CHAPTER IV
CHANGING NATURE OF URBAN GOVERNANCE

This chapter traces the emergence of urban governance in India and elaborates on the administrative structure of the process of urban planning and governance of Guwahati city. It explicates the role of the primary agencies responsible for the urban management and governance of Guwahati city, which include Guwahati Municipal Corporation, Guwahati Metropolitan Development Authority and Guwahati Development Department. This chapter examines the implication of neoliberal policies on urban governance, a predominant characteristic of which has been an increased bureaucratization and progressive marginalization of people's participation. The chapter highlights the increased role of bureaucratization in the process of urban planning which has led to privatization and commercialization of public amenities, resulting in an exclusionary form of urban governance.

4.1. Introduction

Cities are viewed as the land of economic opportunities and aspiration for a better standard of living; the more a city becomes developed, the more viable it becomes in terms of its capacity to grow, both economically and demographically. This has led to a rapid rise in the urban population. With urbanization advancing at a rapid pace, the focus has shifted since the last quarter of the 20th century to the Global South as the newly emerging landscape of urbanization with the onset of "fast cities", the urgency of which is highlighted using the rhetoric of sustainable urbanization to overcome the global urban crisis (Datta and Shaban, 2017). Rapidly developing cities provide the opportunity for a nation to pursue higher economic goals and leave a mark on the stage of world development. Urban planning and governance assume significance here "…as the capacity of a nation to pursue its economic goals is contingent upon its ability to govern the cities"[1].

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[1] *History of Urban Local Bodies*. Retrieved on 5 May, 2021 from
http://rcueslucknow.org/states/Compendium%20of%20Urban%20Data%20(Uttar%20Pradesh)/5%20Introduction%20History%20of%20ULBs.pdf (page 4)

Because of the potential of cities to contribute significantly to a nation's economic growth, the process of development adopted at the national level is geared towards mega projects and model cities which would lead to global significance. The projects and models adopted to achieve this seem to have been directly borrowed from the Global North without factoring in the local issues, concerns and complexities. This rapid process of development and urbanization exerts pressure on the growing urban areas. Despite the development at a macro level, the quality of life of a common urban resident in cities, especially in the Global South, is far from satisfactory. Cities are largely characterized by a range of issues which include overpopulation, insufficient housing, squalor slums, traffic congestion, inadequate water, and sanitation facilities, etc. The governance of urban centres with regard to the basic service delivery for its residents is the prerogative of the state government and urban local bodies; by virtue of being the elected representatives of a particular locality or region, they are considered to have a comprehensible grasp over the range of issues concerning the particular area to which they belong. The advent of modern municipal corporations has its basis on this form of local governance wherein the local authorities are representatives of public opinion as well as instruments of governance.

4.1.1. Emergence of Municipalities and Development Authorities in India[2]

The modern form of municipal governance in India was the creation of the British rule as they embarked on to rule large tracts of unknown land in the country. Under a charter dated 30 December, 1687, issued by the East India Company, Madras became the first city to have a local government. The Municipal Corporation of Madras came into existence on 29 September, 1688 and comprised of a Mayor, 12 Alderman and 60 to 120 Burgesses. Thereafter, similar organizations were created by the charter of 1726 in the other presidency towns, i.e., Bombay and Calcutta.

Though in 1973, a renewed attempt was made to establish municipal organizations with more responsibility in all the presidency towns, the Act of 1842 was the first formal measure taken towards this direction. In 1880, when Lord Ripon was appointed the new

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Viceroy, an emphasis was laid on local governance; he issued a resolution on 18 May, 1882 which is famously known as the "Magna Carta of Local Self Government" (ibid, 10). This resolution sought to empower the local governments though provision of adequate resources as well as provided suggestions for measures of better and efficient governance.

However, when Lord Curzon became the Viceroy in 1899, he implemented excessive centralization of powers at the cost of the local governments, as he was of the opinion that such a measure would lead to better efficiency. But this trend of centralization raised some concerns and as such, a Royal Commission on Decentralization was appointed on 12 September, 1907. One of the most significant recommendations by the Royal Commission was that the municipal chairman should be an elected non-official. Some of the other important recommendations by the Royal Commission include: delegation of administrative functions would be undertaken by the municipal councils, and with regard to budget management, municipalities would be in charge of allotment of funds as long as they maintain a balance for maintenance as prescribed. The role of the municipalities was further realized in 1918 with the joint report on Indian Constitution Reforms, popularly known as Montague-Chelmsford Report, which gave due importance to the extension of franchise at the local level.

With the escalation of the struggle for independence, Indians then concerned themselves with reorganizing governance at the local level, and under the Government of India Act 1935, new reforms were introduced. However, these reforms came to a standstill and did not come to fruition till after independence. When India gained independence, local governance entered a new phase with the introduction of adult suffrage; the Constitution which came into effect in 1950 democratized the process of governance, and since then, various legislations have been passed to reshape and empower local governance in India.

During this period post-independence, along with establishment of municipal authorities across states, there was also an urgent need to address the growing concerns of the metropolitan cities such as Delhi, Bombay, and Calcutta. This concern was raised at the conference of Ministers for Housing and Urban Development in 1971 where it was decided that a common authority should be set up for the development of metropolitan

cities. Thereafter, in 1973 it was stated in the thirty-seventh report by the Estimates Committee of the Fifth Lok Sabha that the Government of India had advised the state governments to set up Development Authorities for large metropolitan cities, along the lines of the already established Delhi Development Authority. The Delhi Development Authority (Provisional) was set up in 1957 to mitigate the issue of housing for the deluge of refugees from West Pakistan after India's partition at the time of independence, and, to develop the modern capital city of newly independent India through formulation of the Master Plan. Following this pattern and under the directive for urban management, the period between 1970-80 witnessed the establishment of urban development authorities to plan, control and co-ordinate development programmes across cities and major towns with rapid growth.

4.1.2. 74th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992[3]

The 74th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 is a landmark with regard to devolution of urban management and governance in India as it formally recognizes urban local bodies (ULBs) as the third tier of government. To ensure delineation of roles and powers, this Act classifies three types of municipalities: "(i) Nagar Panchayats for areas in transition from a rural area to urban area; (ii) Municipal Councils for smaller urban areas; (iii) Municipal Corporations for larger urban areas". According to this Act, direct election will be held in each ward of a municipal area; all seats in a municipality will be filled by the elected representatives. There is a provision for fresh elections in case of dissolution, to be held within six months. This Act mandates that the municipalities be conferred with power and authority as necessary, in order to enable them to carry out the responsibilities entrusted on them in the Twelfth Schedule.

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[3] *The Constitution (Seventy-fourth Amendment) Act, 1992*. Retrieved on 5 May, 2021 from https://www.india.gov.in/my-government/constitution-india/amendments/constitution-india-seventy-fourth-amendment-act-1992

TWELFTH SCHEDULE[4]

(Article 243W)

1. Urban planning including town planning.

2. Regulation of land-use and construction of buildings.

3. Planning for economic and social development.

4. Roads and bridges.

5. Water supply for domestic, industrial and commercial purposes.

6. Public health, sanitation conservancy and solid waste management.

7. Fire services.

8. Urban forestry, protection of the environment and promotion of ecological aspects.

9. Safeguarding the interests of weaker sections of society, including the handicapped and mentally retarded.

10. Slum improvement and upgradation.

11. Urban poverty alleviation.

12. Provision of urban amenities and facilities such as parks, gardens, playgrounds.

13. Promotion of cultural, educational and aesthetic aspects.

14. Burials and burial grounds; cremations, cremation grounds and electric crematoriums.

15. Cattle pounds; prevention of cruelty to animals.

16. Vital statistics including registration of births and deaths.

17. Public amenities including street lighting, parking lots, bus stops and public conveniences.

18. Regulation of slaughter houses and tanneries.

Apart from the municipal areas, this Act also clearly defines a metropolitan area as "…an area having a population of ten lakhs or more, comprised in one or more districts and consisting of two or more Municipalities or Panchayats or other contiguous areas, specified by the Governor by public notification to be a Metropolitan area"[5]. Considering the fact that the management of a metropolitan area is beyond the purview of the municipality, this Act incorporates an important provision in relation to the

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[4] See, note iii
[5] See, note iii

establishment of Metropolitan Planning Committees (MPCs) to develop unified plans for the growth of a metropolitan area as a whole.

