



A crisis in governance: Urban solid waste management in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

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This paper analyzes and reviews the role of governance in solid waste management as administered by the city governments in Bangladesh. An attempt has been made to examine how and to what extent operational problems impede delivery of conservancy services to urban dwellers. The study is primarily based on empirical data gathered in the years 2000, 2003 and 2009. The data document the lack of good governance which has a negative effect on the performance of a conservancy department. As a result, the department delivers inadequate and unsatisfactory services, thus rendering city governments vulnerable to citizens' complaints. A direct consequence of the poor performance of the conservancy department is the growth of community-based initiatives, private and non-government organizations, which are increasingly playing an important role in delivering conservancy services. In the light of its findings, the paper argues that city government, instead of showing indifference to private and community initiatives that have succeeded in reaching the service users, should share the service delivery responsibility with them. The results suggest that a well-built public–private partnership can ensure effective solid waste management and thus good urban governance in Bangladesh. The key lessons learned are: a number of challenges that stem from the lack of good governance thwarted an effective solid waste management; formation of public–private partnership was possible in a politically divided society; and, partnership emerged as an instrument for better service delivery.

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Introduction

Cities in developing countries are confronting a twin dilemma. On one hand, the urban population is growing rapidly, causing a huge increase in demand for waste management services. On the other, the traditional public sector is responding poorly to the growing demand for such services (Ahmed & Ali, 2006). The issue of poor solid waste management (SWM) has become a challenge for governments of developing Asia and Africa (Calò & Parise, 2009; Halla & Majani, 2003; Mwangi, 2000; Ogu, 2000; Zia & Devadas, 2008) because it is critical to the protection of public health, safety and the environment. In developing countries it is also a key source of livelihood and social capital, particularly for the urban poor. Piles of waste left uncollected in the streets, blocking drainage channels or dumped in watercourses, are a major cause of public health risk, and uncontrolled disposal of waste can threaten water resources and place significant environmental health risks on those living nearby. Occupational health and safety risk to solid waste workers and waste pickers is also a major concern (Whiteman, Smith, & Wilson, 2002). Thus, solid waste needs to be managed in a way that

reduces risks to the environment and to human health, which has implications for its storage, collection and proper disposal (Kassim & Ali, 2006). As a result, research on urban SWM in developing countries has developed from concerns such as public sector reform (particularly privatization) and about sustainable development in the urban context (Baud, Grafakos, Hordijk, & Post, 2001). The former is closely connected to the neo-liberal doctrine proclaiming a resurgence of the market and a reduction of state provision and even control, while the latter is focused on private sector involvement in service provision. This raises issues of public interest and acceptability (Baud et al., 2001). It has been recognized that one of the classical tasks of public administration is still to provide conservancy services to citizens. In an increasingly turbulent politico-administrative environment, public administration has been experiencing a bumpy journey, as its tasks seem overwhelming and beyond human capacity to perform satisfactorily: preventing war and reinforcing the peace; preventing governments decimating their own residents; combating international and internal terrorism; reducing worldwide poverty and human suffering; alleviating natural and manmade disasters; and heading off crises before they get out of hand (Caiden, 2007). Bangladesh public administration has confronted these challenging tasks, but the 'effectiveness' and 'quality' of its public services cannot be guaranteed without good governance. One such task that has an

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effect on urban dwellers is poor collection and disposal of solid waste. The effectiveness of SWM in a city is one of the indices for assessing good governance (cited in Nzeadibe, 2009:93; also see Rouse, 2006).

The production of urban solid waste is gradually increasing in Bangladesh. In 1995 urban Bangladesh generated 0.49 kg/person/day waste which is estimated to increase to 0.6 kg by 2025 (Ray, 2008: 5). The potential reason of this is rapid and high growth of urban population. For example, in 1999, 30 million people, around 20% of the total population of Bangladesh, lived in urban areas; by 2015 it is estimated that 68 million, more than a third of total population, will be living in urban areas (Pryer, 2003: 9). Table 1 shows a relationship between per capita GDP, population and waste generation in urban Bangladesh. The table demonstrates that per capita income generation improves the purchasing power capacity of citizens, which accelerates the growth of solid waste production.

This trend of urban population growth has outstripped the capacity of city governments to provide effective and efficient delivery of conservancy services. As a result, nearly 50% of the daily generated garbage remains uncollected in the cities¹ of Bangladesh (Bhuiyan, 2005). A 'gap' exists between the daily generation and collection of solid waste, which leaves urban administration vulnerable to citizens' complaints. Available studies (for example, Ahmed & Ali, 2006; Asaduzzaman & Hye, 1998; Bhuiyan, 2004, 2001; Hasan, 1998; Sujauddin, Huda, & Hoque, 2008) show that, in spite of utilizing public resources, the city governments have apparently failed to provide satisfactory conservancy services to users. Had this been because of resource problems or technical difficulties alone, their solution would have been easier. Evidence suggests that this is not the case. It is in this context that this study attempts to examine whether poor conservancy service delivery stems from a governance crisis in Bangladesh. Thus, this paper: (i) describes conservancy service delivery in two cities, Dhaka and Chittagong; (ii) analyzes operational challenges that impede service provision; and (iii) discusses the effectiveness of public-private partnerships for service delivery and shed light on how such partnerships contribute to the meaningful urban governance in Bangladesh. In sum, the main objective of this paper is to analyze the performance of governance in SWM achieved by the city governments in Bangladesh. The scholarship available on the role of good governance in conservancy service delivery in the context of Bangladesh is far from adequate. It is expected that this in-depth study will fill a research gap now existing in this pressing issue of global importance.

