

An Outline of the Structure and Functions of Municipal and Urban Development Department in West Bengal

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ABSTRACT

After the Second World War, the developing countries of the Third World, including India, have been experiencing rapid urbanization due to socio-economic development. The pace of urbanization in these countries has further increased due to the impact of liberalization and globalization processes. With the increasing pace of urbanization around the world, various problems are being observed in the establishment of good urban governance. Along with urbanization, a type of municipal administration system was developed in our country since ancient times. However, many local government experts believe that the representative municipal system in India is largely a contribution of the colonial rulers. In 1687, the first municipal corporation system was established in the city of Madras. Then in 1726 Calcutta and Bombay Municipal Corporation was established. Municipalities were gradually established in other important urban areas during the colonial rule. The constitution of independent India did not specifically mention municipal administration separately. As a result, the development of municipal autonomy system was completely dependent on the consent of the state government. In the absence of constitutional obligation, most of the state governments have not paid much attention to the formation of municipalities. Urbanization in our state of West Bengal in the 60s and 70s mainly meant the development of Kolkata and its adjoining areas. The 74th Constitutional Amendment of 1992 was a landmark in the evolution of the all-India municipal history. Through this amendment, municipal institutions not only got constitutional recognition, but also reflected the clear outline of an all-India municipal policy. Reservation of seats for the weaker sections of the society, formation of ward committees, formation of finance commission and election commission as well as the inclusion of municipal duties in the twelfth schedule of the constitution has undoubtedly given momentum to the development of municipal administration at the all-India level. The West Bengal Government also passed the West Bengal Municipal Act in 1993 in the context of the 74th Constitutional Amendment. The West Bengal Municipal Act of 1993 is considered as a precedent to be followed for the whole of India. According to the 2001 census, the rate of urbanization in West Bengal was higher than the average rate of urbanization in India. West Bengal has an urbanization rate of 28.03 percent as against the national average of 27.62 percent.

Keywords- Urban Development, local government, municipal, Authority, Planning.

I. INTRODUCTION

It is essential to have a clear understanding of the structure and functions of both the Municipal Affairs Department and the Urban Development Department in the practice of urban local government. It has been observed from experience that in the knowledge practice of urban local government, the discussion is mainly limited to the structure, function, and role of the municipality. However, the activities of the Municipal

and Urban Development Department are inextricably linked with the formation, development, and role of the municipality. To understand the structure, role, and current position of municipalities in West Bengal, it is necessary to study the functions and roles of the Municipal Affairs Department and the Department of Urban Development of the Government of West Bengal. The present chapter reviews a brief structure and functional outline of the Department of Municipal Affairs and Urban Development in West Bengal.

