

## Sylhet City Corporation's Services: Citizens' View

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### Abstract

*The Sylhet City Corporation is responsible for the services that are provided within the city which includes road works, garbage collection, water supply, public safety, registrations and many others. This paper tried to find out citizens' satisfaction level on the services provided by the SCC and citizens initiative in addition to SCC services. In this study random sample technique is being used. The study reveals that about 52 percent of the respondents were dissatisfied with most of the services; Mosquito prevention and Garbage disposal are major concern for the citizens, 80 percent of interviewees are subscribing to some form of private garbage removal initiatives, 42 percent of the respondents informed that they are paying for some kind of private security in their locality.*

**Key words:** Sylhet City Corporation (SCC), citizen and services

### Literature review

The small township, starting in 1869 through the Act VII (District Town Act) of the then British government Sylhet has grown into a metropolitan city. The country's youngest divisional headquarter is located in its north east region. Sylhet is one of the oldest towns and the fourth most populous urban centre. It stands on the northern bank of the river Surma. Under the said Act, the then small town of Sylhet had the Surma river on the south, hills and a tea garden of Mr. Hudson on the north, Dewanbag and Old Railline Road on east and Akhalia and Chundrai's Church on the West as its boundary. The district magistrate was made chairman of the 16 men town committee (Siddiquee, 2006).

Sylhet is located on the banks of the Surma River and is surrounded by the Jaintia, Khasi and Tripura hills. It is the headquarter of Sylhet Division and Sylhet District. On 9<sup>th</sup> April 2001 the Sylhet municipal corporation was elevated to a City Corporation and was granted metropolitan city status in March 2009. The city has a high population density, with nearly 500,000 people living within 26.5 square kilometers. At present, Sylhet is the district-headquarters as well as the divisional headquarter of the districts of Sunamganj, Habibganj, Maulvi Bazar and Sylhet District. It is one of the largest cities in Bangladesh. The city however is currently known for its business boom — being one of the richest cities in Bangladesh, with new investments of hotels, shopping malls and luxury housing estates, brought mainly by expatriates living in the United Kingdom. Sylhet consists of 27 wards and 210 mahallas, and has a total area of 26.50 km<sup>2</sup> (SCC website, 2011).

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Sylhet City Corporation (SCC) has announced a Tk 275.95 crore budget for 2010-11 financial year (thedailystar.net and theindependentbd.com, 2011). The corporation consists of the Chairman along with 22 Commissioners and focuses on the development of the city. The Sylhet City Corporation (SCC) is the elected local administration that runs the various facilities required for the large metropolis. It provides a range of civic amenities and the citizens' expectation of the organization is high (SCC website, 2011). Every City dweller has many hopes and expectations from the city corporation; however, the reality is far different and there are many questions that need to be answered.

- Has the citizens' life in city improved?
- Is the increase in population consistent with the increase of civic amenities?
- Are they satisfied with the following basic services: garbage disposal, mosquito prevention, roads works etc? (Democracywatch Dialogue paper, 2000)

### **Objectives of this paper**

- To measure the satisfaction level of the citizens on the service provided by the SCC.
- To prepare a list of the various problems and difficulties in acquiring essential services.
- To find out the initiatives the citizens have taken in addition to the SCC services.

### **Methodology**

The sample for this survey comprised solely of house owners in Sylhet, who pay the Holding Tax – an annual tax payable to the SCC is dependent on the house and land size. The questionnaire was developed in collaboration with the city inhabitants. Demographic information of the respondents was also obtained. Out of 27 wards (Wards are small geographical sub-divisions) of SCC, 12 wards (shown in appendix) of SCC were randomly selected. We randomly chose an area from each of the wards and interviewed the head of the household. In the event of the householder's refusal to be interviewed, interviewers had to move to the next house. In absence of the head of the household, other responsible members aged 18 and above were interviewed. In total 223 people were interviewed with 12 to 18 people being interviewed from each ward. A group of trained interviewers were engaged for the process and each interview took approximately 15 minutes. The gathered data was processed and analyzed using spreadsheet application. The survey was conducted over a period of 15 days in the month of July, 2011.

### **Limitation of the study**

Interviewing target respondents adopted random sampling, at some phases where respondents were found too busy and also reluctant to talk by telling lame excuse although proper written permission from the competent authority was shown.

