

Research Paper

Redefining the roles and jurisdictions of civic bodies to provide efficient public service delivery: A case of Bengaluru Metropolitan region

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Abstract

The Bengaluru Metropolitan Region, encompassing approximately 8,005 sq. km, is India's second-largest metropolitan area and fifth-largest by population. Rapid urban expansion has led to the creation of multiple civic agencies instead of consolidating responsibilities under the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP), the primary governing body. This fragmentation includes various agencies such as the Bangalore Metropolitan Region Development Authority (BMRDA) and the Bangalore Development Authority (BDA), which complicates oversight and accountability, resulting in inefficiencies in public service delivery. The BBMP's constrained political representation along with the one-year term of the Mayor and its omission of a local Ombudsman for the city's issues creates more problems for the effective planning and governance of the city. The region grapples with severe issues such as insufficient urban planners, poor staff filling rates, and low public involvement in management. This paper explores the existing governance structure of Bengaluru in terms of public service delivery, followed by the review of the Greater Bengaluru Governance Bill, 2024. The study evaluates the pros and cons of the Bill and suggests how the weaknesses can be minimized, and ends with possibilities on further understanding of urban governance.

Keywords

Metropolitan region, public service delivery, civic bodies, fragmentation, accountability, redefine, efficiency

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

The demand for efficient public service delivery has become more important than ever, given the dynamic urban environment. Also, the civic bodies face exponential pressure to adapt their functions and structures to support the growing population and expanding urban areas. This paper focuses on the Bengaluru Metropolitan Region (BMR), which exemplifies the challenges and opportunities associated with public service delivery systems. Due to the diversity and complexity of its socio-economic landscape, BMR serves as a perfect case study for rethinking the roles and jurisdictions of the institutions. The present-day governance structure of the BMR has a complex interaction of multiple civic agencies that result in overlapping jurisdictions and inefficiency. The city is mainly governed by the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP), its municipal corporation. It takes care of urban planning and infrastructure development within the city limits but the jurisdiction is limited to the core urban areas, excluding surrounding municipalities. In collaboration with the BBMP are several smaller municipalities and local bodies, such as the Bengaluru Development Authority (BDA) and the Karnataka Urban Infrastructure Development and Finance Corporation (KUIDFC). Alongside these, there is an array of other agencies involved in multiple facets of urban development such as land planning, housing, and infrastructural projects. The Karnataka Government is also an essential partner with BMR, owing to the policies and urban development projects that they usually sponsor. A top-down approach is followed by them which in many cases does not address

