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# Development from Below: Community Participation and Citizens' Expectations in the Urban Planning Process of Bogura

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***Abstract:*** *Citizen participation is an important component of inclusive and sustainable urban planning, particularly in rapidly urbanizing cities. The present study explores issues of citizens' awareness, expectation, participation and perception on urban planning from the point of view of Development from below perspective in Bogura Town. It also uses Arnstein's (1969) Ladder of Citizen Participation to evaluate the level of citizens' participation and how meaningful it is within the urban planning and decision-making processes. The study was conducted by mixed method of primary and secondary data. To collect primary data, a structured questionnaire was used from 130 residents of Bogura Town, simple random sampling method was employed. Notably, the results reveal a high level of disconnect between the citizens' views of engagement in urban planning and their actual experiences. Whilst citizens strongly support consultation in planning decisions nor do they have full involvement in meetings, discussions and consultations. The study also indicates that there is moderate awareness of urban planning processes, and low levels of trust in municipal responsiveness and information provision. The lack of awareness, limited information, weak communication, limited participation opportunities, lack of trust, influence from politics, complexity of bureaucracy and unequal influence were listed as major obstacles. Meanwhile, citizens reacted positively to the participation with the use of ICT. The study finds that urban planning in Bogura should be more transparent and inclusive with a proper and meaningful influence of the citizens to enhance Development from Below and achievement of responsive urban governance.*

**Keywords: Development from Below; Citizen Participation; Urban Planning; Citizens' Expectations; Bogura**

## Introduction

In this study, the Development from Below in the urban planning of the township of Bogura is explored by analyzing citizens' need, expectation, opinion and participation in development decisions and by using the ladder of citizen participation (1969) by Arnstein to understand the level of citizen participation (informed, consulted, to meaningful participation in development decisions) in relation to citizens' expectation. Bogura Town is on the brink of rapid urbanization and facing both challenges and opportunities when it comes to roads and other public service provisions, drainage, waste management and communications, though these needs and demands need not necessarily be addressed within urban plans. Thus, in this study, citizens' participation and expectations in the urban planning process of Bogura is studied through Development from Below (DfB) perspective and Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation (1969) is used for understanding the extent of their participation, influence, and involvement in the planning and decision-making process. In general, community participation in urban planning in developing countries is believed to be key, but in Bangladesh it is not widespread because of a number of factors including lack of awareness, mistrust of planning systems and citizens' negative perceptions of results of participation (Swapan, 2014). Development from below is a

development approach focusing on grassroots participation, local control and mobilization of human, natural and institutional resources that satisfy the basic needs of local people (Stöhr & Taylor, 1981). Sharma (2025) emphasizes the need to shift from tokenistic consultation towards enabling communities to participate and influence decision-making processes as per their needs and expectations. Willems et al. (2017) used the Smart London case to illustrate the different levels of citizens' participation and showed how they could be mapped in urban planning projects using Arnstein's Ladder. They also emphasized the need to analyze the degree of citizens' involvement and representation in urban development projects.

The findings of the nationwide survey across all 12 city corporations in Bangladesh showed that generally the satisfaction of citizens regarding delivery of municipal services was low, and the public responsiveness, service quality, timeliness and promptness were found to be the critical factors determining their satisfaction (Mahmud, 2021). To review citizen expectation and participation in urban planning process from 'Development from Below' point of view and explore level of citizen participation in urban planning process in Bogura and identify the meaningfulness of citizen participation in this regard based on Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation.

## Methodology

The research was carried out with residents and people of Bogura Town to know their engagement and anticipations to urban planning. The method in this study is mixed method, primary data and secondary data were collected and analyzed. The number of respondents was 130 which was selected by simple random sampling from Bogura Town. Data were gathered from the people of Bogura town regarding their expectations and involvement with urban planning using a structured questionnaire that was created with Google Forms as a tool. These together, explored the citizens' involvement, perception and expectation from a Development from Below standpoint, whilst Arnstein's Ladder was used to understand the extent and significance of their participation in urban planning decisions. Data were analyzed using frequency and percentage, and displayed through graphs and charts using Microsoft excel.