II. ESTABLISHMENT OF DEPARTMENT OF MUNICIPAL AFFAIRS

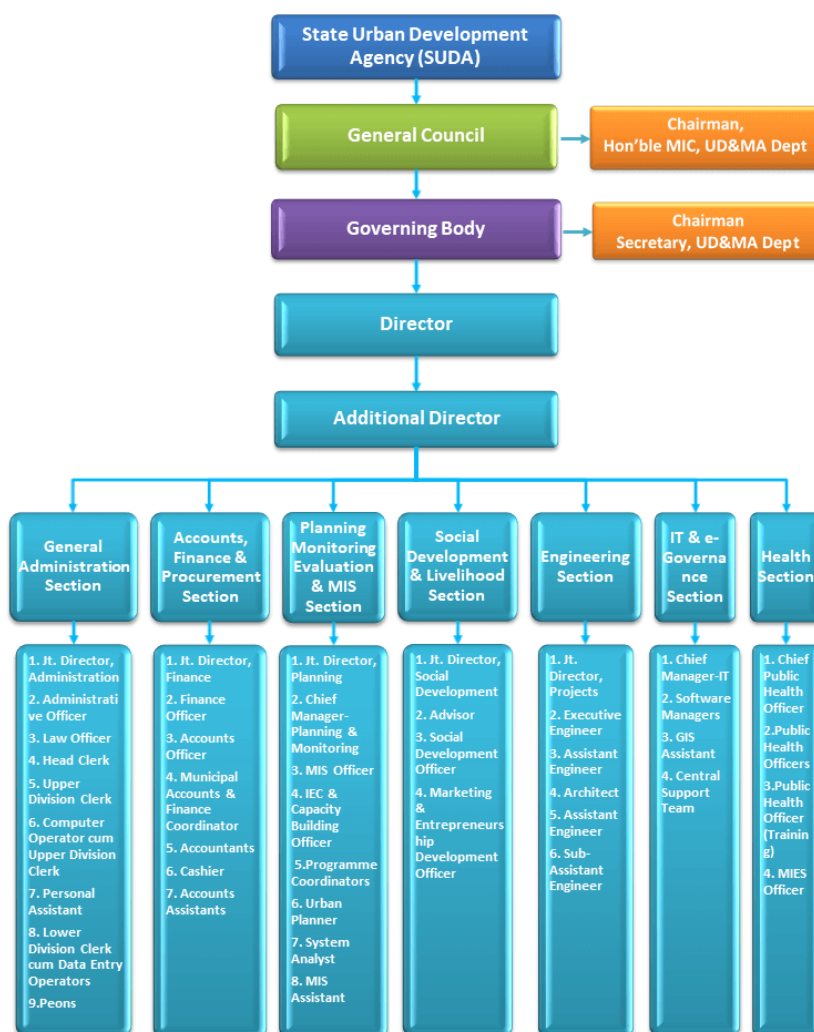
Although the urban governance system of West Bengal was introduced through the formation of Calcutta Corporation at the beginning of the eighteenth century during the colonial rule, the Department of Municipal Affairs was established in the state in 1972. At this time this department was named as 'Department of Municipal Services'. Later, the Left Front government came to power in 1978 and changed the name of 'Public Services Department' to 'Local Government and Urban Development Department'. In 1991, the Left Front Government split the Local Government and Urban Development Departments and created two separate departments called 'Municipal Affairs Department' and 'Department of Urban Development' respectively. Both these offices have been held by a minister for a long time.

III. ORGANIZATION OF DEPARTMENT OF MUNICIPAL AFFAIRS

A full minister oversees the municipal affairs department. Who is also the Minister of Urban Development Department. The secretariat of this department is located at Mahakaran, Kolkata. A secretary oversees supervising the directorates and other organizations of the department. Directors of Municipal Affairs Department and other organizations are:

- a) Directorate of Local Bodies;
- b) Directorate of Municipal Engineering;
- c) Institute of Local Government and Urban Studies;
- d) State Urban Development Agency;
- e) Central Evaluation Board;
- f) Change Management Unit;
- g) Society for Training and Research on Urban Governance;
- h) West Bengal City Managers Association.

The organizational structure of the Department of Municipal Affairs is as follows:



Source: <https://sudawb.org>

IV. MAIN FUNCTIONS OF MUNICIPAL AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT

The main function of this department is to provide necessary support to all the municipalities of West Bengal. This office plays the role of helping in the development and maintenance of municipal systems in the entire state. It may be mentioned that municipalities are accountable to the people on the one hand and to the state government on the other hand. For example, people can question the provision of services by municipalities. Similarly, the State Government can legally regulate the Municipal Corporations to maintain an efficient administrative system in the State as a whole. The State Government through the Department of Municipal Affairs ensures that the Municipalities discharge their duties and responsibilities efficiently within the framework of the rules.

West Bengal Valuation Board

Legislative Assembly in 1978. West Bengal Central Evaluation Board was constituted in the same year. This board is headed by a chairman and three members. The organizational structure of the Central Evaluation Board the West Bengal Central Board of Assessment Act was passed by the is as follows:

The main functions of central evaluation stage are:

- (i) assessing property taxes of municipalities;
- (ii) Application of scientific and objective methods in evaluation work;
- (iii) Reducing variation in tax assessment between different municipalities.