## Findings and Analysis

- 1. Service Approval Levels:** The respondents were asked about their satisfaction and dissatisfaction levels of the services delivered by the Sylhet City Corporation. The table-1 shows that 68 percent of the respondents were dissatisfied with mosquito prevention, 52 percent and 51 percent respondents were consecutively expressed dissatisfaction with public safety and garbage disposal. Whereas street lighting service got 47 percent and road works service had 30 percent satisfaction rate from respondents. Surprisingly, the rate of don't know on public toilet, bus shelters and pedestrian bridges are respectively 36 percent, 57 percent and 47 percent which are relatively very high suggesting that the respondents are not aware of these facilities. It is really a matter of concern for the SCC that none of the service type had received at least 50 percent satisfaction rate.

**Table 1:** The level of citizens' satisfaction toward services delivered by the SCC

Type of services	Satisfied (%)	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (%)	Dissatisfied (%)	Don't Know (%)
Garbage disposal	36	11	51	2
Mosquito prevention	22	7	68	3
Public toilets	13	11	40	36
Street lighting	47	16	35	3
Road works	30	17	48	4
Public Safety	26	13	52	8
Bus Shelters	8	9	26	57
Park maintenance	18	11	23	47
Pedestrian Bridges	22	13	32	32

- 2. Service Improvements:** The respondents were asked if services have improved during the present Mayor's tenure. Here, few people thought that services had improved during his tenure. The table- 2 shows that the services where the figures for improvement are higher than the figure of deterioration are the garbage disposal and street lighting; whereas almost 50 percent respondent thought that services such as garbage disposal and mosquito prevention remain the same as before. On the question of mosquito prevention and public safety almost 30 percent of the respondents said that the situation had deteriorated.

**Table 2: The improvement of SCC services in the tenure of the present Mayor**

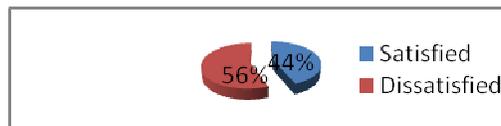
Type of services	Improved (%)	As same as before (%)	Deteriorated (%)	Don't Know (%)
Garbage disposal	34	48	14	3
Mosquito prevention	17	48	30	4
Public toilet	9	39	14	37
Street lighting	37	38	19	6
Road works	26	43	26	5
Public safety	20	45	26	9
Bus Shelters	14	16	14	56
Park maintenance	15	25	23	36
Pedestrian Bridges	18	34	30	17

- 3. Problems in receiving services:** Again Mosquito prevention and Garbage disposal are major concern for the citizens as they reported drains and garbage places are the breeding ground for the mosquitoes. They want proper disposal of garbage and destroy the breeding place of mosquitoes, but authority fails to respond in time. The study shows that 62 percent respondents faced problems in receiving services as such getting solution of that problem. Public safety is another concern for citizens as 52 percent of them face problems receiving safety related issues. Bus shelter, street lighting and road works related services are worthy to mention because majority of the citizens are having no problems receiving these services.

**Table 3: Do the respondents face any problems receiving services**

Type of services	Yes (%)	No (%)
Garbage disposal	55	45
Mosquito prevention	62	38
Street lighting	41	59
Road works	49	51
Public Safety	52	48
Bus Shelters	23	77

- 4. Behavior of SCC Staff:** Respondents reported that they had problems while they tried to contact the concerned authority or person in order to get solution. Citizens' major communication media include telephone, face to face conversation, letter, and via influential person. 56 percent respondents reported SCC staffs' behavior is not satisfactory while they tried to communicate via face to face and telephone conversation and letter.



5. **Private Initiatives:** The respondents were asked whether they had undertaken any private initiatives if the SCC services were considered inadequate. If they had taken an initiative they were asked how much the private enterprise would cost them.

**Table 4: Citizens initiative in addition to City Corporation and average expenditure for it**

Service	Initiatives (%)	Monthly cost (in taka)
Garbage disposal	80	20
Street lighting	7	10
Mosquito prevention	6	20
Public safety	42	25
Road works	11	10

It turns out that 80 percent of the interviewees are subscribing to some form of private garbage removal initiatives. This high number is a reflection of the inadequacy of the SCC to cope with the important problem of rubbish removal in the city. 42 percent of the respondents informed that they are paying for some kind of private security in their locality. For this the average payment is 25 taka per month for each household. The local law and order situation has deteriorated in the last few years and this has probably led to an increase in the private security sector.

6. **Privatization of SCC Services:** The sample was asked whether the SCC services should be privatized. The table below (Table 5) reveals that 70 percent respondent think that garbage disposal should be firstly privatized. 61 percent respondent are in favor of privatization of mosquito prevention. 51 percent respondent wants to privatize the services of public toilet and public safety. Whereas, 63 percent of them are not likely to welcome privatization for street lighting.