## Theoretical Framework

The Development from Below (Bottom-Up Development) has been the main basis of this study that is based on Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation (1969). The Development from below approach highlights the participation of the grassroots, local needs and local knowledge and community-led development as opposed to top-down planning and suggests a break with it. This contextual view is pertinent to the context of urban planning of Bogura as citizens' expectations and local experiences can help in identifying the priorities of development. Second, Arnstein's Ladder provides a valuable tool to judge the extent and significance of citizens' involvement in the planning process. It separates out limited participation of citizens from more significant participation in which they have a more important influence in planning decisions. These views are brought together to look at the reasons for 'citizen participation' and the 'meaningful' ways citizens participate in urban planning.

## Literature Review

Despite the increased advocacy of participatory approaches as a way to advance democratic and effective public policy in cities, Bangladeshi cities, like others, suffer from some degree of disengagement of citizens, resulting from a mix of bureaucratic inefficiency, top-down planning and informal socio-political networks that interact with formal participatory mechanisms (Swapan, 2016). Even though the policy of participatory planning has been adopted in Bangladesh, urban poor people are largely excluded from the planning process and plan making, therefore the development strategy failed to capture the needs and concerns of urban poor people (Das, n.d.). Institutional arrangements are not the only factors affecting community participation in developing countries but also social, political, and psychological factors. In the context of Dhaka, limited awareness, lack of confidence in planning processes, negative perception of participation results, and the perceived success of informal political networks keep citizens from engaging in formal planning processes. Utilizing information and communication technologies (ICTs) to urban governance can improve the efficiency of planning processes and increase public participation. A series of European cities carried out evaluation studies that showed that e-planning requires planners, developers and citizens to develop digital methodologies and e-skills, enabling e-planning and more inclusive and sustainable decision making in cities (Curwell et al., 2005). Following the conversion of villages into urban areas, a gap between citizens' expectation and their perception of urban service quality often occurs and the highest dissatisfaction is shown at social services (Mahdiraji & Moradi Koochi, 2014). In addition to formal avenues for citizens to participate in planning, it is important that citizens are empowered to engage in planning in meaningful ways, including in decision-making processes, which are inclusive and flexible (Maier, 2001). Community driven development (CDD) programs in Rajshahi City often target relatively better organized poor members, and poorest urban informal settlements with lower social capacity are usually not included in poverty alleviation programs, making participation of the poorest urban residents limited (Walters, 2018). Community participation in development is often hampered by a number of structural, social and institutional barriers, and participatory development is a complex process that needs careful planning, inclusive participation and should follow practical guidelines so as to achieve the desired participation by the community (Botes & Van Rensburg,

