“STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE
- A CASE STUDY OF MALDA DISTRICT”

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Purpose:

With the passage of the 74th Constitution Amendment Act 1992, there is increasingly more pressure on the Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) to ensure better service delivery to the citizens. Good Governance is one of the essential propositions for providing better service delivery to the citizens, as well as for sustainable development in both economic and social senses. Strategic Planning is a scope and an initiative to address the three essential aspects of good governance, viz. transparency, accountability and responsiveness of the administration. Purpose of this article is to illustrate how improved governance and sustainable development can be achieved together through a strategic planning approach.

Design/methodology/approach:

The essay is based on some direct observation of the methods suggested by various competent authorities for good governance and strategic planning at ULB level. Chapter I try to conceptualise the practice of Good Governance at ULB level in Indian context. Chapter II describes a Case Study considering the theoretical and the practical issues using the examples of the preparation process and the broad outcomes of the Draft Development Plans (2008-09 to 2012-2013) of the two ULBs of the district of Malda. This article attempts to illustrate how improved governance and sustainable development can be achieved together through a strategic planning approach.

Findings:

Good Governance promises public participation in decision-making, accountability, equity and efficiency. These are also the defining characteristics of strategic planning which has the essence of social, economical and environmental sustainability.

Key Words:

Good Governance, Urban Local Bodies (ULBs), Strategic Planning, Bottom Up approach, DDP
STRATEGIC PLANNING: WAY TO GOOD GOVERNANCE AT MUNICIPAL LEVEL

Chapter I: Understanding Good Governance at Urban Local Bodies

I.1 Introduction:

Local government is the directive and management of slender interaction by the inhabitants of the locality through elected representatives. Local government refers to the operations of Municipal corporations, Municipalities, Panchayats which are entrusted with the implementation of functions, relating to and concerning the locality.

Local Self Government is not a new concept in Indian context. Tradition of the local government institutions in India has a long history. The village governments were ancient institutions and were themselves small republics. Although local government existed in India in ancient times, in its present structure and style of functioning, it owes existence to the British rule in India. A beginning of local government in India may be said to have been made in the year 1687.

I.2 Local Governments in India

Then what does Local Body mean? In India, there are three levels of government, viz., local, state and central government. To simplify, we may say that ‘Local Government’ is the first level and is responsible for matters close to local communities.

Indian local governments are basically a State-subject figuring as item 5 in List II of the Seventh Schedule to the Constitution of India. Article 243 G of the Indian Constitution enshrines the basic principle for devolution of power to the Local Bodies. In the nation's journey towards becoming an economic power, Local Body plays an important part in enabling infrastructure availability to the citizens.

Local Body is broadly classified into two categories, such as, the RLBs (Rural Local Bodies) i.e., Panchayats which are constituted for local planning, development and administration in the rural areas; and the ULBs (Urban Local Bodies) i.e., Municipalities, Corporations, which are constituted for local planning, development and administration in the urban areas.

I.3 What does it mean by Good Governance?

Mahatma Gandhi says: Keep your thoughts positive because your thoughts become your words. Keep your words positive because your words become your behaviour. Keep your behaviour positive because your behaviour becomes your habits. Keep your habits positive because your habits become your values. Keep your values positive because your values become your destiny.

And those are the key words behind Good Governance in search of a high-quality surroundings, superior livelihood, and excellent world within a limited globe. Since our county, our India is free, sovereign, we, the citizen of India must be positive in all sense. We must be truthful to ourselves. We must be sensitive to each other. However, there is no accepted definition of governance.
There is divergence of opinion about the meaning of governance between the conservatives and the liberals, between socialists and the communists\(^2\).

For example, Governance is “The traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised” (Kaufman et al); The way “… power is exercised through a country’s economic, political, and social institutions.” (The World Bank’s PRSP Handbook);…. “the exercise of economic, political, and administrative authority to manage a country’s affairs at all levels. It comprises mechanisms, processes, and institutions, through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations, and mediate their differences.”(UNDP).