**Table 5: Privatization of City Corporation Services**

Services	Privatization (%)	
	Yes	No
<b>Garbage disposal</b>	70	30
Public toilet	51	49
Street lighting	37	63
Mosquito prevention	61	39
Public Safety	51	49
Road works	54	46

## Recommendations and Conclusion

In this study, an attempt was made to draw a picture of the quality of the Sylhet City Corporation's public services and the level of the citizens' satisfaction. In the research paper, many problems facing the existing services of Sylhet city area have emerged. The sincerity of the concerned authorities in containing the problems of the major services provided under SCC management is doubtful and unsatisfactory. It seemed that much of the popularity of the SCC services have been reduced due to this.

Respondents participating in the study have made some suggestions for improvement of SCC's service system. The respondents and author feel that the concerned authorities would take these suggestions of the city dwellers seriously and with due importance and in the interest of developing better service management system of the beautiful historical city would take early necessary steps.

- The city mayor will have to play the role of a more dynamic, good administrator so as to ensure that all the officers perform their individual responsibilities properly and there is accountability. The Engineers or concern persons will have to be accountable to the mayor for accomplishing all work in appropriate time.
- Most of the respondents informed that the quality of services has decreased (more than 50 percent dissatisfaction rate) in the key areas such as mosquito control, garbage disposal, and public safety; particularly these three major services management systems need to be redesigned. One Stop service hub and emergency service delivery unit can be developed.
- There should be coordination between service hubs in the conduct of the activities in a systematic manner.
- The technological and physical facilities of the service hubs should be expanded and updated.
- In some services where dissatisfaction rate is higher citizens respectively 70 percent and 61 percent want privatization for those services such as mosquito control and garbage disposal services; there public private partnership (PPP) can be encouraged.
- Regarding public safety measures 52 percent respondents were unhappy. About 80 percent of the buildings were constructed without following the building code; the geologists and other scientists say that Sylhet region falls within the most earthquake prone zone of the country. During the last 150 years three major earthquakes (surface-wave magnitude larger than 7.5 on the Richter Scale) have occurred in this area. But local people are not aware of the seismic status of the region (Siddiquee, 2006), such unconsciousness may result in great damage and destruction for public safety issue. Here SCC authority can play proactive role by taking creative and innovative actions regarding public safety measures.

- SCC authority and the law enforcement agencies will have to be stiffer and uncompromising for containing or stopping snatchings especially in the sound locality, parks and lakes and police excesses.
- A massive 56 percent of the respondents were unhappy with the behavior of the SCC staff; better corporate culture need to nurture and customers' interest must be prioritized in all respect.
- Respective ward councilor offices can be more empowered over their concerned area so that prompt actions on various types of services can be initiated.
- Monthly, quarterly, semi-annual or yearly meeting can be held in each ward at convenient location so that citizens can express their valuable opinion or suggestions on the services delivered to them; in this way citizens are likely to feel a sense of participation in the local government development process and concern authority's accountability can be justifiable in this process.
- The Urban management is dependent upon the central government in conducting its programs. Due to fund constraint the city authorities are not able to take important steps at times. The major source of income of the city management is from holding tax. According to Siddiquee, organized ventures are absent as yet to create better scopes for the people of Sylhet living in the UK, US and other countries. The amount of idle money, lying with the commercial banks here as deposits is about 4,000 crore taka, which is very uncommon in other parts of the country. The bankers find no suitable scope for investment here. However, the quantum of income may be raised through identifying and maintaining new sources of tax generating sector.

Finally, this paper hopes to inform the SCC of the true situation in Sylhet for its citizens and to make their act on this information before life in Sylhet deteriorates further. So, further studies regarding these aspects may explore something different in future.

## References

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## Appendix

### List of ward and areas covered in the survey:

Ward Number	Mahallahs
Ward 1	Ambarkhana, Dargah mahalla, Rajargali, Miah Fazil Chist
Ward 2	Dairapar, Lamabazar, Mirza Jangal
Ward 3	Kajal Shah, Keyapara, Munshipara, Subid Bazar
Ward 5	Electric Supply, oypara, Khush Dabir
Ward 7	Jalaabad, Kalapara
Ward 8	Noapara
Ward 9	Baghbari, Modina market, Sagardigirpar
Ward 10	Gasitala, Majumderpara, Nababroad
Ward 11	Bhatalia, Bilpar, Madhu Shahid, Rekabi Bazar
Ward 12	Bhangatkar, Kuarpar, Sekhghat
Ward 15	Bandar Bazar, Jial road
Ward 22	Block –C