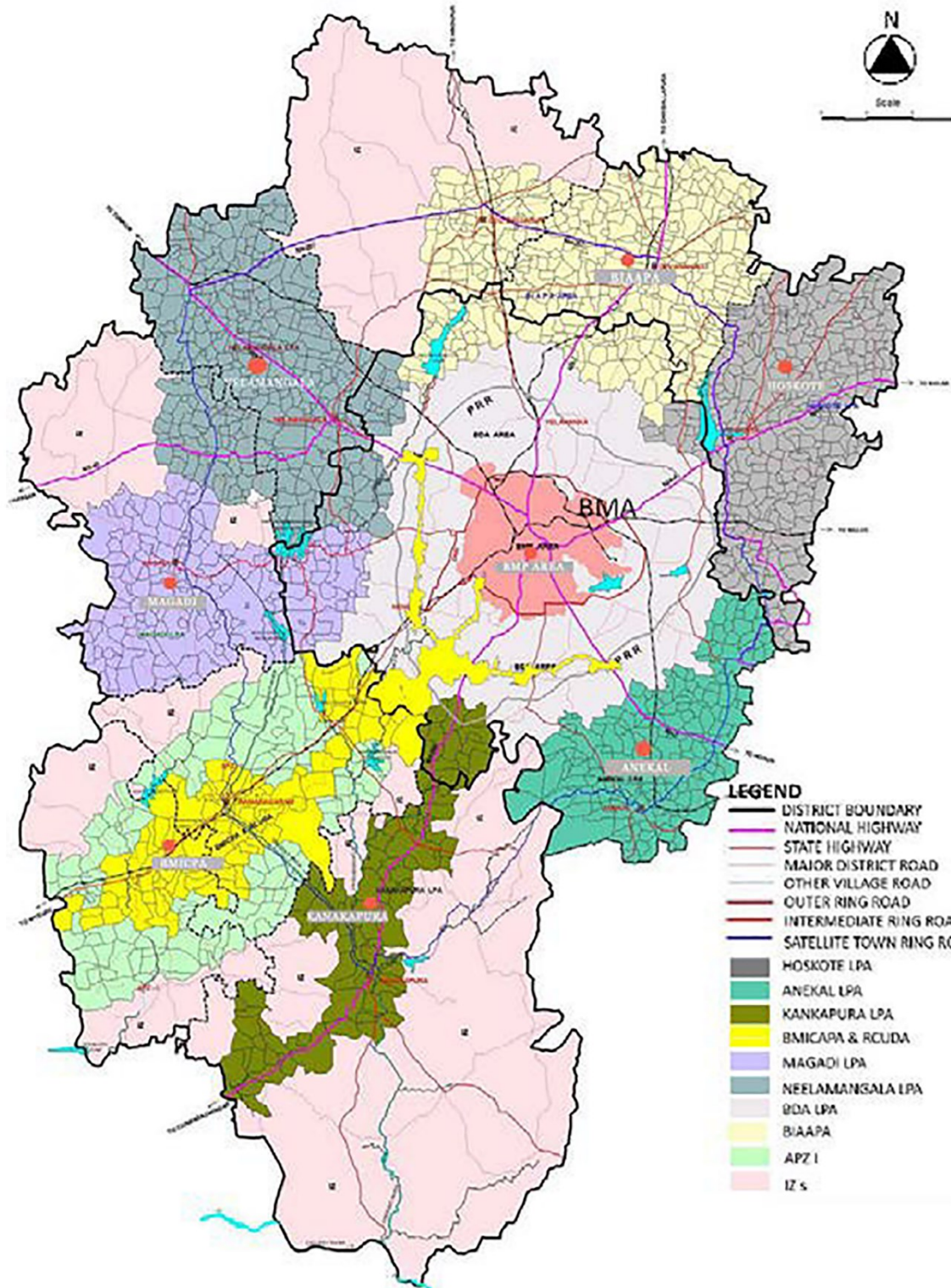


Figure 1 Bengaluru Metropolitan Region (Source: Revised Master Plan for Bengaluru - 2031(Draft): Volume-3)

the local needs of the people. The presence of multiple layers of governance, including state and local authorities, complicates accountability and citizen engagement. Over the years the emergence of numerous stakeholder agencies including private developers, NGOs, and citizen groups has added another perspective to the governance scene.



Figure 2 Planning Authorities in BMRDA (Source: Revised Master Plan for Bengaluru - 2031(Draft): Volume-3

Though they enhance service delivery through innovation and community participation their integration into the existing governance framework remains uncertain. The roles of these agencies need to be delineated and the coordination enhancement among the various agencies is important for improving the structure and function of these agencies. Alongside these, there is an array of other agencies involved in multiple facets of urban development such as land planning, housing, and infrastructural projects. The Karnataka Government is also an essential partner with BMR, owing to the policies and urban development projects that they usually sponsor. To address all the aforementioned problems, a legislative proposal - GBGB or The Greater Bengaluru Governance Bill - has been put forth. The goal of this research is to gather information about the City Bodies' current function in the BMR, resolve the issue of role duplication by providing examples and analyze the GBB 2024 for core concepts. Additionally, the strong points and flaws of the bill will be discussed. Therefore, this

paper advocates that reconstructing the governance frameworks through a centralized and plan-oriented approach will better the structure of the public service delivery systems within the BMR and how GBGB is a constructive approach to the aforementioned.

