

Navigating Strategic Purchasing for Equitable Urban Primary Healthcare in Bangladesh

FACILITATORS AND BARRIERS IN THE CURRENT ARRANGEMENTS

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Background

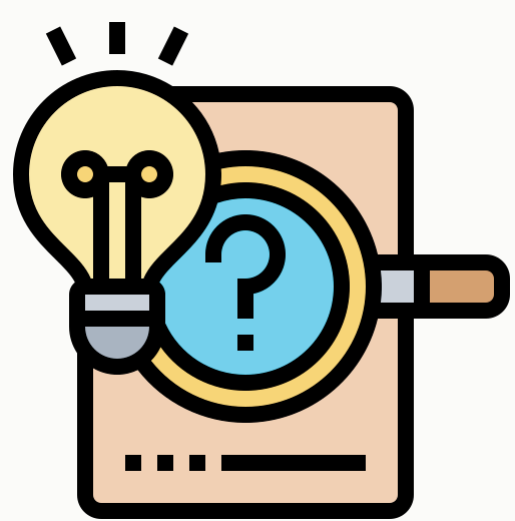
With Bangladesh's growing urban population, exacerbated by climate migration, cities are struggling to provide equitable primary health care to all. Climate change has caused extended heatwaves and severe outbreaks of vector-borne diseases like dengue. City authorities must be capable of designing systems to meet these health needs. Strategic purchasing offers an opportunity for city authorities to direct resources to external providers who can address these emerging health challenges. This study explores the feasibility and challenges of implementing strategic purchasing in Bangladesh's urban primary health care (UPHC) system.

- **Research Design:** Qualitative Study
- **Study Site:** Dhaka North & South City Corporations
- **Data Collection Duration:** May 2023 to January 2024
- **Data Collection Tool:** Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

- **Sampling:** 21 Respondents selected through purposive sampling
- **Participant Type:** central-level policymakers from government ministries, development partners, and NGO stakeholders
- **Analysis Software:** NVivo 12



Methods



Findings

Bangladesh's UPHC, though legally under local government, suffers from ineffective stewardship and capacity constraints. Local government bodies (LGB) struggle with capacity issues and power dynamics with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW). Responsibility conflicts and resource limitations—both human and budgetary—hinder city corporations and municipalities from sustaining health services independently. Moreover, overburdened health officers, and underutilized healthcare facilities, the systemic reliance on foreign aid over domestic funding, combined with low health spending, reflects a lack of intention and prioritization. The ongoing power struggle between these entities hinders effective PHC provision in urban areas. Coordinated leadership and collaboration between the two ministries are needed to strengthen UPHC service delivery.

Local Government's Stewardship Challenges



Public-Private Partnership v/s Strategic Purchasing



Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) in Bangladesh's healthcare sector serve as the government's primary method for procuring services, exemplified by projects like the Urban Primary Health Care Services Delivery Project (UPHCSDP). However, these partnerships face significant operational challenges, including delayed government payments and inadequate monitoring, which disrupt service delivery and undermine their effectiveness. Conversely, the concept of strategic purchasing is emerging but lacks clear definition and recognition within existing policies, leading to confusion with traditional procurement practices. To enhance healthcare service delivery, reforms in public procurement regulations and better coordination between public and private sectors are essential for realizing the full potential of both PPPs and strategic purchasing.



Feasibility of Strategic Purchasing

The implementation of a strategic purchasing model for primary healthcare faces significant challenges, particularly in urban areas where the roles of local governments and MoHFW need clearer definition. Concerns include the local government's capacity to manage resources effectively and the need for legal amendments to current procurement rules to facilitate strategic purchasing. Additionally, while engaging the private sector is essential for enhancing service delivery, profitability concerns may deter investment in UPHC. Policymakers must assess sustainability and cost-effectiveness, ensuring equitable access while addressing potential gaps in infrastructure and service quality.

Strategic Purchasing Essentials



- **Build Dedicated Purchasing Bodies:** Establish expert-led bodies with the capacity to negotiate, monitor, and manage purchasing agreements, particularly when engaging with private providers.
- **Enhance Policy and Regulation:** Amend existing procurement laws to include clear guidelines for strategic purchasing in health services, ensuring accountability and transparency.
- **Incentivize Private Sector Involvement:** Encourage private providers to invest in urban healthcare by offering incentives, ensuring quality services without compromising equity or affordability.



Conclusion

Strategic purchasing holds potential for improving UPHC delivery, substantial efforts are needed to build necessary infrastructure, capacity, and legal frameworks. This includes defining clear roles for MoHFW and LGBs, amending procurement policies, and developing a dedicated purchasing body. The transition should be gradual, supported by technical assistance and continuous policy and system adaptations.