

## **Urban Development and Developing Society: A Case Study of Guwahati City**

Purobi Sharma

The urbanisation process in Guwahati, in which population concentration, land expansion, emerging site and situation have gradually created a formidable urban centre. This paper highlights the question of planned urban development in Guwahati which reflects the urbanisation pattern of the whole region. As a prime city it needs proper urban perspective for economic development of the entire region. The management pattern is highly confusing and ad-hoc and entirely dependent on the will and the interest of the State and National Government. The sporadic development programmes simply reveal a situation of utilisation of funds sponsored by the Government. An attempt has been made to discuss land development pattern which in turn reflects the nature of public policy towards growing urbanisation in a backward economy. It is highlighted that the economic status of the city, as a high revenue earning seat for the Government, deserves promoted urban management. The perspective of growth of vital urban leadership at the city level is part of it.

**Keywords:** Urban Management; haphazard growth, Proliferation of agencies

### **Introduction**

Social change and development leads to altered relationship of human beings with the environment. Urbanisation is one of the most striking phenomena of social change in modern civilisation which is altering the world landscape at an unparalleled scale and space. The growth and development of city is a key component of urbanisation process and it goes beyond the spatial and demographic expansion comprising many elements of overall transformation process of the society to which it belongs. Among the many attributes of urbanisation, behavioral, demographic, structural, spatial and the demographic aspects are most widely understood connotation of urbanisation. However, it is a complex phenomenon involving decision making at multiple levels. Finding out the appropriate role of government and the impact of its policies on the process of urbanisation is a major question of enquiry.<sup>1</sup> Developing societies, as the name implies, reflect a situa-

---

Dr. Purobi Sharma is Associate Professor and Head, Department of Political Science, Cotton College, Guwahati, Assam, India.

tion in which the process to adapt to many new conditions is being unfolded. In this situation urbanisation takes place with two distinct trends: massive shift of labour from predominantly rural sectors to predominantly urban sectors, and the existing urban centers expanded and new centres developed. According to the United Nations (UN) the proportion of urban dwellers rose to 47 percent in 2000 from 30 percent in 1950 and it is projected to reach 60 percent by 2030. The projection made by the UN reveals that by the year 2025 the level of urbanisation in less developed region would have risen to 61 percent which would account for about 80 percent of total urban population at that time.<sup>2</sup> The 2011 Revision of World Urbanisation Prospects reveals that urban population increased to 3.63 billion from 1.35 billion in 2001 and has been projected to raise up to 6.3 billion by 2050. Within this backdrop the development of Guwahati city is to be understood as reflections of and stimuli to many changes in the North Eastern part of India.

The management of urban development is theoretically conceived as tackling the growth process of urban area in a planned and positive manner and making provision for infrastructure. It also has a pragmatic attribute of new realism of utilising potential capabilities of cities. It is a multi-dimensional aspect. Here is an attempt to reveal management of urban development within the public policy at the politico-administrative level. It is to be highlighted that urban development as a reflection of overall development process cannot remain outside the purview of the political system of the country.

### **An Indian Perspective**

Indian urban phenomenon has been characterized by a tumultuous growth of urban population and an unprecedented growth of urban settlements in the last few decades. The total urban population of 285 millions in 2001 in India is more than the total population of several countries. According to the 2011 census report it has further risen to 377 million. It is also a little over 10 percent of the total urban population of the world; it is more than 21 percent of Asian urban population. Polarization of population in higher order urban settlements is a conspicuous feature of urban development in India. Total population of class I cities including million plus cities constitute 70 percent of total urban population as depicted in the 2011 census report. In searching for major components of an urban development policy in India, it can be easily accepted that it must be conducive for economic development of the country. The Government of India's concern has been reflected in providing a sound infrastructural basis for urban environment and activities with a socio-cultural, economic-physical and politico-administrative dimension. The voluminous reports of the National Commission on Urbanisation, 1988 appointed by the Government of India provided the basic guide lines for the formulation of goals of National Urban Policy both at the macro and micro level. At the Macro level it stressed on the identification of Urbanisational hierarchy of cities as Generators of Economic Momentum. It was a departure from the past as it made an attempt to explain growth potentialities of regional towns, capital cities and urban centers of backward regions. Similarly at the micro level the Commission emphasized guided land management in correct perspective as a scarce, complex, sensitive and costly resource and its optimised use under changing circumstances. The realization, if materialized in our context, would have resulted in a formidable urban development in the whole North East

