# Public accountability failure in solving a public nuisance: stakeholder disengagement in a clash of Western and Islamic worldviews

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**Abstract**

**Purpose** – This paper examines the link between the failure of public accountability and stakeholder disengagement brought about by a New Public Management (NPM) style 'smart solution' introduced to reduce public urination in Dhaka city. It shows how New Public Governance (NPG), Islamic and dialogic approaches can improve decision-making and solutions.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Drawing on the concepts of public accountability, NPM, NPG and dialogic accountability, this study highlights how narrow conceptions of accountability and poor stakeholder engagement impacted the effectiveness of the 'smart solution' based on data collected through observation and unstructured in-depth interviews.

**Findings** – Evidence suggests that narrow conceptions of accountability driven by monologic NPM perspectives led to poor stakeholder engagement, which impacted the effectiveness of the 'smart solution'. The solution that consists of changing anti-urination signage from Bengali to Arabic script has not solved Dhaka's public urination problem. In many instances, the solution has disenchanted certain stakeholders who view it as an offence against Islam and a confusing de-privileging of the Bengali language which has significant national and cultural value in Bangladesh.

**Originality/value** – The findings of the study contribute to policymaking discussions on how to effectively engage with stakeholders and extend the literature on accountability within the context of conflicting public versus private demands related to a public nuisance. The study outlines important issues related to stakeholder engagement and introduces a framework that conceptualises how to increase the effectiveness of public policy decisions using NPG, Islamic, and dialogic accountability approaches, especially on matters that require significant public/external stakeholder support. It also provides a conceptual integration of these various approaches, including nuanced insights into accountability challenges within 'non-Western' contexts.

**Keywords** – Accountability; stakeholder engagement; Language conversion; public urination; smart solution; Dhaka City

**Paper type** – Research paper

## 1. Introduction

Public urination is a significant social problem in Bangladesh, especially in large cities such as Dhaka. The metropolis has more than 21 million households (United Nations, 2018) and thousands of visitors daily. There are just 65 public toilets in 126.34 square kilometres for this many residents and visitors (BBS, 2014). Few toilets are functioning, and very few of these include women's or children's facilities (Shafi et al., 2011). No public toilets have sufficient health or safety provisions, threatening public health and the city's reputation (Alam et al., 2020; Arias-Granada et al., 2018; Foggitt et al., 2019). As a result, most sewage, directly or indirectly, pollutes nearby water systems (Rabbani, 2009). Over time, the problem has intensified and 'do not urinate here' is one of the most common slogans displayed on city walls.

The complexity of solving the public urination issue has been tackled in Bangladesh, however, previous interventions such as issuing fines and public awareness campaigns have not significantly reduced the widespread problem. Lapsley, Miller and Panozzo (2010) argue that a recent trend has been for city policymakers to adopt 'smart city' initiatives, incentivising new forms of governance that enhance community wellbeing and cooperation. This represents a shift away from a New Public Management (NPM) perspective which emphasises economic efficiency, values market-based systems, and considers citizens as 'consumers' (Wiesel and Modell, 2014, p. 178). Valuing collaboration and network coordination, as well as considering citizens as co-producers of solutions, where the effectiveness of initiatives is judged by citizen satisfaction, represents a new paradigm – New Public Governance (NPG) (Grossi and Argento, 2022; Wiesel and Modell, 2014). NPG is defined as "...the processes through which citizens and state officials interact to express their interest, exercise their rights and obligations, work out their differences and cooperate to produce public goods and services" (Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith, 2005, p. 200). However, these 'smart' initiatives usually require new systems to be implemented, which can often fail because of a lack of cooperation between stakeholders or a lack of network coordination (see, for example, Argento et al., 2019). Nonetheless, the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Bangladesh designed a new 'smart solution' which uses most of Bangladeshis' Islamic religious beliefs to change attitudes and moderate public urination. The 'smart solution to a foul problem' (*Language Matters*, 2015), involves changing the originally Bengali instructions on city walls into Arabic with an assumption that people will avoid urinating on Arabic text (Sabbir, 2015) because the Muslim Holy Book, the Quran, is written in Arabic. The authorities claimed the 'smart solution' constituted success and planned to implement it on a large scale. However, stakeholders in Dhaka City disputed the effectiveness of this solution, arguing that it exacerbates the public urination situation (Amin, 2015; Anam, 2015). The number of urination spots has increased as a consequence of this initiative. Urinators in the city avoided urination places with Arabic language on the wall and built new ones before returning to the original spots. This raises questions regarding the accountability of public authorities in Dhaka City. Using this as a case study, this article examines the failure of public sector accountability in terms of the duty of discharge, stakeholder involvement, and the risk of misplacing religious sentiments.

Prior research on public accountability and stakeholder engagement regarding social nuisance or anti-social behaviours has shown how solutions (and indeed, definitions of the problem) are vague and left to contextual interpretation (Brown, 2004; Millie, 2009; Ramsay, 2004). However, it usually refers to individual or group activities creating discomfort or trouble for the residents or visitors of a location (Burney, 2009). Public urination is part of a global social nuisance phenomenon causing discomfort in many big and small cities (see, for example, Brown, 2004; London Police, 2018; McCoy, 2020; Millie, 2008; Scottish Executive, 2003). Different measures, such as requests to refrain from anti-social behaviour, fines, and public humiliation, failed to solve this problem. In November 2012, the London Mayor's Office officially categorised public urination as a criminal offence (Transport for London, 2012). In 2015, the US city of San Francisco implemented pee-proof paint on the walls in public spaces (Imam, 2015). New York, Seattle, Madison, Dubai, New Delhi, Queensland, Brighton, Paris, Brussels, and Manila issue fines for public urination (Grimm, 2015; Hochbaum, 2019). In India, Hindu Deities' images are painted on the walls in public spaces to prevent people from urinating on the street (Mohanty, 2014). However, this initiative and others failed (Mohanty, 2014), including fines (Singh, 2009), pounding drums when someone urinates publicly (BBC News, 2012), and spraying water cannons (Hebblethwaite, 2014).

Public urination in Dhaka City has consequences for accountability and highlights the need to regulate a 'tragedy of the commons' scenario in which the criminal behaviour of a few can hurt

many. Numerous stakeholders are involved, including local government, businesses and households, and others in the community. However, little is known about how these stakeholders were involved in the policy's formulation and its success among its direct recipients. This article investigates public urination by interviewing various stakeholders engaged as 'producers' or 'targets' of the 'smart solution' and illustrates how the solution failed using an Islamic and public accountability lens. This research contributes to theoretical and practical understandings of Islamic and public accountability by revealing policy flaws and how to avoid them in the future. The overarching research question of the study is:

> RQ: How and why has the 'smart solution' to end public urination in Dhaka City failed, and what are the implications for public accountability?

This study contributes in various ways beyond its practical implications. First, it reports on public accountability failure in a developing country. While public accountability is well researched in developed countries (see Agyenim-Boateng et al., 2017; Cooper and Lapsley, 2019; Taylor et al., 2021), it is a novel topic for developing countries (see Arun et al., 2020; Hathaway and Askvik, 2021), producing unique contributions to understanding accountability in a broader sense. Due to disparities in institutional frameworks and stakeholder involvement, accountability dimensions in developing nations are more diverse and inconsistent than in affluent countries. Second, it explores the 'public side' of accounting research by examining a societal problem in Bangladesh that exhibits poor public value and democratic involvement (Steccolini, 2019). It explains how the confused implementation of a solution driven by monologic NPM accountability causes inefficient interventions. This paper suggests that stakeholder participation is crucial for public accountability via an NPG approach that allows solutions to be co-created using dialogic accountability processes. Consequently, this paper resonates with Rana and Hoque's (2020) call for public dialogue for the successful discharge of public accountability.

Third, this paper explores the tension between Islamic and Western worldviews and the subsequent conceptualization of accountability. While there is a growing body of literature on adopting Islamic concepts in the banking and food (halal) sectors (see, for example, Belal et al., 2015; Kamla and Rammal, 2013; Riaz et al., 2017), Islamic accountability or the tension between it and Western concepts of accountability has not been considered extensively (see, for example, Yasmin et al., 2021). A search for "Islamic accountability" in Scopus and Web of Science yielded only two papers. One-third of the global population is Muslim; thus, this tension must be considered to improve individual and societal accountability, otherwise various actors may exploit these tensions inappropriately, leading to a failing of public policy. Fourth, this paper's findings help comprehend how public authorities use faith-based responsibility within an institutional structure predicated on Western concepts of accountability. Public authorities in Dhaka try the advantage of 'meaning lost in translation' about religious concepts to affect public mood without incorporating the accurate narratives of religion or appropriately assess their accountability. This paper shows how a critical dialogic approach can empower citizens and facilitate contextually, culturally, and religiously sensitive reforms (Brown and Dillard, 2015). This study establishes a foundation for future research on the role of religion in public accountability, especially in Muslim majority nations where the clash between Islamic and Western worldviews is not well defined.

The remainder of the paper is organised as follows. Section 2 discusses public sector accountability in Bangladesh, followed by a description of the 'smart solution' and the research context in Section 3. Section 4 presents the research design. Sections 5 – 8 explore key findings

regarding stakeholder engagement and public sector accountability. Section 9 provides a discussion of these findings and concludes the paper.

