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Public Participation in the Formulation of DMDP: A Procedural Framework

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Abstract

Dhaka, the capital and the largest metropolitan city of Bangladesh, has remained as a polluted, congested, unsafe and unhealthy megacity due to its long and consistent unplanned growth and development. An environmentally sustainable, climate resilient and socially equitable urban development plan is very vital for a livable Dhaka. Engaging public at an early stage of preparing the plan and throughout the planning process is essential for achieving the planning outcomes (i.e., sustainable development solutions); furthermore effective public participation is needed not only to identify the planning problems but also to build consensus to resolve them. The level of participation (i.e., power given to citizen in the decision-making process) supported by the institutional/regulatory/legal mandate as well as agency policy also influence the outcomes of public participation. The purpose of this study is to (1) review literature on public participation in urban planning, (2) identify key issues and challenges that may undermine participatory planning, and finally (3) provide a framework on how to integrate public participation into the steps of Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan (DMDP) formulation process. The procedural framework addresses the purpose of participation as well as tools/techniques that may be employed for such participation in each phase (stage) of the DMDP formulation process.

Keywords: Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan (DMDP); Public Participation; Procedural Framework, Level of Participation, Detailed Area Plan

1 Introduction

Dhaka is an unplanned mega city and has been growing very rapidly in recent decades. In the last 100 years or so, a number of long-range plans (i.e., 1917 conceptual plan by Patrick Geddes; first Master Plan of 1959; Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan, DMDP: 1995-2015 etc.) have been formulated for Dhaka (RAJUK, 2015). These planning efforts could be termed as very poorly articulated technical and political exercise. Continuous failure of planning initiatives led Dhaka to grow primarily organically and emerge as a polluted, congested, unsafe and unhealthy megacity. The ongoing long-range plan (DMDP:2016-2035) was initiated by RAJUK in July 2015 (RAJUK, 2015). It is a multi-sectoral strategic development plan for Dhaka Metropolitan Area (DMA). The total area of DMA is 1528 sq. km covering portions of Dhaka, Narayanganj and Gazipur districts. It is a three-tiered plan consisting of Structure Plan (SP), Urban Area Plan (UAP) and Detailed Area Plan (DAP).

The SP is a long-term (20 years) planning policy document that sets goals, objectives and policies for future sectoral developments; the UAP is a midterm strategy (10 years) that translates long-term structure plan policies into sketch level sectoral development proposals; and the DAP (5 years) formulates detailed plans (set of actions/projects) for immediate implementation. In the formulation of DAP, RAJUK (RAJUK 2021; RAJUK 2022), with the help of consultants, conducted non-binding public participation exercises (including meetings/workshops; seminars, focus group discussion) at various local jurisdictions (i.e., city corporations, union perished/municipalities) where elected officials such as mayors, word councilors, representatives from professional and trade organizations, journalist forums, environmental activists, general public etc. are attended. However, how public inputs (i.e., recommendations and concerns) are taken into consideration in the formulation of DAP is unclear. Furthermore, as per the Town Improvement (TI) Act of 1953 (TIA, 1953) (article/clause 73(4)), public inputs/comments were sought on the draft DAP (i.e., at the final stage of DAP) for a period of 60

days between 6 September, 2020 and 4 November 2020 before making DAP a law on August 23, 2022. Thus, the current practice of DMDP is that major planning decisions are made before public inputs are sought and public comments at the last minute provide very little opportunity to critically examine the plan or it becomes very costly to alter the fundamental plan as per comments with resulting additional debate, dispute/disagreement and lawsuits/litigations.

The purpose of this study is to (1) review literature on public participation in urban planning, (2) identify key issues and challenges that may undermine participatory planning, and finally (3) provide a framework on how to integrate public participation into the steps of Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan (DMDP) formulation process. The procedural framework addresses the purpose of participation as well as tools/techniques that may be employed for such participation in each phase (stage) of DMDP formulation process.

2 Public Participation: A Review

Public participation has been recognized as a tool for inclusive, equitable, resilient and sustainable urban development. For instance, the World Bank defined participation “...as a process through which stakeholders’ influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them” (WB 1994). The UN-Habitat defined participation as: “...the process of decision-making and problem solving, involving individuals and groups who represent diverse interests, expertise and points of view and who act for the good of all those affected by the decisions they make and the actions that follow” (Fisher 2001). “Agenda 21- a program of actions” signed at the 1992 Rio conference on Environment and Development (also called Rio Summit) advocated for a community driven development approach with broadest possible participation (Agenda 21, 1992). And most recently, the United Nations 2030 agenda (UN, 2015) further reinforced for “inclusive, participatory and sustainable urbanization”.