Region. It is to be highlighted in this context that the Government of India at the national level plays a crucial role to formulate policies, sponsor and support programmes, coordinating and monitoring all issues of urban development.<sup>3</sup> Components of urban policy reflect the comprehensive outlook with sectoral plans. It also reveals the highly complicated character of the process and the interrelationship between various elements. Components can be structured as: Policy guidelines made by the Union government from time to time; urban planning and development legislation of states serving as the basis for determination of the system of urban government, management and regulation of development process; the National Plan Document; government policy on slums and town improvement, schematic programmes, the Urban Land Policy, Housing Policy, policy of urban environment, and infrastructural arrangements.

### **Growth Dynamics**

Urban history is the narration of the fact that it is never a uniform force. The course is a concomitant of its particular political, socio-economic and cultural settings. Ancient Guwahati resembled a "regal-ritual city" which is described as socially demarcated centers of political and ritual status unlike rural areas of the society. The eminent historians recognize that the religious activities and the political patronage was the driving force in the growth of the city. The process of Aryanization is evident from the ancient name of the city- Pragjyotishpur. Hence it served the purpose of fostering the all India phenomenon of religious unity in the North East part of India. The later developments were synchronized due to its strategic geographical situation. The emergence of an administrative centre started under the Ahom Kingdom in the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries. During the British period, since the nineteenth century, continuity of social change with new ideas and institutions was maintained. The British period was remarkable for development of the urban structure with a process of expansion in size and quality in physical aspects, socio-economic conditions and politico-administrative management system. Gradually it emerged as a primate city system common in developing societies with a dominant role in the region due to its antiquity, location, size and population and wide functional base. However, no significant step was taken to interweave the macro level aspects of regional development with the micro level process of city development. The physical expansion in the last few decades has been recognized as Urban Agglomeration, Greater Guwahati, Master Plan area and Guwahati Metropolitan Area (GMA) at different times. The Master Plan covers an area of 262 sq. km. This area is proposed to be increased by 66 sq. km. in the Master Plan for G.M.A.-2025 including more village with an approximate area of 328 sq. km. Out of total planning area the total developed area was 6447.06 Hectres. Unusable land was estimated as 38% to total planning area. Hence, the scope for planning was left only for 37.16 percent to total planning area. The Land used pattern (Table-1) reveals predominance of the land coverage for residential purposes.

Zoning Regulation have not been realistic in the perspective of the growth of scattered commercial activities which has given rise to inter mixing of residential and commercial land use. The unplanned settlements in the core area is conspicuous. The usual practice in other areas to construct houses without any consideration of the development

of the whole sector in respect of road, drainage show the poor land management policy. In this context it is important to note that special planning was needed for the hills in and around the city. According to data of Soil Conservation Department the total land area in hilly track is 7,117 Hectare. In the year 2000 the Department survey showed that 1,23,989 number of people have been settled in the hills causing serious threat to environment. These settlements mostly belong to illegal occupants.

**Table-1-Proposed Land use pattern for GMA-2025**

<b>Land use</b>	<b>Percentage of developed area (excluding new town)</b>	<b>Percentage of developed area (including new town)</b>
Residential	31.92	25.10
Retail Commercial	1.33	1.36
Wholesale Commercial	0.30	1.27
Industrial	1.91	2.80
Public and Semi-Public	12.07	10.99
Composite Use I	3.01	2.48
Composite Use II	1.11	2.56
Recreational and Open Space	12.3	11.0
Transporta-tion	10.53	10.39
Eco-Sensitive/ Eco-Friendly Zone	25.5	26.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Master Plan for Guwahati Metropolitan area-2025

**Table-2 Population Trend and Projections**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Population in GMCA</b>	<b>GMA excluding GMCA</b>	<b>GMA</b>
1951	43,615	53,774	97,389
1961	100,707	98,775	199,482
1971	123,783	169,436	293,219
1981	268,945	102,351	371,296
1991	584,342	61,827	646,169
2001	809,895	80,878	890,773
2011	1,191,418	110,062	1,301,480
2021	1,752,668	149,776	1,902,444
2031	2578,310	203,821	2,782,131

