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Dhaka City Split Up: Rationales, Challenges and Prospects as a Sustainable City

Abstract

The main objective of this study is to analyse the rationales, challenges and prospects of Dhaka City split up from the context of a sustainable city grounded in relevant theories and widely used standards. We cited opinions of urban planners and politicians and used relevant theories and standards to achieve the objective. An assessment of the divided Dhaka city alongside the City Development Strategies shows considerable deficiencies in most aspects of public goods and services provisions. Whilst Dhaka city split up supports "World City Hypotheses" it is not without criticisms such as those raised by the urban planners and experts and politicians. The lack of resources and overseeing to address those deficiencies and problems and the administrative, allocative, economic and social inefficiencies makes it very difficult for the Dhaka city authorities to achieve sustainable urbanisation objective. Therefore, stringent decisions and appropriate strategies must be taken by Bangladesh government to resolve the problems, inefficiencies and mismanagement of the cities to make the city living attractive to and sustainable for the inhabitants.

Key words: *Dhaka city split up; rationales, challenges and prospects; aspects of sustainable urbanization; City Development Strategies, "World City Hypotheses"*

Introduction

Presently, half of the world's megacities are in the Asia-Pacific while Asia has 7 out of 10 of the most populous megacities in the world (UN-HABITAT, 2010). Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, is well known as the fastest growing megacity of the world (German and Pyne, 2010). The estimated current population of Dhaka is 15.39 million (United Nations, 2012) and it is ranked 9th among the world's megacities (World Bank, 2010). During the last four decades, Dhaka has recorded phenomenal growth in both population and area (United Nations, 2006). Although Dhaka's growth rate has declined slightly in recent years, the United Nations still projects that by 2025 it will have grown into the world's eighth largest city with a population of around 23 million (United Nations, 2012). Dhaka's 14.65 million people live in just 325 km^2. At more than 45,000 people per km^2, the capital of Bangladesh is nearly 75 percent denser than Hong Kong (Cox, 2012). According to City Mayors Statistics, the GDP of Dhaka was registered at $52 billion in 2005 with an annual growth rate of 6.1 percent. The projected GDP of Dhaka in the year 2020 is $126 billion (District Statistics (2011). The annual per capita income of the city is estimated at $1,350, with 34 percent of households living below the poverty line (Asian City Development Strategies, 2000). According to Bangladesh Poverty Maps (2010), the poverty rate in the Dhaka city is 30.5 percent while Forbes Media (2013) estimated the per capita GDP of the Dhaka city residents at US$3,100. Describing the current status of Dhaka city in its Development Series paper, the World Bank (2007, p. xiii) stated, "The country does not have a comprehensive policy on urbanisation and urban poverty. There are between 16 and 40 different bodies involved in one way or another in urban matters in Dhaka with little coordination and planning. As a result, there are major gaps in services and infrastructure ranging from weak electrical supply to inadequate land and housing options, and major traffic congestion. The poor are particularly affected as they do not have the resources to find alternatives for meeting their basic needs. While a new committee for Urban Development was set up and has achieved some progress in the coordination process, it focuses on solving day-to-day problems and not on medium to long term strategy."

However, urban planners and city administrators always faced challenges in ensuring an equitable growth for Dhaka, partly because of certain unique and challenging characteristics of urbanization in Bangladesh. As many as 60 percent of the urban population of Bangladesh live in only four cities and are at risk of natural disaster and climate change impacts (Intellecap, 2012). In Dhaka, the country's capital, 37 percent of the city's population live on 5 percent of available land (Intellecap, 2012). The average population density in slums is 831 persons per acre, which is seven times higher than that of national average (Hossain, 2014). Further compounding the problem, only 5-6 percent areas of the city have been used for roads against the worldwide average of 25 percent, causing severe traffic congestion (Intellecap, 2012). Mismanagement and lack of vision by city administrators also contributed to the sufferings of Dhaka dwellers. From infrastructure perspectives, roads are in dilapidated conditions, pavements are either missing or illegally occupied by street vendors, traders and house builders and public transport facilities are too inadequate to meet the demands of an ever-burgeoning population. The recent Rana Plaza collapse in Savar, a sub-district in the greater Dhaka area, resulted in an official death toll of 1,127 and an injury of approximately 2,500 garment workers. With many more people working in the building are still unaccounted for, this tragedy tells us how vulnerable the migrated poor and marginalised communities in the city are. City growth results in split up, which we consider as an emerging trend, especially in the developing and emerging countries like Bangladesh.