## 2.  Public sector accountability in Bangladesh

The public sector is the major provider of basic services for citizens (see, for example, Mauro et al., 2015). The sector is a symbol of trust, pride, satisfaction, and confidence (Buelens and Van den Broeck, 2007; Deloitte, 2018). However, the sector is also blamed for being a major source of inefficiency, bureaucratic incompetence, corruption, and irresponsible practice (Canel and Luoma-aho, 2019, p. 3; Tooley et al., 2010). In Dhaka, a team of elected and unelected officials govern each city corporation (a sub-district of the larger city). This team has hierarchical, collective, and individual accountability to stakeholders, including city residents and visitors (Bovens et al., 2014). In the team, while the elected officials are the mayor and councillors from each ward, professional staff and selected women councillors are included in the unelected segment of the team. For example, Dhaka North City Corporation has 54 elected councillors and 18 selected women councillors along with the elected mayor (data retrieved from the city corporation web page[1]).

Authorities in the public sector, especially in developing countries, apply a 'push approach' to plan and implement policies that involve significant national interest (see, for example, Nyamori et al., 2017). In this way, developing countries have embraced a top-down NPM approach which sees citizens as consumers/targets, rather than as engaged co-producers of initiatives to benefit their lives. For example, the World Bank championed the 'poverty reduction strategy program' and the social marketing campaign encouraging contraceptives to reduce the birth rate in Bangladesh (see, for instance, Kamruzzaman, 2014; Schellstede and Ciszewski, 1984). In many cases, a push approach is successful, but the failure in this regard is also remarkable, especially in cases requiring stakeholder engagement. For example, the coercive policy transfer of NPM in Bangladesh (Dolowitz et al., 1999) did not prove effective (Kundo, 2018). Stakeholder engagement underpinned by critical dialogic approaches are essential when solutions require significant behavioural change and deal with religiously or culturally sensitive issues (see, for example, Ceglarz et al., 2017; Juntunen et al., 2019; Mitchell et al., 2020).

The public urination problem in Dhaka city is an example of such a context due to both stakeholder malpractice and resistance to behavioural change, as well as how the 'smart solution' attempted to co-opt religious and cultural inclinations as a response. Taking this 'smart solution' as a case study, this paper focuses on how accountability in the public sector fails due to narrow and culturally insensitive NPM approaches and stakeholder disengagement.

## 3.  The Case: Smart solution to a foul problem

Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) authorities embraced a controversial 'smart solution' to prevent public urination in 2015. This solution involved changing the language of signage from Bengali to Arabic. Bengali is the mother tongue of Bangladeshis, while Arabic is a religiously sensitive script for Muslims who comprise 90.39% of the country's total population (BBS, 2020). City administrators believed that people would not urinate on Arabic script, however, the solution did not work, and the public urination problem is still widespread in the city.

Public urination is a common phenomenon in Bangladeshi cities, mainly due to inadequate sanitation facilities. There is no concrete information about available sanitation facilities; the number of public toilets reported in different sources ranges from 47 – 69 (Amadershomoy,

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[1] Website of Dhaka North City Corporation: http://www.dncc.gov.bd

2016; Shafi et al., 2011). The website of the DCC suggests having 65 public toilets in the city, but there is no information on their functionality. As reported by Water Aid, most of the fully or partially operational toilets do not have any facilities for women (Shafi et al., 2011). Based on accessibility characteristics, public toilets in Dhaka can be grouped into three categories: public toilets (available to all), public toilets with market access (toilets within a market or shopping mall), and public toilets with restricted access (toilets adjacent to mosques, cinemas, hospitals, universities, and petrol stations). Of these three types, public toilets are typically in the poorest condition as, a) they do not have a proper water connection and supply; b) more than half of the toilets do not have adequate lighting facilities; c) there are safety concerns, particularly in the dark; and d) more than half of these toilets are used for purposes other than sanitation.

Dhaka, the capital and the only megacity of Bangladesh (Hossain, 2006), is currently the 6th most populous city globally and is projected to be in the 4th position from 2025 to 2035 (United Nations, 2018). In 2011, the city has been split into two city corporations – Dhaka South and Dhaka North – for better management (Liton and Hasan, 2011), however, in this research, both are termed Dhaka City Corporation (DCC). In addition to having almost all administrative offices, leading educational institutions, business corporations, and media based in Dhaka (Siddiqui et al., 2012), many visitors place increased pressure on existing infrastructure and resources.

## 4. Research Design
This qualitative study is built around the design, execution, and consequences of a solution developed to solve the public urination problem in Dhaka city.

### 4.1. Conceptual underpinning
Public accountability focuses on public sector entities such as local government, central government, public organisations linked to the local or central government, and business entities linked to central government (Sargiacomo and Gomes, 2011). It concerns the relationships between elected officials, public sector managers and citizens (Almqvist et al., 2013) in relation to resource management, namely, accumulation, distribution, and proper use in solving problems. The public depends on these entities for various services, including the fundamental requirements of living such as food, clothes, shelter, education, and medicine. Thus, performance is an obvious consideration in the accountability framework for public sector entities. However, complex stakeholder relationships and shifts in public governance perspectives altered what is meant by public accountability in recent times (Grossi and Argento, 2022).

Public accountability refers to providing accounts to the general public transparently (Bovens et al., 2014), however, it is a contested term with differing perspectives on what it means and how to enact it (see, for example, Mulgan, 2000; Sinclair, 1995). Almqvist et al. (2013) distinguishes between 'vertical accountability' and 'horizontal accountability', which relate to the transition from NPM to NPG. NPG approaches can also be associated with more 'collaborative governance' approaches which centre on citizen empowerment and engagement within decision-making (Grossi and Argento, 2022). These different paradigms affect how stakeholders are viewed within accountability processes and the definition of 'success' of a particular intervention (Grossi and Argento, 2022).

Vertical accountability is underpinned by an NPM paradigm which focuses on the performance of single organisations in relation to outputs based on performance indicators measuring efficiency, effectiveness and financial results (Almqvist et al., 2013; Wiesel and Modell, 2014). Performance is typically quantified with monologic, calculative technologies that are limited

and narrow (see, for example, Manetti et al., 2021). In this way, "[p]owerful elites entrench their meanings and preferences and (wittingly or unwittingly) 'universalise' their own partial positions" (Brown, 2009, p. 316). However, there are criticisms that this narrow focus creates a superficial mentality that ultimately diminishes public value (Manetti et al., 2021). This is because public accountability requires the management of diverse expectations both within and outside organisations, which is increasingly difficult given the complexity and fragmentation of modern societies (Grossi and Argento, 2022; Torfing and Triantafillou, 2013). In response, an NPG approach has emerged as an alternative to the top-down, market-oriented focus of NPM.

Horizontal accountability, embodied by an NPG approach, focuses on the performance outcomes of a network of organisations. Performance is considered in a multifaceted and dialogic manner, where systems "…are based on enabling control through dialogue-driven systems of performance indicators, strengthening the contribution of individual organizations to the network performance" (Almqvist et al., 2013, p. 5). Horizontal accountability is focused on 'social and moral obligations' for organisations to be accountable to stakeholders and relate to them on equal terms (Almqvist et al., 2013, p. 4; Bovens, 2007).

NPG values citizens as co-producers of solutions that affect their lives (Wiesel and Modell, 2014, p. 178). In this way, engaging with citizens and emphasising their rights and role at the centre of democratic processes takes precedence (Torfing and Triantafillou, 2013, p. 12). The key to this process is building and maintaining collaborative networks with controls targeted at 'inter-organizational processes and outcomes'. While under an NPM approach, efficiency and financial results are prioritised with an NPG logic; effectiveness and citizen satisfaction with solutions are emphasised (Wiesel and Modell, 2014). This focus encourages a deeper dialogue and engagement with citizens to understand and further their interests.

Dialogue between entities and stakeholders (Smith et al., 2005) has always been seen as part of public accountability in some forms. However, the limitations of existing mechanisms for stakeholder engagement have been heavily criticised (Brown and Dillard, 2015). Critical dialogic accountability argues that meaningful democratic processes need to integrate pluralistic logics that appreciate difference and diversity (Brown, 2009) and alter existing power structures (see, for example, Kuruppu et al., 2022). Work in this area seeks to answer the question of "… how can accounting, accountants and accountability regimes better facilitate democracy by serving the needs of pluralistic communities given inequalities among the various constituencies?" (Brown et al., 2015, p. 627). In this sense, "[d]emocratic participatory governance requires that affected stakeholders and publics be able to scrutinize and debate the values and interests at stake from diverse perspectives" (Brown and Dillard, 2015, p. 964). While dialogic accountability enables all stakeholders to be involved in decision making (Manetti et al., 2021), it also suggests that dissensus and the contests between perspectives may actually be powerful forces to create social change and progress (Dillard and Vinnari, 2019; Tregidga and Milne, 2020). This pluralism has resonance with NPG's concerns (Osborne, 2010, p. 10), which seeks a more inclusive, network-centred approach. In this way, *all* perspectives are considered to have a valid place (Brown et al., 2015) which raises implications for how this particular case suggests a privileging of majority-Muslim views over minorities in the design of a 'smart solution'.