2000). While there have been some legal and institutional changes to increase scope for communities to influence the development projects and obtain economic gains, overall, there is only limited scope for community control, and effective participation relies on communities' capacity to exercise formal rights and public means of influence (Foster, 2018). Njoh (2002) emphasized that institutional, social and cultural barriers such as paternalistic leadership and governance, selective participation, leadership gatekeeping, group conflicts, lack of public interest and existing belief systems hinder effective community participation in development planning, by limiting meaningful participation in development plans and activities, thus collectively reducing the effective participation of communities in development planning. Blair (2004) said that community development and strategic planning require public participation, because when citizens are involved in planning and implementation of development it helps to ensure that they are part of the program, make it more effective and support sustainable community results. The active involvement of the local community in the planning process is widely acknowledged as an imperative for urban planning; it promotes trust, credibility, commitment and consensus building and aids more sustainable development outcomes (van Empel, 2008). Strong stakeholder engagement is crucial for achieving sustainable urban development in Bangladesh, with participatory strategies being recognized as a way to address governance challenges and enhance urban planning results at the city corporation level (Hossain et al., 2024). The development of City Corporations has been closely tied up with the process of urbanization and industrialization and the Local Government (City Corporation) Act 2009 has significantly increased their authority in delivering public services, yet there are significant issues related to fiscal autonomy, local resource mobilization, collection of revenue and allocation of budget (Rahman and Akter, 2025). South African citizens in the Sedibeng District Municipality were quite discontent with the public service delivery by the municipality, especially in delivering on road maintenance, job creation and crime reduction due to inadequate performance by the municipality in addressing these needs (Akinboade et al., 2012). In another replication study in Hong Kong and Shenzhen, the expectancy-disconfirmation model was proved to be a valid model that citizen satisfaction with public services was influenced by public services performance, and by citizen expectations prior to the experience in varying cultural settings (Chen et al., 2022). The development-from-below paradigm is one that is people centered, where local communities mobilize their own resources and capacities to attain social, economic and political development, and in the process do not rely too heavily on the centralized, top-down approach (Stöhr, 1981). Legal and institutional structures that fail to account for municipal corporations' vulnerabilities to economic risks and the demands of creditors can be detrimental to the financial sustainability of these corporations, especially in times of fiscal crisis (Howard, 2014). Community-based and bottom-up rural development has become more popular as an alternative to large-scale, top-down rural development schemes especially in Africa where it is believed that the participation and self-reliance of the local community is crucial for sustainable rural development (Nel et al., 1997). Decentralized planning processes can also make development programmes more effective, as local institutions determine and solve local needs and problems (Raj, 1971) in the field of urban planning. The satisfaction of the public in the city corporations in Bangladesh is highly correlated with both quality and accessibility of urban services, and responsiveness to their needs and requirements. Any deprivations in the urban services and infrastructure often create a huge expectation-reality gap (Mollah, 2025). Steve Curwell, Mark Deakin, Ian Cooper, Krassimira Paskaleva-Shapira, Joe Ravetz and Dominica Babicki (2005) have investigated citizens' expectations of Information cities in the EU project IntelCities and found that e-governance and the use of digital planning tools can increase the efficiency of urban planning, as well as the participation of citizens and the development of sustainable knowledge-based cities (Curwell et al., 2005). It is important to recognize that meaningful citizen participation in urban planning is not merely providing information or consulting citizens; but rather giving power to influence planning decisions and outcomes, as argued by Arnstein (1969). A key point of Arnstein's (1969) framework is that participation is not defined solely by citizen presence in consensus-seeking meetings or by citizen statements in meetings, but by the extent citizens have power over the planning outcome or to shape it. Inform and consult may allow citizens to voice their opinions, but this type of participation does not guarantee that citizens' opinions will affect the final planning decision, according to Arnstein (1969). Lauria and Slotterback (2020) underscored the need of meaningful public participation in planning, where the participation of residents and communities in planning and community building activities should be increased, thus enabling planning from the bottom up and a view on planning from the local community and their expectations. Hurlbert and Gupta (2015) demonstrated that meaningful participation can promote trust, social learning and inclusive decision-making processes, and thus emphasized the need for local communities to be involved in planning and tackling complex development issues in line with their needs and expectations. Although, there has been a considerable extent of research on the grounds of community participation in Bangladesh, major part of them is focused on the large metropolitan cities like Dhaka. Therefore, there is not much empirical evidence from secondary cities which may have distinct governance systems, citizenship and planning capacities.

While citizen satisfaction and expectation–disconfirmation in urban services have been thoroughly explored, there is a lack of knowledge on how citizens' expectations affect their real involvement in urban planning. There are few studies on service delivery as opposed to planning involvement. This concept of development from below is based on grassroots participation and bottom-up planning, although evidence of

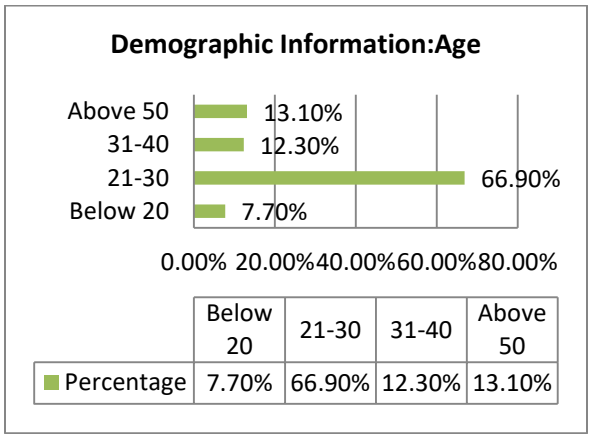
the practical application of this concept in the urban planning system of Bangladesh is limited. This results in a disjuncture between theory and practice.

The literature has cited barriers to participation, including bureaucracy, lack of awareness and distrust of institutions; however, most of these studies have focused on one of these barriers only. Little is known about the interaction between the barriers and how they affect the actual participation outcomes, particularly in smaller cities. While the use of ICT and e-governance is encouraged for increased participation, evidence on the effectiveness of these digital means in increasing citizens' involvement in urban planning in Bangladeshi city corporations is weak. The other important gap is in the lack of attention given to the urban poor and marginalized communities. There is a lack in existing studies to explain the perception of these groups about participation opportunities, or why and how they are excluded from planning processes.