Methodology and fieldwork

This paper is based on primary data collected in June and July, 2000, and has since been updated in June 2003 and February 2009. The study was conducted in two major city corporations of Bangladesh: Dhaka, the capital city, and Chittagong, the commercial capital of the country. There are 41 wards² in Chittagong City Corporation (hereinafter called Chittagong) and 90 wards in Dhaka City Corporation (hereinafter called Dhaka). Of these, 3 wards from these two corporations, that is, 2 wards: Jalalabad and Jamal Khan from Chittagong and one ward, Kalabagan, from Dhaka have been selected for this study. Two types of ward, e.g., (i) conservancy and (ii) non-conservancy exist in Chittagong. There are 24 conservancy wards, which receive regular conservancy services. On the other hand, 17 non-conservancy wards receive less frequent and irregular

Table 1

Relationship between per capita GDP, urban population and waste generation.

Year	Urban population	Total urban waste generation (ton/day)	Per capita waste generation rate in urban areas (kg/cap/day)	Per capita GDP
1991	20.8 million	6493	0.31	US\$ 220
2005	32.76 million	13,330	0.41	US\$ 482
2025	78.44 million	47,000	0.60	–

Source: Enayetullah & Hashimi, 2006.

service. The latter emerge due to the corporation's lack of capacity to provide equal service to all (Chittagong City Corporation, 2007). In order to make this study representative, one ward from each category has been selected. Jalalabad represents as non-conservancy and Jamal Khan as conservancy ward. Unlike Chittagong, there is no non-conservancy ward in Dhaka. It means that all are considered as conservancy wards. Kalabagan was selected because of its adoption of the 'Parichana Kalabagan', a private SWM initiative, which is considered to be the first of its kind in the country. This permits an examination of the effects of establishing this organization vis-à-vis the presence of conservancy service administered by Dhaka.

Sweepers and garbage truck drivers are key actors of conservancy service delivery in Bangladesh. In order to get access to information from them, they were regularly visited on a random basis in their workplace; on streets and at disposal sites. Sixty of them were interviewed and accompanied to their ghettos, and time was spent with them listening to their problems at work as well as discussing what they felt to be problems of the conservancy department in general.

Twenty interviews were also conducted with Dhaka and Chittagong officials and employees who were directly engaged in SWM, using open-ended questions. Twenty service users, selected randomly, were also interviewed by using the same tool.

All discussions, observations and interviews were transcribed in daily notebook and annotated with comments where applicable, and then carefully preserved for reference. This paper largely benefits from wide-ranging set of field notes, and thus building its data core.

Secondary data have been collected to substantiate the primary data and are mainly derived from the analysis and review of relevant academic articles and books, newspapers/magazines reports and previous studies. Admittedly, the limited access to official documents, because the Official Secrets Act of 1923 and the Government Servants Conduct Rules of 1979, bind bureaucrats to an oath of secrecy even forbidding them to provide official information to other government departments unless empowered by the government (The World Bank, 1996). Despite this administrative rigidity and restriction, the limited records of the two corporations related to the academic and technical qualifications of conservancy officials have been accessed.

Conceptual issues

Meaning of governance

The topic of governance is broad, multi-faceted, and of great complexity (Andrews, 2008). The concept was first highlighted, in a developing country context, in a 1989 World Bank report on *Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth. A Long-Term Perspective Study* (The World Bank, 1989). Governance is ultimately concerned with creating the conditions for ordered rule and collective action (Stoker, 1998). Governance has a dual meaning; on the one hand, it refers to the empirical manifestations of state

¹ There are 6 city corporations in Bangladesh located at the divisional cities, namely, Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna, Barisal, and Sylhet.

² The lowest administrative tier of urban local government.

adaptation to its external environment as it emerges in the late twentieth century (Pierre, 2000); on the other hand, governance also denotes a conceptual or theoretical representation of coordination of social systems and, for the most part, the role of the state in that process (Pierre, 2000). In the broadest sense, governance concerns performance of the government, including public and private sectors, global and local arrangements, formal structures, informal norms and practices, and spontaneous and intentional system of control (Roy, 2006:5). Some definitions offered by well-known scholars and international development agencies are presented in Box 1.