Of the different ways of discharging public accountability, such as through annual reports (Keerasuntonpong et al., 2019), by incorporating Islamic sentiment into the 'smart solution', Dhaka City authorities invoke faith-based (Islamic) accountability and expect people to be religiously sensitive in their actions. There is evidence in the literature that religious sentiments can play a role in ensuring accountability across contexts (see, for example, Jayasinghe and Soobaroyen, 2009; Yasmin et al., 2021). But, with an implementation of a Western governance

system, Bangladesh is hardly ready for that. Further, public urination has been cherry-picked by the authorities to ask for an Islamic way of accountability while the country does not comply with the Islamic governance system, called *Sharia.*

Although the Western and *Sharia* governance systems have similarities, they differ significantly on some matters (see, for example, Hasan, 2011). In Bangladesh, these systems and their intended political ideologies have been in tension (Karim, 2004). While they agree on the 'how' of accountability, that individuals can be held liable for their actions and accountability is ensured through account-giving, there is a stark difference in relation to the 'to whom' and 'for what' accountability is discharged. In the Western system, citizens are the ultimate source of power, and thus public sector accountability is directed toward them. What the authorities give accounts for depends on the task and activities necessary to complete it. In general, there is a separation between personal and professional accountabilities. In the *Sharia* system, accountability is directed toward the Creator only, and one is accountable for all of one's actions, both personal and professional (Ghafran and Yasmin, 2020; Lewis, 2001). Unlike the traditional Western mechanisms, personal accountability in the *Sharia* system does not stem from a defined relationship (hierarchical or contract-based); accountability to others is an automatic requirement embedded in ways of thinking and being in the world. Thus, accountability to the Creator is the overarching accountability framework within which there are different layers. For example, when an individual is accountable to another individual for their action, irrespective of the second individual holding the first accountable, the Creator will do so. Therefore, regardless of an individual's concern for another, ultimately, they temper their actions based on being held to account by the highest authority in their own eyes.

There is a growing body of literature on the *Sharia* governance system which is a broad domain of research (see, for example, Al-Sulami, 2004; Ghafran and Yasmin, 2020; Sajoo, 2018; Yasmin et al., 2021). The similarities and differences between *Sharia* and Western systems have been discussed from different perspectives. Considering the subject matter of this research, accountability and related differences are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: *Sharia* versus Western governance systems on accountability

| Western system | *Sharia* system |
| --- | --- |
| *Similarities* | |
| - Three core issues of governance are constitution, consent (election or obedience), and consultation. <br> - Accountability binds these three elements <br> - There are both individual and professional accountabilities <br> - Accountability is ensured by asking for accounts | |
| *Differences* | |
| The scope of accountability is comparatively narrow to include neighbours and the state. | The scope of accountability is wider and beyond neighbours and the state to include God and conscience. For example, a public authority is accountable to the citizenry, and on top of that accountable to God for the same act. |
| Laws are not divine and are changing continuously. Thus, the basis of accountability is subject to change. | Sharia laws are divine intervention in lives, and with the death of the last messenger, the revelations of such laws stopped. Thus, there is a fixed set of laws directing both legal and personal behaviours. |

| Western system | Sharia system |
|---|---|
| Accountability focuses on the material world | By benefiting society in the material world, the focus of individual accountability is on the hereafter. For example, Zakah (Charity). |
| Laws are codified | Laws are uncodified, paving the scope for numerous interpretations of the same law. |
| Precedence in the same or higher/lower court is binding. | Does not work on precedence and it is not binding. |
| The connection between ethics and laws is weak; one may ignore doing something ethical but not legal. | The connection between ethics and laws is very strong; one is accountable for anything which is not a legal but ethically responsibility. |
| In the absence of absolute values, standards of ethics might change from good to bad and vice versa. | The values and principles are absolute, can be controversial but easy to apply for accountability |
| Usually, religion is kept separate from politics | Religious rules set the foundation of the governance system. |
| Sovereignty of people | Sovereignty of God |

Sources: Al-Sulami (2004); Ghafran and Yasmin (2020); Sajoo (2018); Yasmin et al. (2021)

The public accountability that this paper examines is a subset of the broader accountability, portraying a relationship between the authorities and Dhaka city's inhabitants.

### 4.2. Sample participants
Stakeholders are the sample participants for this research, and a stakeholder is broadly defined as an actor or factor affecting or being affected by a certain activity (Freeman, 1984). Anti-social behaviours, such as public urination, involve a large set of stakeholders. The logical first point of contact is the urinators themselves, as the problem is a repeat occurrence. Data have been collected from a diverse sample of stakeholders representing all walks of Bangladeshi society. The sample participants live or do business close to urination spots, regularly pass through them, or are members of the wider society.

### 4.3. Data and data collection
Data were collected from Dhaka City through observation and unstructured interviews in two phases. In the first phase, two activities were performed. First, by exploring Dhaka city and informally talking to local people, different urination-prone spots were identified to collect information about when people urinate on the street, what types of people urinate on the street, and the probable reasons for urinating on the street. Second, a natural observation technique (Malhotra and Birks, 2007) was applied to two spots where language translation occurred. The observation period comprises eight days over three weeks (three days for the first two weeks and two days for the third week). Hence, observation in each location was conducted for a total of four days. The purpose of this observation was to identify a) if anyone urinates in the location; b) if yes, how many and why; c) if anyone urinates nearby; d) if yes, how many and why; e) reasons for urinating in alternative locations; and f) reasons for not using public toilets. Observation commenced at 9 AM and ended at 6 PM each day, with a two-hour lunch break. Lunch breaks were taken at varying times to ensure a complete window of observation. The daily observation ended at 6 PM to capture the activity of commuters after work hours. Data collection at the initial stage indicated that urination occurs infrequently in the early morning, and thus the starting time for observation was fixed at 9 AM. During the observation period,

the researcher observed the primary locations and two research assistants observed probable alternative places within 200 metres of the primary location.

Observation does not indicate particular times during which people prefer to urinate on the street; this activity occurs throughout the day. However, there is a general trend of increasing public urination after lunch (Table 2).

Table 2: Observation Output for two selected locations in Dhaka

| Spot | Day | Timeline and number of incidents | | | | | | | | | Total incidents | | | Average incidents | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 9-10 | 10-11 | 11-12 | 12-13 | 13-14 | 14-15 | 15-16 | 16-17 | 17-18 | Day | BL | AL | Day | BL | AL |
| 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | - | - | 2 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 11 | 3 | 8 | 10 | 4 | 6 |
| | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | - | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 9 | 3 | 6 | | | |
| | 3 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | - | - | 1 | 1 | 2 | 8 | 4 | 4 | | | |
| | 4 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 2 | - | 1 | 2 | 3 | 12 | 6 | 6 | | | |
| *Spot 1 Total* | | 2 | 2 | 4 | 6 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 7 | 10 | 40 | 16 | 24 | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 1 | - | - | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 9 | 3 | 6 | | | |
| | 6 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | - | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 11 | 4 | 7 | | | |
| | 7 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | - | - | 2 | 1 | 2 | 9 | 4 | 5 | | | |
| | 8 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 | - | 2 | 1 | 2 | 12 | 7 | 5 | | | |
| *Spot 2 Total* | | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 6 | 6 | 9 | 41 | 18 | 23 | | | |

BL = Before Lunch, AL = After Lunch
Lunchtime in Bangladesh is usually from 13.00 to 14.00; an empty cell refers to lunchtime
Observation period lunchtime: 12.00-14.00 (Day 1), 12.30-14.30 (Day 2), 13.00-15.00 (Day 3), and 13.30-15.30 (Day 4).

In the second phase, data were collected from 30 participants through unstructured interviews (Table 3). Analysing the data collected in the first phase, four key spots were selected for further study: New Market, Kamalapur, Gulistan, and the Science Laboratory. New Market and the Science Laboratory are well-known shopping locations, and Kamalapur and Gulisthan are two major transportation hubs connecting Dhaka city with the rest of the country. As all types of people urinate on the streets (as observed in the first phase), these locations are ideal for data collection because people from various socio-economic backgrounds visit them. However, it must be noted that all observations of public urination involved men as it is culturally and socially inappropriate for women to do so in public. Due to Bangladesh being a Muslim majority nation, the participants also had Muslim backgrounds. The sample participants were recruited from these four locations and the surrounding areas by applying the convenience sampling method. The participants included urinators, businesspersons (i.e., people doing business at a location close to the urination spots), residents, students, and journalists. Invitations for interviews were also extended to public officials to better understand the perspectives of government authorities in Dhaka. However, the requests were not accepted, which may be due to a variety of reasons including a lack of time, their availability, or for political reasons[2].

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[2] This could also mean that public officials may not welcome the NPG or dialogic approaches discussed in the paper. However, pluralistic perspectives are important to enhancing decision making and democracy in developing countries such as Bangladesh.

