

Urban Governance and Service Delivery in Guwahati City

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Abstract: *The paper explores that the primary development agenda of Guwahati City is carried out by two main agencies, the Guwahati Municipal Corporation and the Guwahati Metropolitan Development Authority. But the presence of multiple agencies while discharging similar duties has compounded the problem of service delivery in Guwahati City. The study focuses that wherever possible, the functioning of the agencies need to be streamlined, to bring it under one agency, which will not only help in improving service delivery but also bring about accountability. It is recognized that various agencies need to be brought under the ambit of Guwahati Municipal Corporation which should have the overall responsibility of providing infrastructure services in Guwahati and shall utilize the services of other agencies on a need basis.*

Key words: *Governance, Service delivery, Guwahati, Municipal Corporation, Agencies*

I. Introduction

Cities and towns play a vital role in the country's socio-economic growth, its transformation and change. The exponential increase in population and unplanned growth over the years have created enormous pressure on the land and infrastructure with the result that most cities and towns are severely stressed in terms of available infrastructure and delivery of basic services. Similarly, in the city of Guwahati this unprecedented growth of urban areas has put severe strain on infrastructure and delivery of urban services such as clean water and sanitation, housing, transport and so on. Moreover, presence of multifarious agencies for the delivery of urban services has made the situation more critical. Guwahati is recognized to be the most critical city in the North east India. Hence, the development of the city is not critical to the state of Assam but also to the entire North east.

The methodology adopted to study the urban governance and service delivery mechanism in the city, necessitated the use of primary and secondary data. The unit of observation has been confined within the limits of the city. The city has been divided by Guwahati Municipal Corporation into five divisions within which twenty zones and thirty one wards are demarcated for better service. The study being descriptive, both primary and secondary data have been collected to arrive at a clear conclusion.

II. The City of Guwahati

Guwahati, meaning "areca nut marketplace" in Assamese, was known by the name of "Gauhati" during British period [1]. It is situated along the Brahmaputra River and is bound on the southern side by the foothills of the Shillong plateau. It is the capital city of Assam and gateway to North-East India. Guwahati is also the business hub and the largest city of Assam and the North-East. The physical features of the Guwahati city sufficient impact on its urban development process, particularly in the settlement pattern in the post 1974 period. The spatial growth of Guwahati city has been accompanied by growth of population. This in turn has contributed towards the continuous growth of the city revealed through the high density of population and magnitude of function. Guwahati is the largest city in the North Eastern Region and enjoys a prime status with broad population base in relation to the other centres of the region. The rapid population growth indicates increased functional efficiency of the city. At the same time demographic attributes in a development process influences the urban condition including the infrastructural facilities to a great extent.

According to the 2011 census, Guwahati Municipal Corporation Area (GMCA) and Guwahati Metropolitan Area (GMA) had a population of 963,429 and 968,549, respectively (Table 1). The municipal area is under the jurisdiction of the Guwahati Municipal Corporation (GMC) whose limits were last extended in 1991 to cover an area of 216.79 sq.km. The GMA covers about 262 sq.km. and is under the jurisdiction of the Guwahati Metropolitan Development Authority (GMDA)

Table 1: Guwahati Population Growth

Year	GMCA*		GMA excluding GMCA		GMA*	
	Population in	CAGR (%)	Population	CAGR (%)	Population	CAGR
1951	43,615	—	53,774	—	97,389	—
1961	1,00,707	8.7	98,775	6.3	1,99,482	7.4
1971	1,23,783	2.1	1,68,436	5.5	2,93,219	3.9
1981**	2,68,945	8.1	1,02,351	-4.9	4,35,280	4.0
1991	5,84,342	8.1	61,827	-4.9	6,46,169	4.0
2001	8,09,895	3.3	80,878	2.7	8,90,773	3.3
2011	9,63,429	1.8	85,998	0.6	9,68,549	0.8

* GMCA- Guwahati Municipal Corporation Area; GMA- Guwahati Metropolitan Area (also known as the Guwahati Urban Agglomeration)

** The Census 1981 was not conducted in Assam. The population figures have been extrapolated on the basis of the 1971-1991 Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR).