Lastly, although numerous studies have investigated satisfaction with municipal services, few have related satisfaction with municipal services to participation in municipal planning. Citizens' service experiences and their involvement in urban decision-making is an under-researched field.

## Results and Discussion

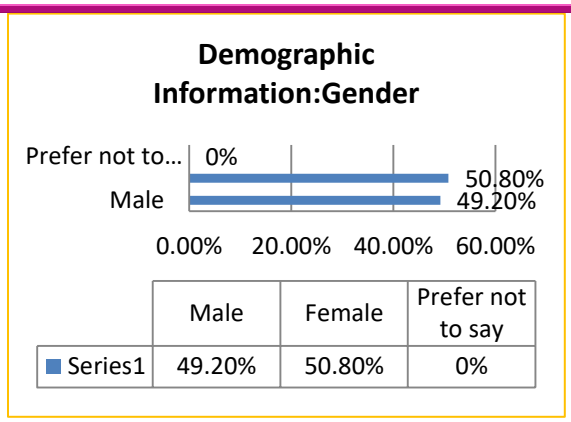
### Age Distribution of Respondents




**Source: Field Data, 2026**

Based on the age distribution of the respondents shows that age group 21 years – 30 years was the majority group which is 66.90% in the study. This means that youths were an important segment of the attitudes of the respondents towards participation of citizens and the expectation of the citizens in Bogura urban planning process. Represented were those aged 31 to 40 years (12.30%) and those over 50 years (13.10%), with all those under the age of 20 years (7.70%) being the smallest group. Overall, the data has a good representation of young adults, as well as views on views at various ages.

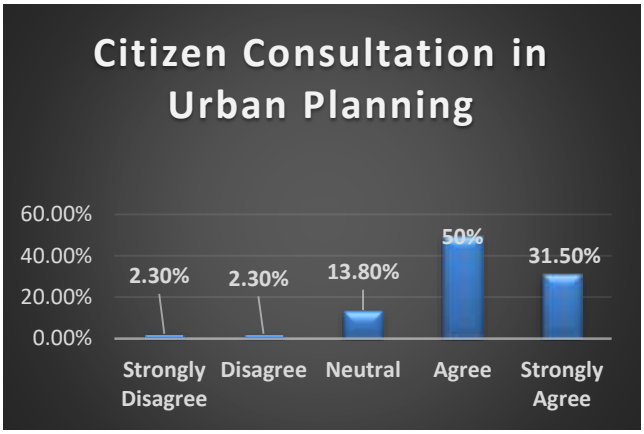
### Gender Distribution of Respondents




**Source: Field Data, 2026**

In the data, it was seen that the gender of the respondents who participated in the survey was female 50.80 % and male 49.20 %. These indicate that approximately equal number of males and females were included in the study. There were no respondents who answered in the Prefer not to say category, so 100% of all respondents are male or female. Overall, there is a balanced gender split amongst respondents.

### Citizen Consultation in Urban Planning




**Source: Field Data, 2026**

The findings indicate the opinion of 50% agreed and 31.50% strongly agreed that there is a need to consult citizens prior to taking urban planning or urban development decisions in bogura. A total of 81.50% of them talked about supporting citizen consultation, with a strong desire for citizens to participate in planning decisions. This means that very few (2.30% strongly disagreed and 2.30% disagreed) felt strongly opposed to citizen consultation. In the meantime, 13.80% were neutral, meaning that some of the respondents might not have had any opinion or they might not have been involved in planning issues. To sum up, the findings show that citizens' opinions and perceptions should be taken into account in Bogura's urban planning and this is in line with a concept of development from below.