Interviews were unstructured and unrecorded. The participants were selected from the urination spots and nearby locations. Some of the participants were found urinating. Approaching them with an 'interview attitude' might have offended them and the sensitivity of the issue meant it was not possible to ask urination-related questions upfront. Consequently, an informal discussion and unstructured interview was developed with the target participants while drinking tea with them in the nearby tea stall or walking alongside them. During the initial discussion, the interviewer often jumped into an ongoing conversation. This is culturally common in Bangladesh depending on the topic of the ongoing discussion and how the interviewer joined the conversation. Gradually, the target participant is isolated, and a one-to-one discussion is formed where the urination issue is eventually brought up alongside different off-topic issues. At some stage of the discussion (varied across participants), the participants were informed about the data collection and its purpose. Initially, all participants, especially those found urinating on the street, were wary of providing data. However, when it was explained to them that their anonymity was assured, they consented to participate in the data collection process, although none wanted their interviews to be recorded. After each interview, the researcher and two research assistants prepared a summary written document of the conservation.

Table 3: Summary description of participants

| Type | Description | Number of interviews | Was anyone found urinating in public? |
|---|---|---|---|
| Businesspersons | Doing business around the urination spots; the majority is involved with small and medium enterprises, grocery stores, tea stalls, restaurants, and vegetable selling. These people suffer from having one or more urination spots adjacent to their business premises or workstation, but they also are the reason for sufferings for doing the same misdeed. | 7 | Yes |
| Civil society members | Members of the civil society; they are often the opinion leader in the social structure. Stakeholders often depend on these people to manage sanitation services, either for their expertise or power. | 6 + 5 (follow-up interviews) | Yes |
| Journalists | Journalists who cover urination or relevant social nuisance issues | 2 | No |
| Local residents | People who live around the urination spots or have to pass through these spots regularly. Students going to different schools, colleges, or universities are included in this. | 15 | Yes |
| Total | | 35 | |

Five members of civil society, including one woman[3] and two non-Muslims, were later interviewed, making the total number of participants 35. The views were found to be similar to that of the existing participants', and due to data saturation, data collection stopped after interviewing five participants.

## 5. Why do people urinate on the streets?

In Dhaka city, people of almost all ages and socio-economic backgrounds are found urinating on the street. However, rickshaw and van drivers outnumber others, while students are the second mentionable category followed by jobholders. Urination activity occurs throughout the day but tends to increase after lunch (see Table 1). This is because an increased number of people are on the street on their way home, shopping, on an afternoon walk, and at a restaurant. Moreover, it is more convenient to urinate once it is dark. Stakeholders suggest diverse but interrelated reasons for public urination in Dhaka city. Table 4 summarises the opinions of 35 participants who were interviewed in the second stage of data collection, asking why they urinate on the street or think others do the same.

Table 4: Reasons for urinating on the street

| Reasons | |
|---|---|
| No public toilet is available | Lack of education |
| Public toilets are far away | Do not have an alternative |
| Public toilets charge to urinate | Do not know where to go |
| Lots of people do this | Convenient option |
| It is nothing new; get used to it | Lack of respect for other people |
| Lack of strict law enforcement | It saves time |
| Nobody asked me to stop | Disgusting condition of public toilets |
| Natural call, cannot prevent | |

The unavailability of public toilets or sanitation facilities is the dominant reason for public urination. The number of public toilets in the city is insufficient, and public spending on them is low. As reported on the city corporations' web pages, spending on public toilets amounts to 0.13% and 0.05% of the total budget in the 2018-19 and 2019-20 financial years, respectively. Facilities are generally not convenient to access, and the available facilities are often not adequately maintained. Toilets are dirty, smelly, and do not have tissue or proper water facilities (see, for example, Saxton et al., 2017). The environment is such that people do not feel like using public toilets as roadside urination spots are considered more accessible, convenient, and ironically, more hygienic. Though some facilities have arrangements for women, none have any provision for children.

The problem is more severe for those who are homeless or live in slums (Alam et al., 2020; Haque et al., 2020). They usually take the lion's share of the blame for various social nuisance activities, including public urination. These people have no alternative, are less educated and concerned, and cannot afford public toilets. They are often found urinating on the street, though there is a public toilet nearby, reflecting their inability to pay for sanitation in addition to a reluctance to use public toilets. Public sanitation facilities in Dhaka city charge people for the service. Participants find this charge unacceptably high (up to Taka 5) and suggest that

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[3] Due to socio-cultural norms in Bangladesh, it was very difficult to talk to women about a sensitive issue such as public urination. Should more women and non-Muslims be interviewed, their opinions would have enriched the findings of this research.

amenities like public toilets should be a responsibility of the government or city corporation, and that the service should be provided free of cost.

> [...] I know that there is a public toilet about a kilometre away. But that is not a feasible option for me. How would I get there? I cannot walk a kilometre having pressure for urination. If I take a bus, considering the traffic jam, I do not know how long it will take. A rickshaw is very expensive for me for urination purposes. [...] Moreover, they charge money for urination. I do not afford to pay three to four times a day to pee. I, sometimes, cannot earn that much money in a day. (I040401)

There is scepticism as to whether having enough public toilets will solve the public urination problem. It cannot be guaranteed that public urinators will change their behaviour because of the extra facilities. The urination epidemic is now at such a stage that those who do not urinate publicly have also become used to seeing it. Public urinators typically suffer from low self-esteem and do not feel ashamed of urinating in public despite knowing that their activities cause social discomfort. On at least three occasions, people were also found urinating on Arabic script:

> [...] Some people are forced to do this; their situation is awful, and they are forced to create this nuisance. [...] Moreover, I think that this [public urination] is something we have had in this country for a very long time. In rural areas, people still do these things [urination and related activities] in open spaces. All of us living in the city today are somehow from rural areas and probably are yet to change our habits from living in those rural areas. [...] So, this is normal, and I do not think people will stop doing this. Yes, there is a temporary problem of bad smell, but with rain, it goes away. (I010101)

Different factors related to individuals as well as overall infrastructure and governance influence the decision. Figure 1 models this relationship for Dhaka city.
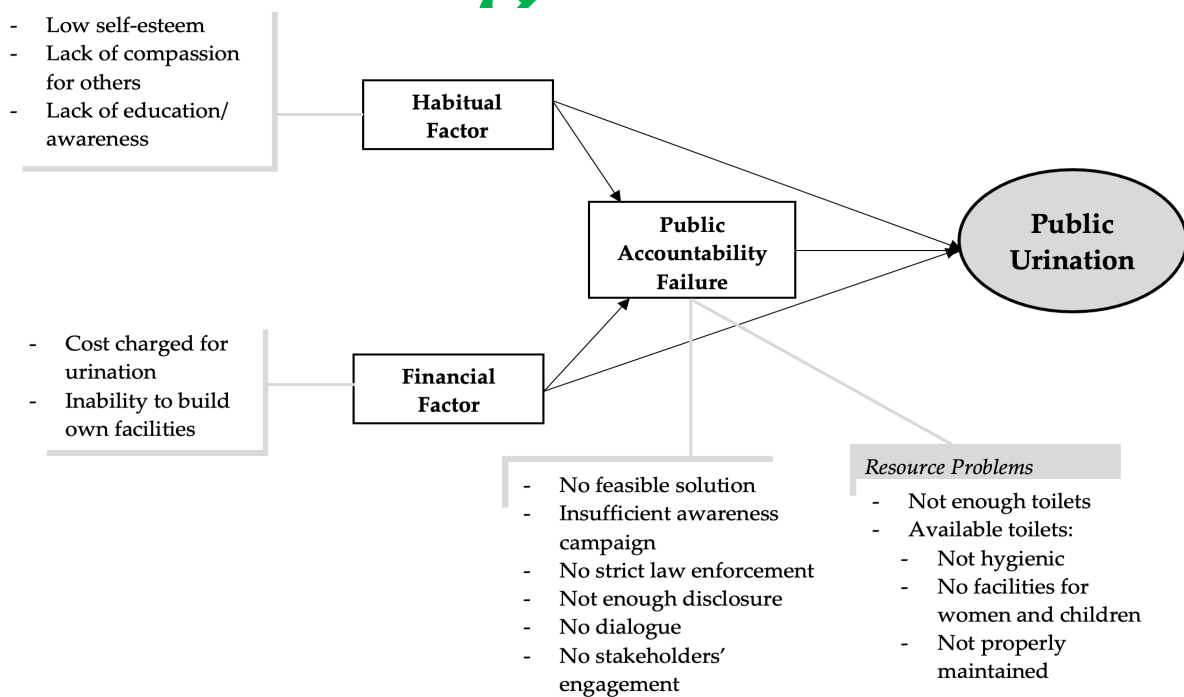


Figure 1. Modelling the public urination problem in Dhaka city

## 6. Effectiveness of the 'smart solution'

Overall, the 'smart solution' is ineffective. Although it produced a temporary pause in public urination in some locations, it did not prove to be a viable long-term solution. Table 5 summarises interviewees' responses when asked about the (in)effectiveness of the 'smart solution'. The city's urinators quickly became insensitive to the Arabic language and started urinating on walls with messages in Arabic. Different actors, including the news media, increased this de-sensitisation by disclosing that the message in Arabic was a verbatim translation of what was already there in Bengali:

> You cannot fool the public for a long time. It was almost certain that the urinators would come back to these spots or create new urination spots. They are habituated to this. [...] You came to me because my shop is near one such spot. I do not know what you expected, but I knew from the beginning that this would happen. My experience of working in this area for the last five years tells me that. [...] When a solution is not sound, this is bound to happen. (I040101)