2. Current Governance Structure

As discussed before the existing governance framework of the BMR is characterized by institutional overlap and fragmented responsibilities which often lead to inefficiency and service gaps. Some of the issues that highlight the limitations of current governance structures are traffic congestion, inadequate waste management, and insufficient access to public amenities. Consequently, rapid technological advancements, and increase in stakeholder participation initiatives call for a reassessment of how these civic agencies operate, collaborate and deliver services. BBMP being the parliament of Bengaluru has major discontent towards its bureaucracy as there are no citizens elected to serve as executives over the BBMP to provide representation or accountability. Additional activities such as urban planning, land use regulation and slum improvement are typically handled by the elected city government. The agenda for Bengaluru Infrastructure and Development Task Force has significant influence over city administration. There are no locally elected representatives for consultations in the panels of bodies like BESCO or BWSSB. Additionally, there is a duplication of tasks among multiple organs. For example, the BBMP, the KSCB, and the BDA all share

responsibility for slum improvement, while the PWD constructs houses for economically weaker sections (EWS). Moreover, the maintenance of various roads and infrastructure projects is the responsibility of the BBMP, BDA, and PWD. The geographical areas that these organizations govern differ, and their sub-units do not align geographically. Due to their distinct jurisdictions, it is challenging to coordinate civic services. Urban residents are uncertain about the various civic agencies and their corresponding functions.

A few of the functional overlaps that are seen in the governance structure are discussed below. The Bengaluru Development Authority (BDA) is responsible for various urban development tasks. It implements land use zoning, regulates land use, and plans for urban areas, including identifying and providing sites for development. (*Mathew Prasad Idiculla MP, 2010*) This function is originally under the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) which is also partially carried out by BMRDA and ABIDe. The BMRDA is responsible for the urban planning and development activities of land in the larger BMR, which is a Municipal Corporation function currently fulfilled by BDA in the city limits. The Karnataka Urban Infrastructure Development and Finance Corporation financially support the urban institutional bodies in planning and developing infrastructure. Being a Municipal corporation function, similar tasks are also carried out by ABIDe. The Karnataka State Co-operative Bank (KSCB), Bangalore Development Authority (BDA), and Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) are all responsible for the rehabilitation of designated slum areas. They oversee the development and upkeep of these areas. The Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) is tasked with the distribution of clean water, collection, and disposal of sewage, as well as treating wastewater to ensure a safe water source for the public. Certain functions, such as wastewater disposal, are also managed by the BBMP. BMTC oversees the bus-based public transportation system of the city. BESCO manages the city's electricity distribution. Water supply, power, and transportation services are controlled by parastatals such as BWSSB, BESCO, and BMTC rather than the city municipal corporation. (*Mathew Prasad Idiculla MP, 2010*)

3. Key Challenges in Public Service Delivery Systems

The primary difficulty facing civic agencies is the absence of locally elected representatives for consultations in their specific domains, as well as a lack of accountability to the BBMP or the populace. (*Janaagraha 2024*) They are only answerable to the state government, making it a complicated affair. According to the 12th Schedule of the Constitution, the functions executed by these civic bodies include urban planning, land use control, water supply management, and slum enhancement, among others, etc. are supposed to be performed by the elected urban local body. Additionally, the ABIDe Task Force, while not a statutory entity with operational authority, wields significant influence inside the municipal government. Bodies like BESCO or BSSWB do not have any locally elected representatives for citizen interactions or consultations. Various agencies are tasked with analogous responsibilities; for instance, the BBMP, KSCB, and BDA are all engaged in slum enhancement, while the Public Works Department (PWD) constructs housing for economically weaker sections (EWS). (*Babu MD, 2016*) Similarly, the BBMP, BDA, and PWD are responsible for the maintenance of different roads and for different infrastructure projects.

However, the geographical extents which these bodies administer are different and the various sub-units of these bodies have also no geographical congruence. With each agency having a different jurisdiction, coordinating the different civic services is difficult. (*Idiculla M 2015*) The duplication in terms of functional structure and services handled leads to a wastage of resources. This also leads to inconsistent quality of service due to the multiplicity of agencies, consequently leading to a lack of accountability. The urban area of Bengaluru has a lot of ongoing projects in various sectors whose implementation is hindered due to the disturbed coordination leading to roadblocks in these projects that require cross-sectoral collaboration and communication. Continuous issues about service delivery have eventually lead to citizen apathy and distrust leading to reduced civic engagement and a lack of trust in public institutions. (*Janaagraha 2024*) The culmination of these factors results in urban residents being uncertain about the civic agency accountable for different services. Therefore, to achieve effective governance, it is imperative to

delineate the administrative scope and responsibilities of these agencies. However, for such reforms to be implemented, citizens must comprehend the operational framework of each civic agency to engage with them effectively. (*Janaagraha 2024*)

4. The Greater Bangalore Governance Bill, 2024

As a solution to the significant challenges in public services delivery that the urban area is facing the Greater Bengaluru Governance Bill, 2024 has been introduced. It marks a remarkable attempt to remodel the administrative framework of the BMR, addressing the long-standing issues of fragmented governance and inadequate service delivery in the city. Of the many things addressed in the bill, the most important that are relevant to this paper has been discussed below.