The 74th Amendment Act is of significance as it granted municipalities constitutional recognition and sought to empower them politically, functionally and fiscally. However, there has been no significant change as can be witnessed from the present plight of the ULBs across states in India. Most often, the state governments exercise influence over the functioning of the ULBs or the power and authority for urban planning is vested in the hands of executive bodies such as the Metropolitan Development Authorities (MDAs). As such, the urban management in metropolitan areas is inhibited by the power dynamics of different competing agencies, as discussed in the following section in the case of Guwahati city.

4.2. Urban Management of Guwahati city

The three primary agencies responsible for the urban management and governance of Guwahati city are Guwahati Municipal Corporation, Guwahati Metropolitan Development Authority and Guwahati Development Department.

4.2.1. Guwahati Municipal Corporation[6]

Guwahati Municipal Corporation (GMC) is the ULB responsible for the urban management and governance of Guwahati municipal area and administers an area of 216.79 km² of Guwahati city. GMC was constituted with 34 wards in 1974 under The Guwahati Municipal Corporation Act, 1969 published in the Assam Gazette, Extraordinary, dated 18 January, 1973. With the establishment of GMC, the Assam Municipal Act, 1956, the Panchayat Act, 1959 and the Assam Town and Country Planning Act, 1959 ceased to have effect within the city of Guwahati.

Since then, with rise in population and expansion of the municipal area, the wards were further delineated and the number of wards was fixed at 60. Thereafter, several of these wards were clubbed together into 31 municipal wards divided into smaller sub areas

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[6] *Guwahati Municipal Corporation*. Retrieved on 8 May, 2021 from https://gmc.assam.gov.in/

(Area Sabhas) for better management. Each ward was represented by elected Ward Councillors and Area Sabha representatives; there were 31 elected Ward Councillors and 2 nominated Councillors appointed by the Government, and 90 Area Sabha representatives. Recently, on 25 January, 2022, the number of wards was again increased to 60 on the ground for widespread representation. The head of GMC is the Mayor who is elected by the Ward Councillors and is supported in office by a Deputy Mayor and Mayor-in Council.

Figure 4.1: Area of Jurisdiction under GMC
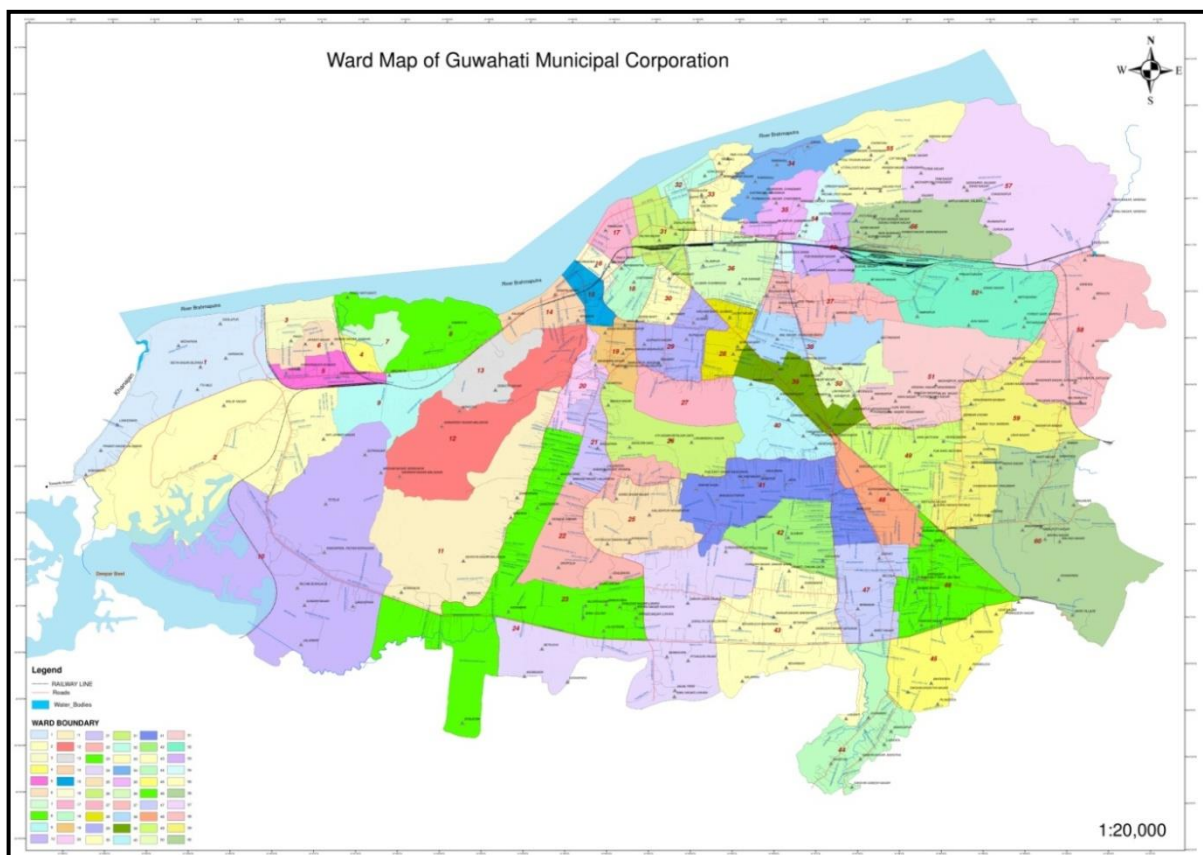
Source: GMC website

The municipal services provided by GMC are[7]:

- Property assessment/reassessment/mutation
- Development and maintenance of roads/drains
- Issue and renewal of trade license

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[7] See, note vi

- Development and maintenance of municipal markets
- Construction and maintenance of Public Toilets/e-Toilets
- Building permission
- Development and allotment of parking slots
- Development and maintenance of parks and ponds
- Hoarding and advertisement
- Issue of Birth/Death certificates
- Installation and maintenance of Street Lights
- Cesspool emptier
- Construction and maintenance of crematorium
- Implementation of different central/state Government programmes schemes and projects
- Water supply with metered/non-metered connection, etc.
- For property tax and trade license purposes, the corporation area is divided into six revenue zones.
- For Conservancy and Public works, the corporation area is divided into six engineering divisions

*4.2.2. Guwahati Metropolitan Development Authority*[8]

Guwahati Metropolitan Development Authority (GMDA) is a para-statal agency in charge of the planning and implementation of the development projects with regard to Guwahati city. It was set up with the aim to provide an authority for the preparation and execution of the Master Plan, and also for the formulation and execution of schemes for the planned development of Guwahati Metropolitan Area. GMDA was established in 1992 as per the Guwahati Metropolitan Development Authority Act, 1985 (amended) and replaced the erstwhile Guwahati Development Authority constituted in 1962 under the Town and Country Planning Act, 1959 (amended). As per section 126 of the GMDA Act, with the constitution of this Authority, the relevant section of the GMC Act, 1969 (Assam Act-1 of 1973), Assam Town and Country Planning Act, 1959 (Assam Act-I of 1960), Assam Municipal Act, 1956 (Assam Act-IV of 1957) and Assam Panchayat Act 1972 cease to operate within the territorial limit of Guwahati Metropolitan Area.