Source: City Development Plan, July,2006 GMDA

**Table-3 Trend of Population Growth in Guwahati**

Census	Population	Growth (%)
1901	11661	-
1911	12481	7.03
1921	16480	32.04
1931	21797	32.26
1941	29598	35.79
1951	43615	47.36
1961	100707	130.90
1971	123783	22.91
1981	268945	117.27
1991	584342	117.27
2001	809895	38.60
2011	968549	19.59

Source: Census Reports of India

The land use pattern is not properly planned in conformity with its physical features resulting in the haphazard growth pattern of the urban structure. The situation reveals disparity in the potential of a site and its level of utilisation.

The growth of the city is reflected in rapid population growth and increased functional efficiency. Table-3 shows the trend of population growth in the city. The city alone contributes 55% of the combined population of the significant towns of Assam. The decadal growth rate under G.M.A. is 27.61% and density of population is 3,741 in 2011. The population projection for the year 2031 is 27 lakhs. The floating population has been estimated by the transportation survey as 10%. The Literacy rate in GMDA in 1991 was 70.60% which rose to 77% in 2001 and according to the 2011 census it has reached up to 91.11%. The economy of the city is essentially leased on the tertiary sector. Majority of the work force in Guwahati is dependent on the Government and public sector jobs indicating lack of development of industries and enterprises. In 2001 the workforce participation rate in corporation area was 35.1% and as per the CMP-2025 it has been adopted to be 36% for 2025 for the GMA area. Trade and commerce is the prime economic activity.

### **Development Management**

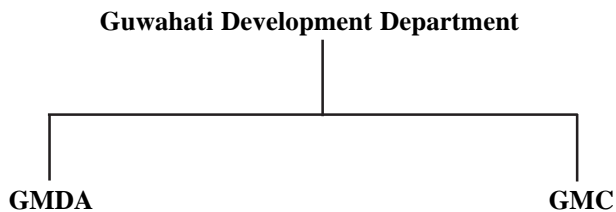
In the ultimate analysis, the challenges and complexities of urban situation are met by the Government in its pursuit to initiate, guide, administer, manage and control the measures meant for the improvement of the physical and quantitative aspects of urban life. Multiple organizational units of the Government shape the developmental process with different degrees of spatial, functional and financial scope. With varying implications they form the integral part of the development management paradigm planning and designing, implementations, financing and control.

With the increase in the growth of population since 1974, the city management was immediately confronted with immense problem. The system that was structured had distinct negative syndrome: though the first Municipal Corporation was constituted, the traditional role of the municipal agency was not enhanced with true spirit. In addition to that, instead of developing particularistic planning policy suited to the situation prevailing in the city, institutions were created at the general instance of all India situation consequently, there was no vibrant growth of local leadership and peoples' participation. There is proliferation of agencies (Table -3). The multiple agencies as different components city development management paradigm are working under the political control. Political intervention is vital in initiating performance as well as in deciding priorities and channelizing finances derived from various sources. The integrated political leadership from the top over the whole issue of urban development provide little scope for continuous interaction between agencies suitable for good performance. The isolation of planning agency from the implementing agencies at several instances further enhances the problem of delinked bureaucratic wings.

### **Urban Planning and Land Management**

Land Management is an important element of urban development process. In the city of Guwahati it assumes a significant role as the geographical location demands very meaningful urban planning. The northern part is constrained by the river Brahmaputra. The eastern and the southern parts are surrounded by hillocks. The central part also has small hillocks like Sarania hill (193m), Nabagraha hill (217m), Nilachal hill(193m) and Chunsali hill (293m). Apart from hilly tracks several water bodies, swamps, marshes also cover the city. Water logging is a perennial problem which hampers the urban structure and urban life in a very detrimental way. The natural causes of water logging are identified as physiographic conditions of the city like average slope, relief, intensity of rainfall, rising level of the Brahmaputra river and the back flow of the river water through three basins Bondajan, Khanajan and the Bharalu. The swamps and low lying areas have emerged between the hills. As a crescent shaped basin the original city is naturally prone to water logging. For an ecologically self sustaining system of urban development planning there is need of "development control" in the form of prohibition on destruction of natural system in the city.

