a clear strategy relating to the pourashava problems.

However, in 1990, an attempt was made to reform the existing urban local government institutions, i.e., the pourashavas of Bangladesh, by appointing the "Poura Commission." The main objectives of the commission were to: 1) identify reasons as to why city corporations/pourashavas could not provide adequate services to the urban people, and 2) offer recommendations on the measures to be undertaken by the local bodies to meet various increasing demands of urban people, keeping in view the country's existing socio-economic conditions.

The Poura Commission provided several recommendations on the aspects of structure and composition of urban local bodies, central-local government relationship, finance, planning, municipal services and housing and land policies. The commission also recommended formulating an appropriate slum development policy with the participation of slum dwellers.

Similarly, in 1997 the Local Government Reform Commission presented a report, with many recommendations about the decentralisation of local government institutions. But, unfortunately, not much has been done on this commission report so far.

The current Bangladesh PRSP indicates the need for a reformulation of the decentralisation agenda and an agenda for promoting local governance. Key priorities in this reformulated agenda include the course of action to lay the groundwork for a comprehensive legislation on local government. At present, there is a plethora of laws and circulars, often outdated and self contradictory, which govern existing local governments. These need to be streamlined into a comprehensive act.

As the current caretaker government is committed to bringing meaningful changes in many sectors, a real need for undertaking urban reforms becomes pressing. Already, a high-powered committee on local government reform has been created to formulate the recommendations and find a way forward.

There is, therefore, an urgent need to review the findings and recommendations of the Poura Commission 1990 and to highlight issues of the pourashavas to enhance service delivery systems of these urban local government bodies. We hope the local government commission will make some sweeping changes in the laws and policies of the local government system both in rural and in urban Bangladesh.



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