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[8] *Guwahati Metropolitan Development Authority*. Retrieved on 8 May, 2021 from
https://gmda.assam.gov.in/

With this Act, GMDA has the power to give directions regarding implementation of any development project to any authority that has received funds from it, and has supervisory authority to ensure execution of development projects; in case of failure, GMDA also has the power to undertake the implementation of such schemes. This Act also provides GMDA with the power to acquire or lease/sell any property which it may deem necessary for the purpose of any of its activities within its area of jurisdiction.

GMDA's jurisdiction extends over the whole of Guwahati Metropolitan Area comprising of an area of 262 sq.km. covering the entire Guwahati Municipal Corporation area, entire North Guwahati Town Committee area and some revenue villages of Silasundari Ghopa Mouza, Pub Barsar Mouza, Dakhin Rani Mouza, Ramcharani Mouza, Beltola Mouza.
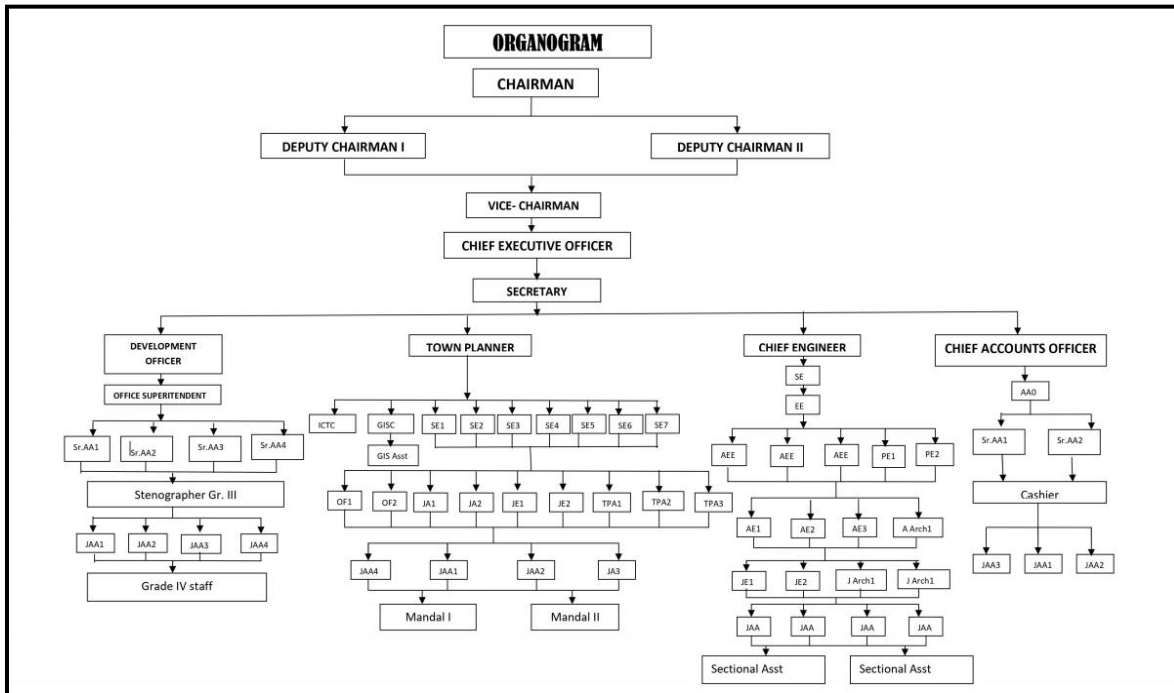
Figure 4.2: Area of Jurisdiction under GMDA
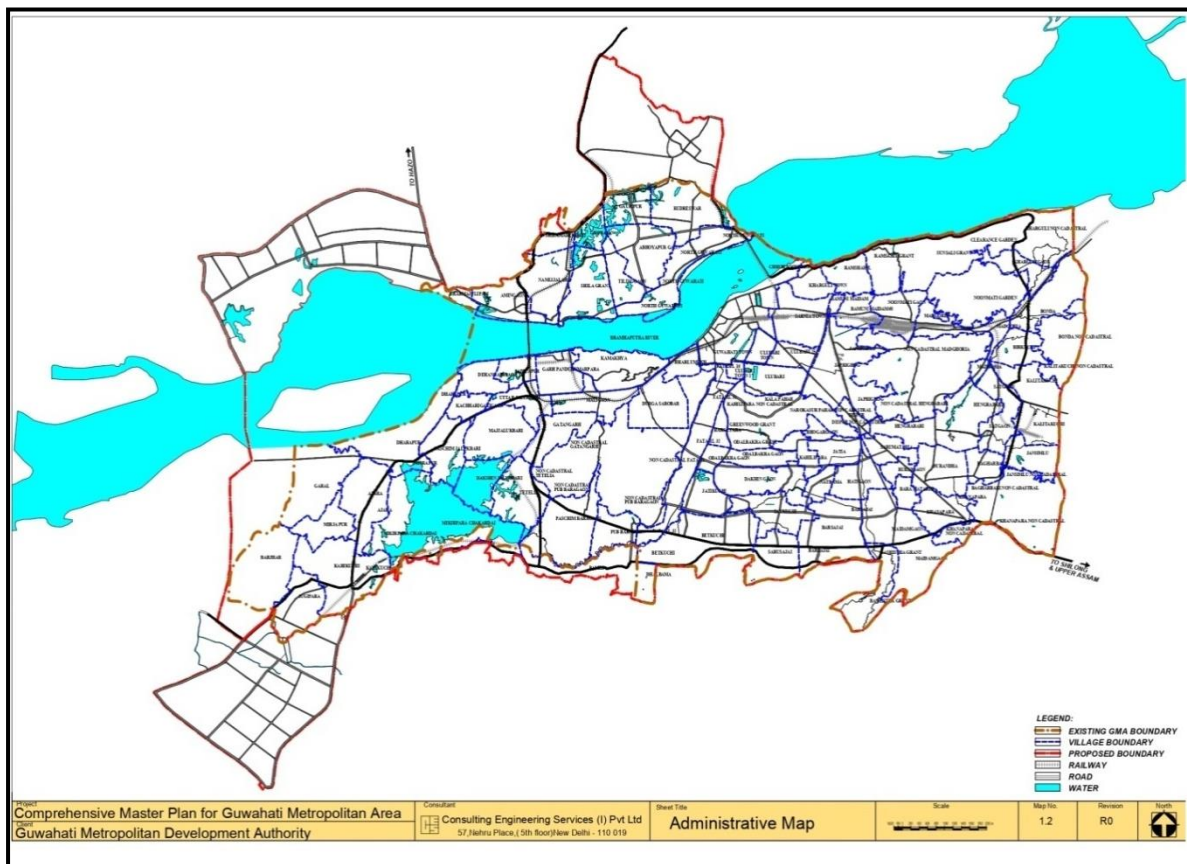
Source: GMDA website

GMDA comprises of the following officials: the Chairman, Deputy Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Chief Executive Officer, Secretary, Town Planner, Chief Engineer, Development Officer and Chief Accounts Officer.

Figure 4.3: Organizational Structure of GMDA

Source: GMDA website

The primary role of GMDA comprises of[9]:

- *Planning:* Preparation of Master Plan and Zoning Regulation
- *Development:* Preparation and execution of development schemes. To carry out or cause to be carried out such works as are contemplated in the Master Plan
- *Regulation and Control:* To regulate and control the development though statutory plans and other measures
- *Co-ordination:* To co-ordinate development activities of other public agencies operating within Guwahati Metropolitan Area

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[9] See, note viii

4.2.3. Guwahati Development Department[10]

Guwahati Development Department (GDD) was created in January, 1994 vide an Order by the Governor of Assam (No. 46/93/22) in light of Guwahati's growing importance. It was created as the administrative department for GMC and GMDA in order to facilitate coordinated development of Guwahati urban area. As per the order, consequent upon the creation of GDD, the Municipal Administration Department of the State Government ceases to be the administrative department for GMDA and GMC.