2.1 Evolution of Participation in Urban Planning: A Brief Overview

As part of a social problem, urban planning problems are complex and often viewed as “wicked problems” (Balassiano, 2011) and the dominant rational (procedural) planning model of the 20th century is a structured methodological exercise based on several key sequential steps including (1) systems and situation analysis, (2) setting goals and objectives, (3) identifying and scientifically evaluating set of solutions and preferred alternative, and receiving post implementation feedback (Meyerson and Edward, 1995). This kind of model often results in inflexible and unrealistic solutions due to ignorance of socio-political aspects and thus, such plans often face implementation challenges. Since 1950s, researchers, activists and professionals mostly in the western societies (i.e., USA, UK and Germany etc.) started to criticize rational planning model (top down procedural approach of systems analysis and decision making) as undemocratic and unrealistic and thus, such approach cannot fulfill citizens need (Levy, 2016). An alternative approach to rational planning is that public participation helps resolve many complex urban planning problems (i.e., setting realistic vision, goals, and objectives; identification of issues and selection of preferred alternative etc.) and support inclusive development (i.e., address the concerns of urban poor’s/slum dwellers socioeconomic development needs). Consequently, non-hierarchical (bottom-up) planning models emphasizing public participation (i.e., truly empowering public) has been emerged (Mäntysalo, 2005). However, participatory planning to be successful: (1) it requires transparent and accountable process for building trust among parties; (2) there must be a legal mandate and agency commitment in meeting the legitimate interest of all stakeholders through acceptable proactive participation process (i.e., through partnering with the public in making collaborative decision). Although participatory urban planning has been well recognized in developed nations, however, in many developing democracies such as in Bangladesh it is yet to be recognized formally (Rahman 2008; RAJUK, 2021, 2022).

2.2 Degree (Spectrum) of Participation and Participation Tools

Considering the level of power given to public in the planning decision making process, Arnstein (1969) proposed a ladder of participation starting from basic information sharing (non-participation) to involving public (full participation) with full empowerment to make decisions. She further categorized participation as non-participation, degrees of tokenism, and degrees of citizen power. At a later time, Scott Davidson (1998) used the term “wheel of participation” for similar proposes. Furthermore, the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2 2018) proposed five public engagement levels (namely inform, consult, involve, collaborate, and empower) for community development with the increasing influence of public in the decision-making process. To be successful, participation process must be impartial (i.e., it must empower marginalized/vulnerable people) and a balanced participatory approach is needed to make a realistic decision (i.e., to find a compromised solution by resolving conflict of interest among stakeholders). Both the purpose of public participation and the level of participation (i.e., power given to public in the decision making process) are factors in the selection of participation tools. Thus the process itself and associated methods/tools need to be defined/selected very carefully. Table-1 shows a spectrum (level) of participation along with the purpose of participation and corresponding participation tools. Depending on the purpose of participation at each stage of DMDP and the

level of power that RAJUK wants to delegate to public for such participation through a legal mandate (i.e., an appropriate legislation), Table-1 can be utilized as a guide for selection of appropriate participation tools.

The participatory tools and techniques shown in Table-1 can broadly be categorized as traditional tools and technology/internet based emerging tools (Petts and Leach, 2000; Evans-Cowley and Hollander, 2010; Seltzer and Dillon, 2013). The key considerations given in the selection of participation tools include: goals (purpose) of participation, availability of resources (budget and trained manpower), convenient location and time for targeted participants, sufficient time allocation for participation and providing comments (Cogan, 1992). However, for a widest possible participation, both traditional and technology based emerging tools are generally utilized (Petts and Leach, 2000; Evans-Cowley and Hollander, 2010).

A number of tools can be utilized for public education and outreach purpose including newsletter, webpage, hotline, public meetings, articles in newspapers, use of TV and radio to disseminate planning information. Regarding technology based tools, Public Participation GIS (PPGIS, also called internet GIS) tool has been emerged as a very useful planning and participation tool that may be used to involve wider group of people including marginalized/ vulnerable people. The strength of PPGIS is that it can be used to retrieve and visualize planning data, disseminate information, perform spatial analysis, assess planning issues, build consensus, and provide opinions (make recommendations/decision etc.) (Healey, 1997; Doyle et al, 1998; Muro-Medrano et al, 1999; Peng and Beimborn, 1998; Sarjakoski, 1998; Al-Kodmany 2001; Bugs et al. 2010; Elwood 2002; Ghose and Huxhold 2001; Hall et al. 2009; Lowery and Morse 2013; Sawicki and Peterman 2002). However, ensuring access to internet particularly to marginalized/ vulnerable groups is a major challenge. Furthermore, from a local context, the fundamental challenges of public participation include: (1) getting needed support for public participation and collaborative decision making from the British inherited traditional bureaucratic/administrative and political culture and practices; (2) getting required resources (i.e., time, cost and trained facilitators etc.) for participation under the current trend of ever increasing annual development budget deficits; and (3) creating public awareness (i.e., mainstreaming participation, outreaching public) as well as educating public (i.e., building social capital) for participatory decision making purpose.

