



The Daily Star and Save the Children in association with C&A Foundation and Bangladesh Institute of Planners (BIP) organised a roundtable titled "Child Sensitive Urban Planning" on December 18, 2017. Here we publish a summary of the discussions.

Child-Sensitive Urban Planning

Syed Matiul Ahsan, Deputy Director, Humanitarian Sector, Save the Children and Moderator of the session



Speculatively, in this era of rapid urbanisation, a third of our current population are children and it is anticipated that by 2030 60 percent of our total population of different urban areas will be comprised of children. These children will play leadership roles for the nation one day and it is proverbial that 'Children are the future of a nation.' As Bangladesh makes social and economic progress, we notice a variegated development spree in many urban areas and in big cities. But these development works should be planned keeping the priority of the children in mind. Save the Children, in partnership with Bangladesh Institute of Planners (BIP), has been arranging seminars and workshops with school-going children of various schools in and around Dhaka to observe how urbanisation is seen by children and how sensitive they are towards urban planning and development. At the same time, it can be considered as an effort to make the children sensitive on the urban dynamics and to make them future leaders to protect their environment. The purpose of today's roundtable discussion is to develop a dialogue between children and adults about urban planning and development and to know their views and opinions so that it may help the planners to make child-sensitive urban planning in future.

Md Moinul Islam, Urban Planner, Narayanganj City Corporation



The government of Bangladesh has set its goal to make the country a middle-income one by the end of 2021 and a developed one by the end of 2041. Keeping pace with the development works the urban and city areas are experiencing a boom in infrastructural development. But we could not make a child-sensitive urban development plan or one that is suitable for the social and psychological upbringing of a child. It is high time we took planned measures to build child-friendly urban and city areas. Today's child will be a city mayor, an architect or a planner in the future. It will be a serious blow for the city if these children do not get the facilities and scope to flourish amidst this rapid urbanisation process. With this in mind Save the Children and Bangladesh Institute of Planners (BIP) have been organising several workshops in different schools since August 2017. Making the children aware about urban planning and its effects, and paving a path to show them how to express their needs and opinions were the main purposes of the workshops.

The planning ministry has urged to consider child-sensitive urban planning in its 7th Five-Year plan (2016-2020). The ministry has taken up ten strategic measures to augment the child rights policy, good upbringing and better services for children. Three of these measures are directly related to child-sensitive urban planning: i) providing children, particularly in urban and remote settings, access to clean water, sanitation and a healthy environment; ii) ensuring participation of children in defining their needs, developing programmes, implementing interventions and evaluating their success; iii) ensuring widespread public support for survival and development of children.

Moreover, the United Nations also states in its Child Rights Charter that the state parties should chalk out all development and habitat planning prioritising children, both healthy and physically challenged ones.

An alarming fact is that there is only two

percent of urban area left for playgrounds for children; there is also the looming threat of land-grabbers. Nowadays, we see that the physical growth of an urban child is seriously impeded due to the lack of playground facilities. Children are prone to watching TV or playing video games which make them obese and ignite various health issues. The capitalist society makes it hard to save the playgrounds for children. Now we have to fight in the courtroom for a piece of land for our kids to play in. How can we ensure a healthy living for the coming generation which will take over the leadership role in future?

With the need for child-sensitive urban planning in mind, Bangladesh Institute of Planners (BIP) with the support of Save the Children organised workshops with eight schools and 400 students to have dialogues and information exchange sessions on eight significant issues such as housing, public transport, urban environment, waste management, community services, urban utilities, urban safety and risks and social cohesion. Children and students have expressed their expectations and opinions in those workshops. This type of workshop will encourage and facilitate the state parties and different authorities to plan and build child-sensitive urban areas. Besides, children will also grow concerned about urban planning which will ultimately give impetus to making better plans for their upbringing.