Source: (i) GMDA (2009: 12), and (ii) Census 2011 Provisional Report

Guwahati witnessed a very high rate of growth of population in the period from 1971 to 1991; 8.1 percent p.a., which is likely on account of the city becoming Assam's capital in 1972, migration from rural Assam and other states of the North-East region of India, and also the cross-border migration from Bangladesh after the latter's formation in 1972. Since then, GMC area has registered slowing down of population growth rate, from 3.3 percent p.a. in 1991-2001 period and 1.8 percent p.a. in 2001-2011 (Table:1). In fact, in the last decade the GMC area has experienced a growth rate that is even lower than that of Assam's urban population growth rate of 2.5 percent p.a. The GMA areas have registered a population growth that is even lower than that of GMC rate in 2001-2011. This means that the migration rate to the city has slowed down in the decade of 2001-2011 due to either decline in migrants from other North-East states and rural Assam or decline from cross-border migration or both. Thus, contrary to the expectation, the population of Guwahati city and its metropolitan region has stabilized since 2001 due to economic and geo-political reasons.

III. Urban local networks and civic groups in the city of Guwahati

The 74th Constitutional Amendment Act has opened up spaces for the participation of civil society organizations in the Urban Governance. In the shift of government to governance, the role of civil society organizations has been very significant. Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) play multifarious roles in the implementation of governmental programmes. Non Governmental Organizations have carved out new spaces in the political processes and delivering public services. NGOs play an important role in contributing to filling the gaps in the efforts of the government. Guwahati has different types of NGOs, voluntary organisations and community organizations like Save Guwahati Build Guwahati (SGBG), Environ, Abhijatri, unnayan samitis (development councils), mahila samitis (women's groups) and youth clubs. Unnayan samitis, and mahila samitis and youth clubs in some settlements, play a significant role (Like Residential Welfare Organization in Bangalore) in improvement of infrastructure and services in the neighbourhood [2]. This is done through two ways: collective self-help and seeking political patronage. In the absence of adequate infrastructure and services, these community organizations participate in the building of infrastructures of water, drainage, roads and street-lights. They collect regular monthly fees from their members and use these for development works and other activities (like building a temple or celebrating a festival) as well as collect one-time contributions from their members for specific development purposes. Some unnayan samitis also organize and motivate its members to contribute their labour. These organizations also seek political patronage (and some organizations are, in fact, formed with the support of a political leader like the MLA or municipal councilor). They make appeals and applications to their elected representatives, whose support is crucial for obtaining funds for the development of the neighbourhood and for getting various government departments to make bore-wells, roads, drainage, etc, in their neighbourhoods. Their success varies widely in obtaining this support and often the realization of benefits through political patronage also fluctuates.

IV. Urban Governance and Service Delivery in Guwahati City

The Municipal Act of 1956 was a significant development towards administration of urban local bodies in Assam. It was the first urban legislation in Assam in the post-independence period which provided a strong basis for organization and administration of municipalities. At that time the Municipal Boards were the principal agencies for management of urban development. The Local Self Government Department in the Assam Secretariat was entrusted with the overall control of urban local bodies prior to this Act. There was no suitable upto date municipal law to guide the municipal agencies. This Department was changed into Municipal Administration Department (MAD) in 1964. A unified system was established in which MAD was in charge of control of municipal agencies [3]. But the role of the MAD has been altered in the context of Guwahati with the

creation of a new department under the govt. of Assam in 1994, the Guwahati Development Department (GDD). The ever increasing demands for the government intervention in the development affairs of the city led to the birth of a new controlling organization with political backing and patronage. The Guwahati Development Department was created to facilitate proper and co-ordinated development of the city. The department has been named as the administrative department for the Guwahati Metropolitan Development Authority and Guwahati Municipal Corporation and matters relating to construction of Assam's permanent capital and the government issued order for transfer of all records and files relating to Guwahati Municipal Corporation (GMC) and Guwahati Metropolitan Development Authority (GMDA) to Guwahati Development Department (GDD). Consequently, the Municipal Administration Department (MAD) ceased to be administrative department for the GMDA and GMC. It is evident that the Guwahati Development Department (GDD) is the overall controlling agency for the city development management process.