### Citizens' Awareness of Urban Planning Decision-Making

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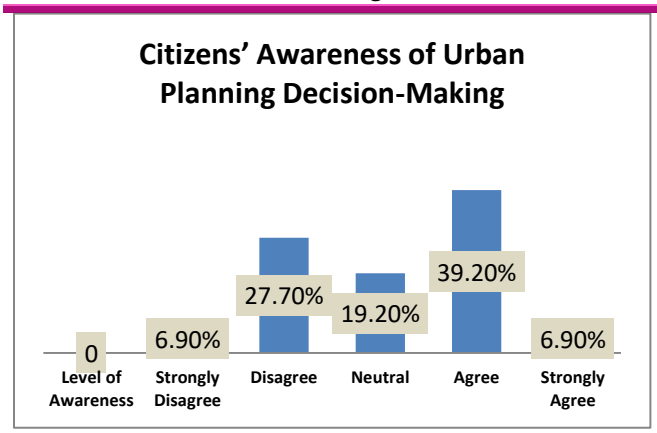
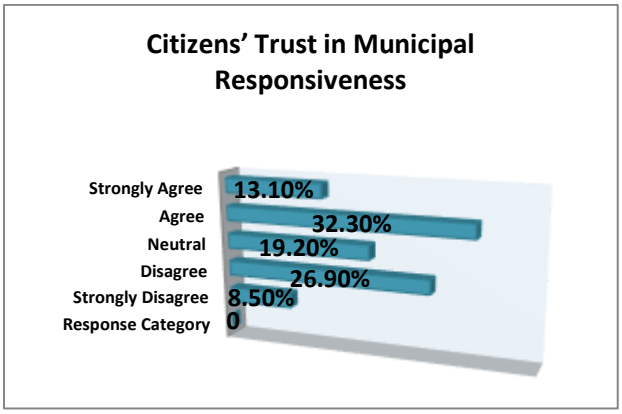



**Source: Field Data, 2026**

The results indicate that citizens have moderate awareness of the part of urban planning decision-making. The majority (39.2%) agreed and strongly agreed (6.9%) that they knew the process. By contrast, 27.7% disagreed and 6.9% strongly disagreed; 19.2% gave a neutral answer. In general, it can be concluded that the results indicate that awareness of many citizens is limited to some extent while a considerable portion of people still have limited knowledge about the planning decisions in urban areas.

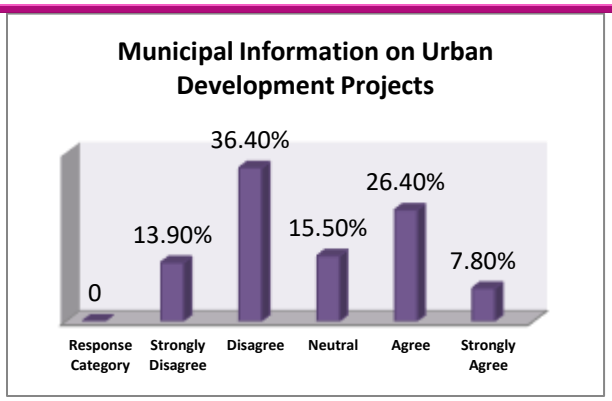
**Citizens' Trust in Municipal Responsiveness**




**Source: Field Data, 2026**

The results indicate that 32.3% agreed and 13.1% strongly agreed that the municipality take citizens' views into account. Conversely, 26.9% dissented, 8.5% strongly dissented and 19.2% were neutral. This indicates a mixed opinion regarding citizens' perception on whether the municipality values considering their opinion. The findings also indicate that there is not a complete confidence in the citizen role in making planning decision. To enhance citizens' involvement in the urban planning process of Bogura, more public consultation and communication are required.

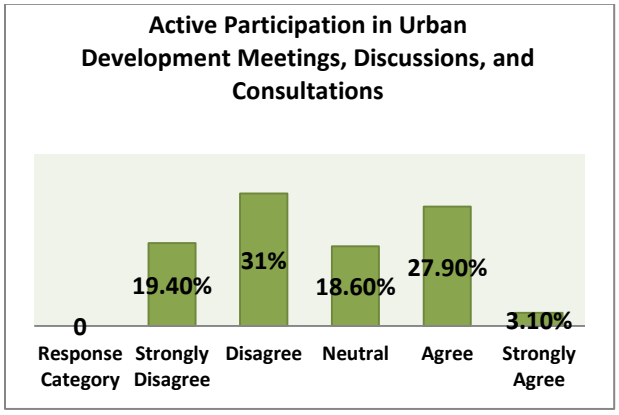
**Municipal Information on Urban Development Projects**




**Source: Field Data, 2026**

Based on the results it was found that 36.4 % disagreed and 13.9 % strongly disagreed that the municipality gives sufficient information on urban development projects. By contrast, 26.4% agreed and 7.8% strongly agreed, and 15.5% were neutral. This means that the majority of Bogura's citizens believe that they are not being informed about enough urban development projects. Taking into account the total, providing access to more information about the project and regular communication with citizens can help encourage more citizens to be involved in urban planning.