Making it more logical, we may state that “... that governance is the process – by which authority is conferred on rulers, by which they make the rules, and by which those rules are enforced and modified. Thus, understanding governance requires an identification of both the rulers and the rules, as well as the various processes by which they are selected, defined, and linked together and with the society generally.”\(^2\)

And the term “Good Governance” can be imagined to be associated with democracy and good civil rights, with transparency, with the rule of law, and with efficient public services.\(^3\)\(^b\). Not necessarily, Good Governance is always associated with making “correct” decisions but it is essentially about the best possible process for making those “correct” decisions.

The process of Good Governance is about\(^4\)

- The sustenance of accountability secured by transparency of the government;
- The process of safeguarding the existing rules of law;
- The responsiveness of the government towards its stakeholders as well as the whole community in an apt balanced manner;
- The equitability and inclusive mind-set of the government;
- The liberty of participation of the whole community in the decision making process;
- The efficiency and effectiveness of the government.

Good Governance is not an automatic phenomenon. It is to be put into practice. It should be, in chorus, be offered by the government and demanded by the society in an unremitting manner. There must be no point of saturation as it should be a ceaselessly self improvising process. A strong civil society, unprejudiced judiciary, sensitive government and free press are the prerequisites for initiating the process of Good Governance\(^5\). For sustainable economic development led by economic growth, the process of Good Governance is one of the fundamental requisites. It is simply because that Good Governance may help citizen within its jurisdiction to maximise returns on investment.

Now, for the purpose of our study, we may confine governance only to the local public domain. We are concerned here with that form of governance which provides social security; uphold of law and deliver services ranging from education, health to livelihood and food security to a localised area. Let us concentrate our study within the governance of the Urban Local Body (ULB).

I.4 Urban Local Bodies in Indian context: a Brief Overview

\(^2\) (Singh, 2013)
\(^3\)\(^a\)\(^b\) (The World Bank, 2013)
\(^4\) (MAV, VLGA, LGV & LGPro 2012, 2012)
\(^5\) (Moily & others, October 2007)
Various historical records may be referred to wherefrom it is believed that some form of local self-government did exist in ancient India. Moreover, in the epic tales of *Ramayana, Mahabharata*, we found some kind of self-government such as Paura (guild), Nigama, Pauga and Gana, performing various administrative and legislative functions and raising levies from different sources. Local government continued during the succeeding period of Hindu rule in the form of Town Committees, which were known as ‘Goshthis’ and ‘Mahajan Samiteses’.\(^6\)

The urban local self-government entered a new phase after the Constitution of India came into force in 1950. The Constitution of India has allotted the local self-government to the State List of functions. The first commission to study and to suggest on all possible aspects of urban management was the “National Commission on Urbanisation”. The commission was appointed in 1985 and it gave its suggestions in 1988. There were other various committees appointed in different states in order to improve the Municipal Organisations\(^6b\).

The Constitution (74th Amendment) Act, 1992 is a landmark initiative of the Government of India to strengthen local self-government in cities and towns. The 74\(^{th}\) Amendment Act, 1922 enables the Municipalities to undertake the tasks of planning for ‘economic development and social justice’ and implement city/town development plans.

As per Article 243Q, every State should constitute three types of municipalities in urban areas. Provided that a Municipality under this clause may not be constituted in such urban area or part thereof as the Governor may, having regard to the size of the area and the municipal services being provided or proposed to be provided by an industrial establishment in that area and such other factors as he may deem fit, by public notification, specify to be an industrial township. The constitution of three types of municipalities by every State is as under\(^7\):

**Nagar Panchayat:** Nagar Panchayat (by whatever name called) for a transitional area, that is to say, is an area in transition from a rural area to an urban area.