GDD monitors the overall development of Guwahati through the exercise of administrative control over the development works carried out by GMC, GMDA, Guwahati Metropolitan Drinking Water and Sewerage Board, and Guwahati Smart City Project; and in some cases, the various departments of Government of Assam such as Public Works Department and Town & Country Planning also fall under the ambit of GDD in the execution of development projects.

The various Acts administered by GDD are as follows[11]:

- The Guwahati Municipal Corporation Act, 1971
- The Guwahati Metropolitan Development Authority Act, 1985
- The Guwahati Defacement of Public Property Act, 2006
- The Guwahati Non Biodegradable Solid Waste Management Act, 2006
- The Assam Fiscal Responsibilities and Budget Management Act, 2005
- The Assam Municipal Disclosure Act, 2007
- The Assam Nagara Raj Act, 2007
- The Guwahati Water Bodies (Prevention & Conservation) Act, 2005
- The Assam Apartment (Construction and Transfer of Ownership) Act, 2009
- The Guwahati Metropolitan Drinking Water and Sewage Board Act, 2009
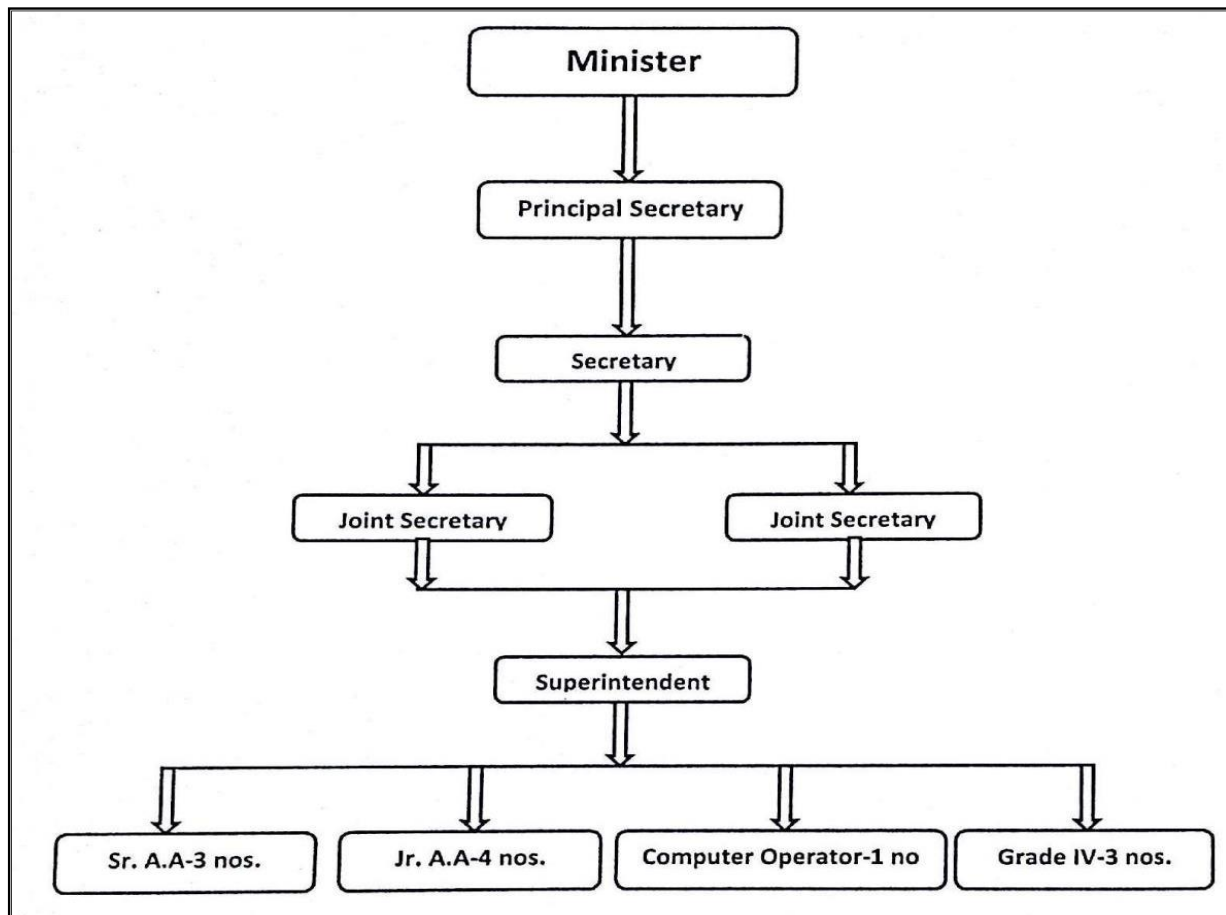
The primary function of GDD is the administrative control of GMC and GMDA and monitoring the activities of these two organizations, and also to sanction and release fund for the various developmental schemes undertaken by these two organizations. It also has

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[10] *Guwahati Development Department*. Retrieved on 8 May, 2021 from https://gdd.assam.gov.in/
[11] See, note x

a technical wing for matters concerning urban and regional planning, strategies, research appraisal and monitoring of central government schemes and development policies in Guwahati. GDD is headed by either the Chief Minister or the Finance Minister of the state.

Figure 4.4: Organizational Structure of GDD

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                        │ Principal Secretary │
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                        │  Secretary  │
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                    ┌──────────┴──────────┐
              ┌─────▼────────┐      ┌──────▼────────┐
              │Joint Secretary│     │Joint Secretary│
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Source: GDD website

4.3. Issues/ Concerns with the Urban Management of Guwahati city

Before delving into the issues concerning the urban management of Guwahati city, one has to understand that the model within which it operates is that of a neoliberal order, as it is the operative model globally. This entails a complex reorganization of state-market relations which is based on active mobilization of state power to promote and further market-based regulatory arrangements (Brenner and Theodore, 2005). Consequently, in today's race for development and economic growth, urban planning institutions and regulatory practices are thereby heavily influenced by the multi-scalar nature of

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neoliberalism. Even though a policy may seem to be planned for a specific issue in a particular place or a city or a region, however, it is shaped by the larger considerations of policymaking across the globe taking into account the shifting institutional and power balances.

Encompassed by neoliberalism, cities have been treated as experimentation grounds whereby neoliberal policies have taken the shape of "*inter*urban phenomena" which relies on a circulatory system that links cities as "policymaking sites", and concomitantly products of a shared discourse (Peck, Theodore and Brenner, 2013, 1096). Under neoliberalism, cities as sites of experimentation are subjected to policies and regulatory practices which can then be replicated as models elsewhere in its bid for expansion across inter-urban spaces. In maintaining the hegemony and legitimacy of the neoliberal order, these models thereby contribute "…to the speed-up and accelerated churn of regularly made-over, relaunched and rebranded policies, helping to constitute a ready audience for new models and putative solutions" (ibid, 1097). As such, in the analysis of a city governed by a state functioning under the neoliberal order, it has to be understood that neoliberalism does not simply operate as a state-market relation; rather it is a process that operates at various levels and is entrenched into the state order as: "(a) as a modality of urban governance; (b) as a spatially selective political strategy; and (c) as a form of discourse, ideology and representation" (Brenner and Theodore, 2005, 103).

4.3.1. Urban Governance: Shift from Public to Private

This section will discuss how neoliberalism as a framework strongly influences the structures and the parameters for the governance of contemporary urban development in the context of Guwahati city.

Increased bureaucratization

India's economy was opened up in 1991, and it sought to move from a state-controlled to a neoliberal economy, leading to a considerable transformation in the nature of governance. One major change of this was a new emphasis on the partnership between public and private sectors and a reduced role of the state. However, what seems to have happened instead is increased bureaucratization in urban governance; this increase in

bureaucratization is a direct result of the increased privatization in governance owing to a neoliberal state. With this, the role of the public through elected representatives is rapidly diminishing as the authority of the ULBs in governance is being transferred to bureaucratic bodies like the MDAs, which work in close partnership with the private sector. This partnership visibly favours the "consumer-citizen" which has led to a form of exclusionary governance (Harriss, 2007).

