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Coordination of urban planning organizations as a process of achieving effective and socially just planning: A case of Dhaka city, Bangladesh

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Abstract

Urban planning and development management in developing countries were restructured following the basic notion of decentralization. Dhaka has a number of other municipalities and rural bodies, which are within its functional jurisdiction under different forms of decentralization. Theoretically it has been assumed in different literature that decentralization promotes good governance for achieving effective and socially just planning. However, this paper argues that coordination of urban planning is essential for such attainment, which is not essentially an output of decentralization. Rather reviewing the case of Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan, it is evident that there is an ongoing conflict among different actors for promoting planned urban development in Dhaka city. But in the era of participatory planning for promoting social justice, the commencement of coordinated development is essential. In this regard, this study is an attempt to understand the importance of coordination for effective and socially just planning in Dhaka city of Bangladesh. © 2015 The Gulf Organisation for Research and Development. Production and hosting by Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Management plan; Metropolitan development; Participation; Social justice; Town planning

1. Introduction

Effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and social justice are some of the major tenets upon which development initiatives are devised, proposed, designed, implemented and monitored. The achievement (or deficit) of the aforementioned tenets is a manifestation of the organizational and institutional relations – both intra and inter-operating within a given intervention's context. Therefore,

promoting better coordination is the major task to ensure social justice through planning. Urban planning organizational coordination means integration of a broad array of interests within and beyond the city scale for policy-making and implementation processes. Coordination of urban planning organizations is a process of achieving good urban governance for promoting social justice (Feiock, 2009). Numerous studies have been conducted in this research field to find out a good coordination set-up under which urban planning decisions and tasks would run in a coordinated and uninterrupted manner. The intention of such coordination was to promote good governance. However, good governance was institutionalized

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in developing countries through the process of democratic decentralization¹. In the field of urban planning in developing countries, it was assumed that initiation of delegated planning organization could ensure better coordination for promoting good governance. However, these assumptions have never been tested through empirical evidences.

Urban planning organizational coordination is one of the pressing issues of Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, responsibility sharing is a major planning problem, particularly, overlapping of functions in urban areas. It has been found that several organizations are doing the same work. The main reason for such a situation is that each organization works under a separate ministry, which affects the development plans having the absence of role casting principle. Dhaka is the primate city and the national capital of Bangladesh with a population of 10 million. The overwhelming rate of urbanization in Dhaka city is perceived due to the major source of formal employment with corresponding informal employment. But along with the rate of urbanization the failure of state in terms of its planning ability is putting down the city into deteriorating living conditions, where the access to services and facilities is not socially just.

In terms of planning the central planning organization is Capital Development Authority (RAJUK) that is responsible for planning and implementation. This organization was established following the global trend of democratic decentralization. This organization is a delegated organization for the planning and management of urban affairs of Dhaka city of Bangladesh. From its inception the organization is preparing several plans for the development of Dhaka. The recent planning package named as Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan (DMDP) was prepared in 1995 for the time period 1995–2015 by RAJUK for its entire 1530 sq. km area. But in its implementation the plan is not successful because of lack of coordination among different agencies of government. There is no policy of integration in DMDP that may lead to shared common goals and objectives among the different organizations. In addition DMDP failed to separate the roles and responsibilities of different organizations through effective role casting. Hence, DMDP disregards the spatial dimensions of coordinating the development and management of Dhaka city.

¹ *Jonhson and Henry (2004)* suggested the organizational arrangement for decentralization in four ways; namely as deconcentration, delegation, devolution and privatization. Whereas, deconcentration is the handing over of some amount of administrative authority or responsibility to lower levels within central government ministries and agencies. Another organizational arrangement for decentralization is delegation, which transfers managerial responsibility for specifically defined functions to organizations that are outside the regular bureaucratic structure and that are only indirectly controlled by the central government. When deconcentration and delegation works effectively, then to spread up the benefit of democratic government devolution is necessary. Devolution is the creation or strengthening—financially or legally—of sub national units of government, the activities of which are substantially outside the direct control of the central government. In the process of decentralization it assumes privatization as a tool for providing services and facilities.

In the above context, lack of coordination among planning organizations at different tiers of Government is a specific problem area of strategic urban management in Dhaka city. Therefore this research explores the debate whether decentralization can promote coordination among urban planning organizations through a delegated urban planning (RAJUK of Dhaka city, Bangladesh) organization to achieve effective and socially just planning.

2. Promoting social justice through better coordination

The question of social justice arrives from the notion of inequality in planning. Inequality is embedded with injustice, which arrives from the unequal access to basic resources and services that hinders the opportunity and potentials of individual (*Satterthwaite, 2001*). To combat inequality, redistribution can be the area of intervention, whereas redistribution has to be considered as a process as *Harvey (2009)* mentioned ‘Just distribution justly arrived at’. That’s why redistribution will not only encompass the equal access to resource rather it has to be operationalized in the process of decision making that recognizes power relations and effective participation. If we consider social justice only in a redistributive manner it will mislead the process as an outcome only. The problem of inequality that is causing injustice lies under institutional context and social relations that cause power and structural phenomenon of domination (*Young, 1990*). Thus the problem remains in public actions without answering the questions for whom, by whom and how the decisions are being made and implemented. Redistribution of wealth and income is not all about social justice; rather it is enacted with the ‘mode of production’. Thus social justice is not merely redistributing wealth and income rather it is the process to recognize power relations and participation in planning which ensures good governance.

However, the changing definition of governance and good governance has emerged with the changing nature of the political and economic situation. The over changing definitions turned into a new dimension when the developing countries went forward to cope up with the challenges of globalization. The transformation occurred to cope up with the challenges of globalization. While, those cities that globalize bring checks and balances of competition (e.g., FDI, credit markets) in terms of restructuring city governance. Apart from these changing definitions of governance the concept of good governance was evolved in transition. The fundamental transformation to promote good governance emerged in two ways. Firstly, the perceived success of market economies and inefficiencies of state enterprises and secondly, the abuses of authoritarian regimes. In this conflictive arena in different literature democratic decentralization was put forward as a means for promoting good governance. It is perceived by *Jonhson and Henry (2004)* that the goal of democratic decentralization is stakeholders’ participation. Moreover participation of different stakeholders is the fundamental

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