



# Empowering the Urban Poor through Participatory Planning Process: A Case from Jhenaidah, Bangladesh

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## ABSTRACT

*The paper analyses a community development project based in Jhenaidah, Bangladesh, which evolved through broadening social capital among slum communities and formal institutions in order to bring positive socio-spatial changes in the neighborhoods. Till date, nine disadvantaged communities have formed a network for city-wide community development, have started to build and manage their own funds, built better houses for themselves, and through this process have managed to draw attention and support from the local government. Started by a small group of architects and a local NGO in 2015, and still broadening its scopes, this project can be regarded as a successful example of people-led development initiative, especially in a context where most development projects exercise limited participatory values and are dominated by unequal power dynamics. Hence issues like scaling up and economic sustainability still concern those, who can see the community-driven development process with an unbiased attitude. The overarching goal of this article is to sketch out these issues with the help of empirical understandings from the field and theoretical findings from literature on social innovation and power in planning in order to understand how to work balance between local and institutional management of projects in order to avoid perceiving bottom-up and top-down initiatives in a dualistic manner.*

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## 1. Introduction

Urbanization in Bangladesh is moving at a rapid pace. Between 1961 to 1981, the average urban growth rate was 8%. The present average growth rate is about 4.5%. According to the population census of 2001, the share of urban population was about 23.29% and at present it is approximately 37%. The importance of urban development is emphasized in terms of its role in the national economy. More than 60% of the national GDP is derived from the non-agricultural sectors that are mainly based in urban areas. The expansion of urban economy leads to the growth of urban population and concomitant haphazard urban spatial growth without

planning. (District town infrastructure development project (DTIDP, 2015))

The case study is from a city corporation in the western part of Bangladesh, named 'Jhenaidah'. Jhenaidah is a medium sized municipality of Bangladesh. Jhenaidah Municipality stands on the bank of the Noboganga River. Located on 210 km west to the capital city(Dhaka) Bangladesh. Jhenaidah Municipality was established in 1958. This is a class "A" municipality. The municipality consists of 9 wards and 33 mahallas (neighborhoods).

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