Box 1. Some selected definitions of governance

"How people are ruled, how the affairs of the state are administered and regulated as well as a nation's system of politics and how this functions in relation to public administration and law." Landell-Mills and Serageldin (1991)

"Use of power in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development." (The World Bank, 1992)

"Governance encompasses the values, rules, institutions, and processes through which people and organizations attempt to work towards common objectives, make decisions, generate authority and legitimacy, and exercise power." (Canadian International Development Agency, <http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/CIDAWEB/acdicida.nsf/En/JUD-111883426-HX4>)

"The relationship between civil society and the state, between rulers and the ruled, and the government and the governed." (McCarney et al., 1995)

Focusing on the definitions of governance, it is apparent that first two definitions in the box are not adequate, as these do not take into account the role of markets and internationalization of states and civil society, while the definition by McCarney, Halfani, and Rodriguez (1995) stresses that the difference between government and governance is premised on the relationship between civil society and state (Khan, 2002: 65).

Good and bad governance

It is useful to explore why bad or poor governance exists. Moore (2001) argues that 'bad governance' is neither inherent in the culture or traditions of the people of poor countries nor a product of poverty. It is rather the result of the ways in which state authority in the South (developing countries) has been constructed – and is being maintained – through economic and political interactions with the rest of the world. He further points out that the policies and practices of Northern (developed countries) governments and the pattern of international economic transactions help sustain poor governance in the south (Moore, 2001). A 1992 World Bank report identified the following key symptoms of bad governance (cited in Khan, 2002:66):

1. Failure to make a clear separation between what is public and what is private, hence a tendency to direct public resources for private gain.
2. Failure to establish a predictable framework of law and government behavior conducive to development or arbitrariness in the application of rules and laws.

3. Excessive rules, regulations, licensing requirements, and so forth which impede the functioning of markets and encourage rent-seeking.
4. Priorities inconsistent with development, resulting in a misallocation of resources.
5. Excessively narrowly based or non-transparent decision making.

Why should 'bad governance' be relatively concentrated in poor countries? Insofar as an answer to the questions is implicit in their behavior, it would appear to be some notion of institutional deficit: developing countries lack the appropriate governance institutions that are found in the rich countries, in the shape of auditor-generals, police academies, freedom of information laws, judicial autonomy, public policy research institutes, and many other things (Moore, 2001).

Asian Development Bank (cited in Roy, 2006) identifies 4 basic elements of good governance such as accountability, participation, predictability and transparency. According to OECD (1992, cited in Khan, 2002), the salient features of good governance are:

1. Promotion of democracy and open pluralistic societies.
2. Strengthening of transparent, accountable, efficient and effective national government.
3. Reinforcement of the rule of law, including fair and accessible legal and judicial system.
4. Promotion of an independent media and dissemination of information.
5. Anti-corruption initiatives and efforts to reduce excessive military expenditure.

A new set of the World Bank public sector governance indicators covering 212 countries from the period 1996–2007 has been recognized as an effective measurement tool across the world. These governance indicators focus on the following 6 dimensions (Kaufmann, Kraay, & Mastruzzi, 2008):

- a) Voice and Accountability: measuring perceptions of the extent to which a country's citizens are able to participate in selecting their government, as well as freedom of expression, freedom of association, and a free media.
- b) Political Stability and Absence of Violence: measuring perceptions of the likelihood that the government would be destabilized or overthrown by unconstitutional or violent means, including politically motivated violence and terrorism.
- c) Government Effectiveness: measuring perceptions of the quality of public services, the quality of the civil service and the degree of its independence from political pressures, the quality of policy formulation and implementation, and the credibility of the government's commitment to such policies.
- d) Regulatory Quality: measuring perceptions of the ability of the government to formulate and implement sound policies and regulations that permit and promote private sector development.
- e) Rule of Law: measuring perceptions of the extent to which agents have confidence in and abide by the rules of society, and in particular the quality of contract enforcement, property rights, the police, and the courts, as well as the likelihood of crime and violence.
- f) Control of Corruption: measuring perceptions of the extent to which public power is exercised for private gain, including both petty and grand forms of corruption, as well as "capture" of the state by elites and private interests.

In this paper, the definition of governance by McCarney et al. (1995) will be used and will focus on how the selected governance

indicators affect the performance of conservancy department of the city corporations under study.

Solid waste and solid waste management

By definition, solid waste is useless, unwanted, and discarded non-liquid waste materials arising from domestic, trade, commercial, industrial, agriculture, as well as public services (Wadood, 1994). Nunan (2000: 384) refers to SWM as the collection, treatment, and disposal of municipal solid waste, which includes wastes from the noted sources. In this article, Nunan's definition of SWM is adopted.

Conservancy service delivery in Dhaka and Chittagong

In a formal sense, the conservancy department of both Dhaka and Chittagong are responsible for delivering conservancy services to the city dwellers. Both Departments follow almost the same work process.