There is also a crisis of utility services like water, gas and electricity (Imam, 2011). Under the backdrop of these ongoing perils, the government of Bangladesh decided to amend the Local Government (City Corporation) Act 2009 and split Dhaka into two administrative zones, Dhaka North and Dhaka South (Figure 1) in November 2011. Our observation reveals that even before the Dhaka city was split up the city authorities were facing a lot of socioeconomic, political and demographic challenges. The same circumstances we observed for the city inhabitants who were facing a lot of problems including lack of access to public amenities and utilities, among others. The city authorities and officials were also blamed for corruptions, inefficiencies and mismanagement in all aspects of their administration, management and service provisions. This study is an effort to critically analyse the rationales, challenges and prospects of Dhaka City split up as a sustainable city. It also provides a brief assessment of Dhaka city split up in terms of the aspects of sustainable urbanization and the effective City Development Strategies. We also analysed "World City Hypotheses" in the context of Dhaka city split up. We believe that this assessment will in turn complement into our efforts to address the above research questions in a more comprehensive and coherent way.



Figure 1. Map of Dhaka city after split in 2011 (Source: The Daily Star, 2011)

Theoretical Underpinning and Literature Review

There are empirical cases in which the split of cities is supported by the scholars for good. Many scholars have discoursed on the issue of splitting up of cities that drives from the ground of politics, economics and geographic reasons (Brenner, 2004a, 2004b; Keating, 1998, 2001). The splitting up process is also relevant within the metropolitan cities that suggests division of administrative unit into small or sub-units to integrate and strengthen the capacity of decision-making process and subsequent implementation (Denters & Rose, 2005; Stoker, 2004). The concept of merging boundaries to create comprehensive administration for large metropolitan becomes obsolete (Bish, 2001). However, in 20th century, many of the world cities e.g., Tokyo, Toronto, New York, Shanghai, Hongkong, adopted the amalgamation of boundaries to capture the metropolises growth and development and to govern those cities effectively (Savitch & Vogel, 2000, 2006). For instance, metropolitan reforms including amalgamation of boundaries, and transformation and reestablishment of administrative units took place due to the contemporary needs. In 1998, Toronto Metro was merged with Toronto, London expanded into Greater London in 2000, many administrative wards assimilated with central Tokyo in 1998, all these represent good example of metropolitan reform. However, nowadays, hierarchical governance in the large metropolitan area is a rare example. The development of regional governments is believed to be a balanced setup in the west to emphasize the strategic development. A good example of this arrangement is the establishment of Greater London Authority (Lefe`vre, 1998). Similarly, the Toronto also adopted the amalgamation of metro and cities from the former hierarchical setup. The examples can be extended for other cities such as Hong Kong, Shanghai and Tokyo where the large-scale city administration is in operation.

However, in practice, the boundary of a metropolitan parallelly depends on the scale of urbanisation. Since scale of urbanization has no limit, we observe a regular inclination to integrate urbanisation into the metropolitan boundary by developing harmonised governance mechanism. Thus, the purpose of amalgamation is to address and provide infrastructures and services beyond the border of a single city, region, and state (Vogel, 2010).