4.1 Urban Governance and Existing status

According to the tenets of the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act, Guwahati has well established institutions for decentralized governance. There are 88 Urban Local Bodies in Assam governed by the State Urban Development Department (UDD). For Guwahati, a separate State Level Department has been created- Guwahati Development Department (GDD), which is at par with UDD. Guwahati Development Department controls both GMDA and GMC. This means GDD is the overall controlling agency for the entire city development and management process.

The Guwahati Municipal Corporation, the first and the only municipal corporation in the state was constituted in 1.2.1974 under the Guwahati Municipal Corporation Act, 1969. The Guwahati Municipal Corporation covers an area of 216 sq.km. The Corporation has a council of 31 elected ward councilors. The council is headed by a Mayor. As per under section 20 A of Guwahati Municipal Corporation Amendment Act, 1971 and under section 12 of the Assam Nagara Raj Act, 2007, thirty one (31) wards committees has been constituted in 31 wards in the Guwahati city. Apart from these ninety (90) Area Sabhas has been constituted for these wards. Ward Committees, with the assistance of the Area Sabhas, are supposed to prepare an Annual Plan with budget for their ward; however, the Nagar Raj Act has been implemented only partially yet in the city [4].

4.2 Functions, roles and responsibilities of GMC and Parastatals

Multiple agencies work in Guwahati metropolitan area including the Guwahati Development Department (GDD), Guwahati Metropolitan Development Authority (GMDA), Guwahati Municipal Corporation, Public Health Engineering Department, Assam Urban Water Supply and Sewerage Board, Public works Department etc. Most of the 12th Schedule functions have been transferred to GMC on paper, however the overall capacity of the ULB is weak to assume charge of these functions and ensure effective delivery of functions. Even though GMDA has been merged with GMC, it operates as an independent organization which plays an over-arching role in delivering most of the functions.

4.3. Service Delivery in Guwahati city

Presence of multiple agencies for provision of various infrastructure facilities is prevalent in the city. Guwahati Municipal Corporation has limited role in infrastructure provisioning, planning for new infrastructure, implementation and service delivery. Amongst the key services mentioned below. GMC's core function is water supply, solid waste management, maintenance of roads and drainage apart from social infrastructure like community toilets etc.

Existing Status- Services

4.3.1 Water Supply

Production: Presently only 30% of the Guwahati city area is covered under piped water supply. The total installed capacity of potable water generation is around 110 MLD against which actual production is 73 MLD (66%). The present production from all sources (73.4 MLD) is inadequate with respect to present demand around 150 MLD. The three treatment plants are also old and damaged due to which they are running much below their actual capacities. Additionally the city is growing fast and manages high floating population, 3 new townships proposed under Master Plan 2025 and new industrial development and service sector expansion planned in the future. Together, the demand for water is set to be high which can be easily met through existing river sources through new augmentation schemes.

Transmission and Distribution: The total piped water supply network in the city is only about 30%. The water supply to the city is provided by three agencies viz. Guwahati Municipal Corporation (GMC), Assam Urban Water Supply & Sewerage Board (AUWSSB) and Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) through their existing system. Both GMC and AUWSSB supply water in the households of the city, while PHED supplies

water in the government installations. Besides Railways, Indian Oil and Defense agencies also have their own independent supply systems for their areas.

Cost Recovery: Guwahati Municipal Corporation (GMC) levies water tax as part of property tax based on Annual Rental Value (ARV) Method. Currently it is charged at 7.5% of property tax for non-piped connections and 10% for piped connection. No user charge is levied. This is because 70% of the population does not have access to piped water and use ground water or tanker for their daily needs.