Change Management Unit

The Department of Municipal Affairs was formed in 2003 to implement and monitor the service program of the city of Kolkata. This organization is registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1961. The main functions of this organization are:

- (i) providing organizational development assistance to local bodies;
- (ii) (ii) helping with municipalities in the use of geographic information (GIS);
- (iii) (iii) Assisting in formulation and implementation of decentralized participatory planning etc.

Society for Training and Research on Urban Governance

The Institute of Local Government and Urban Studies was established in 2005 by the Department of Municipal Affairs to support training, seminars, workshops, research and publications. This society is also registered under the West Bengal Societies Registration Act (1961). Its office is on the campus of the Institute of Local Government and Urban Studies in Bidhannagar.

West Bengal City Managers Association

City Managers Association was formed in April 2004. The purpose of forming this association was to improve the quality of local government personnel. One

of the objectives of this organization is to share information and experience in urban management systems with different municipalities. As well as providing support to municipalities by providing modern technology and expertise. The association is formed by the officials of the municipal affairs department of the state government and elected representatives from the municipalities.

Solid Waste Management Mission

In addition to the above organizations, an organization called 'Solid Waste Management Mission' was created under the chairmanship of the Chief Secretary of West Bengal for municipal solid waste disposal. This organization is working under the supervision of Municipal Affairs Department. Currently, the work of this organization is being conducted from the office of Municipal Engineering Directorate. The main function of this organization is to prepare various schemes for disposal of municipal solid waste, undertake projects and provide technical assistance to municipalities in this regard. At present this organization receives necessary financial support from the Department of Municipal Affairs, Kolkata Metropolitan Development Authority and West Bengal Pollution Control Board.

Establishment of Urban Development Department

Department of Urban Development was earlier known as Metropolitan Development Department. At that time the main function of this office was to assist in the formulation and implementation of government infrastructural development policies in the Kolkata metropolitan area. The main function of this department was to reduce disparities in development of Kolkata city and nearby small and medium towns and provide basic municipal services to the citizens. Statutory urban development agencies such as KMDA, KMW & SA, KIT and HIT were engaged in achieving the desired goals of urban development as agencies under this department. This office was associated with the creation of satellite townships of Salt Lake, Lake town and Kalyani. At the next stage, there was a need for an urban development department to coordinate the work of various agencies in keeping with the needs of urban development in different parts of the state. In view of this demand, the 'Town & Country Planning Branch' of the Department of Development and Planning and the 'Town Land Sealing Branch' under the Department of Land and Land Reforms are merged with the Department of Metropolitan Development. These three organizations associated with urban development came together to form the 'Urban Development Department'.

V. MAIN FUNCTIONS OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

The Administrative Report of the Department of Urban Development divides the functions of the Department into two categories:

- (a) regulatory functions; And

(b) Infrastructural development of the city, improvement, and maintenance of quality of civic services.

(a) Controlling Acts

Regulatory functions of Urban Development Department include:

- (i) formulating plans regulating the development of the city and the use of land;
- (ii) Exercising statutory authority in developed towns like Salt Lake, Kalyani etc.;

(b) Improvement and maintenance of quality of city infrastructure and civic services:

- (i) development of proper urban infrastructure;
- (ii) To provide and maintain civic services consistent with the 74th Constitutional Amendment.

The main responsibilities under which the Department of Urban Development performs its functions are:

(i) Town and Country Planning and Development Act, 1979

According to this Act, Urban Development Department identifies potential areas for urbanization in the state and declares that area as Statutory Planning Area. The Urban Development Department forms a Development Authority in that area to encourage integrated planning and development of that area. Encourages socio-economic development of the concerned area, environmental conservation, controlled and planned land use.

(ii) Calcutta Metropolitan Water and Sanitation Authority (KMW & SA) Act, 1979

A major responsibility of the State Urban Development Department is to assist in the development and maintenance of water supply connections in the Kolkata metropolitan area. Apart from this, the Urban Development Department plays an important role in the development and conservation of drainage in this area.

(iii) Calcutta Development Act, 1911 (CI Act)

Assisting in planning and development of Calcutta Municipal Area. Helping the economically backward people in building houses is an important function of the organization.

