

*Bangladesh Urban Forum
1st Session of Bangladesh Urban Forum
5-7 December 2011
Bangabandhu International Conference Centre*

Declaration of the First Bangladesh Urban Forum
during the 5-7 December 2011 1st Session of Bangladesh Urban Forum
held in Dhaka, the Capital of Bangladesh

The following text is issued by the Bangladesh Urban Forum, a formally constituted group of national ministries, local governments, academics, professionals, NGOs, development partners, civil society partners and various community groups (listed on the attachment). The declaration's official champions are the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives and the Ministry of Housing and Public Works, but each party commits itself to the understandings, identification of the key issues and set of actions set out below.

Preamble:

1. We jointly recognize; the importance of the urban sector and the urbanization process to Bangladesh's future development. This includes its contribution to economic growth, to poverty reduction, to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Government of Bangladesh's Vision 2021 agenda.
2. We also recognize; the prevailing social, economic and environmental problems along with the unequal pattern of urbanization at regional levels and in cities arising as a result of rapid unplanned migration and urbanization and the heavy population concentrations within the major cities of Bangladesh.
3. Furthermore, we recognize; these weaknesses have generally been made worse by inadequate urban governance. This is given by over-centralization and inadequate popular participation.
4. We do note however; the particular pressures faced by Bangladesh and its Government. These include: a high and accelerating rate of urbanization; severe climatic pressures and environmental vulnerabilities in rural areas; and the Country's exceptional population densities.
5. We note, and affirm, the progressive direction given in the Government's Draft Urban Sector Policy and the Sixth Five Year Plan, which aims to achieve a sustainable, inclusive and effectively managed urbanization process.

6. In addition, we consider that joint actions and the creation of partnership initiatives can explore initiatives for tackling the problems faced.

Key Issues of Concern:

7. The presence of severe pockets of poverty, social exclusion, deprivations, slums and squatter settlements within urban areas is an absolute priority for action. This requires a targeted and urgent response in a number of domains by a variety of actors. These responses will need to be at scale and sustained over the medium term.
8. The rural-urban migration process and the pattern of economic activity, driven by industrialization and exposure to environmental risks, are the underlying drivers of urbanization pressures. This calls for holistic policy responses and taking up relevant effective actions accordingly.
9. Major Service delivery failures in cities and towns exist and must be tackled. These are notably in water and sanitation, and access to other infrastructure, but also in schooling and health. These are severe enough to give rise to basic inequities and injustices, between city dwellers, and serve also to limit the inclusiveness of growth and welfare improvements.
10. Weak and ill-defined land tenure and property rights weaken both livelihoods and give rise to homelessness and social insecurities. Arbitrary evictions blight the lives and weaken the opportunities open to the poor to live fulfilled and happy lives.
11. Poor environmental conditions in urban areas pose a direct threat to the welfare of all city dwellers, but especially the poor. Congestion, pollution and degradation of living and commercial space will also - if unchecked – directly slow the pace of development in a variety of domains.
12. The quality of urban governance requires improvement. This includes the upgrading of urban planning and administration. In addition, the level and nature of decentralization is in need of review, with a presumption in favour of further de-concentration of functions and the progressive devolution of powers.

A Bold Agenda for Change:

13. We affirm a joint vision of a prosperous but equitable, greener and fully sustainable future for urban Bangladesh, where the rights of all Bangladeshis are recognized. Moreover, we agree that all stakeholders have a role to play in bringing this about.
14. We jointly resolve that there is a need for more proactive national strategic management of urbanization in Bangladesh, which accentuates the gains and limits the weaknesses of the process. Further, we agree, that the duty of Government is to achieve a more balanced and more measured pattern of urbanization, prioritizing the issues related to social justice, environment and development works.
15. Recognizing these points, and the need for joined-up strategic thinking, the Government of Bangladesh commits as a first step, to refining, adopting and implementing the Draft Urban Sector Policy. The policy includes 24 sectors. These being:
 - i. Patterns and processes of urbanization;
 - ii. Local urban planning;
 - iii. Local economic development and employment;
 - iv. Urban local finance and resource mobilization;
 - v. Urban land management;
 - vi. Urban housing;
 - vii. Urban poverty and slum improvement;
 - viii. Urban environmental management;
 - ix. Infrastructure and services;
 - x. Urban transportation;
 - xi. Health and education;
 - xii. Water and sanitation;
 - xiii. Disaster risk reduction;
 - xiv. Facing climate change and its impact;
 - xv. Social structure;
 - xvi. Gender concerns;
 - xvii. Urban children, the aged, the disabled and scavengers;
 - xviii. Urban recreation, playgrounds, parks, open spaces, religious places graveyards, crematoriums;
 - xix. Cultural and aesthetic development;
 - xx. Rural-urban linkages;
 - xxi. Law and order;
 - xxii. Legislation;
 - xxiii. Urban governance;
 - xxiv. Urban research, training and information.

16. We jointly commit to the institutionalization of the BUF. This would comprise: a permanent office, which would support government and others concerned in policy formulation; and operate a monitoring and evaluation function for relevant research and development works.
17. Government will take the initiative in moving this agenda forward and call on various national organizations and development partners to support Government, when necessary.
18. We firmly believe that the Bangladesh Urban Forum will commence its activities in 2012 and take up medium and long term planning to ensure activities of the Forum in Divisional and District towns, beyond the capital city.

Members of the Bangladesh Urban Forum

7th December 2011

Attachment: Full list of BUF member bodies and organizations