Meters on piped supply are also not there. Other sources of revenue include new connection fee, sale of water tanker, sale of bulk water, shifting of water connection, checking and rectification charges, penalty on illegal connections etc. Key source of revenue comes from sale of water tankers.

4.3.2. Water Supply Schemes under implementation in Guwahati Metropolitan Area

Three water supply projects are currently under implementation in Guwahati under three different funding agencies, namely Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Japanese International Company (JICA). The project planning has been done keeping in mind the future water demand of the city with regards to increase in population, expansion in economic base, industrial development, new township etc. with the guiding vision to surpass the performance on Service Level Benchmark (SLB) indicators.

Table 2: Design Population & Capacity of ongoing Drinking Water Project in Guwahati Metropolitan Area

Sl No	Projects	Implementing Agency	Design Population-In Million by 2025/2040	Design Capacity-In MLD for 2025/2040	Expected Commissioning by
1	West Guwahati Water Project- JNNURM	GMDA through PMU- JNNURM	0.5/0.90	107/170	June 2014
2	JICA assisted South Central Guwahati Water Supply Project	GMDA through PIU-JICA	1.01/1.40	191/255	November 2016
	JICA assisted North Guwahati Water Supply Project	GMDA through PIU- JICA	0.15/0.24	37/57	July 2016
3	ADB assisted East Guwahati Water Supply Project	GMDA through PIU- ADB	0.44/0.69	98/148	December 2017

Source: Guwahati Jal Board Brochure

Institutional Mechanism: Guwahati Jal Board has been instituted as the new institutional mechanism for handling water supply and sewerage functions and will supersede all existing agencies that are responsible for water supply in the future. The entire infrastructure currently being created under various projects for Water Supply and Sanitation (WSS) will be handed over to the Jal Board who will be responsible for its O&M [5]. The Board has representations from elected members and executives from Finance Department, Guwahati Development Department (GDD), Urban Development Department (UDD), Public Health Engineering Department (PHED), Assam Urban Water Supply and Sewerage Board (AUWSSB), Guwahati Metropolitan Development Authority (GMDA), Guwahati Municipal Corporation (GMC), Public Works Department (PWD), Assam Electricity Board etc. The Guwahati Jal Board Act also provides for constituting a three member Water Regulatory Authority in the future which will approve the tariff proposals from the Jal Board (with or without modifications), verify water quality periodically, scrutinize metering and adjudicate on consumer complaint.

Service level benchmarks (SLB) The ongoing water supply projects will address household level metering for effective cost recovery and implement a volumetric tariff plan; include a leak detection plan with water audits to reduce Non- Revenue Water (NRW) and Unaccounted for Water (UFW) and ensure quality of water supplied which will impact the SLBs positively in the future.

4.3.3. Sewerage

Current Situation: Presently the Guwahati Metropolitan Area (GMA) does not have any integrated sewerage system except for certain pockets such as Railway colonies, I.O.C. Refinery and Defense establishment having their own independent system. There are generally septic tanks in Guwahati. The effluent is released untreated into the nearby drains and low-lying areas. Similar is the case of industrial wastewater. In case of septic tanks, the soak pits are becoming non-functional in many areas because of high sub-soil water table within a short span of time.

Proposed Projects: The Master Plan 2025 proposes to cover the entire city and 3 new townships with underground sewerage network. Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Japan International Company (JICA) will fund the sewerage system in various tranches. South East Guwahati will be covered under ADB project; and South Central, South West; North Guwahati will be covered by JICA. A Detailed Project Report (DPR) has been prepared covering entire GMA area but the detailed designing has been only for core city. The DPR was approved by Ministry of Urban Development (MOUD). At the next level of approval, the Department of Economic Affairs raised some concerns. Currently a revised DPR is being prepared which is expected to be completed by September, 2015.