Work process of the conservancy department of Chittagong

In Chittagong, it is evident that field level conservancy services are primarily carried out through the sweepers. A total 1854 sweepers clean the city in three different groups. Hasan (1998) states that the first group cleans the roads and streets and then collects the trash in manually drawn carts or bamboo baskets. This collected rubbish is then taken to intermediate collection points. The second group cleans the roadside drains and collects the silt and the solid waste (which go into the drains) and either carries them to the nearest dump site, garbage bin, or makes another pile on the roadside. The third group collects the wastes from these sites and hauls them to waste dumping sites. The city has now two dumping grounds and these are located at Halishore and Roufabad. Ashraf (1994) and Khandakar (1995) observe that the whole cleaning task in Chittagong is done in the following three stages:

- the residents themselves take domestic refuses from households to the intermediate dumping points;
- street and drain wastes are collected and dumped at intermediate disposal points by the corporation sweepers and cleaners; and
- final collection from the intermediate points and disposal to the dumping yard.

In Jamal Khan, a sample ward of this study, it was observed that the roads and drains are cleaned twice a day, usually in the morning and in the afternoon. The trucks collect and remove garbage from the dustbins at least 3 times a day. For these services, the residents of the conservancy wards have to pay 7% conservancy tax annually along with their household taxes.

The non-conservancy wards in Chittagong receive irregular conservancy services and one to two trips of garbage disposal by the collection truck per day. Roads and drains of these wards are irregularly cleaned. The state of Jalalabad, another sample ward, is very much the same. The residents of such wards pay 4% conservancy tax with their annual household taxes.

A nearly 4 million inhabitants of Chittagong generates about 1400 tons of waste per day. Of this waste, the Conservancy Department clears up to 1000 tons only. The activities of the conservancy department, particularly cleaning the roads and drains and garbage lifting are performed only in daytime, that is, from 6 am to 6 pm.

Work process of the conservancy department of Dhaka

Dhaka has been divided into 10 administrative zones. A conservancy officer runs the conservancy services of a zone. All wards receive regular conservancy services. So Dhaka does not have any non-conservancy ward like Chittagong. All service users pay 2% conservancy tax with their annual household taxes. Currently, the corporation employs around 7500 sweepers to sweep roads/lanes and clean drains. As in Chittagong, the 3-fold conservancy services by 3 different groups are also provided in Dhaka (Bhuiyan, 2001; Paul, 1991). Formally, the cleaners (mainly the female sweepers) of Dhaka are supposed to sweep the roads and lanes and clean the drains daily in 3 shifts: morning, day, and night within the officially assigned duty hours between 6 am and 2 pm, and 7 pm–3 am (Asaduzzaman & Hye, 1998). Usually garbage removal to the final dumping grounds is done at night. One probable reason for night trafficking of garbage is that there is a ban on running any truck (except the trucks used for emergency service duty) in the city during daytime to avoid traffic jams and accidents caused by reckless driving of truck drivers. There are 4 dumping grounds in Dhaka: (a) Matuail, (b) Gabtoli, (c) Amin Bazar, and (d) Badda (The Daily Star, internet edition, November 13, 2000).

In Kalabagan, the sweepers sweep roads and clean drains regularly, at least once a day. In this location, garbage removal by the corporation trucks from the nearby dustbins is carried out minimum twice a day.

According to Asaduzzaman and Hye (1998), the system of solid waste collection in Dhaka may be described as a 'dustbin-based' (including demountable containers) collection system. Dustbins together with demountable containers account for about 66% of solid waste, followed by enclosure (15%), dust-shoot on street collection (10%), and block collection (9%). Door-to-door collection system covers only a negligible volume of the waste (0.1%).

Almost 10 million people live in the 360 km² area of the corporation. The city daily generates nearly 3500 metric tons garbage in winter and it goes up to 4500 metric tons in summer (source: interview of a conservancy officer with the author on February 25, 2009).

The operational challenges of conservancy department

The conservancy department of both Dhaka and Chittagong face operational challenges such as the lack/misuse of resources, corruption, political interference, central-local government relationship, lack of inter-departmental coordination, and lack of people's awareness. Some of these issues are in some detail discussed here.

Hiring of conservancy department employees

The Dhaka and Chittagong ordinances do not provide any specific guideline about the recruitment of officers and staff other than the Chief Executive Officer (CEO)³ Like other employees, conservancy officers and staff are recruited in accordance with the organizations' rules and regulations as approved by the central government from time to time. In other words, relevant rules and by-laws of several ministries and agencies of the central government tightly control the recruitment system of the local

³ Article 43 of the Dhaka City Corporation Ordinance 1983 and Article 42 of the Chittagong City Corporation Ordinance 1982 provide the provisions for the appointment of the CEO. According to the articles, a CEO of the corporation is appointed by the government on terms and conditions as determined by them (Rahman, 1989).

governments (Islam, Khan, & Nazem, 2000:148). Formally, conservancy personnel, other than the sweepers who work on contract and daily basis, are recruited through official procedures such as publication of advertisement in newspapers, scrutiny of the applications in accordance with the qualifications sought for, and conducting interviews. The Secretaries of the organizations replied that all hiring is made according to the formal arrangements as specified in the relevant law.