Stakeholders do not accept the 'smart solution', arguing that it is a political gimmick or ploy to legalise the use of funds sanctioned for this purpose. This is in part due to the lack of significant consultation with communities. A strong sentiment is that the authorities do not study or understand the problem, adopt a reactive rather than proactive approach to accountability (Ebrahim, 2010), and prioritise financial costs; they use cheap signwriting to fix a structural problem rather than addressing underlying needs by improving access to sanitation and hygienic facilities. Interviewees argue that the social elites who design public policies fail to grasp the problems that the working-class face, which is typified by a top-down NPM approach. This also shows how power dynamics have hampered any potential for dialogic approaches to genuinely engage with stakeholders (Brown and Dillard, 2015). Despite power differentials potentially influencing horizontal accountability with an NGP approach, they are more prominent in a hierarchical NPM inspired system (Almqvist et al., 2013). Differing views are not integrated and the assumptions which underpin the city's 'smart solution' are never surfaced or debated. The potential of NPG approaches to co-create solutions is missed as authorities ignore "... reflexive, discursive encounters ..." (Dillard and Vinnari, 2019, p. 34) with citizens to explore what accountability and solutions to the problem can be. Instead, authorities end up with an ineptly managed campaign that fails to solve the problem. Thus, the 'smart solution' is nothing innovative but a transplanted solution without proper customisation to the local context using more collaborative approaches (Grossi and Argento, 2022). Earlier studies also noted the tension surrounding the perceived 'Western' ideals that NGOs were trying to embed in Bangladesh compared to the direction religious clergy were advocating (Karim, 2004). However, they think that the initiative represents an attempt at a solution, thus developing awareness of the problem and creating opportunities for dialogue.

Table 5: Stakeholders' reasoning about the (in)effectiveness of the 'smart solution' initiative

| | | The reason for (in)effectiveness | Broader theme |
|---|---|---|---|
| Effectiveness of the 'smart solution' | Do you think that the 'smart solution' is effective? | No Authority does not understand the problem<br>Lack of research on the problem<br>The flawed design of the solution | Inaccurate problematisation |
| | | Lack of stakeholder cooperation<br>Urinators do not intend to change habits | Stakeholders' self-esteem |
| | | Stakeholder disengagement | |

| | | The reason for (in)effectiveness | Broader theme |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Shifting the focus of the problem to something else | Public sector accountability |
| | | Transplantation of a wrong Indian concept | |
| | | The legitimisation of the fund use | Mistrust of the authority |
| | | Policy design by social elites | |
| | | Authority is not serious | |
| | Yes | At least an attempt was made | |
| | | Awareness development | |
| | | Innovation in solution and message delivery | |

Stakeholders are appalled by the incorporation of religion into the anti-urination campaign and argue that such use of religion can be dangerous. While a majority of the population are Muslims (Rahman, 2022), Bangladesh is a secular country and adopts Western-style democracy in which all governmental branches are structured for democratic accountability (Riaz, 2004). Selective application of religious concepts enables misinterpretation and risks damaging social cohesion. With the 'smart solution', people are encouraged to behave in a certain way and hypothesise that the rules of the Islamic governance system apply to some cases in the country. In practice, there is no infrastructural arrangement to support this hypothesis. Therefore, adding religion to the 'smart solution' neither solves the problem nor serves the religion. In Islam, accountability is ultimately to God (see Table 1), and the authorities were misusing words from the Quran, and the language of Prophet Muhammad in the 'smart solution', by trying to pursue a fallible human agenda. This creates confusion about what public authorities' intentions are, especially as it also leads to a de-privileging of the Bengali language, which has significant cultural and symbolic importance in Bangladesh. Ultimately, it outlines a breakdown of accountability where communication is poor, and expectations are misunderstood, underscoring a profound lack of stakeholder engagement with the people the 'smart solution' most affects (see, for example, Gray et al., 2014).

## 7.   The big picture – stakeholder (dis)engagement

Although a small percentage of city dwellers are directly involved with the public urination nuisance, it affects many people in society. For any possible solution to the problem to be effective, stakeholders and their diverse concerns and differences must be considered when designing and implementing the solution (Brown and Dillard, 2015). The 'smart solution' did not engage stakeholders either in the design or execution phases. It was a top-down decision implemented by the authorities in Dhaka which disempowered the voices of the communities in which the solution was targeted, thus reducing citizens to consumers of the initiative rather than co-producers with the agency (see, for example, Grossi and Argento, 2022). The spaces for critical engagement, and potentially conflict, were never created within institutional and political spaces in Dhaka (see, for example, Tregidga and Milne, 2020). This meant that there are significant flaws in the solution because of the lack of deliberation and a contest of views (Brown, 2009), ultimately restricting the 'smart solution' as a 'cost-efficient' but an ineffective artefact of NPM.

## 7.1. Potential for Religious Intolerance

The present 'smart solution' can increase religious intolerance by bringing a discussion of religion into public spaces. Ideally, the 'smart solution' could have been used as an attempt to open and broaden public forums for citizens to engage on issues which concerned their lives. It could have provided an opportunity for religious, cultural, and socio-economic issues to be

surfaced with a range of stakeholders and a multi-faceted solution to be created. This could only be enabled by the contestation of how to solve complex social issues that include religious minorities and women, who are either perpetrators of public urination or affected by it (Manetti et al., 2021). Instead, by adopting a narrow approach which sought economic efficiency rather than effectiveness, authorities may have incited religious anger and confusion.

The holiest book for Muslims, the Quran, is written in Arabic, and thus Muslims tend to perceive an insult to the Arabic language as an insult to the sacred texts in the Quran. Supporting this sentiment, interviewees strongly oppose the use of Arabic in the anti-urination campaign, believing it to constitute an insult to the Islamic religion and their Prophet:

> [...] I am disgusted with the poor understanding of the problem by the authorities responsible. Look, religion has a big place in our lives, but you do not have to associate that in this way. [...] It does not matter which religion; I just do not find it appropriate to portray any religion or religious institutions in this way. Importantly, when most people are Muslim in this country, you must be more careful. [...] I do not know anything more important than the Quran to Muslims. So, if Muslims find it insulting to use the language of the Quran in this way, I am with them. (I030202)

There is a unanimous agreement from the interviewees that the use of the Arabic language in the 'smart solution' and its association with public urination is harmful. In seeking a 'homogenous' solution that ultimately puts a price on the sacred, and by ignoring Bangladesh's socio-cultural context, participants are all but sure the solution constitutes a risk of social chaos.

> [...] It is not Saudi Arabia, where Arabic is probably just a language. [...] In Bangladesh, Arabic is rather a sacred language. Muslims tend to synonymise Arabic with the Quran and be respectful of anything in Arabic, even when they do not know what is written. So, when they write in Arabic in a urination spot, can you imagine what a catastrophic explanation there could be? It is like bringing something sacred out of the holy book and placing it in a dirty place. If interpretation goes in that way, trust me, the authorities will regret introducing this solution. (I040301)

The promotional video of the 'smart solution' cites Dhaka as a 'city of mosques', wherein the Minister of Religious Affairs says he does not understand why people urinate on the street when there are thousands of mosques in the city (*Language Matters*, 2015). Dhaka city indeed has thousands of mosques, and it is colloquially called a 'city of mosques' (Ahmed et al., 2018).Participants find this association disturbing and think it weakens the context of solving a social nuisance. The Arabic script on the city walls includes arrows indicating the locations of nearby mosques, which has created controversy and widespread confusion. Many stakeholders interpret this signage as indicating that mosques are suitable public toilets. This highlights the dangers of a monologic and elitist approach that NPM can incentivise (Almqvist et al., 2013). Mosques are one of the central symbols or features of the Islamic way of life. These do not exist simply to provide sanitation facilities but are rather built for congregational prayers five times a day (Islam and Noble, 1998). Participants believe that it was unnecessary to associate mosques with the anti-urination campaign. A typical reaction from an interviewee to this situation is as follows:

> This [using Arabic] can backfire. People, I guess, fear disrespect to the Arabic language. It seems not to matter whether they respect Arabic or Qur'anic teaching properly, but any disrespect of Arabic by others cannot go unprotested. [...] The outcome of this scarcity is unpredictable and can create tension in the community. (I030201)

16

> They stupidly merged two different topics. I do not understand since when Bangladeshi society started thinking of mosques as public toilets. (I030502)

The approach in the 'smart solution' itself is wrong and discriminatory. Ministry of Religious Affairs is supposed to represent the total population of the country irrespective of religion. But, as the message in the solution propagates, the 'smart solution' does not consider non-Muslims, which are 11.6% of the total population of Bangladesh (BBS, 2020). Neither the Ministry nor the City Corporation authority subsequently discussed or provided any guidelines about the problems that non-Muslims might face in complying with the solution. Thus, the solution is not inclusive and lacks basic motivational instruments to generate public acceptance.

> How will non-Muslims use mosques as a toilet? Will not it create severe problems in the country? In my opinion, this is an irresponsible act on the part of the Ministry. Muslims will not accept the idea of non-Muslims entering mosques, and it can create communal clashes. I still remember when the Babri Mosque was demolished in India, a communal riot engulfed the whole of Bangladesh. [...] It can be depressing for the non-Muslim minorities in the country. They might think that the government does not care about them. (I030502)

Considering the problem creates discomfort for everyone, the non-Muslim population in Bangladesh may eventually ignore this discrimination, as indicated in the following comment of a non-Muslim participant.