This diminishing capacity of the ULB is clearly visible in the context of Guwahati city. GMC is the urban local body responsible for governing, developing and managing Guwahati. Despite the array of municipal services under the jurisdiction of GMC, it seems to be progressively being reduced to playing an advisory role. GMC's role in the governance of the city is being gradually replaced by the GMDA, which came into existence in 1992 as per GMDA Act 1985 (amended).

In accordance with this Act, GMDA effectively has more jurisdiction in the process of urban planning as the Master Plan and other major projects are entrusted to it. To cite the example of the Master Plan, until the 74th Amendment Act, the master plans of all towns of Assam, including Guwahati, was prepared by the Town and Country Planning Department. With the74[th] Amendment Act in 1992, the ULBs across India were entrusted with the task of preparing the master plans for their respective cities. However, in the case of Guwahati, GMDA was entrusted with the mandate of preparing the Master Plan instead of GMC.

While interviewing the Vice-Chairman of GMDA [12] regarding urban planning for Guwahati, he said that the Master Plan is the instrumental document which guides their work. He informed that the latest Master Plan was prepared in consultation with a private firm, Consulting Engineering Services Pvt. Ltd. from Delhi, in an attempt to restructure Guwahati along the lines of a global metropolitan city. He added,

> The Master Plan of Guwahati is very comprehensive… if you look at the
> Master Plan, you will be able to see how it has taken the problems of the
> city and presented solutions for the long run. When we collaborate with

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[12] Ashutosh Agnihotri interviewed on 22 August, 2016.

> external consultants, the contract is tendered out to the most competent
> agency so that the outcome is good and reliable.

When asked about the role of GMC in this process, he stated that the GMC was consulted in the preparation of the draft, along with a host of other stakeholders such as members from other government departments, NGOs, as well as experts from educational institutions, research organizations, etc. However, when asked about the significance of GMC's role in this process of urban planning, it was found that Ward Councillors were invited to discuss only limited issues deemed of importance by the consulting firm for the Master Plan. Apart from clearing few queries for the consultants, they did not have much contribution in the whole process of preparing the Master Plan. It is important to note here that prior to 1972, GMC was the implementing authority of the previous master plans of Guwahati. However, post 1992, GMDA became the sole urban planning and implementing agency in the areas under its jurisdiction, thereby sidelining GMC.

An example of this increasing bureaucratization is also witnessed in the planning process of Guwahati Smart City Project (GSCP). Out of the 100 cities selected for Smart City Mission (SCM) in India, 10 cities from Northeast India have been enlisted, including Guwahati. On 28 January, 2016, Venkaiah Naidu, the erstwhile Union Minister of Urban Development, Government of India, announced the list of the first 20 cities to be developed into Smart Cities which included Guwahati. The main points of focus of this project are Riverfront Development, Streetscaping arterial roads, Restoration of wetland network, Greenway network and Tourism development, and, Preservation of hills[13].

The planning for SCM is under the authority of the Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV), which is a temporary public-private partnership between a corporate entity and the metropolitan authority, tasked with managing smart city development projects. For the GSCP, a company registered as Guwahati Smart City Limited (GSCL), established on 11 May, 2016, has been constituted by GMDA in collaboration with Tata Consultancy Engineers (TCE) incorporated under Indian Companies Act, 2013, with equal shareholding from the state government. While interviewing the Managing Director of

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[13] *Guwahati Smart City Limited*. Retrieved on 10 May, 2021 from https://gscl.assam.gov.in/

GSCL[14], he stated that the company also includes other stakeholders such as Ward Councillors from GMC and officers from the District Magistrate's office, but the role of these stakeholders is advisory. He said,

> We conduct review meetings from time to time with these various stakeholders. But when it comes to the project, the work order is issued by the company. The company reserves the right to decide, plan, implement and monitor projects for the GSCP.

As such with regard to the GSCP, the company has the upper hand on what will be implemented for public use and development. This claim was validated in the interview with the Chief Finance Officer of GSCL[15],

> Under GSCP, we have area based projects and pan city projects… Work on pan city projects is already being carried out in phases… The area based projects are the big projects which require substantial funding. This was kept in mind while planning these projects so that it facilitates the funding process, seeing that in future they will generate revenue… We hold meetings back and forth in GSCL among the various officers and experts here, and plan the work according to the availability of funds.

Such instances bring forth the inherent bureaucratic in structure in urban planning that has sidelined ULB's authority over the management of the city. With GMDA overriding the other existing bodies concerning planning and development, it is the primary agency in charge of planning and implementation of development projects in the city. Though the expertise of GMDA is essential, as it is an engineering department, the problem with the jurisdiction of GMDA is that it is a bureaucratic organization comprising of officials who are appointed employees within the administrative structure of the state. The process of planning needs to include the GMC Ward Councillors who are elected representatives and can voice the ground level concerns. However, their role being merely advisory, their concerns hardly find adequate attention in the planning process.

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[14] Manvendra Pratap Singh interviewed on 7 March, 2018.
[15] Antima Deorah interviewed on 4 April, 2018.

In fact, the role of GMC is so undermined that before the latest election in 2022, GMC was without an elected body of councillors for a couple of years, as the ward elections were last held in 2013 and was valid for a term of five years which ended in 2018. As such, in this duration there was no elected councillor from the wards of Guwahati or a representative Mayor who could be approached for civic concerns of the city, and who could negotiate the process of development on behalf of the local population. Consequently, GMC ranked last in the assessment of 51 municipalities of the country for the Municipal Performance Index for 2020 by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, GoI[16].

While Constitutional provisions (74th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992) entrusts the matters of urban governance with the ULBs, the latter do not have the financial capacity as the resources for implementation of various development projects are allocated to the MDAs. Bagchi (1999) here argues that the political empowerment of ULBs is a myth in the absence of financial empowerment as well. To state an example here, there are mega projects under the jurisdiction of GMDA which are underway to tackle the issue of water supply crisis in the city, which are discussed below. As such GMC's role in water supply and distribution is severely limited as they await these mega projects to solve the crisis. However, in the meantime, Ward Councillors have to deal with the grievances of the public in their inability to provide a basic amenity which is crucial for survival, as stated by a Ward Councillor[17]. "As a result, accountability now rests with the urban local bodies but it is not backed by either adequate finances or the capacity for planning and management" (Ahluwalia, 2017, 2).

Increased privatization

Privileging the authority of the MDAs over the ULBs in matters of urban governance has led to withdrawal of the state from governance and increased privatization of basic service delivery. Here, I would like to discuss the present condition of water supply in the city to elaborate on this. As we can see listed above in the chapter, GMC is required to provide a range of municipal services which includes the provision of piped water supply to all residents of the city. Before the formation of GMDA, GMC was largely

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[16] Retrieved on 21 March, 2021 from https://www.timesofmedia.com/gmc-worst-civic-body-guwahati-no-longer-a-livable-city-11542.html
[17] Chinmoy Saikia interviewed on 8 March, 2017.

responsible for water supply in the city. After the declaration of Municipal Body in 1873, the first Water Treatment Plant (WTP) was constructed in Guwahati in 1887 at Panbazar. The first modern WTP was also established under GMC in 1963 at the initial Panbazar site which is still functional. Later GMC established two more WTPs, namely Satpukhuri WTP in 1984 and Kamakhya WTP in 1992. However, with the increasing demand for water supply owing to a growing urban population, these WTPs are no longer adequate to suffice the demand for water supply.