Most appointments to the Conservancy Department are made, so it was observed, without conforming to this formal process. The Chief Conservancy Officer (CCO) of Chittagong, for example, was appointed to his present position in this way. The records of the corporation show that the incumbent CCO holds an M.A. in Islamic History and does not have the requisite technical qualifications, for example, diploma in public health. Prior to this appointment he served as an estate officer of the corporation. During the tenure of the present mayor at first he was transferred to the conservancy department as acting CCO and subsequently was confirmed as CCO without following the procedures appropriately. Several respondents reported that the CCO is known as the mayor's 'own man'. To them, the incumbent CCO possibly provides the mayor with all the secret information about the internal politics of the organization. "Thus he [CCO] shows gratefulness to the mayor for giving him the employment as CCO," one of them further noted.

A conservancy officer also reported that some Awami League⁴ (AL) backed candidates were hired (in 1999) as conservancy inspectors by means of an eyewitness selection process as the mayor wished. These inspectors are mostly bachelor degree holders and this is why, it is claimed, they do not want to discharge their duties and responsibilities according to job descriptions. The principal reason for their unwillingness to work is reflected in the following words quoted by one of the respondents, "...we do not like to work for the conservancy department, and therefore waiting to go to another department on transfer. Our leader [mayor] promised to make it possible for us".

What should be clear by now is that the recruitment of conservancy personnel is made either by political choice or through corrupt practices. The description above depicts how abruptly recruitment in various positions took place by flouting the formal procedures. The reported view above also points to the general motives of the political recruits to their respective departmental jobs. Their unwillingness to work was not subjected to disciplinary proceedings as political leaders back them up.

Lack of human resources

Khandakar (1995) observes that for satisfactory cleaning of a city area at least 2 sweepers are required per 1000 populations. According to this calculation, both Dhaka and Chittagong deliver services to their clients with inadequate workforce. Field observation partly confirms this view. But it is argued that if the sweepers perform their task appropriately the magnitude of the problem could be largely reduced. Several respondents opined that the tendency of a large number of sweepers is to draw their salary without doing any meaningful work. A report published in a leading newspaper uncovered the fact that about 50% of the conservancy staff in Dhaka draws their salary without working. This practice, it is estimated, incurs a huge financial waste, about

Table 2

List of material resources as of February 2009.

Name of items	Dhaka	Chittagong
Vehicles:		
Covered/Normal trucks	247	72
Demountable trucks	148	13
Van	–	42
Hand drawn carts	3000	220
Dustbins	4500	1348
Demountable containers	420	21
Equipments/tools:		
Brooms (monthly)	1/sweeper	1/sweeper
Long poles (monthly)	200 for all	100 for all
Baskets	1/sweeper/year	–

Source: Field study.

Taka⁵ 5 million per month. The non-working sweepers live in sweepers' colonies; receive salary every month by giving *bokhra* (bribe) to their gurus (The Daily Ittefaq, July 30, 2000). In a similar vein, a magazine program named 'Apnar Charipash' aired (on December 27, 2002) by the state-owned Bangladesh Television (BTV) reported that the conservancy staff of Dhaka, particularly those employed on contract basis, receive their emoluments without work (Bhuiyan, 2005:76). These cases also reveal the lack of functional accountability in the corporations' work.

Material resources

In order to run an organization effectively, material resources are as important as human resources. Table 2 shows the overall position of material resources of the conservancy departments of the sample corporations.

The table illustrates the insufficiency of the quantity of material resources to provide services to a huge population living in both cities. In this respect, the sweepers and their supervisors with whom the author talked also identified the shortage of material resources as a barrier for them to discharge their duties to the satisfaction of the citizens.

Economic resources

Despite the presence of human and material resources, organizational objectives cannot be achieved without adequate financial guarantees. The budgetary allocation for the financial years 1996–2001 is presented in Table 3 to highlight the position of conservancy budget in the context of the total (revenue) budgets of Dhaka and Chittagong. An analysis of the financial statements reveals that about 70–80% of the budget allocated for the Conservancy Departments was spent for the payment of salary and other fringe benefits to its employees, leaving an insignificant amount of money for the institutional development of the department. This contributes to a better understanding how the city government leaders perceive solid waste as a potential urban problem associated with urban governance.

Lack of inter-departmental coordination

A recent study (Panday, 2007) explores problems of intra-organizational coordination in urban Bangladesh take place due to lack of institutionalized rules and regulation and problematic financial management. Once coordination within the organization

⁴ A major political party of Bangladesh. During the author's first field work in 2000, the party was in power. The party has voted to power again in early 2009 precisely before the author made his third field visit.

⁵ Taka is the name of Bangladesh currency. 1 USD = Taka 68.80 as of June 22, 2009.

Table 3

Budgetary allocation for the conservancy departments, 1996–2001.