**Municipal Council:** A Municipal Council is constituted for a smaller urban area; and

**Municipal Corporation:** A Municipal Corporation is constituted for a larger urban area.

The Constitution (74th Amendment) Act, 1992 has introduced a new part namely, Part IXA in the Constitution, which deals with the issues relating to municipalities. The main provisions introduced by the above Act are related to:

- Constitution of Municipalities
- Composition of Municipalities
- Constitution of Wards Committees
- Reservation of seats
- Duration of Municipalities
- Powers and Functions of the Municipalities
- Elections to Municipalities-
- Planning and implementation of draft development plan considering ‘economic development and social justice’ within the area.

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\(^6\) a,b (Research and Publication Unit, Central Statistics Office, 2014)  
\(^7\) (Article 243Q, Constitution of Municipalities, CONSTITUTION OF INDIA)
I.5 Good Governance at Municipal Level

‘...We sought freedom of power in our language, freedom of imagination in our literature, freedom of soul in our religious creeds and that of the mind in our social environment. Such an opportunity filled me with confidence in the power of education which is one with life and which can give us real freedom - the highest that is claimed for man, his freedom of moral communion in the human world...’, our Rabindranath believes.

So, basically to sustain the quality of government, whether local or not, the essential requirements are organisational development supported by well defined institutional as well as legal configuration and education in its factual expression. And such development could never been happened without skilled and competent professionals. On the other hand, democracy and decentralisation help in improving accountability, responsiveness and transparency of government, whether local or not, which in turn facilitate effectiveness and efficiency of government services.

In this connection, we may mention four characteristics of Good Governance viz., Transparency, Responsibility and Accountability, Participation, Responsiveness to the need of people. Then, a local government should have one developed organisation with construction of distinct legal and institutional support to attend these points. A local government shall become effective only when it is able to provide sensible attention to both of its democratic vision and the criteria simultaneously with an eye to maintain the standards of good governance. For this, not only the improvements in performance of the local government is requisite but also an better interaction among the civil society, the private sector and other line public institutions is very much compulsory.

Considering the basic postulates of the process of the Good Governance, at localised urban area, we can expect that an ULB shall strive to play various roles to promote Good Governance. We expect an ULB as

A Regulator, namely the administration of various acts and regulations to secure the process of safeguarding the existing rules of law;

A Provider, that involves providing urban services efficiently and equitably by managing its accounts effectively and efficiently which will in turn, certainly sustain the accountability of the government secured by its transparency;

An Agent that takes the schemes of higher levels government to the people as well as put together the critical gaps on various aspects of infrastructural, socio-economical set-up of the society to formulate an overall developmental plan with active consultation with the common people in a decentralised manner, or what we might term, with a “bottom-to-top” approach. This includes promotion of popular participation as well as the responsiveness of the government towards its stakeholders over and above the whole community in an apt balanced manner;

A Welfare Agency, which provides active assistance to higher level governments in the equitable distribution and delivery as promised for providing equitability and inclusive mind-set of the government;

An Agent of Development, who strives for improvement in the quality of life through not only the augmentation of infrastructure but also providing liberty of participation of the whole community in the decision making process.

8 (FRCS Project Team Members; Hammer, Dorothee, 2006)
As Shri Balmiki Prasad Singh, Governor of Sikkim, suggested, “In short, Good Governance means securing Justice, Empowerment, Employment and efficient delivery of Services, Administrative Responses, Capacity Building.”

Chapter II: Good Governance through Strategic Planning at ULB Level

II.1 Introduction

“Economic growth is both a cause and consequence of urbanization”\(^9\).

Urbanization is basically the dense aggregation of people into economically interacting units. The urban units mostly provide economies of scale, scope and aggregation. This is happening just due to the continuous interplay among the basic infrastructural facilities such as accessibility and availability of transportation, energy, communications, technology and other important low-cost infrastructures along with available manpower with the characteristic of extreme willingness to work for sustenance with satisfactorily accrued technological knowledge. And thus the urban units become the “engines of economic growth”\(^10\).\(^\)

Urban units are dynamic spaces, and provide important economic, social and cultural opportunities for urban populations as well as the surrounding area. Planned urbanization is efficient enough to improve the accessibility and availability of services and products by increasing productivity which in turn may instrumental to reduce the poverty\(^11\).