It was recorded in *Review of Studies on Urban Floods in Guwahati: from Flood Knowledge to Urban Action* (2014) that the demand of water in the city was 132 MLD. However, it was found that the WTPs installed by GMC have a total capacity of 74 MLD water generation, which in itself is not sufficient. The water supply crisis in the city is a result of, not only the insufficient installed capacity of these WTPs, but more so, because of the actual output capacity of these WTPS which is 44.50 MLD, i.e., only 60% of its total capacity. This gap in terms of its installed capacity and output capacity cannot be overcome because these WTPs have already been utilized beyond their lifespan, as stated by an executive member of the PHE Retired Engineers Forum[18].

Government data states that 30% of Guwahati city area is covered by the piped water network for water supply from these WTPs; however, even this 30% coverage is not absolute. A survey was conducted in the month of September, 2018 as part of this study in Uzan Bazaar to evaluate the status of water supply as this area has the provision of piped water supply. Uzan Bazaar is one of the oldest municipal wards where many of the city's elites live. A purposive sample of 30 households (HHs) with piped water supply was taken and one FGD was conducted with 18 participants. While some respondents were satisfied with the piped water supply, there was also a common concern that ran across the respondents in this area. The concern is regarding the quality of water and the increasing irregular frequency of water supply because of which many have had to resort to alternatives such as borewell.

Out of the 30 HHs, 8 HHs (26.67%) had borewell, 10 HHs (33.34%) relied on piped water supply, and the rest 12 HHs (40%) received piped water supply but due to its

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[18] Najibuddin Ahmed interviewed on 8 September, 2018.

unreliability also have either wells or borewell as an alternative. Despite paying a monthly sum of Rs.300/-, these HHs do not receive regular or sufficient water supply.

Figure 4.5: Piped Water Supply Coverage in Uzan Bazaar
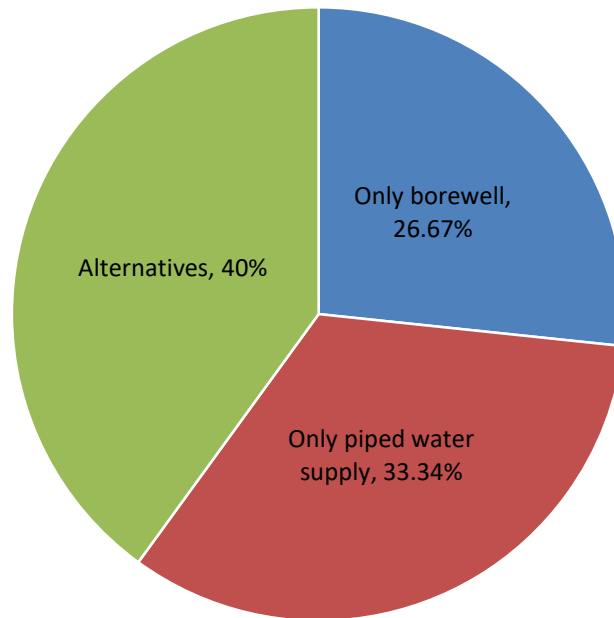
The FGD brought forth that even on days when they receive piped water supply, the water is not always of good quality and as such they hesitate to use it for cooking purposes. A respondent[19] complained, "*bor besi letera pani ahe ketiaba, heidina supply r pani ami use nokoru*" (sometimes the water is very dirty, on such days we don't use supply water). Another respondent[20] stated, "*ami dinot ghorot kunu nathaku… sob kaamot ulai jai… pani ketiaba ahe ketiaba nahe… heikarone ami boring kori loisu*" (we are not at home during the day… we go out for work… sometimes there is water supply sometimes there isn't… so we have borewell).

The FGD also comprised of few respondents from low-income groups who stated that they could not afford the double expense of piped water supply as well as an alternative. A respondent[21] stated, "*ami hajira kora manuh… iman poisa nai… pani bhalke ahileu eta kotha*" (we are daily wage labourers… we don't have so much money… it would

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[19] Malati Barman, FGD conducted in Uzan Bazaar on 18 September, 2018.
[20] Ranjit Borthakur, FGD conducted in Uzan Bazaar on 18 September, 2018.
[21] Babul Ali, FGD conducted in Uzan Bazaar on 18 September, 2018.

also be one thing if the water supply was reliable). Another respondent[22] added, "*bohute tu pipeline je leak ase tar panirei sole… mur ghoror bai jonie hodai ratipua pani dhori ahe*" (many people collect water from the leakages in the pipelines… the maid who comes to my house collects water every morning). Those people who cannot afford to spend on this basic facility resort to siphoning off water from leakages in pipelines which deters the quality and pressure of the supply water.

As such, the 30% coverage of piped water supply does not translate into effective urban service delivery, even for this small percentage of population and they have to resort to alternative measures. The condition is worse in water scarce areas which do not even have the provision of piped water supply and the only option available is to buy water from private water suppliers.

As a result of the growing concern towards inadequate water supply in the city and taking into cognizance SDG 2030[23], the Government of Assam in Vision Assam 2030 promises to provide equitable distribution of safe drinking water to all households. In order to meet this goal, GMDA has undertaken four major water supply projects: South West Guwahati zone (Pandu, Sadilapur) funded grant under JNNURM (now AMRUT), South Central Guwahati (Kharghuli) and North Guwahati zones (Mazgaon) externally aided project by Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), and South East Guwahati zone (Guwahati Refinery, Chunshali) grant for Assam Infrastructure Project by the Asian Development Bank (ADB). But yet again, these projects undertaken by GMDA are already lagging way behind the target years set initially in the proposals (see, Table II).

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[22] Jahnabi Baraua, FGD conducted in Uzan Bazaar on 18 September, 2018.
[23] Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 aims to ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all by 2030.

Table II: Water Supply Projects in Guwahati

Water Source Location	Location of WTP	Name of Executing Agency	Funding Agency	Designed Capacity in MLD	Zone	Initial Target year (source: interview of officials)
Pandu	Sadilapur	GMDA	JNNURM	107	South West Guwahati	2011
Kharghuli	Kharghuli	GMDA	JICA	191	South Central Guwahati	2013-14
Mazgaon	Mazgaon	GMDA	JICA	37	North Guwahati	2013-14
IOCL Gate, Sector-I, Guwahati Refinery	Chunshali	AUIIP	ADB	98	South East Guwahati	2018-19

Source: ActionAid Report, 2019

It was revealed during a discussion with some members of the PHE Retired Engineers Forum (PREF) and some officials from Public Works Department (PWD)[24] that these projects which have been tendered out to private parties are funded by loans, whereby the cost and interest of the delay will be levied as tax on the people. In the meantime, the latest option provided under Smart City Project is installing water ATMs; however, this is commoditization of water which cannot be the alternative. Such institutionalized disparity in the access to basic public amenities exacerbates the level of segmentation between the city's rich and poor (Kundu, 2003).

Because of the increasing privatized nature of urban planning, the role of ULBs in the provision of public amenities is far from adequate. As highlighted by Ahluwalia, "(W)ith regard to the state of public service delivery in Indian cities and towns, unsafe water, poor sanitation, and heavily polluted air have come together to create an urban environment that is a major health hazard. The challenges of mobility and shelter add further to the litany of urban woes" (Ahluwalia, 2017, 12).

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[24] Meeting conducted on 17 October, 2018.

4.3.2. Exclusionary Urban Governance

In this section we will be discussing how with increased bureaucratization and privatization, urban governance under the neoliberal order has assumed an exclusionary nature. This exclusion operates at two levels: at the level of public representation, and, at the level of public participation.