**Table-4 Institutional Framework**



Infrastructure	Planning & Design	Construction	Operation & Maintenance
Water supply	PHE/AUWSSD/GMC/FCD	PHE/AUWSSD/GMC/FCD	PHE/AUWSSD/GMC/FCD
Sewerage	PHE/AUWSSD/GMC/FCD	PHE/AUWSSD/GMC/FCD	PHE/AUWSSD/GMC/FCD
Drainage	PHE/AUWSSD/GMC	PHE/AUWSSD/GMC	PHE/AUWSSD/GMC/
Storm water drainage	GMDA/GMC/T & CP	GMDA/GMC	GMDA/GMC
Solid waste disposal	GMC	GMC	GMC
Municipal R (including flyover)	PWD/GMDA/GMC	PWD/GMDA/GMC	PWD/GMDA/GMC
Street lighter	PWD/GMDA/GMC	PWD/GMDA/GMC	PWD/GMDA/GMC
Town Planning	GMDA & T & CP	GMDA	GMDA

Source: Office of the GMDA

It leads to proper land management, which also has impacts on number of key urban services and elements the location and viability of industries, prospect of urban infrastructure, protection of fragile and sensitive areas, residential and shelter purposes and many others. At present the system is not geared to handle land resource in effective manner. This is evident in the haphazard growth and distorted development in the last few decades, which is creating difficulties in altering the landscape. The trend of population growth and physical expansion through out the years imply the continuous need for development of urban land for industries, residential and commercial purposes, low income settlements, basic infrastructure services, parks and open space etc. several issues are interwoven with the management of land in the city. It is the prime link between the development programmes and the people. The lack of rational urban land management in the city is responsible for lack of transparency in land transaction, particularly in the Government lands in the city. Complex procedures at the administrative level also encourage illegal land transaction.

Land use planning and development control are conducted by the authorities on the basis of Master Plan for the city and the Building Bye Laws. The First Master Plan and zoning Regulation adopted in 1965, modified in 1986 covered regulation, control and guidance pattern up-to the year 2001. The zoning regulation was not followed and over the years the core area of the city was developed densely with intermixing of residential commercial and public and semi public activities. The task of the plan implementation was assigned to several agencies, including the development Authority, the G.M.C. and

some of the Government Departments. For the non-conformity to statutory practice for regulation and control, the land management policy was not materialized. The Master Plan did not fully consider the broader urban development strategy. It did not stretch beyond the limits of metropolitan region and as such the question of linking with a Regional Plan was not dealt with. As a physical development plan it ignored the potentialities of hillocks in and around the city as viable centers of tourist and recreational spots. In the absence of financially viable investment packages through site development etc., the proposed programmes and projects were bound to be implemented in a piecemeal manner. The Second Master Plan and zone Regulation up-to the year 2025 was adopted in 2009 after a gap of few years incorporating more villages with an addition of 66 sq. km. The Guwahati Metropolitan Development Authority in its bid to fulfill one of its statutory obligations to prepare, enforce and execute the Master Plan took initiative since 1995. The existing Master Plan did not include the project for the capital of the state. The capital was established with temporary planning. Increase in traffic load in an alarming rate and the ever expanding traffic nodes added new dimension to the land use pattern. There was another urgent need of revitalization of the land development process in the light of increasing encroachment on the vacant land, including the Green Belt which constituted for 37.16% of total planning area. The GMDA Act provided for acquisition of land by the Authority and as it was recognized that urban land can be used as a major resource to raise funds by acquiring, developing and providing service plots to the consumers. The office records and public declarations showed such awareness. But till 2009 Master Plan approach was sidelined. The sprawling growth of the city could not be regulated. "Development" as defined by the prevailing acts refer to building activities on land. In the city, from this point of view, 75% development activities occur due to housing activities. The construction of parks, roads or beautification constitutes only 25% of total development activity. So it can be logically perceived that if the development activities of this larger section undertaken mostly by private sector housing activities can be guided in right perspective, much of the development targets are fulfilled. Non implementation of existing Master Plan and the fact of non-existence of plan for a long period are major constraints in management paradigm.

