

*Commentary*

## **Reflections on the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference on Urban and Regional Planning (3<sup>rd</sup> ICURP)**

**Shaikh Muhammad Mehedi Ahsan<sup>1</sup> and Ragib Mahmood Shuvo<sup>2</sup>**

### **1. Introduction**

In the wake of global challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic and the Ukraine war, which disrupted international collaboration and tested the resilience of nations, Bangladesh emerged as a beacon of hope, navigating past lower-income status, and committed to global and national goals. The Bangladesh Institute of Planners (BIP), recognizing the pivotal role of planning in achieving these targets, organized the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference on Urban and Regional Planning (ICURP 2023). The conference served as a meeting point for experts, policymakers, and stakeholders, aiming to explore the potential contributions of urban, regional, and rural planning in fostering sustainable development.

### **2. Setting the stage**

The conference, with the theme of 'Spatial Planning for Sustainable Development – Achieving National and Global Goals,' sought to transcend boundaries and address challenges hindering the realization of global and national targets in Bangladesh. Against the backdrop of efforts to implement Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Paris Agreement, and the Sendai Framework, ICURP aimed to catalyze collaborative efforts, especially in the context of climate-induced migration.

### **3. Diverse stakeholder engagement**

One of the highlights was the extensive engagement of stakeholders, with two ministries, 13 government departments, development authorities, 16 *pourashavas*, six local and international NGOs, development partner authorities, and 18 international organizations partnering with BIP. This collaboration demonstrated a collective commitment to the success of ICURP 2023.

### **4. Conference highlights**

Over three days, ICURP featured a robust program comprising 18 sessions, including four plenary sessions and 12 parallel sessions. The event witnessed the active participation of

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<sup>1</sup> Convenor, 3<sup>rd</sup> ICURP and General Secretary, BIP

<sup>2</sup> Research Officer, BIP

71 distinguished Bangladeshi speakers and 19 international speakers, creating a platform for the exchange of research findings, insights, and best practices.

**Table 1.** Schedule of the 3rd International Conference on Urban and Regional Planning.

Day Time	23 September	24 September		25 September	
9:30– 11:00	<b>Opening</b>	<b>Plenary session 01</b> Bangladesh Urban Vision 2050: From planning to practice [German Development Cooperation+ ICLEI]		<b>Plenary session 02</b> Preparedness of urban local government for addressing climate-induced migration in local spatial planning [German Development Cooperation & EU]	
11:00– 11:30	<b>Tea Break</b>				
11:30– 13:00	<b>High-level roundtable discussion</b>	<b>Parallel session 05</b> Integration of urban migration into sustainable planning	<b>Parallel session 06</b> Climate resilience: Hands-on experience from urban hotspots [German Development Cooperation & CBF]	<b>Parallel session 11</b> Towards integrated urban planning and development: Dialogue between urban practitioners in Japan and Bangladesh [Tokyo Development Center & World Bank]	<b>Parallel session 12</b> Community resilience and spatial planning: Vulnerabilities, responses, and strategies
13:00– 14:00	<b>Lunch</b>				

<b>Day Time</b>	<b>23 September</b>		<b>24 September</b>		<b>25 September</b>
14:00– 15:30	<b>Parallel session 01</b> Sustainable urban livelihoods: Assessments, practices, and planning for health and housing	<b>Parallel session 02</b> Performance-based funding for urban governance & infrastructure improvement (LGED) (ADB and AFD funded Project)	<b>Parallel session 07</b> Increasing accessibility of climate finance by addressing local challenges (German Development Cooperation + ICLEI)	<b>Parallel session 08</b> Intersections of population dynamics and sustainable urban & regional planning	<b>Plenary session 03</b> smart city development in Bangladesh—sharing co-created knowledge and experiences from Bangladesh JICA cooperation [JICA]
15:30– 16:00	<b>Tea Break</b>				
16:00– 17:30	<b>Parallel session 03</b> Climate resilient urban development	<b>Parallel session 04</b> Sustainable mobility and accessibility: Innovative transportation strategies in developing urban landscapes	<b>Parallel session 09</b> Planning education in Bangladesh	<b>Parallel Session 10</b> Urban spaces & their socio-economic impacts	(16:00 – 18:00) <b>Dhaka Declaration</b> followed by the <b>closing ceremony</b>
					(18:00 – 18:20) <b>Launching of Dhaka Bank and BIP credit card</b>
19:00– 20:00					<b>Dinner</b>