4.1 Decentralization and Participatory Governance

The new bill is motivated by the fragmentation of power and the construct of multi-tiered governance. It suggests the formation of not more than ten City Corporations in the Greater Bengaluru Area, each in charge of designated territories. The shift from the existing unitary authority of the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike is intended to make the governance of the people more efficient by allowing for better decision-making at a lower level. Moreover, the bill acts to enhance the role of ward committees as 'the building blocks' of urban governance. (*Source: Greater Bengaluru Governance Bill, 2024*)

4.2 Enhancing Responsibility in Governance

This plan establishes the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) to oversee and govern the development of the Greater Bengaluru Area, considering the multitude of civic institutions and their interrelations in Bengaluru. The GBA's power of consolidating and simplifying the political accountability of varied public officials within the GB jurisdiction is a major advancement aimed at minimizing red tape and increasing ease of access. (*Source: Greater Bengaluru Governance Bill, 2024*)

4.3 The Greater Bengaluru Governance Bill, 2024 – Strengths and Weaknesses

Implementing the steps specified in the Greater Bengaluru Governance Bill can aid the Bengaluru Metropolitan Region in addressing its urban difficulties. The legislation envisions a decentralized three-tier governance framework and the creation of the Greater Bengaluru Authority. The structure provides for enhanced community participation and increased political accountability. There is a potential for better resource allocation if the plan is implemented efficiently and integrated planning is aimed at by the establishment of GBA. If attention is paid during execution and followed through with there is considerable potential to address many of the grievances that the Greater Bengaluru Authority has been facing while also improving the quality of life around the city. The bill on its own however fails to retain decentralized governance as it shifts its focus on a participatory approach alongside accountability. However, the success depends on addressing concerns regarding the delineation of responsibilities, ensuring the autonomy of the GBA, empowering Ward Committees, and incorporating robust safeguards for land acquisition and heritage conservation. A comprehensive and inclusive approach, incorporating stakeholder feedback and addressing potential challenges, will be crucial in translating the Bill's vision into a reality that benefits the citizens of Bengaluru.

Even though drafted with the best interests in mind and the effort laudable, there are both strengths and weaknesses which require attention. Firstly, the favourable result of the proposed decentralized structure hinges on the clear demarcation of responsibilities and revenue sharing mechanisms between the GBA, city corporations and ward committees. While the approach does seem appealing, by not implementing a

framework, there exists the risk of breaching the divide of conflict of interest and jurisdiction overlap. Furthermore, the bill lacks stipulations revolving around the formation and election of the Greater Bengaluru Authority which could result in a politicized outcome. Ensuring that GBA's autonomy and impartiality through a transparent and inclusive selection process is crucial for its effectiveness. Thirdly, empowering the ward committees before addressing the issues of capacity and financial autonomy might limit their ability to function effectively. The provision of adequate training, resources, and decision-making power to these committees for their meaningful participation in local governance. There is a lack of political representation as the Mayor has not been re-elected in the last 9 years. One of the major concerns with respect to fragmentation is the economic inequalities due to divisions into smaller corporations. From times immemorial the most difficult thing about a bill, that is meant to create a revolutionary impact, is the efficient implementation of the same. (*Janaagraha 2024*)

5. Proposals

5.1 Potential proposals to overcome weaknesses of the GBGB, 2024

Based on expert opinions the weaknesses of Greater Bangalore Governance Bill, 2024 have been discussed above. Therefore, potential tools/ideas that can address the shortcomings of the bill are discussed below. The first of such recommendations is the improvement of political representation because it will also enhance democracy and the voice of the people in the relevant process. Second, the terms of governance should be clearly specified as this will avoid conflicts of interest and indicate to the users what organization is responsible for the service. Third, measures for ensuring accountability should be recommended to enhance public confidence to ensure that civil society organizations are held accountable. Given the wide disparity, it is important to address economic inequality. To promote balanced growth across the metropolitan region there should be policies targeted to help mitigate disparities between the wealthier and underdeveloped areas. Since the stakeholders are the direct beneficiaries or loss bearers engaging them can lead to more informed decision-making and foster a sense of ownership among citizens regarding the governance structure. Ultimately, to evaluate the functionality and effectiveness of these measures, it is necessary to proceed with the implementation of pilot programs. Pilot programs help in mitigating any risks that may arise due to the incorporation of new and untested ideas at a large scale by allowing the solution to be adjusted based on real world experience.