Financial Year (FY)	Dhaka (Taka in millions, US\$1 = approximately Taka 70)			Chittagong (Taka in millions)		
	Conservancy	Total budget	% of total budget	Conservancy	Total budget	% of total budget
2000–2001	140	1129	8.1	175	1895	109
1999–2000	135	997	7.4	104	1424	13.6
1998–1999	100	991	9.9	101	1313	13.0
1997–1998	90	996	11.1	75	1055	14.6
1996–1997	75	751	10.0	58	924	16.0

Source: Bhuiyan (2005:80).

becomes problematic, policy implementation suffers, which results in delay in project completion, and increases cost and unsatisfactory public service delivery. Coordination among different departments in Dhaka and Chittagong are also lacking. As a result, uncoordinated division of office responsibilities and the process of sanctioning work and funds usually lead to unnecessary delay and inefficiency (cited in [Zamena, 2002](#)). For example, the Conservancy Department runs the overall administration of the SWM in Dhaka; sweepers are employed and supervised by the department, while the storage department is responsible for the supply of different conservancy-related equipment, appliances and other materials. The mechanical (engineering) section of the corporation maintains the garbage collection trucks and other vehicles. But for the successful production of the desired service, coordination efforts among all these sections/departments are essential ([Asaduzzaman & Hye, 1998](#)).

City government's relationship with the central government

The urban local governments in Bangladesh, particularly the city corporations, are heavily dependent on the central government for all aspects of their activities, (that is, personnel, economic, and administrative). All key officials of the city governments, for example, are civil servants on deputation. In addition, various rules and regulations of the central government control the recruitment process of the corporation's own employees. While interviewed, the mayors of both Dhaka and Chittagong agreed on this point.

In any analysis of the central–local relationship, local finance plays a crucial role in determining the autonomy or dependence of local government on central government, and thereby operational freedom ([Islam et al., 2000: 146](#)). “The major portion of the corporation's revenue comes from the citizens (as tax). The government provides 20–30% of the annual budget. This state transfer comes with stipulations as to how these should be appropriated and the corporation has no other option but to comply with the central government order,” the Mayor of Dhaka commented as he was explaining the financial accountability of the corporation.

In the city corporation election of 1994, Awami League (AL)-backed candidates won the mayoral election in both Dhaka and Chittagong. In another two city corporations, (that is, Rajshahi and Khulna), BNP⁶ (Bangladesh Nationalist Party) - backed candidates won the mayoral positions. During that period (1991–1996), the BNP led the central government. “What was the nature of relationship between the central and city government?” the author asked the question to the mayor of Chittagong. In reply, he said, “We (mayors of both Dhaka and Chittagong) were mostly distrusted by the then central government. During the period, the government either squeezed or blocked funds needed for providing service to the citizens.” “There was a mass upsurge against the BNP

government in 1995–1996. Immediately before the fall of the then government, I was arrested on charges of being a leader of the movement to topple the government. One can, therefore, realize the nature of relationship I had with the central government,” the mayor added.

In an interview, the mayor of Dhaka echoed the same view. The [Islam et al. \(2000\)](#) study shows that the attitude of the BNP government towards the corporation was so negative that the mayor publicly accused the government of shrinking and blocking funds needed for development and municipal services. According to this study, it was widely believed that since the mayor of Dhaka belonged to AL, the opposition party, the government, by deliberately withholding the funds, wanted to discredit the mayor and his administration in the eyes of the people ([Islam et al., 2000: 149](#)).

Thus, during the BNP period, the relationship of the central government with both corporations was based on mutual distrust and apathy. It was alleged by both the mayors that under the BNP government, state transfer was reduced to make the AL-backed mayors as unsuccessful to the public. This ill-relationship between the mayors and the central government leadership might have influenced them to strongly oppose the BNP government ([Islam et al., 2000: 149](#)), which signals the poor political culture of Bangladesh.

Lack of people's awareness

Solid waste has become a matter of global concern as is evident from the conclusion drawn in the colloquium of mayors held at the United Nations in New York in August 1994, where they identified 12 severe urban problems and the problem of SWM ranked third ([Islam, 1999](#)). Inadequate collection and disposal of solid waste is a major factor in the spread of gastrointestinal and parasitic disease, primarily caused by the excess number of insects and rodents (cited in [Zamena, 2002:89](#)). Urban dwellers of Bangladesh are not quite aware of this problem. As a result, they throw garbage randomly instead of properly disposing it into designated bins. The role of central as well as urban government is responsible for this as they largely failed to initiate effective motivational campaigns to increase awareness of the people on this issue.

Governance indicators and the operation of conservancy department

The preceding discussion highlights the key challenges related to the delivery of conservancy services in the sample corporations. Now, an attempt has been made to focus on the reflection of two striking dimensions of governance indicators, political stability and control of corruption, in the context of the operation of conservancy department. These two indicators are critical for ensuring the rule of law and thus the economic progress in the country.

⁶ Another major political party of Bangladesh.

Political stability and absence of violence

It has been argued that the general social life of the Bangladesh is regulated according to their political identity. No wonder, then, that the activities of the Conservancy Department of Dhaka and Chittagong are shaped by the interplay of the characteristics of party politics.