**Active Participation in Urban Development Meetings, Discussions, and Consultations**




**Source: Field Data, 2026**

Results indicate that there was a disagreement (31%) and strong disagreement (19.4%) regarding the active involvement in the urban development meetings, discussions and consultations. By contrast, 27.9% agreed, and just 3.1% strongly agreed, with 18.6% being neutral. This means that there is a lack of citizens' involvement in this process of urban planning in Bogura. The results indicate that the citizens need more opportunities for participation in meetings, discussions and consultations. In summary, the direct involvement of citizens in urban planning can help implement an approach that can be achieved from the bottom.

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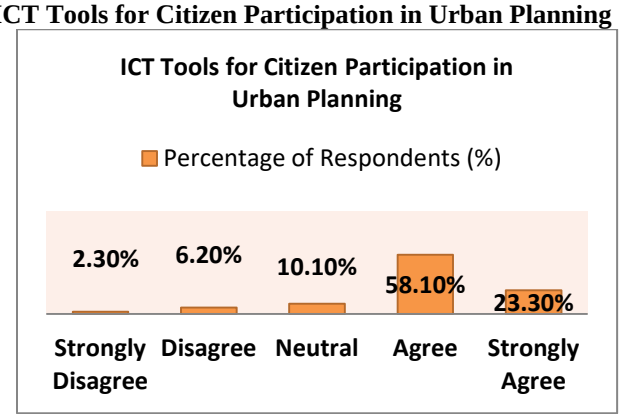
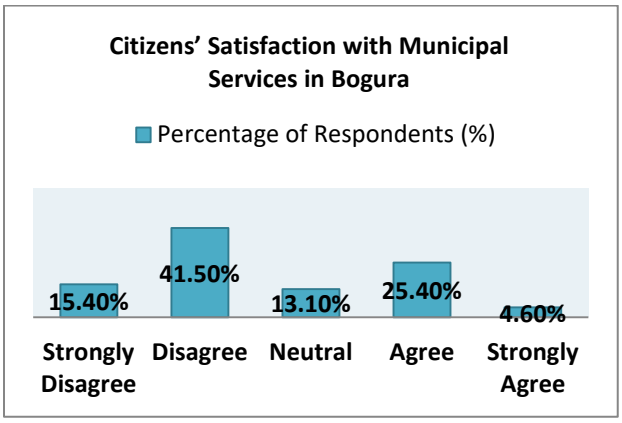
**ICT Tools for Citizen Participation in Urban Planning**




**Source: Field Data, 2026**

The results reveal that 58.1% agreed and 23.3% strongly agreed to the idea that the use of ICT tools can help citizens to participate in urban planning. By contrast, 6.2% were in disagreement and 2.3% strongly disagreed, and 10.1% were neutral. This resulted in 81.4% of the answers indicating a positive attitude towards the use of ICT tools to involve citizens. Overall, the findings suggest that digital platforms can provide citizens with more opportunities to share their views and engage in Bogura's urban planning process.

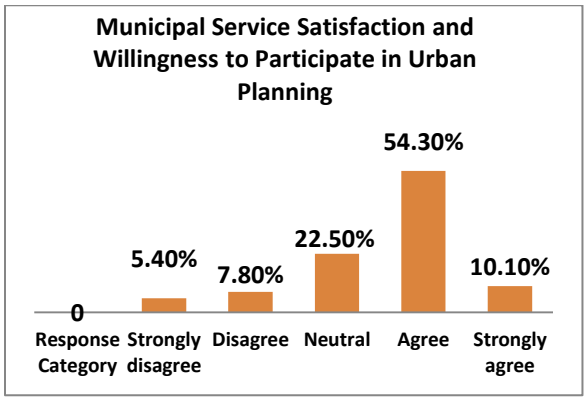
**Citizens' Satisfaction with Municipal Services in Bogura**




**Source: Field Data, 2026**

The result indicates that 41.5% of them disagreed and 15.4% strongly disagreed to be satisfied with the municipal services of Bogura. There were 25.4% that agreed, 4.6% that strongly agreed, and 13.1% that were neutral. This means more citizens are not happy with the provision of existing municipal services. The results indicate that the quality of local services and their sensitivity to citizens' needs could play a role in satisfying citizens' expectations. On a whole, the provision of improved municipality services can help the more effective and inclusive urban development in Bogura.