Table 1: Purpose and tools of public participation.

(Note: Redeveloped by the Author: Adapted from Arnsteein, 1969; IAP2, 2018 with some modifications)

Nature of Participation	Degree of Public Participation	Purpose	Common Tools/Techniques
No participation	Inform (unidirectional Communication)	Information discrimination	Informational meetings; hotlines; media/news/social media
Passive Participation	Consult (bidirectional Communication)	Information/ comments received	Public opinion survey; public hearing/comments ; focus group discussion/workshops/seminars (Zoom/Google meet); Public participation GIS/web-GIS
	Involve	Negotiation (public engage in tradeoff with the authority)	Citizen panels; expert panels
Active Participation	Collaborate (multi-stakeholders; Multi-way)	Delegation of certain powers to public	Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) tools; Roundtable; Citizen Advisory Board
	Empower	Public takes full control/decides	Citizen juries; Ballots;

3 Integration of Public Participation at Various Stages of DMDP Formulation Process

Engaging public (including individuals, government agencies and elected officials, advocacy groups/private sectors/NGOs, civil society organizations, business communities etc) at an early stage of the plan and throughout the planning process (setting vision, goals and objectives; identifying problems; selecting development alternatives and preferred solution, plan implementation and post implementation evaluation and feedback etc. etc) is essential for achieving planning outcomes (i.e., sustainable development solutions); furthermore effective public participation is needed not only to identify the planning problems but also to build consensus to resolve them. In general, community level (word council) participation would be needed to resolve local problems and city level multi-stakeholder-based participation would be needed to develop policy guidelines (i.e., for setting vision, goals, objectives, policies and principles etc) for long-term sectoral developments.

At each stage of plan formulation/development process, not only that the purpose of participation could be different but also the tools for participation may change. As discussed earlier, the tools of participation also depend on how much power is given to public in the participatory decision-making process. Table-2 shows the recommended purpose of participation at various stages of the DMDP process.

At the onset of DMDP Structure plan (Tier-1) under the plan formulation stage, active public participation is very vital for setting vision, goals, objective, principles and policies through consensus building. Thus, a “collaborate” level of participation is recommended. At other stages of planning (such as UAP, DAP, plan implementation and post implementation), public participation would be needed for more creative and just/equitable solutions (i.e., resolving socio-economic and environmental conflicts/disputes) through local inputs and knowledge. Thus, “involve” to “collaborate” level of participation is desirable. Under any circumstances the level of participation must not be at the level of “inform”.

Table 2: Purpose of participation at various stages of DMDP formulation process.

Planning Stage		Purpose of Participation
Plan Formulation	Tier 1: The Structure Plan (SP)	Setting (formulation of) vision, goals, objectives, principles policies, etc
	Tier 2: The Urban Area Plan (UAP)	Development of sectoral/multi-sectoral conceptual plans including land use (zoning) and economic development plan
	Tier 3: The Detailed Area Plan (DAP)	Formulations of detailed plans (projects/actions to be taken) for regional and local areas (issues requiring consensus building may include footpath/road development, open space/play ground, parking requirements, drainage, zoning (Floor Area Ratio), building height, setback, block development etc)
Plan Implementation (Design and construction phase)		Implementations of Programs and Projects (issues requiring consensus building many include design, construction, operations, management etc)
Post Implementation		Review (monitoring, evaluation, lessons lean, and feedback)

4 Conclusions and Recommendations

Participatory urban planning is a widely recognized bottom-up approach for urban planning and it is needed for environmentally sustainable, climate resilient and socially equitable (i.e., to bring equity/eradicate poverty, improve slum etc.) urban development in Bangladesh. However, the current practice of DMDP is that major planning decisions are made before public inputs are sought and public comments (participation) at the last minute provide very little opportunity to critically examine the plan and/or it becomes very costly to alter the fundamental plan as per comments with resulting additional debate, dispute/disagreement and lawsuits/litigations. This study recommends that urban planning process in Bangladesh should consider shifting paradigm from its current top-down approach (scientific and procedural exercise by trained experts) to a formally recognized (i.e. legally binding) bottom-up approach (community driven solution with support from technical experts) by integrating public participation into the stages/steps of DMDP formulation process. Key challenges of participation from a local context are identified and a general guideline for selecting appropriate participation tools (depending on the purpose of participation at each stage of DMDP and the level of power that RAJUK wants to delegate to public legally in the decision making process) is provided.

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