

Detailed Area Plan (DAP): Why It Does Not Work?

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Introduction

It is now being widely acknowledged that the implementation of the DAP is a complete failure. There is a sense of despair among the planning community and environmentalists. Putting aside the mistakes of the DAP; invariably, the finger is pointed towards the land development companies. While they are to blame, the simple matter of fact is that the land use plans like DAP does not work. This article points out a few key issues that are being overlooked in the mainstream discourse.

Private residential land developers have been the biggest market supplier and real builders of large part of the city; between 70 and 95% of the all new housing built in the Third World cities is in the peripheral unplanned subdivisions (McAuslan, 1994, Kombe 2000). Given the rapid urbanization trend, government provisions are not up to the challenge. Subdivisions at the city periphery are an affordable solution to the housing/rental need for the low and middle income groups (Trivelli, 1996). The reluctance of the official acknowledgement has remained the greatest among all the challenges faced by the subdivisions, which stems from not conforming to planning regulations (Gilbert 1981). Currently, the World Bank's 'enabling the market' is the official doctrine of land supply policy in most Third World cities. Along with the National Housing Policy, the Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan (DMDP) Structure Plan proposes that government should only intervene in the land market, in an enabling capacity, to remove existing impediments in the supply, transfer, and regulations of land for shelter (RAJUK, 2006: p. 29). Against this background, the second section of this article explains the government policy and land supply. The third section presents the impediments of private land development. The Fourth section lists the operation process of the land developers. Finally, some concluding remarks are made.

Government Policy and Land Supply

In operational terms, the enabling policy will limit direct government supply and promote market-led land development (Sengupta, 2006). However, government intervention persists in direct violation of the planning system and the national housing policy. Given the current land price and dedicated quotas for the government

employees and the privileged groups, government projects are self-benefiting. If we take for example the land distribution of the Purbachal New Town, about 78% of the total 26,000 residential land plots are dedicated for the selected groups: government job holders 40%, employees and officials of semi-government bodies 15, war veterans 2, journalists 1.5, artists and sportsmen 1, businessmen and industrialists 10.5 and other categories for employees and officials of the RAJUK including the ministry concerned 2.5 (The Daily Star, 2009). It must be noted that the new town, which falls into the flood-flow zone, is a gross violation of the DMDP Structure Plan (RAJUK, 2006: p. 37). Similar priority for the selected groups and violation of policy and planning regulations is evident in other government projects e.g. Jhilmil. Government projects have a ‘formal’ status which guarantees utility, connectivity and services. These government land projects do not address the need for buildable land by the urban majority. Subsequently, government enabling policy and direct land supply is contradictory while private developers are often held accountable for violating the planning regulations.

DAP and Private Land Development

Due to the chronic shortage of buildable land, and speculation¹, residential subdivisions in the peripheral area are the most profitable and common form of land conversion. Controlling and guiding the land conversion has been the biggest challenge for the DMDP. The DMDP Structure Plan promotes dense urbanisation in the newly developed urban areas and partially enables or discourages peripheral land conversions (RAJUK, 2006: p. 48; figure 1).

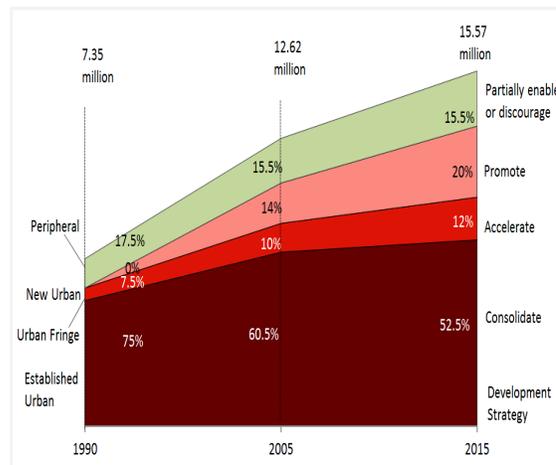


Figure 1: Land Expansion Strategy in the DMDP, 1995-2015

Source: RAJUK, 2006

¹ Land prices put Dhaka on par with New York and London while the median household income in Dhaka is 50 to 100 times lower than in those cities (Dhaka Tribune, 2013).

The land use in the Detailed Area Plans in the extended metropolitan area is virtually a greenbelt (figure 2). Excluding the core city area (DCC) which is about 100 km², of 1428.88 km², about 73.3% is demarcated as non-residential areas (agricultural zone, flood flow zone, rural settlement zone, water body and retention area and others). Excluding the government land projects and declared residential zone (already built-up new urban areas), almost 100% of the area is unavailable for land subdivision (table 1).