The continuous requirement to enhance the socio-economic development of urban areas to address the ever increasing population, the process of Good Governance raised some concerns about the role of urban planning.

The argument is that to sustain the basic socio-economic development in local areas irrespective of rural or urban, the mechanism of governance should be linked up with some strategic planning approaches. Public participation in decision-making, accountability, equity and efficiency – all core principles of good urban governance - are also defining characteristics of strategic planning, and hold the key to socially, economically and environmentally sustainable development\(^12\).

Now the expected questions which may arise in ones’ mind that how strategic planning approach may help in promote the practice of Good Governance in ULB and what should be the applicable approach for planning – should it be the traditional top-down approach or the latest emphasised participatory bottom-up approach or a suitable integration of these two approaches.

To understand the planning process we must conceptualise each broadly categorised approaches individually.

II.1.a The Top-Down Approach

This is the predominant and most common development planning approach. The approach has dominated in the planning cycles for a long time not only in India but also in many other parts of the world.

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\(^9\) (Dey)
\(^10\) (Dey)
\(^11\) (Narang & Reutersward, 2006)
\(^12\) (Cooksey & Kikula, 2005)
Top-Down Planning approach promotes Centrally Made Planning Decision. Stakeholders have very limited activities in the planning process. They, at best, may provide data if asked for and/or approve and adhere to the plan. Such approach of planning is kind of Master Plan based on predetermined project without consulting with the grass-root stakeholders about their needs, choices etc. Top down planning is usually based on poor assumptions of social and environmental behavior often proven to be incorrect as locality and social formations varies.

II.1.b Strategic Planning

Idea of community participation is not new. It can be traced back in 50’s and 60’s. The article “Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning” by eminent planner and lawyer Paul Davidhoff suggested a new model of planning which influenced many planning professionals who literally rejected the traditional practice.

Strategic planning is selective, action-oriented and participatory- it is a bottom up approach. It takes into account implementation capabilities and the resources required, being more interactive with a broad range of stakeholders. It is based on partnerships with civil society and the private sector, rather than on legal sanction or the power to enforce.

II.2 Understanding the Strategic Planning and Good Governance: A Case Study of Malda District

Using the examples of the preparation process and the broad outcomes of the Draft Development Plans (2008-09 to 2012-2013) of the two Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) of the district of Malda, this article attempts to illustrate how improved governance and sustainable development can be achieved together through a strategic planning approach.

In India the 73rd and the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act 1992 has laid the foundation of stakeholder’s participation in the district planning and urban / rural planning. Improving governance in urban planning is the essential pre-requisite for the physical, social, and economic regeneration of urban units of West Bengal. There are 126 municipalities in West Bengal, of which, 40 municipalities are within the Kolkata Metropolitan Area (KMA), while the others are within Non-KMA areas.

Till recent past, at all municipalities the general and detailed urban plans were prepared by centralised institutions on basis of the conventional top-down approaches thus making the plan documents just a pile of papers. Most projects were un-implementable in the varied local scenario.

The KUSP (Kolkata Urban Services for the Poor) Program funded by DFID had a great initiation to engage all stakeholders of Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) in developing their Draft Development Plan (DDP) following the strategic participatory planning approach. All 126 ULBs in West Bengal participated in the program in two phases. The first phase involved the ULBs within the KMA (Kolkata Metropolitan Area) and the second phase involved the Non-KMA ULBs.

13 (Cooksey & Kikula, 2005)
14 (Pissourios, 2013)
15 (Cooksey & Kikula, 2005)
In Malda district there are twin municipalities, English Bazar and Old Malda. Both ULBs prepared their Draft Development Plan 2008-09 to 2012-2013 under the guidelines of the Change Management Unit, KUSP Roll-Out Program. On the basis of the approved DDP, Annual Development Plans (ADPs) of the ULBs are to be prepared for the consecutive five years and are to be implemented. These ADPs are very important parts of the District Annual Plan to assess the urban scenario.

