



PHOTOBOOK ON LIVEABILITY

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Liveability

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The concept of liveability is complex, combining one's psychological needs with materialistic necessities. A truly liveable city can be found where residents can have a vibrant social life and have access to spaces that allow them to fulfil their need for community and belonging. In this photobook the idea of liveability has been explored in two regional coastal cities in South-West Bangladesh- Mongla and Noapara. Two small cities impacted by disasters and climate change that are currently experiencing an influx of migrants and are emerging as potential industrial hubs.



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Liveability provides a lens to show how residents view their city today, and how they imagine their future in these cities. Visual reading of liveability in this photobook will allow insights into the opinions, values, and aspirations of the increasing number of people who intentionally reside in smaller cities.

The conceptual framing of Liveability came up from the study 'Liveable Regional Cities in Bangladesh' conducted in 2019 by the International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD), Bangladesh; the Institute for Hazard, Risk and Resilience (IHRR), Durham University, UK; University of Witwatersrand, South Africa. It was funded by the Centre for Sustainable, Healthy and Learning Cities and Neighbourhood's (SHLC)'s Capacity Development Acceleration Fund and Glasgow University. This study was led by Dr. Hanna Ruszczyk from Durham University.





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The Eight Spheres of Liveability

Based on the literature and the citizens' perspectives, liveability could be possibly comprised of eight spheres: *livelihood and food security, utilities and transport, health and natural environment, education, housing, central and local government, safety and security and lastly social and leisure aspects of life.*



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Livelihood & Food Security

Thriving Town- Mongla Port Municipality

Once a sleeping port, Mongla is now a vital part of Bangladesh's economic infrastructure and has been playing an active role in country's economic development since 2009. The booming port of Mongla has a well-established deep-water port, surrounded by a sprawling industrial area across a river from the town center with cement factories, diesel, fuel, mass storage facilities, and two dozen factories with jobs for 4,300 workers producing everything from luggage and electronics to packaged snacks and mannequins. With the recent declaration as the economic zone, more avenues for economic development have opened up creating more diversified employment opportunities which is expected to further revive the Mongla port.

Inclusive businesses contributing to Local Food Security

Livelihood & Food Security

The 'kacha bazar' plays an important role in ensuring the food supply of the small town of Noapara. The availability of enough food is ensured by the domestic production in the nearby agricultural land and the remaining demand is fulfilled by imports from adjacent areas. The Bhairab river is a blessing for Noapara to ensure the availability of goods at all the places, all the time. It connects all the nearby area and enables easy mobility of people and goods with the main city area using water-vehicles. Easier carrying of bulk amount of products using the river inspires uninterrupted businesses of this area.





Utilities & Transport

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Get Across that River!

Boat is a popular public transport for Mongla. The Mongla River splits the city into two- the main bazar, municipality office, hospitals, local residence and most of the community facilities are located in one side of the river, whereas all the industrial establishments and the seaport are located on the other side. This river can be crossed by small boats and ferries for 3 taka (2 US cents) each way, shuttling every 10 minutes between the bus stand ghat and the main ghat. Everyday thousands of locals cross the river to reach their workstation as well as to travel to closest cities by boats. However, the connectivity between the two wings is highly dependent on the weather and the tidal conditions of the river causing an indescribable plight to the locals during a medical emergency.



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A Town of Pedal Pushers

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Given that, much traffic in Mongla Pourashava is restricted with limited access to vehicles run by fuel, it's a city that begs to be explored by foot or by three wheelers called vans. Most of the students going to local schools like Digonto School and St Paul's High School also travel from home to school using bicycles or by foot. The locals also use bicycles or three wheelers operated by battery or manual labor for their daily commutes inside the municipality. As a part of future expansion plan, the local authority is focused on ensuring walkability with footpaths around the town and efficient public transport system for moving inside the city.

Health & Environment



Water, Water, Everywhere, Nor any Drop to Drink

In Mongla, potable water is a scarce and precious commodity despite the town standing about 18km upstream on the river Pashur.

The municipality supplies water year-round from its two rainwater harvesting ponds. In the scorching summer sun, the women or children are forced to walk to the common water pump or to the fresh water pond preserved by World Vision to collect water. In the course of each day the family needs to make multiple trips when the water supply line opens.

In the dry summer, the water level in the ponds shrink and the supply water that remains gives off a sharp odor, making it undrinkable. During the monsoon, the shortage of water in the village somewhat abates, and the town people collect rainwater in 'motka' (earthen buckets), plastic buckets, drums, PVC tanks etc.

The Rubbish Story

Dwellers of Noapara have been experiencing a bitter pill of garbage spilling over from dustbins on the roads for a long time. The city has an open pile of garbage beside the road not removed for a long time, making the locality unfit for living. Wastes are thrown in a disorderly manner in dustbins where street children and dogs as well as crows scramble the wastages in a chaotic way spreading bad smell in the area. Besides, in Noapara, imported coal are kept open beside Bhairab River and dumped around croplands, highway and homesteads afterwards. This poisonous coal dust is making life unbearable for the people of Noapara.



Health & Environment



Education

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Anecdote from The St Paul's

Once, the inhabitants of Mongla, were less sanguine about their children's education and would rather involve their children in income-generating labour activities. Since Father Marino Regan, a preacher of Christian Missionary came to Mongla, education has flourished in the town. He was the founder of St. Paul's High School in 1954. Father Regan promoted girls education from very early times and knocked from the door to door in the locality encouraging people to send their children to school. The school continued flourishing. People from different Upazilas of Khulna, Jessore, Shatkhira came to St Paul's School for its popularity. At present there are 55 teachers, number of students is above 2200, with a hostel for Christian girls.