With the momentum raised of the level of worldwide globalisation, research on metropolitans has continued to develop around the world (Douglass, 2000; Friedmann and Wolff, 1986; Friedmann, 1988; Clark, 1996; Godfrey and Zhou, 1999; Hill and Kim, 2000; Knox and Taylor, 1995; Lo and Yeung, 1996; Sassen, 1991; Sharpe, 1995; Short et al, 1996; Taylor, 1997). But literature is silent on whether the growth and developments and the increase in population of the megacities around the world, especially in developing Asia, have caused split up in them, particularly in the last few decades. What we observed is that, about splitting up of megacities, ample of studies gives attention entirely on ranking of global cities based on economic characterization. This undermines the issue of sustainable urbanism and quality of life and living. But some exceptions are the studies by Douglass (2000), Lo and Marcotullio (2000, 2001) and Marcotuillio (2001) that discussed the living standard and urban sustainability issues relating to cities, but not from the context of city split up. Literature also exhibits that only a few scholars have studied on account of sustainable development of world cities, for instance, challenges of sustainability in Asian cities (Ng & Hills, 2003; Douglass, 2000, p 2326), globalization and urban sustainability (Lo & Marcotullio, 2000, 2001). However, as Marcotullio (2001, p 577) argues, "the process of achieving urban sustainable development is uncharted". Though the major metropolitan cities in Asia e.g., Tokyo, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Taipei, Singapore lead the global economic race, the sustainable urban development remain challenging to these cities (Ng & Hills, 2003). The literature on Dhaka city specifically its sustainability and quality of life issues are also surprisingly thin. Despite a proliferate of literature on Dhaka city, most of these studies underline slum and squatter populations isolating the issue of sustainability in holistic manners (Hossain, 2013).

Friedmann (1988) disagrees with the concept of amalgamation and advocates splitting up of cities due to administrative necessities. He also emphasizes on economic, social and political causes that lead to physical restructure of cities. Discussions in the previous section reveal that Dhaka city split up has divided the nation and resulted in political conflicts between the government and opposition parties. In addition to that, service delivery has sharply declined due to predominance of muscle use by local leader, party member, and ward commissioner. All these individuals with service officials form an oligarchy to earn money by means of corruption that deprives the mass to obtain basic urban services (Hossain, 2013). Corruptions, crimes, political killings and violation of media and public rights in Dhaka city top the news headlines of Bangladesh dailies and the law and order situation especially in the city is also blamed for not functioning as expected. In other words, the Dhaka metropolitan area has ascended to as a place of organized crime in the form of financial, social, and environmental by the affluent class (Hossain, 2013). Class struggle remains acute among the quelled sections in the city. The rightful demand against the capitalist monsters by large suppressed group can easily subsidence through paid gangsters. And all these are supposedly linked with political affiliation— a popular malpractice among the oligarchic groups (Hossain, 2013). However, our observation from globally comprehensive literature review suggests that the split up of cities in the developed countries has shown remarkable development achieving administrative, allocative, economic and social efficiencies in any case. In those countries, the vulnerability of splitting metropolitan governance often turns up as obvious threat that may diminish

competitiveness of the regional economy (Benjamin & Nathan, 2001; Brenner, 2004a, 2004b). As an opposite to splitting up, due to the comprehensive metropolitan feature, New York city stands in a commanding position of offering high economic competitiveness globally. On the other hand, Branscomb (2006) summarized that growth and decay of a city often outpace each other. To ensure quality living standard of the citizens, a proper planning and investment are required, lacking these can lead unsustainable city.

Materials and Method

This is fundamentally a conceptual research study with the key library materials such as relevant refereed journal articles, edited book chapters, refereed conference papers, and articles have been used expensively to substantiate the authors' arguments and achieve the study objectives. Some qualitative data used in the study is secondary in nature, and they have been referenced where applicable. Except those have been referenced duly all other arguments and analysis are of authors' own. No primary data as well as no other quantitative tools and techniques have been used in the study. In the present study, we used the themes of City Development Strategies (CDS), which have been defined by the World Bank and UN-Habitat (sourced from ECON Analysis & Centre for Local Government, UTS 2005). We also used the aspects of sustainable urbanisation, which have been outlined by Saha & Paterson (2008). The above two criteria have been used to briefly assess the sustainable urbanisation merit of and quality of life in two Dhaka cities.