Exclusion in public representation

With GMDA bringing in external consultants and funding agencies, it has drastically reduced the role of GMC in the provision of basic service deliverables. Commenting on this, the Chief Executive Officer of GMDA[25] said,

> I am happy to say that GMDA has taken up a number of initiatives, which I feel will make Guwahati a better place to live in. We will be working on the development of various civic amenities… We have found that for urban development, Public Private Partnership is a very feasible alternative and so we will be carrying out number of projects in PPP mode… We will have participation from various stakeholders as we want to have a human touch to the process of urban planning. But ultimately the projects will have to be drawn up by the consultants who are experts in this field and their knowledge will be more beneficial in improving the city… Because of the PPP mode, we have many options that we can explore to set up ties with international organizations. We have already collaborated with a company based in Switzerland.

However, these multi-scalar projects are planned, created and managed by non-elected team of officials and consultants, who cater to over-ambitious plans on paper without taking into consideration the ground reality. This has severely limited the capacity of GMC as these projects are under the jurisdiction of GMDA. In an interview with the Mayor of GMC[26], he stated,

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[25] Varnali Deka interviewed on 12 April, 2017.
[26] Mrigen Sarania interviewed on 6 March, 2017.

> The role of GMC is to supply water, dispose garbage, build roads, issue permits and keep a check on whether everything is running smoothly in the wards… But nowadays there is a lot of overlap of our work with GMDA as they are implementing the Master Plan and Smart City Project. So we cannot undertake work that does not fit into the larger plan for the city.

Incidentally, on one of my visits to the GMC office, I ran into few Ward Councillors. They heard me enquiring about Ward Councillors and asked me what it was regarding. Once I introduced myself, I had an informal conservation (unstructured interview) with the members present[27]. There were 6 members present in the room; two of them were from the Congress party (opposition party) and 4 from BJP (ruling party). I started my conversation with them with a general enquiry about their roles and areas of jurisdiction. On probing further about how they manage public expectations, one of the members from Congress was the first to respond,

> Whichever party is in power in the Centre (GoI), they also get the benefits in the state. We do our part but nobody wants to listen to people from opposition party.

The other member from Congress added to this saying,

> See, work can happen only if we are given projects and funding. Now we have to keep checking on, not only with the GMC office, but also with GMDA for everything… and if something clashes with GMDA's project then our work doesn't get done.

However, to this, one of the members from BJP said,

> We also face the same difficulty. It is not about the party but it is related to the ward. If it is an important ward, then it is slightly easier to get things done because funding is given… because if the areas where *dangor manuh* (the elites) live don't function properly, then it'll be a problem.

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[27] Interview conducted on 8 March, 2017.

Another member from BJP added,

> But sometimes even after getting a project, work doesn't happen. Now in
> my *elaka* (ward area), there is a Sewage Treatment Plant; but it is non-
> functioning. GMC and PWD had worked in collaboration on the project
> for this plant… But now GMDA will be undertaking a big project for
> sewage treatment. So we are waiting for GMDA to finish the project, but
> we haven't heard of any work been done till now.

To this another member from BJP added,

> That is the thing… without GMDA's permission work cannot get done,
> and there is no money. Now in an area like Zoo Road, where there is
> scarcity of drinking water but one can swim in the flooded road when
> there is rain, there the most we can do is clean the drains…but we cannot
> dig drains just because we need to. And there is no drinking water either.
> But where will we give it from; there is no water!

From this conversation, we can get a sense of the declining role of GMC as their area of
jurisdiction overlaps with GMDA. To state another instance, if we take the case of
building permits under Guwahati Building Construction (Regulation) Byelaws, 2014,
one needs to obtain NOC before the construction of any building. Without an NOC,
constructing a building is illegal and can be demolished. Both GMC as well as GMDA
provide NOC; but GMDA can override GMC's permit if the land has already been
allotted for development purposes. As stated by a sub-divisional officer in the District
Circle office[28],

> We work on land *patta* (ownership) documents and keep a check on
> encroachment areas. If there is encroachment, we inform DC sir's
> office… The problem is with NOC of building permits. There are big
> private players who are encroaching land but they have building permits.
> Nowadays it is easier for private companies to get NOC from GMDA…
> Look at Radisson Blue Hotel, for example; it is set up on encroached land

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[28] Lakhinandan Saharia interviewed on 16 May, 2017.

but it cannot be demolished as they have the NOC and other necessary papers from GMDA.

Apart from GMDA and GMC, there are also multiple other bodies which are designated to manage various urban activities in Guwahati such as Public Works Department (PWD), Public Health Engineering Department (PHED), Assam State Housing Board (ASHB), Assam Urban Water Supply and Sewerage Board (AUWSSB), Deputy Commissioner's Office, along with North Guwahati Municipal Board and Panchayat offices of the five revenue villages which fall under the jurisdiction of GMDA. The presence of multiple agencies seems important for delegation of responsibilities, but what it has led to is negligence and lack of accountability. There are overlaps because of which each agency passes the buck to the other resulting in lack of action on important civic issues in the city.

This becomes exclusionary to public representation because GMC has been sidelined to an advisory role, and these agencies have to get approval from GMDA which is a bureaucratic organization working on plans and projects for revenue generation. GMC is accountable to the people, GMDA is not; GMC can be re-elected by people to voice their concerns, GMDA is not answerable to people on delay or failure of projects, and they don't need the approval of the public as they are appointed officials. Banerjee-Guha (2009, 98) argues that this pattern of urban governance is to "…create a functional impotence of democratically elected bodies and encroach upon the constitutionally devolved areas of state government jurisdiction". Under neoliberalism, it is beneficial for a city to be governed by chief executive officers (as in the case of MDAs) who would give importance to mega projects and material expressions of development in a bid to attract investment capital rather than ministers, mayors or commissioners (as in the case of ULBs) who are required to be accountable to the public and can pose roadblocks.

Exclusion in public participation

Disempowering the municipalities by overriding its authority through overlap of domains of jurisdiction has led to a crisis of local urban governance, leaving the ULBs with constrained capacity to deal with growing urban challenges. As Bhide (2017) argues,

(O)verlapping domains and the uncertain fixation of responsibility and accountability have meant that, on the one hand, the disempowerment of urban local governments runs deep, while, on the other, a culture of politicised institutions, poor service standards, opacity and non-accountability also thrives, resulting in apathy and alienation towards local governments. Unsurprisingly, the voting levels for urban local government elections are lowest in the country. (ibid, 177)

This "apathy and alienation" reflected in an informal conversation with few of my acquaintances who reside in the Zoo Road area. They had just returned from *Unnayan Samiti* (Development Committee) meeting and were discussing about it. With Durga Puja right around the corner, the topic of discussion in the meeting was regarding its celebration in the *para* (neighbourhood). So I enquired if the committee in their area was an active and engaging one, to which one of my acquaintances responded[29],

They call for meeting when there is a chance of getting donations to organize something... otherwise they have no other role. I was also a member 2 years ago… There is so much water crisis in our area… so we had gone with our ward councilor to GMC office to discuss this. There we were told that GMDA is working on the water supply project. So we went to GMDA's office to see if they could do something about this issue… but everyone is an officer there; they sent us from one table to another, eventually nothing came out of it. And we cannot keep running from one office to another. All we can do is raise the issue to our Ward Councillor and the rest of the work is on him. But if GMC people cannot do anything, then what are we supposed to do? So we gave up… everyone buys water for consumption now… we don't have a choice, we have to subsist.

Disengagement from the public becomes even more pronounced when we take the case of Smart City project. The conceptualization of Smart City emerged as a reaction to one of the worst economic crisis faced by the world in 2008. During this time, when markets

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[29] Conversation on 17 September, 2019.

were crashing and the world economy was in a flux, the question of sustainability assumed great significance. As a response came the need for better planned cities to accommodate the ever-increasing urban population and its associated concerns. Smart city seemed to provide a respite from the chaos of the ongoing unplanned urban development.