There is a change of authority for planning-from Town & Country Planning Organization to the Development Authority. The approach of the present Master Plan(2009-2025) touches the question of dispersed Urbanisation and reduction of congestion and improvement of inter and intra regional accessibility. Besides the shift of authority the notion of urban planning assumes a crucial turn in the context of 12<sup>th</sup> schedule of the 74<sup>th</sup> constitution Amendment Act. The Act envisaged community participation in the planning process. However no initiative was taken by the state government in this context. The role of the Corporation as a civic body was restrained by the fact that it is dissolved by the Government from time to time. In the last few decades the elected body could operate only for few years and this greatly hampers the objectives of city Government in a growing city. It is a recognized fact that the corporation is facing perennial financial crunch. The constraints arise due to insufficient supply of fund from the Government, failure in augmenting own resources of revenue, mismanagement of fund.<sup>4</sup> The Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) launched by the Government of



India aims at bringing-about fast track planned development of identified cities. Guwahati has been identified under the Mission. The City Development Plan, 2006 designed under the programmes of the mission focuses on community perspective in planning urban development, through capacity building at Corporation level along with its accountability towards citizen. In our context the corporation has an important role to play as it is a vital agency in shaping urban landscape. It is also entrusted with the power to implement Building Bye-Law and to take part in development control” by deciding permissibility of construction activities in the city. This again touches the vital question of coordination between corporation and the Development Authority in maintaining uniform standard to ensure proper efficiency. The New Master Plan 2025 takes a pragmatic vision through development of new areas in periphery. A strong political lobby will go a long way in determining the proper paradigm of urban development management in future.

### Conclusion

The present study attempts to focus on the facets of development process in a city where a geographical entity gradually adapts itself to multifaceted changing phenomenon occurring with time. In our context, the reporting and recording system is highly inadequate and the academic interest on city development management was not accepted. Against the magnitude of the growth process of the city in a backward economy, no consideration has been paid for acceleration of economic process of the city. It is a situation of purposeful expansion, not a purposeful growth. In this context it is highly necessary that instead of treating Urbanisation as a problem, it is to be promoted. Institutional responsibility is fragmented resulting in lack of conformity to the total policy and there is a trend of piecemeal and ad-hoc responses to the growing urban challenges. The urban law created by the state Government is marked by duplicity and is leading to bureaucratization.. At present there is an urgent need of restructuring the city corporation. There is sufficient scope for revenue generative schemes in the light of new economic momentum in the city, which can strengthen the city corporation.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> J. Vernon Herderson, *Urban Development Theory Fact and Illusion*,; Oxford University Press, New York, 1988.P.1

<sup>2</sup> UN, *World Urbanisation Prospects. The 2001 Revision*, New York, United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs

<sup>3</sup> *Urban Infrastructure Report,2006*, 3i Network Oxford University Press,2006 P-46

<sup>4</sup> *Audit certificate on the accounts of the GMC. Asstt. Director of Audit, Local Fund. Assam,1990*

### References

Augustine, Jhon ed. (1984): *Strategies for Third World Development*, Sage Publications, New Delhi.

Buch, MN (1993): *Environmental consciousness in Urban Planning*, Orient Longman, New Delhi.

- Gottdiener, M.ed, 1986, *Cities in Stress: A New Look at the Urban Crisis*, Sage Publications.
- Henderson, J. Veron, 1988, *Urban Development Theory-Fact and Illusion*, Oxford University Press.
- Kasarda, Jhon D, Allan, 1994, *Third World Cities: Problems, Policies and Perspectives*, UNESA.
- Me. Gee, T.G., 1971, *The Urbanisation in the Third World*, G. Bell and Sons, London.
- Naik, MTK, *Urbanisation of India*, Serials Publications, New Delhi, 2007. Report Documents, Acts:
- 3i Network, “ India Infrastructure Report, 2006”, Oxford University Press, New Delhi,
- United Nations, 2002, world Urbanisation Prospects, New York: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs., Population Division.
- National commission on Urbanisation, Govt. of India”, Research study Reports, Ministry of Urban Development , New Delhi. 1988.
- Master Plan and Zoning Regulations, 1987, (Modified) Town & Country Planning, Assam.
- Master Plan for Guwahati Metropolitan Area-2025, 2009, GMDA.