II.2.a Prominent Features of DDP
The important features in the process of preparing the Draft Development Plan include:
- Participation by and consultation with the widest range of stakeholders, building on existing grass root structures such as Ward Committees, NHG, NHC and CDS
- Explicit attempts to assess socio-economic needs, especially of the poorest groups living in formal and informal settlements
- Transparent system for prioritization of issues
- Matching plans to projected resources. Financial projections must be realistic and affordable, from predictable funding streams.

The Draft Development Plan encompasses three main Components, viz.,

Component I: The Infrastructure, Land Use & Environment Development Plan includes
- a. Intra Municipal Infrastructure Development,
- b. Trans Municipal Linkage Improvement Plan,
- c. Land Use Development Plan,
- d. Environment Development Plan.

Component II: The Social & Livelihood Development Plan includes
- e. Livelihood & Poverty Alleviation Plan,
- f. Local Economic Development Plan,
- g. Health Care Service Delivery Improvement Plan,
- h. Primary Education Improvement Plan.

Component III: Municipal Institutional Strengthening Plan includes
- i. Organizational Development Plan,
- j. Internal Process and Systems Improvement Plan,
- k. Citizen Interface Improvement Plan,
- l. Financial Plan.

As per the guidelines there are broadly two sets of stakeholders interacting during the preparation of the DDP:

1. Organizations or Agencies External to the ULBs
   a. District Planning Committees
   b. External agencies e.g. CMU, SUDA, ILGUS, MED, WBVB, KMDA, KMPC etc.

2. Internal Municipal Stakeholders
   a. DDP Policy Group (DPG) to guide, coordinate & monitor the DDP preparation process.
   b. DDP Technical Group (DTGs) constituted for each components to prepare the project proposals, sub-component wise plans and the component level plan.
c. Councilors
   i. to participate in all initiatives related to preparation process;
   ii. Participate in the DDP approval process at the Municipality level;
   iii. Lead ward level consultative processes in respective wards (ward committees, NHCs, Citizens Groups)

d. Municipality Staff (other than those in DTGs) to
   i. Provide all data, support and assistance to the DDP Policy and Technical Groups;
   ii. Participate in all DDP meetings

e. Ward Committees, CBOs, CDS, NHG, NHC, Women’s groups are to
   i. Play an instrumental role in the DDP preparation process and assist the DTG in conducting ground level work;
   ii. Prepare a list of schemes and submit to the Municipality for incorporation in the Municipality plan;
   iii. Participate in all workshops and field activities to ensure that the planning process is participatory

II.2.b Observations:
From the study it is clear that both the selected municipalities had to prepare the DDPs on the basis of participation of members from all most every corner of the society. Such participations are instrumental right from problem identification to spot the possible solutions to prioritization of the projects. It appears the issues related to immediate need of the people have been addressed better.

For examples, in this scope we may mention some major project proposals identified and proposed by the two selected ULBs:

   o For Component I, issues like encroachment, lack of open green space, problems related to transportation (inter and intra locality), electricity, sewerage, provision of safe drinking water etc. have been identified and prioritized.
   
   Both municipalities take projects to recognize the various (formal and informal) segments of the urban land and to ensure their proper co-ordination. It has been identified that a major portion of the residential areas of the ULBs are covered by many illegal and irregular constructions. The ULBs are not able to formulate any concrete proposal to get rid of from such existing clumsy constructions. But they propose some rules and regulations for future constructions according to the UDPFI guidelines.

   Both Municipalities proposed projects on Environmental Planning and Management on acceptable levels of resource use. Projects on Solid Waste Management, Rain Water Harvesting, projects on cleaning the bank of Mahananda river are the projects of common interest of the twin municipality of Malda district, i.e., English Bazar and Old Malda.