Discussion

This section provides a critical discussion of Dhaka city split up from the context of the possible challenges it might face, and relevant theories developed by the past and recent studies. This is aimed at evaluating the split up of Dhaka city from the contexts of sustainable urbanization and quality of life issues. Then, in this section, we have also provided a brief assessment of both the Dhaka North and Dhaka South cities in terms of the aspects of sustainable urbanisation as outlined by Saha & Paterson (2008) and the effective City Development Strategies (CDS) as defined by World Bank and UN-Habitat (sourced from ECON Analysis & Centre for Local Government, UTS 2005). The last part of this section briefly analyses the "World City Hypotheses" postulated by the world's distinguished urban planners Friedmann and Wolff (1986), in the context of Dhaka city split up. We believe that any split up of a megacity such as Dhaka does not have only major implications in terms of sustainable urbanization and quality of life issues, but this does also considerably result in various development and political consequences. This is because any such move is sometimes triggered by short term political objectives of the government that initiates that split. Thus, our main effort in this study is to critically discuss the Dhaka city split up from the contexts of sustainability and quality of life issues as well as development and political consequences.

Challenges for a Divided Dhaka

The decision and subsequent implementation of splitting Dhaka city into two different and separate administrative zones was a challenging one from the perspectives of benefiting the city dwellers. The main rationale was that with less city area to serve, each DCC's governance would improve and better civic participation could be ensured. However, the rationale is not ideal for an inclusive city concept. Because splitting up of a city may affect the civic services, management of urban features, natural resource use and preservation, and future growth

(Morshed, 2011). In this section, however, we discussed some major challenges that the divided Dhaka cities might experience due to some political, socioeconomic and demographic factors, and our discussion of those challenges has been substantiated by recent and relent studies.

Electoral Politics

It is often problematic when an elected mayor either of Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) or Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) is from the opposition party. Due to the asymmetric political affiliation of a mayor, the administration under the mayor will more likely to be a shaky administration while ruling government may intervene in most of the decisions making. As per the existing political norms of Bangladesh, the elected representatives from the ruling party are assisted with all supports, while the representatives from the opposition party lack necessary resources and administrative tools to be effective. So, if one part of Dhaka receives preferential treatment over the other due to this electoral politics, the city will degenerate into a permanently fragile and divisive urban system (Morshed, 2011).

Asymmetric Visions and Strategies

Even if both the mayors of the two Dhaka city corporations are affiliated with the same political party, there are always possibilities of undertaking uneven strategic visions for city management and development. Historically, the great physical development of cities is always coined with urban administrators who have dynamic vision with authorized power. In the late 1980s, for example, sustainable urbanism initiated by the mayor Jaime Lerner who also implemented a bunch of reforms for the southern Brazilian city of Curitiba. The problem of managing municipal waste was appeared as the most challenging issue to the mayor while he took charge of office. A massive pile up of the household wastes retained on the narrow road became public health concerns. It was almost impossible to collect municipal waste as the waste removal vehicles could not enter the narrow streets. The visionary mayor came up with new and innovative idea of exchanging trash bags for bus passes. The program brought tremendous success to mayor for achieving a clean city which also induced more people to use rapid-transit system (Morshed, 2011). The visionary administrator is, therefore, crucial to design a sustainable and vibrant metropolitan who does not merely focus on providing services, but ensure quality of education, health and accommodation in affordable cost. The administrator is also concerned for ensuring good urban ecology that sufficiently offers recreational green and blue spaces for the residents (Morshed, 2011). With two Dhaka city mayors in office with two different visions, it will be challenging for urban planners to develop a comprehensive urban strategy for the entire city and implement it accordingly.

Centralized City Governance

Although Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) has been divided into DSCC and DNCC, no change has been made in the existing top-down and centralized city governance model. The two city corporations are now divided into many wards (political units), while the ward councillors are not commissioned with enough responsibilities and authorities. If these wards can bring under modern concepts of governance, Dhaka could have been in a better condition in terms of planning, infrastructure management and services. But the lower administrative unit such as ward cannot provide the benefits that the local government is supposed to deliver across the country. The reason is straightforward as the ward councillors had no chance to participate in

ward planning, infrastructure management and services (Ahsan, 2011), resulting a continuation of an inefficient city governance model.