IBM pioneered the concept of smarter cities within its Smarter Planet Initiative. It was in the midst of the financial crisis of 2008 that IBM CEO Sam Palmisano delivered a speech titled, "A Smarter Planet: The Next Leadership Agenda", where he argued that in order to recuperate from the financial crisis, cities will have to cope by becoming smarter so that they are more sustainable and economically efficient. Almost instantaneously, this concept was grasped by various nations across the globe as a development strategy. Following this, IBM appropriated the concept of "Smarter Cities" for its worldwide advertising campaign to promote ICT as a solution to urban problems. By the beginning of 2009, countries like South Korea, UAE and China started investing into the research of the concept and making its formation a reality (Harrison and Donnelly, 2011).

The concept of Smart City was introduced in India during the election campaign of 2014 by the present Prime Minister, Narendra Modi. The agenda included development or rather upgradation of 100 select cities into smart cities in accordance with the already established international standards associated with the concept. Smart Cities Mission (SCM) was officially launched in India on 25 June, 2015, with the objective of facilitating cities to provide quality urban life to its citizens though "smart solutions". SCM aims towards achieving models of sustainable and inclusive development which will guide the way for other aspiring cities[30].

Out of the 100 cities selected for SCM, 10 cities from Northeast have been enlisted, including Guwahati. As already mentioned above, for the purpose of the Guwahati Smart City Project (GSCP), a company called the Guwahati Smart City Ltd. (GSCL) has been constituted with collaboration between GMDA and TCE. I conducted interviews with three officials working on GSCP in order to get an understanding of the process.

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[30] *Smart City Mission*. Retrieved on 10 May, 2021 from https://smartcities.gov.in/

An AMRUT official[31] who was involved at the stage of drafting the proposal said,

> To start work on the proposal, we had to make an assessment of the most pressing issues of the city… If you look at the proposal, you will see that we engaged with various stakeholders through multiple mediums to understand what we needed to highlight in the proposal. We advertised though print media as well online platforms; we organized events such as Tech Fair, Smart lab setup, meeting with educational institutes, essay competitions, etc… We also conducted review meetings with various government officials and other stakeholders. And we conducted ward level meetings to make the public aware about the project and to invite suggestions.

Considering the kind of public outreach that the proposal presents, the area coverage seems quite extensive. It was also stated in the interview that the areas of focus for GSCP was identified through online public voting, which is anyway exclusive as not everyone has the access or the capacity to use the internet. Additionally, interviews with the Project Manager and Chief Technical Officer of GSCL reveal the cursory treatment given to public participation in the process of planning. The Project Manager of GSCL[32] stated,

> I have to oversee and ensure that the projects are on track. For that we have to follow the plan drawn up by our expert consultants… These expansive projects will be successful only if they are based on technical concept and logic… The whole city will benefit from this.

On probing further on public participation, she said,

> We conducted meetings at various wards and organized many events while we were drafting the proposal… There are so many issues but we cannot solve everything. So we zeroed in on the most important issues that can be addressed under GSCP. Once that was decided, it is the work

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[31] Utpal Sharma interviewed on 14 March, 2018.
[32] Moonmi Kalita interviewed on 3April, 2018.

of the technical officers to prepare the plan as they have the knowhow… We will notify and keep the public updated about the progress. We have to build these projects in a way that completely transforms how the city looks… Once the projects are successful, it will be the public who will enjoy the benefits.

Through the course of two interviews, public participation got reduced from inviting suggestions and feedback to being notified as and when changes take place. The Chief Technical Officer of GSCL[33] stated it even more bluntly by saying that the public is not interested in the technical details of the project. "They want to see development…" which is why the projects are modeled after developed cities, for which expert consultants are required to bring the project to fruition.

An important point to note here is that, on paper there seems to have been an effort to engage with the public, but the engagement was limited to just spreading awareness among the public. As stated by a respondent[34] in Uzan Bazaar area, which will be undergoing drastic change owing to the Brahmaputra Riverfront Development Project under GSCP,

> Yes, there was a meeting held… but we were not asked anything. They just informed us about the project and how this area would become developed. We sat and listened… we will see what happens… we have nothing to do in this regard.

This meeting was also selectively exclusive, as stated by their household help[35],

> I did not know about any meeting; in fact no one from my neighbourhood knew. These things are not for us… we do not even know what smart city is. We only got to know from *dada* (elder brother, in this case referring to the employer) that some project work is going to happen on the riverside.

[33] Sanjay Verma interviewed on 4 April, 2018.
[34] Girindra Deka interviewed on 12 March, 2019.
[35] Jonali Baishya interviewed on 12 March, 2019.

Another respondent[36] who lives near Sola beel, a wetland area cited for restoration and rejuvenation under GSCP, said,

> There is always some work or the other going on in the wetland… just no improvement happens. Nowadays we have stopped going to meetings; few officers will come and explain to us that this time the wetland will be cleaned and made beautiful… But you can see the condition of the wetland yourself!

Through the instances cited above in this chapter, we can see how neoliberalism as a "modality of urban governance" has penetrated into the structure of urban planning in Guwahati city. The implementation of the Master Plan and Smart City project of Guwahati is under the jurisdiction of GMDA which comprises of appointed state officials; it is a bureaucratic organization which works towards projects that are economically viable for revenue generation. They are not obligated to work towards the welfare of the public; rather their incentive is to provide services to the public that ensure returns. As Harvey points out that since the turn towards neoliberalism in the 1970s which proposes that "…human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade" (Harvey, 2005, 2), globally there has been pervasive privatization and withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision. This is evident in the increasingly privatized nature of public amenities. The concern here, as Harvey (2005) argues, is that,

> (I)n the event of a conflict, the typical neoliberal state will tend to side with a good business climate as opposed to either the collective rights (and quality of life) of labour or the capacity of the environment to regenerate itself… in the event of a conflict, neoliberal states typically favour the integrity of the financial system and the solvency of financial institutions over the well-being of the population or environmental quality. (ibid , 70-71)

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[36] Simanta Thakuria interviewed on 18 May, 2019.

As it was found, that is already the case with Guwahati city as it has led to an exclusionary form of urban governance. The bureaucratic structure that permeates GMDA gets manifested on the structure of governance and thereby on the physicality of the urban space, as the plans for the city's development are finalized by GMDA. The implementation of such projects is then tendered out to private companies with an objective to generate revenue, which is often divested from the ground reality. Such projects are modeled after development projects of the Global North; these projects then determine the layout, accessibility and progression of the city. This is reflective of the neoliberal model of development espoused by the Global North which is adopted by the Global South in a bid to emulate. Within such a bureaucratic model of planning, massive projects are planned as though the implementation would be on unused and unoccupied space; that makes it unrealistic and exclusivist which ultimately results in its failure, as these areas already have ground level problems of their own which need to be dealt with first.

The following chapter argues how this has created a problematic discourse around the concept of development for the "public", whereas the reality is that public participation is encouraged of only a selective population who can contribute to revenue generation. For instance, the overemphasis on the beautification of the city, and the insistence on converting open spaces into gated parks under the Smart City Project is directed towards facilitating the accessibility for only a selective population, who resonate with such markers of what is considered essential to be called urban and developed. Multi-storied buildings and commercial complexes which exert pressure, not only on the land, but also on traffic and drainage system, receive building permission with very little persuasion as it fits within the mandate of infrastructural development. But the repercussion is faced by the economically marginalized population as they are either evicted or have restricted accessibility to such public amenities and spaces.

This raises serious concern about the planning process as no lessons seems to have been drawn from glaring failures of the past; rather each plan becomes more grandiose in achieving the previously failed targets. Because of a top-down bureaucratic approach at the level of planning, the ground level concerns are not taken into consideration and the public is led to believe that the new upgraded project would be the solution to all existing

problems. However, as already discussed, development projects for the public have not been designed based on what is required in a particular locality; rather they are based on what is considered as a sign of development promoted by the standardized neoliberal model. Thus, these development projects do not address the concerns of the public who will be consequently at the receiving end, but has rather adopted an approach towards development of the "consumer public" which has led to gentrification of urban spaces for exclusivist consumption.