During the mayoral election of 1994, the AL-backed candidates in both corporations won the mayoral positions. But at that time BNP formed the central government. According to the statements of the mayors, as noted earlier, the then government mostly distrusted their activities. The mayors publicly accused the central government of cutting back and blocking funds needed for the development work of the corporations (Islam et al., 2000). Just before the fall of BNP government in 1996, the government ordered the security forces to put the mayor of Chittagong behind the bar for his alleged involvement in organizing the movement to topple the government (Islam et al., 2000). In response to such governmental actions, both mayors were directly involved in organizing violent political strategies to unseat the BNP government. Field data substantiates that both mayors used corporations' employees, conservancy staff in particular, to add force to the anti-government movement. It is widely held that, due to the direct involvement of AL-backed mayors, the quick fall of BNP regime occurred. After BNP left office, AL was installed in power on the basis of winning the parliamentary elections of 1996. In 2001 elections produced a BNP victory in the form of a four party alliance. The opposition party, AL, refused to accept the result and from 2001 to 2006 they rarely attended the Parliament sessions and thus deserted it (Knox, 2009; Moniruzzaman, 2009). Since summer 2006 opposition alliances, directed by AL claimed that the BNP-led government was seeking to manipulate the electoral infrastructure and announced in January 2007 a boycott of the general election (Knox, 2009). The pointless political squabbles between the two major coalitions before and during the term of the third constitutionally-mandated caretaker government⁷ created harrowing lawlessness and chaos causing social and economic misery and ultimately to the declaration of emergency and the installation of a military-backed non-party caretaker administration (Zafarullah & Rahman, 2008). The caretakers, at the end of their two years (January 2007 to January 2008) rule, conducted an election in December 2008. In this election the AL and its allied parties won a landslide victory and formed the government. However, Bangladesh still continues to experience political violence, which stems from the contesting and parochial party interest.

Control of corruption

Among the many challenges facing public service institutions in developing countries, corruption remains one of the most pervasive and the least confronted (Davis, 2004). It has been widely recognized that corruption retards economic growth, distorts the political system, debilitates administration and undermines the interests and welfare of the community (Zafarullah & Siddiquee, 2001).

⁷ The Thirteenth Amendment to the Bangladesh Constitution provides that the incumbent government will hand over power to a non-partisan Caretaker Government headed by the immediately retired Chief Justice of Bangladesh Supreme Court three months before any parliamentary election is due. A council of advisers comprising eminent personalities chosen on the basis of political consensus assists the head of the Caretaker Government. Its main task is to conduct the national parliamentary election and hand over power to the newly elected government. The parliamentary elections of 1991, 1996, 2001, and 2008 were conducted under the supervision of such government (Bhuiyan, 2003; Momen, 2009; Zafarullah & Akhter, 2000).

Petty corruption in the various forms of bribe transaction is a fixture of daily life in Bangladesh (Knox, 2009). High-profile corruption is also rampant. Apart from being a national disgrace and embarrassment, corruption, as recent studies reveal, has severely constrained the development of the economy and inhibited the prospects of good governance in the country (Rahaman, 2008; Rahman & Khan, 2008). This avoidable malady is destroying the country. As a result, a 2008 Global Country Report on the state of corruption launched by the Transparency International ranks Bangladesh 10th from the bottom with a CPI (corruption perception index) of 2.1, one of the lowest of all the South Asian countries (Transparency International, 2008).

Corruption and abuse of rules and regulations in city corporations are not limited to conservancy officials; rather this problem climbs to rank and file. For example, a study conducted by Siddiqui, Ahmed, Awal, and Ahmed (2000) has mentioned some press stories regarding the corruption of the then mayor (1994–1999) of Dhaka city. Referring to the report published in the influential *The Daily Ittefaq*, the study has detailed specific instances of corruption: (i) Taka 10 million from the *ijara* (lease) of the cattle market; (ii) Taka 5 million from the lease of Bongo Bazar (market); and (iii) Taka 4 million from the fund of constructing a fountain in Bahadur Shah park (cited in Siddiqui et al., 2000:90–91).

The immediate past caretaker government led by Fakhruddin Ahmed took several measures to fight against corruption. As a result, 44 cases involving high-profile figures and their family members were undertaken by the courts; while a further 573 cases remain pending (Hagerty, 2008: 178). As a matter of fact, corruption-control is neither easy nor rapid in a country that has a long tradition of nurturing corruption. No quick-fix will serve the purpose of containing corruption (Khan, 2008 cited in Quddusi, 2008). However, the anti-corruption drive seems to have been sent on recess by the present government.

Moreover, the reality of Bangladesh being in a political flux affects the political environment of urban government. Though the caretaker government to some extent succeeded in reducing the intensity of corruption, the governance indicators discussed above remain elusive in terms of effective conservancy service delivery in the corporations.

A quest for building public-private partnership

In recent years there has been a growing body of literature within public administration and development studies that discusses and analyzes the process involved in enabling public-private partnership (PPP) for the improvement of public service delivery. PPP is an ambitious governance arrangement (Klijn & Teisman, 2000), which falls within the context of the intense changes the role of the state is currently experiencing (Sedjari, 2004). Partnership appears to be a new typology of public services, its key objective being to involve the private sector in the management of community assets through the creation of new contractual and organizational links between the public and private sectors. The outcome of such engagement of interests is simple: to make public services more cost-effective (Sedjari, 2004).