A Sight of the Slum Community

Once a small town, Mongla is now becoming a rapidly growing city. Due to new migrating population in town, the city has seen a rapid growth of informal housing settlements in addition to the formal housing. There are four big slums inside Mongla. Balurmath slum, the oldest slum was set-up 30 years ago, built with dredged material from the river. Ratarati slum was established in 1971. The name implies that the allotment happened 'over-night' ('rata-rati') when around 300 to 400 families came to the Mongla port area and started to live here informally.

The slum population generally comprises of low-income people of different occupation, petty traders like peanut or betel leaf-cigarette sellers, van drivers, rickshaw-pullers and part time female domestic help. The slum inhabitants need to deal with lack of basic services such as drinking water, sewage and sanitation facilities. Sewage runs freely, sometimes they throw their household waste in 'kainmari canal', the local water canal running through the town. In slums and informal settlements residents do not qualify to be legal utility customers and most electric lines are tapped illegally from the grid. The residents of the slum area are reluctant to leave because of the low living expenses of living in the slum. However, shelter in a slum is affordable for the irregular income people and regarded as a cost-effective zone for poor communities.



Housing & Neighbourhood

Home along the Railway Tracks

In Noapara, a dismal sight is the settlement with pieces of tin and tarp precariously assembled along the railway tracks providing a place for the poor to call home. Noise and danger are permanent features in residents' lives as their homes rock to the movement of trains going by while children are held near. As constant stream of trains roar through the tracks, people scatter off the tracks and wait for the danger to pass. Their life is hard, living in a fear of evacuation. But the community continues to persevere as the days, like the trains, roll on. Local government of Noapara is concerned and thinking of relocating and resettling them to a more safe and secure place.



Housing & Neighbourhood

Central & Local Governmnet

The Mayor – Blazing a Trail

Being in the firing line of climate threats, the previous mayor of Mongla municipality, Zulfikar Ali had looked into ways to beef up the town's defenses against increasingly powerful storms and the recurring phenomenon of natural hazards.

The most ambitious project of his ten years in power was a 12km-long embankment, 3.5 meters high, which snakes its way along the river on Mongla's south bank; and the sluice gates on three canals flowing through Mongla town. This embankment has dramatically brought an end to the long-standing problem of inundation and frequent waterlogging that used to occur in the town. Besides, he has also planted several thousand shade trees and installed a city-wide loudspeaker system that informs residents of important news and when extreme weather is afoot. To ease the water salinity problem, he has invested in a freshwater treatment and distribution system that has increased the number of houses with running water significantly.



Central & Local Government



A Story of Connectivity

Noapara is a city having a robust road, rail and river connections to many parts of the country. A national transportation road travel through the city is an important junction for goods and materials being transported to the capital Dhaka. Besides providing local connectivity within the country, the railway is linked to India for container train service between India and Bangladesh via Benapole. Noapara is also an important inland river port for natural resources. Imported materials are transported by truck internally within Bangladesh. Besides, the development of 9km road, walkway and drain network around the city by the initiative of municipal authority has made the daily lives of the locals much easier.

The tri-network domestic connectivity and investment of foreign funds on infrastructural development works is a vital reason behind Noapara being more upgraded than many other municipalities of its kind.



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We deserve to be safe

Mongla Port Municipality has streetlamps and two dozen closed-circuit security cameras to improve safety in the community and common places. In most cases, the citizen feels safe when their children travel to and from their school. Women also feel safe during the day commuting to their workplaces. But despite the safety measures, women are still not allowed to go out during night. Social beliefs of women being unsafe at night and few cases of harassment in the past had supported this social behavior. Girls also avoid going to the marine drive road after dark due to few incidents of harassment and teasing in that area. The scenerio is similar in Noapara as well.



Safe Places for Women

A female vendor in Noapara expressed that she chose vending as it does not require any technical knowledge or skills, academic education. It only requires low capital investment, it is easy to enter and she is free to move her business. Interestingly most of her customers are male. In Noapara women work beside men in most of the cases and they feel safe and secure working besides them. Female tea stall owners are also common there. In many cases men and woman work together to meet the family expenses. Many help their husbands in local shops, they are also involved in labour activities, work in ghat-bazaar as well as in factories.

Social Life and Leisure

The 12 km marine drive road in Mongla Port Municipality with walkways and benches along the riverbank shaded by native trees and flowers provide the locals an open space for their leisure.

They can take a stroll along the road enjoying the sight of the river and take a quick bite from the street-side food shops indulging themselves with the local delicacies like 'fuchka', 'chotpoti' and 'jhalmuri'.

There is also an amusement park with various amenities like swings and a toy helicopter for young children. The park and the marine drive road becomes a vibrant place for children and adults alike during the festive holidays like Eid, Puja and Bangla New Years.



The Need for Critical Liveability

Liveability of a city is highly contextual, location-specific and often means different things to different people. Discussions on liveability thus need to look beyond mere indicators to understand the very concept holistically. There is a need to look out for the finer nuances to understand how each indicator of liveability can have different meaning to different groups. Going forward, a world of liveable cities can be created, developed, and maintained if residents, local governments, and the uniqueness of the cities themselves are given equal consideration.





The End

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