   Projects also emerged considering the Trans Municipal Linkage Improvement Plan, such as improvement of the Mahananda Bridge between the English Bazar Municipality and Old Malda Municipality. Such project proposal shall definitely promote healthy integrated, inter-sectoral planning and management practices. Projects on Traffic Control also gained importance for both of the ULBs. Such project is particularly important for these two ULBs as NH-34 is the only way of road connectivity between these two ULBs.

   Proposals taken for regular-interval orientation and sensitization programs to raise awareness of the risk of disasters as well as formulating local emergency
management plans, based on reduction of risk, readiness, response and recovery, for natural and human-made disasters.

None of the two ULBs took any area development projects for future residential growth. Fragmented small scale projects like beautification of parks, creation of market complex, ward office or health centre remained as majority.

- For Component II, issues like provision of primary education, primary health care, employment opportunities, community development etc. gained attention unanimously. All most all project proposals in this component have been merged with the existing ongoing projects of the central and/or state government.

- For Component III, the most important issues identified by all the municipalities are better service delivery. The introduction of the participatory planning approach has also brought with it some broader changes in the functioning of the municipalities. ULBs also proposed to set up Front Desks – single-window set up to address all kind of public dealings such as providing information, issuing forms and the most important a simplified gate way to grievance redressal. Such instigation shall also improve the efficiency of the back offices of the municipality as they will be free of unnecessary visitors.

The establishment of the Front Desks, along with the proposed changes in the “Organisational Development and Internal Process and Systems Improvement” within the ULBs, definitely bring greater transparency in service delivery, transparency and documentation which promise, in turn, enhanced accountability in tasks such as the issuance of building permits, which are important sources of revenue for the municipalities.

Project proposals have been taken by the selected ULBs to analysis and develop the existing local tax collection system and to increase revenues from land and building tax may certainly help to enhance the financial health of the ULBs to some extent.

From the study of the DDPs of the selected ULBs it is clear that the process of preparing DDP involved vast and varied stakeholders in identification of local needs, finding the critical gaps and tackle them with possible solutions to formulate feasible project proposals as well as to prioritize the proposals.

It also can be traced that the selected ULBs are able to formulate projects through the strategic planning method which certainly satisfy the characteristics of good urban governance such as sustainability, subsidiary, equity, efficiency, transparency and accountability, civic engagement and citizenship, and security (UNCHS 2000).

It is to note that the project proposals in the DDPs of the selected ULBs are quite able to full fill local needs if implemented properly. But such projects are basically to address the local needs and not practically promising any regional development.
II.3 Conclusion

Considering the outcomes of the process of preparation of DDPs of the two ULBs of the district of Malda we can say that such approach of planning is very much instrumental to initiate the practice of good governance in urban local bodies. Such approach of planning satisfies the main features of good governance, at least, theoretically.

The participation aspect of the DDPs ensures ‘contribution of all to the common goal’ through significant civic engagement. The process of preparing DDPs emphasizes on equity, with institutional priorities focusing on pro-poor policies and mechanisms for responding to the basic needs of the most vulnerable groups in society.

The process of preparation and the proper implementation of the project proposals in DDPs actually reestablish the role of ULB as An Agent of Development and An agent of Welfare.

The DDPs includes issues of social security, poverty alleviation, urban employment generation, provision of basic infrastructure through community empowerment. Such process ensures social and economical sustainability. Consideration of environment is another important aspect of such planning process which assures environmental sustainability.

We may remember Nobel laureate, Amartya Sen, when he says, “I don't think it is a question of economics, but of public policy. There is need for more explicit analysis of the effects of public policies on different classes, particularly the extreme underdogs of society. Good governance can make all the difference." Good governance promises expansion of social opportunities and removal of poverty. A systematic strategic planning approach, ‘deriving from the core of collective values, a consensual vision, and the identification of priorities that respond to the needs of all citizens, particularly the poor, the most vulnerable and marginalised’

References:


\(^{18}\) (Cooksey & Kikula, 2005)