In an effort to improve the dismal performance of urban conservancy services, many developing countries, such as India (Ali, Olley, & Cotton, 1999; Chakrabarti, Majumder, & Chakrabarti, 2009), Ghana (Post, 1999), Nigeria (Afon, 2007; Ogu, 2000), Kenya (Mwangi, 2000), and Tanzania (Halla & Majani, 2003; Kassim & Ali, 2006), have built PPP in an attempt to improve the cost-effectiveness service delivery. In the same vein, private sector participation in SWM in Bangladesh started as a response to poor service delivery by the public sector. Frustrated by the accumulating garbage on the streets, some civil society activists started community-based

primary collection to clean up their neighborhoods (Ahmed & Ali, 2006). The operational success of some initiatives, notably, *Parichana Kalabagan* in Dhaka (Ahmed & Ali, 2006), *Halishore K & L Block Development Society* in Chittagong (Bhuiyan, 2005), and *Prodipan* in Khulna (Ahmed & Ali, 2006; Bhuiyan, 2000), have received considerable attention from policy planners, city government leaders, and international development agencies to replicate the practices across the country. As a result, more non-government and community-based organizations are engaged in this mission.

Recognizing the reality, Dhaka has expressed interest in sharing its responsibility of garbage clearing with interested private and non-government organization. Consequently, since 2001, it has extended its logistic support to a non-government organization to initiate a pilot project entitled 'Solid Waste Management in Dhanmondi Residential Area' in ward 49 (Dhaka City Corporation, 2007). The key activities of this project are:

- Door-to-door garbage collection in a particular time notified in advance;
- Disposal of waste in corporation's nearest dustbin/container;
- Segregation of waste (organic, inorganic, and clinical waste);
- Promotion of public awareness.

An evaluation of the project shows the following major impact in the locality (Islam, n.d.):

1. Environmental such as air, water and soil pollution has significantly reduced in the area.
2. Daily generated waste is collected from the members' households by the project staff which ensures cleanliness in the locality.
3. The project has helped to generate positive behavioral changes of the community.

The pilot project has been extended to another seven wards: 22, 36, 39, 40, 45, 54 and 56 of Dhaka operated through non-government organizations. The partnership has been built with the following conditions: (i) no financial support will be given to the non-government organizations, (ii) conservancy staff will extend their support to the non-government organizations, and (iii) the collected solid waste will be disposed of in the corporation's earmarked dustbin/container.

On the other hand, Dhaka recently privatized its conservancy services in Uttara, Gulshan, Banani, Baridhara, Mohakhali and Tejgaon area (zones 9 and 10). Two non-government organizations and two private contractors are responsible for this service. The private parties do the street sweeping, drain cleaning, door-to-door waste collection, dustbin cleaning, and waste transportation to the final dumping site (Dhaka City Corporation, 2007 available at: www.dhakacity.org/Page1Department, accessed December 8, 2008). The users enjoy these services by paying a small monthly fee. The interviews result suggests that the users in Uttara and Banani are largely satisfied with the quality of service provided by the firms.

The contribution of PPPs to the domain of public administration is substantial. Analyzing the benefit of a symbiotic partnership between the two, Caiden (2007) argues that the public sector has to raise resources from the private sector through borrowing or taxation, or even both. A prosperous private sector depends on law and order, an adequate public structure, and government protection and largesse. There are some functions that only one of them can perform, others that one cannot do without the other, and still others in which they can share and compete to enhance public choice and avoid excessive monopolization (Caiden, 2007). The profit that accrues from the partnership between the public sector

and the private and non-government organizations for conservancy service delivery reflect what Caiden (2007) has postulated. Such a relationship is, however, conducive to achieving good urban governance in Bangladesh.

Conclusions

This paper has focused on key dimensions of governance in the provision of effective conservancy services in Bangladesh. The results of the performance of city corporations with respect to the governance dimensions of political stability and absence of violence and control of corruption painted an unfavorable landscape. Weak governance has a damaging effect on the country's politics, economy, and public administration. It is clear that public organizations operate in accordance with the basic characteristics of the politico-administrative system of host country. This study confirms this proposition.

The Conservancy Departments in both cities suffer from the lack of human, material and financial resources, poor inter-departmental coordination, fraught relationships between central and city government, and political interference in day-to-day operations. All these have a constraining effect on their operational efficiency. As a result, urban dwellers are largely dissatisfied with the service provided by the cities. Against this backdrop, community-based SWM initiatives have grown across the country to offer a civic door-to-door garbage collection so that an environmental-friendly situation is obtained in the neighborhood. On its part, Dhaka has privatized its conservancy services in some selected areas and has formed partnership with private and non-government organizations in others. This concludes that public-private partnerships contribute to an effective SWM. Such partnerships can have a significant impact on the perceptions of what constitutes good urban governance.

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