(iv) Howrah Development Act, 1956 (HI Act)

According to this law, this department plays an important role in planning the urbanization of the Howrah municipal area and developing the civic infrastructure.

(v) West Bengal Metropolitan Planning Committee Act, 1994 (WBMPC Act)

According to this law, a metropolitan planning committee must be formed to coordinate the development activities of a metropolitan area for the drafting and development plan of each metropolitan area of the state, and in supervising and coordinating the work of the Metropolitan Planning Committee.

The office has an important role to play. The three main branches of the Urban Development Department mentioned in the chapter are:

- (a) Town and Country Planning Branch;

(b) Metropolitan Development or Urban Development Branch;

(c) Urban Land Ceiling Branch (Urban Land Ceiling Branch).

The following paragraphs discuss the workings of these three branches.

VI. METROPOLITAN DEVELOPMENT BRANCH

Among the three branches of the Urban Development Department, the Metropolitan Development Branch is an important branch of urbanization. This department is responsible for administrative control of development facilities like KIT, HIT along with urbanization activities like Salt Lake, Kalyani etc. This branch plays an important role in the work of various development projects of Kolkata Metropolitan Development Authority.

This wing of the Urban Development Department is playing an important role in the first and second phase of Ganga Action Plan land acquisition, construction of road-bridges, implementation of housing projects, shifting of the headquarters of South 24 Parganas from Alipur to Baruipur and construction of Dankuni town. This branch of urban development plays a key role in land acquisition for various development authorities. In the next paragraph the structure and functions of the two main development agencies under the Metropolitan Development Wing-KIT and HIT are discussed separately.

(a) Kolkata Improvement Trust (KIT)

The provincial government of Bengal enacted the Calcutta Development Act in 1911. This Act came into force on 2nd January 1912. Calcutta Development Corporation (KIT) was established by this act. The organization was entrusted with the responsibility of expanding, developing and increasing the wealth of Calcutta. The Calcutta Development Corporation's annual report for 1913-14 shows that out of 2500 acres of road land, 400 acres are classified slum land. Domestic problems were also very acute at that time. 9 lakh people lived in only 45000 houses. That is 20 persons in a household as a percentage lived.

At present an Officer on Special Duty (OSD) oversees the Kolkata Development Agency from the Kolkata Metropolitan Development Authority (KMDA). Calcutta Development Corporation's functional activities are limited to former Calcutta only. That is between 1 to 100 wards of Calcutta Corporation. The role of this organization in designing and implementing housing projects for the poor people of the city is undeniable.

(b) Howrah Improvement Trust-HIT

Howrah Development Corporation was established by the Howrah Development Act in 1956. The structure and powers of the Howrah Development Corporation are regulated by statute. According to the

statute, the function of this council is to acquire land and provide it to various organizations for carrying out development projects in the Howrah Corporation area. There is a chairman at the top of the Howrah Development Corporation. The development agency performs the functions entrusted to it through various departments of the government. The Heads of Departments of Development Organizations carry out the responsibilities assigned by the Board Chairman. Heads of departments are assisted by other officers and staff. Notable recent works of this organization include:

- (i) Construction of GT Road Bypass;
- (ii) Kona Express;
- (iii) Construction of Salkia Flyover;
- (iv) Construction of Howrah Mangala Hut;
- (v) Construction of modern saree sales center at Howrah;
- (vi) Renovation of Rabindra Bhavan etc. at Uluberia.

VII. TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING BRANCH

The Town and Country Planning Branch is a specialized agency dedicated to preparing urban development plans for the entire state. It may be pertinently mentioned that the successor to the erstwhile Calcutta Metropolitan Planning Organization (CMPO) is the Town and Country Planning Branch. This branch works under the Department of Urban Development. Since the formation of this branch in 1979, the task of this branch is to identify the urban growth centers (Urban Growth Cos (5)) of the state and make development plans. At present, apart from the Kolkata Metropolitan Development Authority, the activities of the Town and Country Planning Branch are spread over the areas of other development authorities of the state. The main objective of the West Bengal Town and Country Planning Act, 1979 was to prevent the uncontrolled development of the city and to take appropriate steps for planned urban development. West Bengal Town and Country Planning Act, 1979 was to prevent the uncontrolled development of the city and to take appropriate steps for planned urban development. Along with the introduction of Kanti Planning Act, the old Acts like 'Calcutta Metropolitan Planning Area Control Act' (1965) and 'Durgapur Development Act' (1959) were repealed, making the Town and Country Planning Department the sole planning authority for balanced urban development in the whole of West Bengal.