Corruption and Mismanagement

An administration can run efficiently if it ensures good governance and zero corruption. The size of the organization doesn't matter but the quality does matter the most. The quality administration of an organization is referred to a system where employees work with honesty, sincerity, and dedication confirming equity and good governance at all levels. Yet many of the residents in Dhaka city have often been struggling to obtain minimum public amenities due to widespread corruption. The under-table practice appears as a normal routine to the officials and administrators who normally do not entertain customers without seed or speed money for the services are to be delivered. It is not the size of city area or the population density, inhabitants are more concerned about the corruption and mismanagement of the public officials (Imam, 2011). Without any substantial changes in the system and human resources, the old challenges remain in place resulting in deprivation of resources and public amenities for the city residents and inefficiencies in the city management and administration.

The Terrain and Demographic Pattern of Dhaka

Dhaka, as one of the most densely populated cities of the world, is virtually surrounded by rivers that limit its expansion. Even dividing the Dhaka city into more administrative units could not diminish the erupting challenges due to its physical features and anthropogenic pressure. The future growth of population in Dhaka city already intimidates the administrators with more challenges, including lack of resources and inefficient services delivery in traffic management, waste management and healthy environment. This resonates with Islam (2012) in that Dhaka provides a fascinating site for understanding these complexities of emerging urban life. Consequently, no miracle should be expected in the delivery of services (Choudhury, 2011).

Aspects of Sustainable Urbanization

Likewise, if we assess the divided two cities of Dhaka in line with the three key aspects of sustainable urbanization, such as environmental protection, economic development and social and justice equity as outlined by Saha & Paterson (2008) in Table 1, both the cities of Dhaka North and Dhaka South would largely fall behind those sustainability aspects. Out of fourteen criteria for environmental protection, eleven criteria for economic development and eleven criteria for social justice and equity as integrated into the aspects of sustainable urbanization, no single criterion could any of the two Dhaka cities be found as passing the requirement of sustainable urbanization at an acceptable level. Apparently, considerable deficiencies on the part of both Dhaka North and Dhaka South city authorities exist in all the three aspects of sustainable urbanization. Therefore, the authorities of two Dhaka cities must work out how considerable improvements in all the three aspects of urbanization as well as in the related criteria could be done by undertaking policies and strategies and implementing them effectively to ultimately achieve the greater city objectives.

Table 1: The aspects of sustainable urbanization

Environmental Protection	Economic Development	Social Justice and Equity

1. Alternative energy offered to consumers	1. Agricultural protection zoning	1. Affordable housing provisions
2. Energy conservation effort (other than green building requirements)	2. Brownfield reclamation	2. Day-care services for service sector and low-income employees
3. Environmental site design regulations	3. Cluster or targeted economic development	3. Homeless prevention and intervention programs
4. Green building program	4. Eco-industrial park development	4. Inclusionary and incentive zoning
5. Renewable energy use by city government	5. Infill development	5. Jobs–housing balance
6. Curbside recycling program	6. Purchase of development rights and/or transfer of development rights	6. Living wage
7. Environmental education programs for the community	7. Tax incentives for environmentally friendly development	7. Mass transit access with local income subsidies
8. Green procurement	8. Urban growth boundary and/or urban service boundary	8. Neighborhood planning
9. Water quality protection	9. Business retention programs	9. Sustainable food systems or food security programs
10. Environmentally sensitive area protection	10. Empowerment/enterprise zones	10. Women/minority-oriented business Community Development Corporations (CDCs) and investment programs
11. Open space preservation program	11. Local business incubator programs	11. Youth opportunity and anti-gang programs
12. Operation of inner-city public transit (buses and/or trains)		
13. Transportation demand management		
14. Ecological footprint analysis		

Source: Saha & Paterson, 2008.

City Development Strategies (CDS)

We argue that an assessment of the greater Dhaka city, including Dhaka North city and Dhaka South city, alongside the following CDS as defined by the World Bank and UN Habitat (Table 2) would result in large deficiencies in terms of CDS on part of both the city authorities of Dhaka North and Dhaka South. Unless effective city development strategies are taken and then implemented accordingly, the split up of Dhaka into two cities could not by itself reduce those deficiencies. Therefore, what the two Dhaka cities need are to first formulate strategies by aligning them with the themes of CDS and then implement those strategies effectively to achieve the greater city objectives.