4.3.4. Solid Waste Management

Current Situation: Guwahati Municipal Corporation is mandated to deliver the Solid Waste Management (SWM) function in its area. On November 2008, the management of entire municipal solid waste of the city was handed over to the Hyderabad-based private sector Ramky Enviro Engineers for 20 years (2028). This company has undertaken Integrated Solid Waste Management in the under the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewable Mission. As per its agreement with the Guwahati Municipal Corporation, the company is to collect municipal solid waste from the households as well as roadside dustbins and dispose and process them in an environment-friendly manner. But the company has failed to keep these mandates. So, GMC has withdrawn its agreement with Ramkey Enviro Engineers on June, 2014. Now GMC has put in place a new Solid Waste Collection and Transportation system in association with different NGOs from July, 2014. GMC has entrusted 31 NGOs for 31 wards (one NGO for each ward) which is executing door-to-door collection of household solid waste, sweeping of arterial roads, streets, footpath and pavements, and collection of solid waste from bulk generators- for a nominal monthly charge per household and commercial establishment.

Process: GMC has engaged 31 NGOs and facilitated them with 50 auto tippers, showers, and 298 tricycles to collect waste from households in selected localities. In the morning between 7 am to 9 am and in the evening 4 pm to 7 pm the sweepers rings the bells or whistles to collect waste. Glass and plastic materials are segregated at doorstep and rest is dumped at secondary collection point which has two-bin dustbins of 3.5 cubic meter capacity. There are about 300 dustbins in the city. Total waste generated is about 600 Metric Tonnes Per Day (MTD) including dumping by uncovered households at secondary collection points of which about 500 MTD is collected by the GMC. The waste is transported through dumper placers vehicles, dumpers and compactors to the landfill facility at Boragaon [6].

4.3.5. Storm Water Drainage

Current Situation: At present, Guwahati does not have a planned drainage system with the exception of a small area where Town and Country Planning development has implemented drainage schemes in the past. The GMC area has got some roadside small drains which have problems of encroachments, poor outfall channels, silting etc. Many areas of the city stay water-logged during rainy season.

The overall drain network in the city is highly insufficient. Most of the drains fall on the upstream side of the river Bharalu, the level of which is higher than the level of the drains, the outlet of the water is retarded by the difference in the levels. Bharalu basin is also the most flood prone area. If the Bharalu River fails, the entire drainage system of the city collapses. The main causes for flooding include heavy situation on the Bharalu River and encroachments on the natural drainage catchments areas. There are encroachments on the drainage systems as well. Apart from that there is garbage dumping which has resulted in blocking of natural drains.

GMC needs to invest in new infrastructure development and improve O&M of existing drains with efforts at removing encroachments, regular de-silting and effective Solid Waste Management to avoid dumping. The drainage infrastructure needs to be planned 'Basin wise' such that, if required, flood water may be diverted to other basins when the capacity of one basin is full.

V. Conclusion

The above discussion lead us to the conclusion that the structural network of urban development management operating in the Guwahati city is the replication of the all India scenario which is fairly diverse and incompatible with the growing demands of speedy urbanization. The study reflects a complex institutional framework of overlapping roles and responsibilities. Parastatals have their efficacy but the system should not grow at the cost of democratic decentralization. So, there is a need for undertaking an assessment of the existing institutional structure for municipal governance in Guwahati to assess gaps, overlaps and duplication of function between various organizations. A specific institutional study for Guwahati Municipal Corporation (GMC) as an organization covering current situation, capacity gaps, roles and responsibilities etc, would help in overall strengthening of the municipal body such that it is able to assimilate the organizations and functions being

merged into it as per the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act. This will help in making GMC strong enough to assume the role of steering organization for all purposes and reduce dependency on Guwahati Metropolitan Development Authority (GMDA). Because GMDA overpowers GMC in most domains of infrastructure provisioning which is in conflict to the 74th CCA., though GMDA has been merged with GMC on paper, it continues to operate as an independent entity because of the nature of its skills and expertise.

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