Main Functions of Town and Country Planning Branch

This branch of urban development was developed under the West Bengal Town and Country Planning Act as mentioned earlier. Its main functions are:

- (i) preparation of proper land use maps and land registration;
- (ii) preparing future land use maps;
- (iii) Implementation of land use and controlled development planning policies;
- (iv) preparing and implementing development plans;
- (v) Coordinating the development activities of various departments in the planning area.

VIII. URBAN LAND CEILING BRANCH

The Urban Land Ceiling and Regulation Act came into force in West Bengal in 1976. By creating this law, the government wants to protect the land of the city from monopolists and use it for the common good. Since 1992, the Urban Land Ceiling Wing under the Department of Urban Development has been entrusted with the task of implementing this Act. Incidentally, earlier this matter was under the Land and Land Revenue Department.

The Urban Land Ceiling and Regulation Act applies only to urban agglomerations of the state, such as Kolkata Urban Agglomerations, Asansol Urban Agglomerations and Durgapur Urban Agglomerations. The Kolkata Urban Conurbation Area includes 3 Corporations, 41 Municipalities, Cantonment Areas, and Panchayat Areas. The agglomeration area consists of panchayat areas besides the cities of Asansol and Durgapur. The Sub-Divisional Officer is responsible for implementing the Urban Land Ceiling and Regulation Act. On the other hand, the Calcutta Corporation is responsible for implementing this law in the densely populated areas of the city of Kolkata and the various sub-divisional rulers are responsible for this in their respective sub-divisions.

The main objective of the Urban Land Ceiling Branch is to identify and dispose of non-ceiling land in urban areas, acquire surplus land and use the land for public purposes. It may be mentioned that this organization has the authority not to apply the upper limit law of city land in the case of industry, trade and cultural works used in public interest.

In 1999, the central government repealed the Urban Land Ceiling and Regulation Act of 1976 and enacted a new law. In this regard, the state government feels that if there is no control over the use of land in the city, the land in the city will only go to the hands of profiteers. The urban poor will be affected the most. The West Bengal government has not yet implemented the Urban Ceiling Act of 1999, despite building pressure on the state government to lift the urban ceiling on getting central projects. However, recently the state government constituted an expert committee under the Department of Development and Planning. To review the City Land Ceiling and Control Act of 1976. Currently, the report of the committee is under the consideration of the state government.

IX. CONCLUSION

If all efforts are concentrated only in the development of the city, the balance of development is bound to deteriorate, similarly, if the development efforts are concentrated only in the suburbs and adjacent rural areas due to larger socio-economic reasons, the balanced development of the city can never be completed. The Left Front government passed the 'West Bengal Town & Country Act, 1979' to make harmonious development

efforts in the towns and suburbs and nearby rural areas successful. The result of this act is 9 development authorities. At present West Bengal has 21 Urban Development Authorities.

Urban Development Authority itineraries are responsible for the following.

- Ensuring that town planning schemes are implemented.
- Creating and implementing development plans for notified areas.
- Creation and implementation of urban area development initiatives like affordable housing and slum-dwellers development.
- Implementation of Local Area Plans for the improvement of existing areas.
- Modernising building laws.
- Promoting transit-oriented development.
- Inclusion of conversion of heritage buildings in local area plans.
- Social and economic development planning.

The Urban Development Authority itineraries are faced with following challenges:

- Meeting casing requirements of civic settlers.
- Investment on development enterprise.
- Resolving drinking water issues.
- Resolving sanitation issues.

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