> [...] if you had never lived in Dhaka City, you would not recognize how stupid I feel when I cannot breathe while walking back home because of the bad smell of urine on the street. [...] It is a Muslim-majority country, and thus arguably, the majority of public urinators are Muslims. So, I do not mind if this solution does not include me, but I am more than happy if it stops public urination, which I do not see happening with this solution. (I050203; follow-up interview)

The Ministry of Religious Affairs is supposed to educate people about religious superstitions and misinterpretations, but they appear to be perpetuating them in this instance. While the Ministry should be aware that the Arabic language does not equate to Islamic rules and regulations, they took the wrong path to strengthen the existing misinterpretations. The Quran promotes human accountability toward oneself and the environment, making it mandatory for people to clean themselves and the environment after urination or defecation (Quran, 5:6). Therefore, Islamic scholars in Bangladesh voiced their concerns against this campaign, finding it insulting to Islamic values and urging its immediate cessation. A positive frame could have been adopted with a citizen-engaged model, using these Islamic values to then incentivise hygienic practices along with the provision of more sanitation facilities for the poor and vulnerable. For example, with the Islamic practice of *Shura*[4], the community could have been consulted and involved in decisions about an acceptable solution, although ultimately, the final decision would rest with authorities. Adopting an NPG approach alongside dialogic engagement with multiple stakeholders may have also enabled new initiatives to emerge (Brown et al., 2015). For instance, public authorities may have appealed to wealthy stakeholders to fund some of

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[4] Islam supports dialogue or consultation. The Quran directs to consult where necessary (Quran, 3:159 and 42:38). The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) consulted his companions in making decisions and asked his followers to do the same (Khel, 1980). After the death of the Prophet, the Caliphs of Islam followed the footprint of the Prophet and developed a solid infrastructure of consultation called Shura to make state-related decisions in ruling kingdoms (Khel, 1980).

these sanitary facilities, again using Islamic values of generosity to engage with a wider pool of citizens to create solutions.

## 7.2. Damaging national identity

The 'smart solution' is perceived as demeaning to the national spirit of the language movement. The right to speak its language has a special significance in Bangladesh. On 21 February 1952, several young men were killed in broad daylight by the then Pakistani government in Dhaka city protesting the government's decision barring them from using their mother tongue, Bengali, as the language of communication. This day is boldly marked on the list of nationally significant events, and the UNESCO declared it *International Mother Language Day* in 1999. Therefore, language is a sensitive issue in Bangladesh, and the use of an alternative language to solve a domestic problem is widely considered an insult. Participants felt humiliated:

> This is a betrayal to the martyrdom of known and unknown people in 1952 and onwards. I think that it does not go with the spirit of our independence war as well. [...] This is retreating from the main problem. It does not help in solving problems, rather shows the incapability of the concerned people. People in Dhaka city will not satisfactorily remember this. [...] This kind of disrespect to national heroes and their stories does not eventually go well. History tells us that. (I040502)

The solution indirectly approves of urinating on the mother tongue, but not on Arabic. The image of urinating on one's language while respecting others' language is a statement of poor judgment and taste, damaging nationalism. Interviewees argued that it is important to respect all languages rather than infusing this kind of discriminatory attitude. In their opinion, there is no dispute about the sacredness of the Quran, but framing the language of the Quran in this way is unacceptable:

> [...] It is a shame that we are not smart enough in our 'smart solution'. It prioritises one language over another and, unfortunately, Bengali is not prioritised. While I do not have any grudge against Arabic, I am appalled to realise that the solution indirectly indicates that it is okay to urinate on Bengali. [...] I do not judge any language; I do not think that portraying any language in this way is anything close to positive; it is rather very much immature. (I010201)

## 7.3. Banking on the Ignorance of Stakeholders

The major element in the design of the 'smart solution' is widespread ignorance of the Arabic language beyond its use as a potent religious symbol. Many stakeholders did not understand that the Arabic script on the city walls was merely a translation of the existing Bengali instructions. Further, due to a lack of education, many stakeholders do not understand that Arabic and the Quran are not synonymous; Arabic is just another language that also happened to be the mother tongue of the last Prophet in Islam. They treat the Arabic text with respect, irrespective of its content. Therefore, it was easy for the authorities to administer this type of campaign. However, as stakeholders became aware of the situation, confusion and outrage were prevalent:

> It is insulting, for sure. I do not get proper facilities, but I, along with my religion, have been made a subject of fun. It is not my fault that I do not understand Arabic. I did not expect this from a democratically elected government. This in no way represents the wishes of the common people. [...] What I mean is that they [concerned authorities] probably are ignorant about the problem in the way I am about the Arabic language.

> This is like telling someone that 'I know that you are stupid, so you deserve this'. No rational person will do this, I believe. (I010501)

This highlights the sense of privilege and arrogance of elites in public authorities and their dismissal of community voices they are meant to serve. Monologic thinking and processes are clear with such an engendered power difference between those in authority and the citizens they are meant to serve. Participants expressed their hopelessness with this campaign gimmick and indicated that because of a lack of dialogue, there was a loss of trust in their elected officials. Critiquing the emphasis on 'cheap solutions' to wicked problems, interviewees opine that current systems are a means of bypassing the problem and failing to develop a workable solution:

> [...] This solution will not solve the problem at all. [...] The authorities just played with the people, and some of their supporters tried to promote the solution without even making a proper analysis of it. [...] Now, this is not new in our country. We are used to this and do not expect anything better from these inept and willingly immoral authorities. [...] I just do not understand what makes them [authorities] believe that they can make a joke like this with millions of people in the city. I find this absurd and inhumane. (I020301)

### 7.4. Lack of consideration for women and children

A lack of dialogic engagement with broader stakeholder groups means that neither the 'smart solution' nor the currently available facilities adequately consider women and children. The interviewees for this research also did not actively consider the inclusion of women and children in the solution to public urination. This highlights the concerning way that some stakeholder voices are completely excluded from discussion, even by other parts of the community. In general, interviewees do not find it problematic that children urinate on the street. As they do not see women urinating on the street, they fail to visualise the difficulties women continuously face.

> [...] I am sorry that it [women's inclusion] did not come to my mind. Now that you asked about it, let me share my experience with that. I know how difficult it is for women. They must be considered, and I would recommend giving them a priority. [...] When I go out with my family, I face problems with these [urination facilities for women]. Except for some good shopping malls such as Bashundhara, we do not have an option for women. One or two public toilets have some arrangements for women, but the facilities are not good enough in those toilets either. For example, I know that the public toilets in New Market have such an arrangement, but they do not maintain it well. (I030401)

In the Bangladeshi context, it is socially accepted (with a certain level of disgust) that men urinate on the street (Joshi and Morgan, 2007). The same is considered unacceptable for women, and no women were found urinating publicly during data collection. However, complementing previous research (see, for example, Joshi and Morgan, 2007), some participants mentioned women doing so at night, especially during the morning darkness before sunrise with privacy being a major concern. This is not common, and usually occurs on railway tracks near slums.

The non-consideration of women and children is disturbing, but apparently a trend across countries. Women are discriminated against, left to suffer, and forced to raise a voice against malpractices in public urination issues. Their voices are not only ignored by public authorities but are also not considered in the first place. This is a fundamental disempowerment in any

democratic or accountability process. For example, in India, a movement called 'Right to Pee' was formed to voice against a discriminatory practice that women are required to pay for using urination facilities while men do not (BBC, 2015). In the Philippines, girls are told not to drink water to avoid urination while out (Ellis et al., 2016), which is undeniably inhumane. Further, it is confusing to suggest people use the facilities of nearby mosques. Should women equally consider doing so, it might interfere with the long-established and adhered socio-religious practice in Bangladesh as women typically do not enter Mosques. However, this is a tension that public authorities should try to create dialogue and debate on, rather than reinforce or ignore it (Tregidga and Milne, 2020). In the words of participants, ignoring underlying perceptions and stakeholder interests can create religious backlash. But, they understand that the exclusion of women, who are 49.4% (The World Bank, 2020) of the total population, is an early indicator of the solution failing.

> [...] You are right that the solution does not consider women, though it should. But I now think about whether the solution can consider women in this form. How will religious leaders respond to the idea of women entering mosques? The last time I listened to them, they were dead against women praying in the mosques. I do not see them agreeing to let women get inside mosques for urinating purposes. To be honest, I am a little scared, even thinking of their reactions. (I020501)

While Islamic rules encourage women to pray at home, there is no prohibition on women praying at or visiting mosques (Prickett, 2015). In mainstream Muslim countries such as Saudi Arabia, women regularly pray at the two holiest mosques of Islam in Mecca and Medina. But, when Islam met patriarchal subcontinental culture, it was the political polarisation that drove the adoption of some local conservative elements into the religious practice (see, for example, Hashmi, 2000; Kabeer, 1991). Local religious pundits are often wrongly advised on many issues, including the disapproval of women visiting mosques (Hashmi, 2000; Katz, 2014). In this way, it has been established as a norm that women do not visit mosques. Therefore, it is unlikely that stakeholders in the city, if not the whole country, will accept women frequenting mosques, even for prayers, let alone urination.