Saptarshi Chakraborty, Morgan Girls' School and College, Narayanganj



We want to live in a clean city with clean air. But air pollution is creating havoc in many cities including the capital, Dhaka. Several research studies have shown that the lungs of 25 percent of children in city areas in Bangladesh are not functioning properly. The unplanned cityscapes, brick fields, and carbon dioxide emissions from vehicles are seriously damaging our health. I conclude my speech enquiring government's initiatives to reduce air pollution in this city.

Mahmud Hossain Sajedin, Narayanganj High School and College, Narayanganj



A great proportion of urban populations are slum-dwellers. Children from these slums do not get any civic advantages, namely education and medical treatment. These facilities and fundamental rights are more important to them than urban planning. The urban planning pioneers and initiators should know the expectations of these slum children before planning any development work.

Tahrim Maria Progga, Savar Girls' High School, Savar, Dhaka



Though children comprise one-third of the total population, they are always neglected when it comes to their opinion. Even if the matter is related to a child, he/she is not given any chance to say his/her opinion. The elders always make the decision regarding anything related to the well-being of children. It is a serious defect of this current society which must be changed. A child can easily perceive a better environment for his/her upbringing, one in which he/she feels comfortable. For example, as a child I can better understand how the stairs of my school should be built for children. The opinion of a child should be given proper consideration before taking any child-related development plan. My appeal is to know what measures the

planners and the state parties are including in urban planning keeping children's need in mind and to develop a child-sensitive plan.

Shakila Akter, Savar Girls' High School, Savar, Dhaka



The thing that bothers me is that there is literally no playground for us. There is hardly any indoor game facility in the schools of Dhaka and in the cities around. Just few minutes ago I have come to know that Dhaka has only two percent of playground for its schools and colleges. It is utterly frustrating to know that we are only getting the opportunity to learn what the books teach us. Though in urban planning it is said that proper initiatives will be taken to provide children with playground facility in residential areas, in reality the playgrounds and fields that are available are mostly in business areas. In this reality many potential students cannot become a famous player or athlete. My query to the planners and authorities is: How many initiatives have been taken to solve these problems?

Fatema Akter Soma, Savar Adhar Chandra High School, Savar Dhaka



One of the biggest problems faced by school-going children is transport. The buses plying in the city are not fit for transporting children to and from schools. Most of the time we cannot get on the bus due to the crowd. Even if we manage to get on the bus, we have to travel to and from school standing in the bus. Moreover, there are no fixed bus stands and drivers are not willing to stop on those bus stands. It is regretful that female students get harassed in public transports very often.

Faria Faiza Kanika, Mirpur Girls' Ideal Laboratory Institute, Mirpur, Dhaka



We, the school-going children, face intolerable suffering especially in the rainy season. The roads are submerged with torrential rain and many of the areas in Mirpur remain under water for days. Our studies are hampered and we feel discouraged.

Sumaiya Akter Eitey, Mirpur Girls' Ideal Laboratory Institute, Mirpur, Dhaka



I am surprised to know that no one cares for building codes while building any infrastructure or residential building. The building codes set by RAJUK or other authority assert that all buildings should be built leaving a common space around the building. Alas! It is never complied by the builders and they are escaping through loopholes of the law.

Sannjida Ayesha Siddika Oishi, Shaheed Abu Taleb High School, Mirpur



My question to all in this roundtable session is: "Is there any project implementation in this city similar to what we read about urban planning in the books?" It would be very positive for the children and their future if more parks and public spaces were built around the city like

the one in Hatirjheel.

Md Ayatullah Taha, Savar Adhar Chandra High School, Savar Dhaka



We cannot walk safely and most of the time we are forced to walk on the streets which is very dangerous and serious accidents can happen to any school-going child at any time. I want to know about the future plan of the government and the urban planners about child-friendly walkways and pavements.

Manal Mabrook, Heritage International School, Narayanganj



Children are passing their time at home and growing up without any social cohesion and social mingling. This wall-bound life worsens children's adaptability as a social being. Through today's discussion I want to know what plans have been taken to enhance social cohesion among kids.