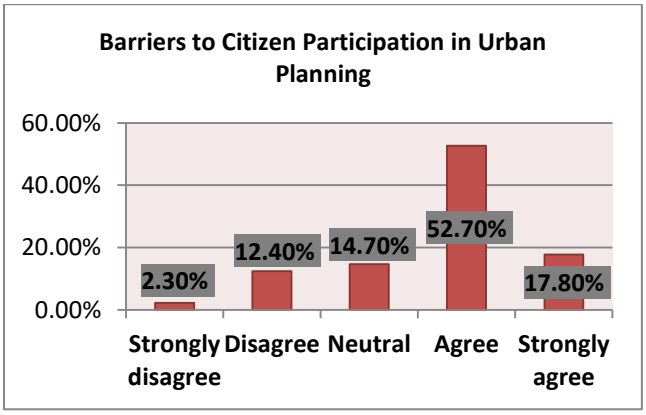
**Municipal Service Satisfaction and Willingness to Participate in Urban Planning**




**Source: Field Data, 2026**

Results indicate that 54.3% rated as "agree" and 10.1% as "strongly agree" to the extent that their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with municipal services affects their participation in urban planning. By contrast, strongly disagreed - 5.4%, disagreed - 7.8% and 22.5% were neutral. In total, 64.4% agreed/strongly agreed indicating that citizens' readiness to participate is related with their experiences of municipal services. This indicates that people's encounters with services may affect their participation in the urban planning process.

**Barriers to Citizen Participation in Urban Planning**




**Source: Field Data, 2026**

The results indicate 52.7% agreed and 17.8% strongly agreed that obstacles like lack of time, awareness and/or trust in authorities influence their involvement in urban planning. Twelve per cent (12.4%) disagreed, two per cent (2.3%) strongly disagreed and one in five (14.7%) were neutral. Overall, 70.5% of the respondents agree or strongly agree, suggesting that these represent common experiences among citizens. The results indicate that dealing with time constraints, low knowledge and trust related issues could contribute to promote more citizens to become involved in the urban planning process of Bogura.

**Barriers to Citizen Participation in Bogura's Urban Planning**

From the responses, it is evident that the biggest obstacle is lack of awareness, with respondents using the terms "lack of awareness" and "lack of information" repeatedly and stating that people do not know "where to go or whom to give their opinion. Poor communication and lack of participation opportunities were also referred to by many respondents, such as 'lack of communication', 'limited public consultation' and 'no feedback platform'. Another theme that was clearly evident is lack of trust, with respondents stating that their opinions "will not be considered" and "will not make a real difference." Respondents also recognized political influence, such as "political power," "top-down approach," and 'politics is more prioritized than people's opinion' and top-down decision making as factors. Bureaucratic complexity and corruption, no response from authorities, and authority not willing to allow citizens to participate were also among the authority-related problems reported. Lastly, lack of time and lack of money were cited as practical obstacles and some respondents ascribes unequal influence in others such as "big or influential people's opinions" are given more weight over ordinary citizens' voices.

**Suggestions for Improving Citizen Participation in Bogura's Urban Planning**

The 106 responses point to lack of awareness, infrequent consultancy, a lack of transparency, and the lack of digital engagement between citizens and urban planning as some of the major issues to address for better citizen participation in Bogura's urban planning. The respondents had suggested about ward committees and public hearings, public meetings, surveys, town hall meetings, and annual programme, particularly focusing on local issues like Borogola's parking and traffic, Satmatha's traffic, road, footpath etc. Several citizen apps, SMS, social media and online surveys, ICT platforms and opinion booths exist for making it easy for citizens to submit complaints and suggestions. also expressed the need to publish budgets, expenses, development plans, policies, and progress of projects in simple language to enhance transparency, accountability, and trust. They talked about the need to involve Gen-Z, University students, women, low income and marginalized, local representatives, businesses and community leaders. Several answers emphasized the need for corruption-prevention, qualified staff, thorough research, inter-departmental collaboration, and crucially, the need to "listen" to citizens, and to "make citizens really feel heard."