## 5. Key takeaways

### 5.1. Spatial Planning Framework

BIP unveiled the Spatial Planning Framework (SPF), a three-tier framework for national, regional, and local spatial planning. Endorsed during the conference, the SPF was

highlighted by the Honourable Speaker of Bangladesh Parliament, Dr. Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury. Salman F. Rahman, the Chief Guest of the Inauguration Ceremony, ICURP 2023, voiced his support for the framework and emphasized that coordination among plans needs to be prioritized. All seven planning schools of the country committed to integrating the Spatial Planning Framework in their curricula and research.

### **5.2. Accreditation manual**

ICURP witnessed the publishment of an Accreditation Manual for undergraduate planning education, aligning with the Higher Education Quality Enhancement Project. The manual received input from department heads and teachers of planning schools, reinforcing the importance of planning in national development.

### **5.3. Inclusion of planning students**

Thirty-four research papers from student members of BIP were showcased in seven sessions, addressing diverse themes within urban and regional planning. This initiative aimed to empower and encourage the next generation of planners.

### **5.4. Strengthening organizational relationships**

ICURP provided a platform for organizational relationships to flourish. Co-hosted sessions by various organizations, including ADB, World Bank, AFD, German Development Cooperation (GIZ and KfW), JICA, UNDP, ICLEI, and JICA, facilitated dialogue and collaboration.

## **6. Dhaka Declaration**

The conference culminated in the 'Dhaka Declaration,' announced in the presence of the Honourable Speaker Dr. Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury. BIP President Fazle Reza Sumon highlighted the essential role of urban, regional, and rural planning in achieving Bangladesh's global and national targets, as well as the translation of these at city, rural and community levels through this declaration, which outlines the following principles:

### **6.1 Delivering the Spatial Planning Framework for Bangladesh**

Emphasizing the need for a foundational Spatial Planning Framework as the pillar for sustainable urban development, aligning with the vision for 2041.

### **6.2 Aligning with global commitments**

Recognizing the importance of aligning actions with global agreements like SDGs, the New Urban Agenda, Paris Agreement, and the Sendai Framework.

### **6.3 Spatial planning guides development initiatives**

Advocating for a paradigm shift towards comprehensive spatial planning at the forefront of development initiatives.

**6.4 Strategic planning informs projects**

Stressing the importance of strategic planning in guiding project selection for long-term sustainability.

**6.5 Integration and prosperity**

Highlighting the need to integrate urban, rural, and community planning into national policies for shared prosperity and climate-resilient development.

**6.6 Transformative mobility**

Addressing the critical need for transformative mobility in cities and regions, supported by a Transportation Development Plan.

**6.7 Climate resilience**

Urging commitment to incorporating climate-resilient strategies into urban planning and design.

**6.8 Prioritizing affordable housing**

Recognizing the urgency of meeting housing needs and committing to strategic development of affordable housing solutions.

**6.9 Critical infrastructure**

Emphasizing the importance of investing in critical economic and social infrastructure for inclusive, sustainable communities.

**6.10. Ensuring environmental health**

Acknowledging the paramount importance of environmental health and committing to measures that safeguard clean air, water, sanitation, and green spaces.

**6.11. Collaboration and capacity building**

Recognizing the importance of multi-stakeholder collaboration and capacity building among urban planners, policymakers, and local authorities.

**7. Conclusion**

The Dhaka Declaration encapsulates a collective commitment to building a brighter, more equitable, and resilient future for Bangladesh and the world. The conference demonstrated the power of planning in navigating complex challenges, fostering collaboration, and contributing significantly to national and global targets. With the vision outlined in the Dhaka Declaration, Bangladesh, under the Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's leadership, continues to inspire a journey towards sustainable development and global leadership. Through shared commitment and actions, the planning community stands united in its determination to shape a sustainable and inclusive future.