Table 2: The themes of City Development Strategies (CDS) defined by the World Bank and UN-Habitat

The World Bank	UN-Habitat
Liveability: the poor achieve a healthy and dignified living standard	Shelter: Adequate housing and basic services; security of tenure; access to land and credit
Competitiveness: buoyant, broad-based growth of employment, incomes and investment	Social Development and Eradication of Poverty: Equal opportunities for a safe and healthy life; social

	integration; support for disadvantaged groups; gender equality
Good governance: inclusion and representation of all groups in the urban society; accountability, integrity and transparency of local government Bankability: sound financial management of local government	Economic Development: Stronger small and micro enterprises; public/private partnerships; access to productive employment Governance: Participation and civic engagement; transparent, accountable and efficient governance; sound financial management; decentralization and strong local authorities Environmental Management: Balanced settlement structures; water management; reducing pollution; disaster prevention; environmentally sound transport; etc.

Source: ECON Analysis & Centre for Local Government, UTS. (2005).

Analysis of "World City Hypotheses" in the Context of Dhaka City Split Up

The "World City Hypotheses" is proposed in 1986 by the distinguished urban planner John Friedmann. According the hypotheses formation of world city put forwards polarisation of urbanization processes and the new international division of labour. Consequently, the polarisation yields social costs at rates that tend to exceed the fiscal capacity of the state. While Dhaka city split up supports the above hypotheses, they are not without criticisms such as the ones raised by the urban planners and experts and politicians. The current government has also cited inefficient coordination and lack of adequate autonomy as the reasons behind splitting up the city into two because of its vast size. But the facts are considerably different as regards to coordination and autonomy. Particularly, the government authorities of the Dhaka city have failed to provide services adequately and efficiently. For example, the semi-autonomous organisations, such as Dhaka Electric Supply Authority (DESA), Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authority (DWASA), Rajdhani Unnayan Kortiporko (RAJUK, i.e. Dhaka Development Authority) and Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) enjoy little autonomy and are noted for corruption and inefficiency (Hossain, 2013). While coordination of government entities with all stakeholders is a sufficient condition to perform better administrative service for a metropolitan, this mechanism is absence in Dhaka City (Hossain, 2013). In fact, most of the prominent metropolitans have well-ordered governance mechanism that ensures economic, social, cultural, and technological advancements. The introspective of such great cities is to provide well-equipped services to the citizens sustaining urban environment (Ng and Hills, 2003). But on every account Dhaka city fails to provide administrative services and living environments adequately and efficiently for its inhabitants and thus split of the city will increase more challenges to the already mounted ones.

Conclusions

This study initiated a research issue which has not been addressed by any other studies thus far. So, our main contribution lies in addressing the research question related to Dhaka city split up and adding in the literature on a mega city split up like the one took place in Dhaka. We believe that the split up of Dhaka into two separate cities would add in further complexities to the already unaddressed problems and inefficiencies it was experiencing. Lack of resources on part of the city authorities to address those problems and their administrative, allocative, economic and social inefficiencies are also undeniable. So, there must be taken stringent decisions and appropriate strategies by Bangladesh government to resolve those problems,

inefficiencies, and mismanagement in order to make the city living attractive to and sustainable for the inhabitants.

Our discussion of Dhaka city split up in the aspects of sustainable urbanisation, City Development Strategies and "World City Hypotheses" is not encouraging. This is mainly due to the problems, challenges and administrative and management issues experienced by the Dhaka city authorities and the city inhabitants as discussed earlier. For the divided Dhaka cities, poor city planning, corrupt administrative practices and development together with huge migration of rural poor and marginalised communities to the city and any political motive behind the splitting could potentially undermine the capacities of the city authorities to attain the administrative, allocative, economic and social objectives, both effectively and efficiently. In fact, cities like Dhaka is believed to be offering opportunities for all. Millions of rural populations migrate to Dhaka city each year to seek livelihood and live here for better life. Similarly, city opportunities are also attractive to the financial elites who want to establish creative businesses and ventures. Therefore, as whole, the city gives the hope of wealth creation to all. The austerity of such city is that it has often failed to manage large populations with their growing demand for various public services and amenities.

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