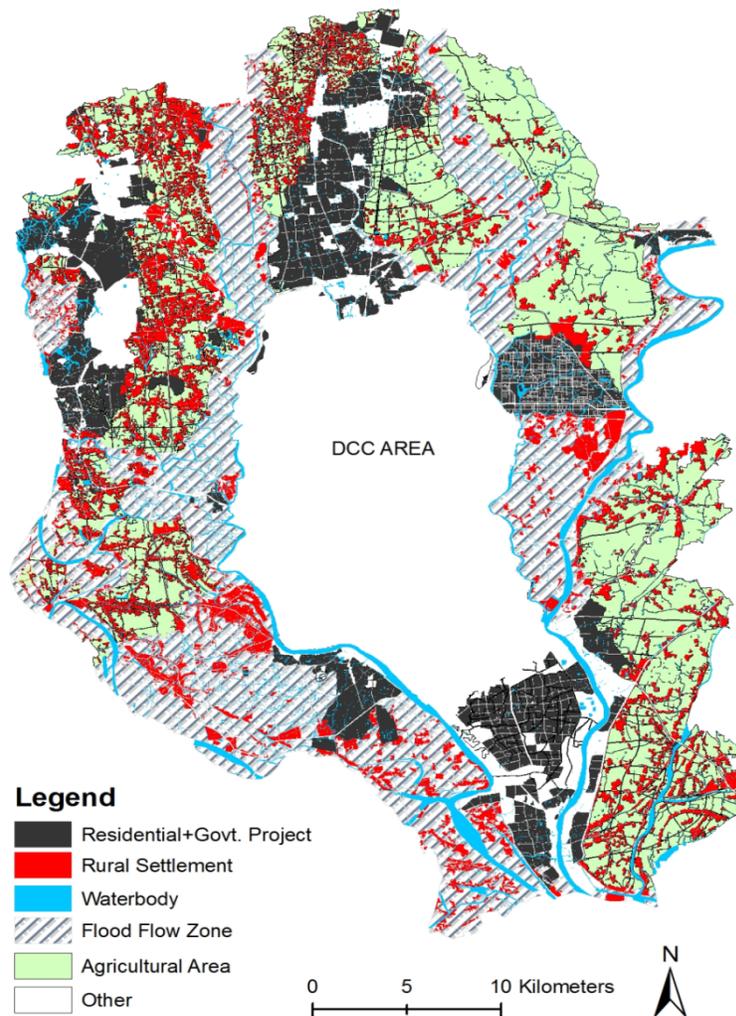


Figure 2: Proposed Land Use of the Detailed Area Plans, 1995-2015

Source: GIS Map, RAJUK 2010

Table 1: Possibility of Land Conversion in the Detail Area Plans, 1995-2015

Land Use	Area (km ²)	%	Land Conversion Possibility
Agricultural Zone	329.5	23.1	None
Flood Flow Zone	301.8	21.1	None
Residential	320.4	22.4	Already built-up
Government Land Project	60.5	4.2	None
Rural Settlement Zone	145.4	10.2	None
Water body + Retention Area	106.2	7.4	None
Others	165.1	11.6	None
Total	1428.9	100	None

* Excluding the Dhaka city Corporation Area (DCC) of about 100 km²

Source: GIS Map, RAJUK 2010

Based on location, there are two types of developers: those inside and those outside the DMDP area. All the developers inside the DMDP area are illegal since these alter the proposed land use plan of the DAP. The developers in the hinterland areas are required to acquire permission from the local authorities (local municipality and village authority). Recently, RAJUK has banned operation of all developers both inside and outside the DMDP area. Additionally, it requires all developers to seek permission from RAJUK, and to follow the Residential Land Development Regulation, 2004. More than hundred large and small land developers are active both inside and outside the DAP area.

How do the Land Developers Work?

Based on the literature, newspaper reports, blog posts, field survey and educated opinion, below are some of the common techniques that land developers follow to sustain their operation in spite of the illegality.

- According to Dr. Sarwar Jahan, president, Bangladesh Institute of Planners (BIP), most of the local political leaders are developers or own land in the DMDP area.

- The local politicians are involved in land development and transactions which they cannot do if the DAP is implemented. They are strictly against the implementation of the DAP and are provoking the local people to go against it.
- Publicly RAJUK condemns the operations of the land developers, but many RAJUK planners have land development companies and act as consultants for the land developers. There is an internal support and financial linkage between the land developers and RAJUK planners, which help the land developers to bypass the regulations e.g. standard layout design.
 - The Real Estate and Housing Association of Bangladesh (REHAB) maintains a strong linkage with the political parties and their subsidiary organisations. REHAB plays a key role in influencing the political commitment to implement any public policy.
 - Strictly speaking, most developers have not even acquired the land they are selling. The present status of the developers is mainly low-lying rice fields. The developers have established a mechanism of land transaction in which potential buyers, while unfamiliar with the location of the land, pay in instalments. Since all clients pay in instalments, there is no hurry for either party to physically ensure the land parcel. Rather it is a slow investment for future land on which to build or to speculate. The proposal areas of the developers will extend laterally as the number of customers increases.
 - Since the current land market is a virtual one, it is difficult to enforce the DAP land uses. Recently, RAJUK's initiative to evict and to charge the land developers ended in failure because most of the land developers vanished overnight.
 - The developers in the hinterland areas are required to acquire permission from the local authorities (local municipality and village authority). These bodies have neither the capacity to guide nor the intention to control such residential land developments. In many cases, the developers finance the elections of the local leaders.
 - Environmental NGOs are vocal and active for protection of environmentally sensitive areas e.g. flood-zones, water bodies within DAP area. Even though they have limited legal success e.g. Metro Makers Ltd. (The Daily Star, 2013).

Concluding Remarks

Urban planning in Bangladesh still pivots around fulfilling the formal requirements of the system, and the roots of the system can be traced back to UK planning. However, government intervention in the land market by direct provision violates the planning system and National Housing Policy, benefits the already better-off groups

and does not provide housing solutions for the urban majority. On the contrary, land use plan like DAP is an externally imposed criterion for the land developers.

Private residential subdivisions present a complex market in the absence of formal recognition. However, subdivisions present a homogenous trend all over the world, that is, they can by-pass legal requirements, and the legalisation, recognition and densification of these are time-consuming and costly processes. Moreover, the local stake holders (e.g. political leaders and land owners, land developers) are the deciding factors of the land development, rather than the planning guidelines. Therefore, the extent of the land development is mostly dependent on the interests of the local stakeholders and on the local geography, and is merely a consequence of the planning system and public policy. Land use proposals of the DAP does not address the interests of the local stakeholders; and this is why DAP is impossible to implement. Unless the planning system can address the interest of the local stakeholders and compromise, any external and top-down planning system is bound to fail. And ultimately, planning is a discipline of compromise.

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