The sloppiness of the 'smart solution' is evident from the authorities' failure to consider cultural or religious noncompliance (practice, but not the legal basis) with the solution before recommending urban people to use mosque facilities for urination. Dialogue has been suppressed in favour of creating 'cost efficient' solutions driven by 'public managers' (Waheduzzaman, 2019, p. 692) which demoted the rights and interests of many citizens. It is appalling that they did not provide any details of what provisions are there or how those provisions, if any, can work for women and children. They also do not provide any information about how many and where mosques are in the city. Web pages and annual reports of the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, Ministry of Religious Affairs, Dhaka District, and Dhaka City Corporations do not have any disclosure on these issues. This reduces the possibility for stakeholders to engage and indicates the unaccountability of the public authorities in Dhaka City.

The discourse on gender discrimination in the 'smart solution' identifies public urination as an individual rather than a community or religion level issue. This limits the problem and related solutions, whereas an NPG approach would encourage network thinking and coordination to facilitate change (Wiesel and Modell, 2014). This enables a more sophisticated and contextually grounded approach to public accountability. For instance, Dillard and Vinnari (2019) outline how 'responsibility networks', groups who are galvanised by a shared interest in an issue, can work together to create the parameters for evaluation criteria which then assess how effective

(or not) a solution is. This embeds diversity and pluralism into decision-making, which is important given anti-social behaviours can be influenced by the local culture and historical precedent (Alok, 2010). These are embedded beliefs and taken-for-granted views that require more fundamental change, rather than the 'cost-effective' solutions NPM based thinking prioritises (Almqvist et al., 2013). Participants raised questions about the intention of men urinating in public, arguing that if women can manage without urinating in public, men should be able to do the same. In their opinion, accountable behaviour at the individual level should produce a better end in solving the public urination problem.

> [...] As a woman, I consider this a wrong-footed focus. The question should be why men urinate in public while women do not. [...] The socio-cultural norms give men a sort of right to urinate in public while women are deprived of that. [...] Proper sanitation for both men and women is critical for equality and inclusion. (I050202; follow-up interview)

## 8. Accountability of the public sector

The authorities in Dhaka city have failed to address the public urination problem. The introduction of the 'smart solution' indicates authorities' awareness of the issue and accountability pressures to solve a 'tragedy of the commons' issue. Nonetheless, the authorities acted in a primarily NPM informed and compliance-driven manner, reactively addressing stakeholder concerns without regard to the longer-term sustainability of the solution. As a result, the 'smart solution' that the authorities proposed has largely failed, with public urinators in the city now urinating on the Arabic signage in addition to creating new urination spots. Contrary to the intention of the initiative, the urination problem has intensified.

The public sector has significant resource management and policy design problems to inclusively serve the urban people with proper sanitation options (Hossain and Ahmed, 2015). It neither ensures enough public toilets in the city nor maintains the available facilities. Many places in the city are without sanitation facilities, and authorities cannot accede to new installation requests from the public due to resource scarcity. Observations revealed that most existing public toilets at the case sites are filthy and do not have necessary supplies such as tissue and water. Interviewees expressed that they only used these toilets when left with no better option. The general sentiment is that public sector employees do not care about accountability, and they actively ignore requests from the public as there was no mechanism to deliver consequences to these employees. In this way it shows how public authorities actively diminish the voices and rights of citizens in creating solutions to social problems:

> [...] It is not that we did not request local authorities to have mercy on us, but you know how far we can go. The attitude of the people in the office does not encourage us to seek help from them. After a few minutes of discussion, you will understand that they do not listen to you, do not care about your problem, and do not have any intention to help you. [...] Thus, we got used to this [urinating public], and to tell you frankly, I nowadays do not feel anything about it. [...] Again, being honest with you, I lost interest in thinking about this after the first few times. I found many people doing this, and most importantly, I do not yet have a proper living place. How will I think about this, continuously? (I020402)

Interviewees unanimously argued that the biggest accountability underachievement was the public sector's failure to produce a viable solution to a centuries-old city's urination problem. They believe this should not have been a major issue to solve if there was no corruption and bureaucratic inefficiency. However, contrary to their beliefs and expectations, the scope of the

problem has increased over time and currently is beyond the authorities' control, causing anger and frustration among stakeholders:

> [...] Now, when you do not do what you are supposed to do, you probably cannot tell others what they should do. Before you ask me to stop urinating on the street, you must give me alternatives, is not it? [...] It is the job of the government either to produce or to import a solution to the problem and make it available to the people for free or at minimum cost. When they do not do it, they certainly do not fulfil their obligations. I just wonder the reasoning behind paying tax if these facilities are so pathetically scarce to avail. (I040201)

The accountability failure of public authorities is further extended to legal enforcement, disclosure, and communication. The Dhaka City Corporation Act 2009 recognises public urination as an offence, and it has a provision of fining a maximum of Tk. 5,000. It reflects the authority's seriousness on the issue, but in practice indicates a shallow understanding and discharge of accountability. The authority criminalises public urination without providing enough sanitation facilities. In this way, the public, especially the vulnerable parts of it, is denied a basic sense of dignity.

The existing law against creating a social nuisance (including public urination) is rarely applied, and thus there is relaxed or no legal ramification for public urination. Moreover, the authorities perform poorly in discharging communication and disclosure accountability (Gray et al., 2014, 1996). There is no accurate or updated information about sanitation and mosque facilities in the city. Moreover, the authorities do not engage the stakeholders at the mass level for any public policy matter. This leaves the city's inhabitants not counselled about the demerits of public urination and unengaged with the problem-solving process.

Interviewees argued that they were comfortable engaging with city corporation authorities regarding their problems. Thus, presenting the Ministry of Religious Affairs as the decision-maker for the city (in the 'smart solution') creates confusion, and as such, they do not take the solution seriously let alone engage. They mention being busy enough to consider all the information coming from the relevant authorities, so they should not be expected to respond to a sudden surprise, even though it is called a 'smart' surprise. Furthermore, the Ministry's significant socio-cultural and religious power suppresses the ability of less empowered stakeholders such as women, children, and religious minorities to have any engagement with the design of a solution. This entrenches vertical logics when it comes to democratic practices, rather than the horizontal and participatory practices which we have shown are likely to yield more effective solutions (see, for example, Osborne, 2010).

## 9. Discussion and conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to investigate public urination in Dhaka city, a significant social and health issue, and to highlight how narrow conceptions of accountability and poor stakeholder engagement impacted the effectiveness of the 'smart solution'. The 'smart solution', consisting of changing anti-urination signage from Bengali to Arabic script, has failed to solve the public urination problem in Dhaka city. While the authorities wanted a cost-effective solution to create behavioural change, their lack of consultation with affected stakeholder groups signified a hierarchical and monologic approach to framing and discharging accountability (Almqvist et al., 2013). In particular, their lack of stakeholder dialogue and engagement following a monologic/vertical/NPM accountability approach (Almqvist et al., 2013) meant that the 'smart solution' was not contextually informed, nor were consequences or

punishments defined as a deterrent for public urination. This resulted in a failure of accountability.

The public sector in Bangladesh has a long history of failure in managing public affairs (Sarker, 2011; Uddin, 2005); the state-owned and managed railway and airline are notorious examples. A vicious conglomeration has been formed, comprising public sector failure, increased bureaucracy, uncontrolled corruption, and overall underdevelopment. To combat this, on the recommendation (as well as pressure) from donor organisations to implement an NPM agenda, the Bangladesh government has begun to privatise public sector entities to a significant extent (Uddin, 2005). Although there is resistance, privatisation is already a successful phenomenon in Bangladesh (Ahmed, 1999). Thus, it is possible that while the government leases the facilities and fixes the standards to uphold, the private sector takes charge of the sanitation facilities in Dhaka city. Previous literature indicates that the private sector has a high success record in offering public goods (see, for example, Kirama and Mayo, 2016; Silvestre et al., 2018). However, NPM approaches have increasingly been criticised for their failure to achieve meaningful reform and create sustainable solutions (Almqvist et al., 2013).

Adopting a network oriented NPG co-production approach, which surfaced the difference and diversity of citizen views with a dialogic accountability system, could have created more effective solutions to this social problem (Almqvist et al., 2013; Brown et al., 2015; Dillard and Vinnari, 2019). This is because the public urination problem in Dhaka city requires both reactive and proactive initiatives that need to engage horizontally across various groups of stakeholders. Given the sensitivity and multifaceted nature of the problem, residents and daily commuters to the city expect public authorities, such as Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), to arrange proper sanitation facilities for them free of charge.  However, these expectations have not been met because authorities ignore the voices of stakeholders, and they "universalise their own partial positions" (Brown, 2009, p. 316). Public urination continues to be an everyday struggle for communities, particularly those who tend to be poorer or marginalised. The elites who make decisions, through their distance and unwillingness to engage with diversity, can never fully grapple with the scale of the issue. While authorities have taken some actions to mitigate resource scarcity and social nuisance of public urination, concerns have been raised regarding whether relevant stakeholders have been listened to and empowered to solve the problem successfully. Importantly, there is a lack of any mechanism which can hold public authorities to account.

