly expressed the need for on-demand technical assistance to prepare urban plans and infrastructure projects that are viable, sustainable and climate resilient (citing the positive experience from CIP exercise under MGSP – see para. 6). At the same time, professional associations lack the institutional arrangement to respond to this growing demand in a structured and coordinated way. Finally, the multitude of training activities provided through public and private training institutions are often not coordinated, leading to overlaps, duplication and/or gaps. This has contributed to the inefficient and ineffective use of scarce resources and lack of a strategic coherence across activities. The stakeholders represented at the conference—city leaders, policy makers, technical experts, civil society, and professional institutions—emphasized the urgent need for establishing a structured collaborative platform which, through its learning and knowledge functions, can help build strong urban governance structures; plan and manage urban spatial development; and assist local governments in the implementation of successful projects and programs. Such a platform can also curate and accelerate the dissemination, adoption and/or scaling up of best practices and good policies.

18. Furthermore, the creation of the center of excellence for urban development is also timely. Over the past three decades, Bangladesh has attempted to implement decentralization reforms to promote and strengthen local governance⁴. While reforms have encountered some resistance since Bangladesh is still highly centralized, there appears to be growing support for decentralization and an awareness that strengthening local governments would be in the key interest of the country. By empowering local governments through its capacity building programs, the CEUD will also contribute to advancing decentralization. As such, a properly structured and adequately resourced center of excellence for urban development, as envisaged above, is both timely and groundbreaking.

E. Operationalizing the CEUD

19. The conference generated a strong momentum for the formalization and operationalization of the CEUD. Immediately following the event, the World Bank convened a follow-up meeting with the CEUD Working Group on October 30, 2017 to discuss the way forward. International professional associations present at the conference were invited to explore networking opportunities with the CEUD. The meeting set the foundation for operationalizing the CEUD.

- During the meeting, CEUD partner institutions re-affirmed their commitment to work together to strengthen the capacity of cities and municipalities to improve urban management. They also reiterated their common interest to build on the momentum from the conference to address priority issues to promote sustainable urban development. They welcomed the opportunity to partner with international professional institutions to bring in global best practices.
- The CEUD Working Group agreed to begin work to register the organization with the appropriate government authority. As part of this, through a series of consultation with its members over the last year, it has prepared a draft Charter and By-Laws and is working on an operational manual.

⁴ The Local Government Commission in 1996 recommended specific steps which resulted in three new acts - the Local Government (Union Parishad) Act 1997, the Upazilla Parishad Act 1998, and the Zilla Parishad Act 2000.

- The Bank shared examples of organizational arrangements, terms of reference for staffing positions, business models, and templates for partnership agreements.
- MAD highlighted the importance of a training needs assessment to better target the type of technical assistance that can be provided to the Pourashavas. Such an assessment will be an important milestone in the preparation of the CEUD training strategy and work plan.
- The meeting explored networking opportunities with the associations present. ICMA indicated that it could provide: (a) short term assistance of three to four weeks to prepare the training needs assessment; and (b) long-term technical support once the work program is identified. ICMA also highlighted its existing collaboration with MAB under which they are jointly preparing a project proposal. ICMA could also provide expertise on a pro-bono basis, (with some support on the travel expense) as demanded by the partners. Similarly, APA would be willing to collaborate with the CEUD on learning and knowledge programs, including guidance on a professional certification program. They encouraged the CEUD to participate in global events, such as the World Urban Forum. It is worthwhile noting that since the meeting, ICMA and APA have followed up with the World Bank on the next steps.
- The IPPUC could organize structured study tours for mayors and organize training for urban professionals. However, it is important to ensure that participants return to work to apply their training and contribute to the work program of the CEUD.
- While not present at the meeting, both the League of Cities of the Philippines and the Galing Pook Foundation offered support to the CEUD. The former welcomed knowledge exchanges with MAB members on good practices in urban governance and management. For its part, the Galing Pook Foundation could provide support in developing the champion city awards program introduced by the CEUD at the conference. It also encouraged the CEUD to become a member of the Global Public Innovations Network.

E. Next Steps

20. To move up within the middle-income bracket, Bangladesh will need to remove the barriers to higher growth posed by low access to reliable and affordable infrastructure, limited availability of serviced land, rapid urbanization and extreme vulnerability to climate change and natural disasters, among other. Building the capacity of urban LGIs to tackle these challenges will be critical. The conference validated the demand for structured, coordinated and sustained capacity building support to local governments. The launch of the CEUD is an important step in this direction. The actions needed to operationalize CEUD are outlined in the 2019-2020 CEUD Indicative Work Program Table below.

CEUD Indicative Work Program 2019-2020		
Activity	Sub-Activities	Date
Organized knowledge exchanges/training for CEUD Working Group*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Webinars and knowledge exchanges for the CEUD Working Group organized (e.g., with ICMA, APA, IPPUC, League of Cities of the Philippines, Galing Pook, etc.) 	Start in March 2019
Registration and Set Up of the CEUD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Charter and By-Laws Adopted • Legal Registration Completed • Key Positions filled • Operational Manual prepared • 18-month work plan and budget prepared 	Completed by end-October 2019
Training Needs Assessment (TNA)*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Methodology and scope agreed • TNA conducted, and results analyzed 	Completed by end-August 2019
Capacity Development Strategy*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity development strategy prepared based on needs assessment and stakeholder consultation. • Evaluation methodology designed 	Completed by end-October 2019
Roll out of capacity building strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Webinars, S-S and N-S knowledge exchanges, on-demand technical assistance, training and knowledge management 	Start in December 2019
Financial Sustainability Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial sustainability strategy prepared and adopted 	Completed by end-January 2020
Marketing campaigns for CEUD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1st round of marketing campaign (March 2020) • 2nd round of marketing campaign (September 2020) 	Two rounds (March 2020 and September 2020)
2020-2022 Budgeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detailed budget for remaining period of 2020 and subsequent rolling 3-year budget prepared 	Completed by end-May 2020
1 st Six-months assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key performance indicators developed • Structured assessment against agreed KPIs conducted 	Completed by end-July 2020
2 nd Six-months assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structured assessment against agreed KPIs conducted 	Completed by end-February 2021

*These activities can be started before the CEUD is legally constituted.

21. Finally, as previously mentioned, this project has two phases. Phase 1 established the rationale for the CEUD. The organization of the conference, and events leading to it, validated the demand for the learning and knowledge services envisaged under the CEUD. The second phase will focus on the operationalization of the CEUD. The activities outlined in the above table lay the roadmap for the operation of the CEUD and provide for a financial sustainability plan to carry it beyond the period of the project.

Annexes:

1. MoU between the WB and CEUD Partners
2. Conference Brochure
3. Conference Proceedings
4. WB Press Release
5. Picture from the Inaugural Session

February 12, 2019