Mahtab Hussain Siddique, Architect and Urban Designer



We can see the light of hope that many changes are taking place. No one can ever imagine building any residential or commercial building without leaving enough space for air and light. The government has become stricter regarding building code. We are trying to make spaces for playgrounds for all age groups, not specifically for cricket or football. Various projects are going on under "Jol-Shobuj Prokolpho" in Dhaka South.

Dr Adil Mohammad Khan, Joint-Secretary, Bangladesh Institute of Planners & Professor of the Department of Urban & Regional Planning, Jahangirnagar University



Neither being romantically hopeful nor being a pessimist, I would prefer standing on a realistic ground and telling young school-going kids that they do not have any playground. There were many playgrounds once, but those went down in history. We cannot give you false hope that we will try to manage a playground or cricket field for you. A mass movement is all that we need now to ensure playgrounds for kids. The policymakers in the government always talk highly about development and progress but most of their development plans are devoid of children and their well-being. Why are kids prone to taking drugs and juvenile crimes? There is no scope for them to pass their leisure time in games and sports. How can we make the children dream of a better future? We don't want policies in ink and paper. We want fields, playgrounds, pavements, clean air and safety for our children. We need to set more and more citizen dialogue exchange programmes to collect more ideas about child-sensitive urban planning.

Maruf Hossain, Programme Manager, Work for a Better Bangladesh Trust



Many of us pointed the blue arrow of blame towards the government or the city authority. Breaking the bias, we have to accept that we do not use our nearest playgrounds which are still available in our

locality for any games and sports. The children must pursue their parents to take them out to the fields and playgrounds which are still available. Children of different age groups should start using the existing playgrounds nearby and set a trend. When there is a trend, there is a demand. If the demand is established, the government will also positively act for establishing playgrounds in the city. Another aspect of urban planning that requires to be addressed is community-based schools and colleges. Community-based schooling will reduce the travel time of kids and thus also alleviate traffic congestion. If this can be done, children will get more free time to play and utilise their leisure time to explore their creative talents.

Dr Akter Mahmud, General Secretary, BIP & Professor of the Department of Urban & Regional Planning, Jahangirnagar University



When we plan for a city we plan it for all age groups. But there was a time when children's opinions were not considered. But now the scenario is just the opposite. Children are the true future of a nation. Every nation thrives when its development plan truly targets the children. We have just ignited the first movement of child-sensitive urban planning and we will see the outcome soon. We all have to work together and achieve the true purpose of this movement.

Architect Iqbal Habib, Member Secretary, Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon (BAPA)



The air of Dhaka is more polluted than that of New Delhi. We, the planners, the environment activists, guardians, parents, all are deeply concerned with the issue. Nearly 25 percent children in Dhaka and other big cities are suffering from lung-related problems due to this increasing air pollution. But the policymakers have turned a deaf ear to our appeals. The only reason is that their children commute in air-conditioned private cars or live beyond the city pollution. Numerous brick fields are given license without the consideration of the environmental issue. The roads are being swept without any use of water. The whole city becomes dusty in a minute. Even the morning air is not fresh anymore in Dhaka. It is a matter of grave concern that our beloved Dhaka city has become a city of muscle power. I mean in this city, policy and laws are made to benefit only those who are in power either politically or economically.

It is evident that the policymakers are intentionally ignoring the poor and underprivileged people. When we intentionally try to ignore an existing problem, the problem will never be solved. Only if the children can ignite fire in parents' minds about healthy urban planning in which all children can learn, grow and flourish, the positive turn of the wheel will be visible. All those concerned should keep in mind that a good generation is the greatest visible and permanent development a nation can avail. Otherwise, only the flyovers and bridges will not ensure long-term development. The parents must join the movement. The parents must take responsibility to make this city liveable by means of continuous movement for a child-sensitive city.