In many instances, the proposed solution has disenchanted certain stakeholders who view the solution as an offence against Islam and de-privileging of the Bengali language that has significant national and cultural value in Bangladesh. To ensure accountability in an Islamic way, it is required to implement the Islamic *Sharia* system in which accountability is measured through the instructions in the Quran and the Prophet's sayings (Hamid et al., 1993). Bangladesh does not operate on the *Sharia* system, and should that be the case, public authorities will be liable in the first place for (i) misrepresentation and misuse of the Islamic concept of cleanliness, (ii) failure to produce an expected outcome, and (iii) overall mismanagement of the process in which stakeholders were not engaged. *Sharia* (and more specifically, the concept of *Shura*) recommends mutual consultation among people (Robinson, 2021). These authorities would also be accountable for non-transparency that Islamic law strongly prohibits (Lewis, 2001; Moten, 1996) because a significant portion of the population, especially the target audience of the anti-urination campaign, is historically denied a voice in the urban decision-making process (Ahmed, 2014). Therefore, the whole saga of putting religious sentiment upfront through the 'smart solution' was immature and a gimmick that lacked foresight. This highlights the lack of agency and disempowerment of stakeholders who

were integral to the 'solution' (see, for example, Bathran, 2011). Furthermore, the differences in the interpretation of Islamic rules across Muslim groups and non-Muslims were largely ignored, and this created conflict both within and beyond the practice of Islam (Robinson, 2021).

Stakeholder dialogic processes must be accompanied by action according to the evaluative criteria determined by responsibility networks in relation to a particular problem (Dillard and Vinnari, 2019). As shown in Figure 2, engaging with, and understanding the position of the urinators themselves is important for public authorities. Being disrespectful to others' discomfort as a result of their actions, and they often continue behaving anti-socially (Donnellan et al., 2005), making a strong case for effective engagement. Debate, and the contest of conflicting views, is key to open and pluralistic democratic processes (Brown and Dillard, 2015). Therefore, centring citizens and enabling polyvocal discussion in the democratic process is fundamental (Manetti et al., 2021; Torfing and Triantafillou, 2013). Consequently, public accountability can be enhanced with dialogic stakeholder engagement (Brown et al., 2015; Brown and Dillard, 2015; Dillard and Vinnari, 2019; Grossi and Argento, 2022).

Through engagement, citizens can be counselled one to one about the social and health hazards of public urination and what options they have in the city. Civil society has a high impact, particularly if they can harness their networks to drive engagement with the community and provide another layer of feedback to public authorities. Civil society may also be able to harness private sector and NGO partnerships to provide sanitary facilities in places of greatest need, with buy-in from public authorities. While law enforcement requires a moderate level of engagement, participants doubt how effective law enforcement would be, given that urinators are often from a vulnerable segment of society. Thus, it may be more useful for urinators to be aware of the issue while keeping law enforcement a supplementary tool. Media, mainly social media, plays a vital role in information dissemination, stakeholder engagement, and holding the concerned people accountable (Andon and Free, 2014; Bellucci and Manetti, 2017). But, as many of the target population often do not have access to the media, low engagement with the media is proposed so that resources can be redirected to engage the urinators. Local politicians are important stakeholders, but in the context of Dhaka city, participants want to keep their involvement minimal. They understand that politicians ultimately decide on resource allocation, but they are also the reasons for the mismanagement of the resources. Non-profits, educational institutions, and residents are the sources of knowledge, expertise, and ideas; engagement with them will facilitate stakeholders' engagement and solution to the urination problem.

Figure 2: Impact and engagement consideration for stakeholders

Given the considerable power inequalities and Bangladesh's socio-economic context, a solution requiring stakeholder engagement is likely to succeed if the whole process is divided into multiple stages. This will help the decision-makers create a demand for the solution, and the stakeholders to decide on their engagement level. Table 6 shows a possible implementation framework for an anti-urination solution which incorporates NPG and dialogic perspectives. It must be noted that this is a potential pathway but in no way is it a panacea to solving public issues. The proposed actions will hopefully help shift the dial in developing countries by enhancing citizen engagement and participation in democratic processes. However, these public sector accounting and accountability practices need to be continuously reassessed (Grossi and Argento, 2022).

Table 6: Multistage implementation of an anti-urination solution

| Stage | Major activities | Accountability met | Engagement ensured |
|---|---|---|---|
| One: Problematization and dialogue | Stakeholder engagement Communication to stakeholders Interactive rather than a push approach Awareness development | Awareness Engagement | Partnership and dialogue |
| Two: Design and dialogue | Stakeholder engagement Communication to stakeholders Awareness development | Sustainable solution Awareness | Dialogue |
| Three: Execution and feedback | Stakeholder engagement Communication to stakeholders Promotional activities | Performance Engagement | Employee volunteering and dialogue |

The first stage involves problematisation. With utmost care and proper consideration of stakeholders' sensitivity to the relevant issues, the problem must be identified and analysed from both the administration and stakeholders' perspectives and incorporate cultural and religious sensitivities. If the problematisation of issues is flawed or inadequate, the solution will likely fail. Thus, a diverse set of stakeholders, as outlined earlier, must be engaged with the problematisation process to collect, and incorporate their viewpoints in the understanding and subsequent solution development of the problem. A nationwide (at least citywide in this case) dialogue can be facilitated to allow communication of the authority's seriousness and strategic posture about the problem (Pérez et al., 2017). This will encourage stakeholder engagement, as decision-makers' attitudes toward public involvement play a significant role (Li et al., 2015). Although they are important in all stages, non-profits and voluntary organisations are of special importance in this stage. These organisations have a record of phenomenal success in making the public aware of different issues affecting their lives negatively (Gauri and Galef, 2005). They can reach poor, marginalized, and vulnerable people in society and help bridge power differences between stakeholders. These organisations also enable 'bottom-up' approaches to feature in decision making rather than the 'top-down' approaches favoured in Bangladesh (see, for example, Tanima et al., 2021)[5].

The second stage should produce and communicate the solution. With the enhanced understanding of the problem from the first stage, authorities are now better prepared to engage relevant experts to develop a feasible and sustainable solution. The design team must frequently communicate with the stakeholders, and authorities run different promotional campaigns at the design stage. This will facilitate continuous and dialogic stakeholder engagement, as people tend to forget a message that is not brought to their attention repeatedly (Schmidt and Eisend, 2015). During this stage, the Ministry of Religious Affairs and/or Ministry of Health in collaboration with the City Corporations can run different awareness programs to educate people on the importance of cleanliness from health and religious perspectives. It is important to acknowledge the differences between Islamic worldviews and how they need to contribute to the way that accountability mechanisms are implemented in Bangladesh. These dialogic approaches enable values and perspectives to be given greater visibility and debated. While authorities should outline the law enforcement actions anti-social behaviours, there also needs to be mechanisms that provide consequences for public officials to be held accountable for their decisions.

In the third stage, authorities introduce and improve the solution developed in the second stage. Along with execution, a rigorous feedback collection mechanism is in operation at this stage. The collected feedback will measure performance and indicate possible improvements to the solution. Appropriate consequences for all stakeholders, which is a necessary step in accountability, also needs to be visible (Bovens, 2010). This stage will indicate the success or failure of the previous stages. The implementation process must create opportunities for new stakeholders to become engaged while also keeping the already engaged stakeholders active. Different socio-cultural elements such as an award, promotion rallies, and engagement of television or film personalities can be arranged to keep the issue relevant, and stakeholders engaged.

Dialogic and 'horizontal' engagement with stakeholders, which is sensitive to the unique socio-cultural and religious norms of the Bangladeshi context, must be at the core of the solution to

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[5] As noted earlier, there is a tendency to rely on public officials or government to solve issues in Bangladesh. However, these approaches have failed or been very limited as shown in this example. NPG and dialogic approaches encourage bottom-up engagement that could lead to far more sensitised and effective solutions to public issues.

the anti-urination problem. It is also important to acknowledge that this research discusses NPG and dialogic approaches as potential solutions to the public urination nuisance, however it does not empirically test this assertion. NPG is not a panacea (Dahl and Soss, 2014) and suffers from its own failings, including that it glosses over power dynamics and structural inequalities. Therefore, a more critical dialogic approach was suggested as means to encourage pluralism and a fundamental reconfiguration of stakeholder engagement and power structures (Kuruppu et al., 2022, p. see, for example,). However, dialogic approaches are challenging to implement (Tanima et al., 2021; Tregidga and Milne, 2020) despite mapping out a multi-stage approach for more engaged citizen decision making in this paper. Inherent power differences, especially between elected and public officials and citizens, may render dialogic approaches impossible or hollow. Meaningful consequences also need to be devised for actors such as public officials to take stakeholder engagement and dialogic processes seriously.

As a result, further research is needed to explore if and how shifts are taking place away from vertical NPM to horizontal NPG approaches. Research is needed to better understand the enablers and barriers to such stakeholder engagement in Bangladesh (and other developing countries), particularly from public authorities and elected officials, and from other stakeholders such as women, children, and religious minorities. Such research can expand and enrich the frameworks that are presented in Figure 2 and Table 6. Better defining 'meaningful consequences' should be the focus of new research to enhance accountability strategies, and hold those with power to account (Tanima et al., 2021). Action research allows richer insights to be drawn on what factors/elements enable or constrain the success of social interventions, and therefore how to strengthen public accountability in developing country contexts through participatory and/or critical dialogic processes.

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