**Result Discussion**

The results show that people's expectation and their participation with Bogura's urban planning system are not matched. Development from Below is based on involvement from the grassroots and local needs, and Arnstein's Ladder is based on the level of involvement of citizens in decision-making. While 81.5% indicated they were in favor of citizen consultation, actually citizens' participation in planning meetings and consultations was limited, with 50.4% saying they disagreed or strongly disagreed. Awareness was also divided and 70.5% felt that barriers to participation were lack of time, awareness, or trust. The survey participants also noted that information is deficient, communication is weak, there is bureaucracy, political influence exists, and the opportunities for feedback are limited. ICT was being Positive: 81.4% supporting Digital tools for Participation. Meanwhile, 56.9% said they were not satisfied with the services offered by their municipalities and 64.4% indicated that experiences with municipal services have an impact on how likely they are to participate. Overall, the findings indicate that Bogura needs to provide more accessible information, regularly consult, and provide meaningful opportunities to citizens to shape planning, in line with the principles of a Development from Below.

**Conclusion**

Based on citizens' high expectations of participation in the urban planning process, this study finds that participation of citizens in the urban planning process of Bogura Town is still low. As for the first goal, citizens' awareness and understanding of urban planning processes was moderate, and their expectations of consultation and participation were significantly higher, pointing to an existing disconnect between expectations and opportunities for citizen participation. With regard to the second objective, various institutional, social and psychological barriers revealed themselves, such as limited knowledge and information, weak communication, limited consultation opportunities, lack of trust, bureaucratic complexity, political impact, and the lack of consideration of citizens' opinions. As for the third objective, the results show that citizens' expectations are not fully met in terms of their involvement in planning decisions. Citizens feel that consultation is good but, their direct participation in meetings, discussions and consultations is still small. The fourth objective also draws attention to some of the structural and perceptual barriers that are faced by smaller and less powerful groups, such as differential influence, differential access to information, or limitations, such as time and financial restrictions. Finally, citizens exhibited positive attitudes when it came to participation on the basis of ICTs, which indicates that there may be more accessible avenues available to citizens for voicing their opinion and participating in urban planning through the use of ICTs. In respect to the sixth objective, the results suggest the citizens' experience of services provided by the municipality affects their willingness to engage with their municipality, thus indicating that increasing the quality of the services and responsiveness of the municipality could lead to increased engagement. The study reveals that the Development from Below approach is pertinent in the context of Bogura, though the dimensions of

that approach are not well manifested yet. From the Arnstein's Ladder perspective, the rates of participation exist primarily on the tiers of informing and consultation, and not in meaningful citizen influence. Thus, it is necessary to shift towards transparency, inclusion, accountability and citizens' influence in the urban planning system of Bogura. Increasing the participation of grassroots, ensuring access to information, broadening the participation through the use of ICT and gradually integrating citizens' opinions into city planning can lead to a shift from planning for citizens to planning with citizens.

## Recommendations

The municipality should do more to strengthen regular meetings between the municipality and wards, public hearings and community consultations on the basis of the findings. Development plans, budgets, policies, and project progress should be made public and transparent to increase transparency and trust. To promote citizen engagement, the use of ICT based tools such as social media, online surveys, mobile applications, complaints etc. should be expanded. Special focus needs to be placed on women, lower income families, less privileged groups, students, and local businesses. A strengthening of Ward Committees should also be considered to relay local priorities to the Municipal authorities. Last but not least, citizen's feedback should be taken into account systematically in planning decision-making to ensure more meaningful participation in a sense of Development from Below.

## Limitations

The total respondents of this study were only 130 from Bogura Town, which might limit the generalization of the study. A structured questionnaire and data self-reported may also restrict the depth of the respondents' experiences. Also, the research concentrated primarily on the citizen's perspective and not a detailed view of the municipal official or planner. Finally, the research was self-financed which restricted research fieldwork and data collection.

## Funding

This research was done principally at the author's own expense. No support was given from external funding agencies, public institutions, private organizations or non-governmental entities during the data collection, fieldwork or any other aspects of research.

## Conflict of Interest

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