5.2 Proposals to redefine hierarchy of jurisdictions

Redefining the jurisdictions and roles of a Metropolitan Region is a complex task, but useful in the disaggregation of the jurisdiction and functional domain of a Metropolitan Region, however, it is a prerequisite for Bangalore being more efficient and more transparent. It is paramount to first target metropolitan region agencies with overlapping functions, given the large number of these institutions and then amalgamate them, to limit the amount of confusion and improve the delivery of services. There shouldn't be a great deal of ambiguity and ambiguity in undertaking the functions of each agency (*Weerakkody et al., 2021*) It helps people understand the institutions and their roles. The Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike should be empowered as the primary civic body, with greater autonomy and resources. (*Are citizens in Bangalore giving up because of poor governance? _IDR, 2023*) As a result, there is increased decentralization and subsequent responsibility for decision making. Allocate distinct tasks for service provision to the ward committees and enable citizen engagement and service provision responsiveness. (Legislature committee bats for a bigger role for MLAs in city administration, 2018). There is no doubt that in this time of technological innovations we must develop online tools that will be easy to use and give up to date information about budgets, projects and indicators of services. (*Mishra & Das, 2022*) It empowering citizens and encouraging them to ensure they obtain progress within their respective aims and hold the relevant agencies responsible. Strong and adequate systems need to be set up that enable citizens to file complaints and then track how the complaints are dealt with. (*Pareek & Sole, 2020*) Speed and clarity are of essence here. As already discussed Involve citizens in the planning and budgeting processes through consultations, surveys, and public forums. (*When Public Affairs Centre invited me to write a memorial for Dr.*

Samuel Paul, I took the..., 2019) This ensures that services align with actual needs and priorities. A strong partner with NGOs and resident welfare associations will use their local context knowledge and networks to achieve efficacy in the means of providing the services (*Chandran & Narayanan, 2016*). Additionally, rebuilding the capacity is tremendously essential, hence, investing in training for civic officials in order to build their technical and managerial skills better is paramount, Lastly, implementation of systems that reward efficiency and innovation in service delivery, motivates agencies to continuously improve.

6. Way Forward

The post-implementation of proposals/projects and the regular feedback analysis is the most crucial step which is not followed effectively, that leads to the failure of a project in most cases. The way forward in this research mainly outlines this crucial assessment. Firstly, it is critical to evaluate how the decentralization of governance into multiple municipal corporations affects service delivery efficiency and responsiveness. The focus area for the same should be the measurement of changes in citizen satisfaction, service response times, and resource allocation before and after the bill's implementation. The next stage is to analyze the level of inter-agency integration of the Greater Bangalore Authority GBA and the effect of such integration on the coordination of the service delivery. In the course of this event, the focus should also be taken on inter-agency interaction evaluation, service provision efficiency, and minimization of institutional delays. Finally, the effectiveness of the ward committees and citizen engagement initiatives in improving public service delivery has to be assessed. Analyzing the levels of citizen participation, the effectiveness of the feedback mechanisms, and how these two factors influence decision-making processes at the local level, is the focus area.

7. Conclusion

The study has delved into detail about the existing urban level governance structure and their functioning system in the Bengaluru Metropolitan Region. The existing structure and the key challenges of this structure have been discussed in detail. As a solution to this the Greater Bengaluru Governance Bill, 2024 was introduced. The core ideas of the bill as well its strengths and weaknesses have been discussed in this paper. Proposals that can overcome the weaknesses and those that can direct the redefinition of the hierarchy of urban institutions have been discussed. The paper concludes with the way forward i.e., the measures to be followed to pursue efficient public service delivery and stakeholder participation for the phase of hypothetical implementation of these proposals. This piece of literature will help researchers, scholars, etc. understand in detail the background, the present situation, the government solutions, and potential ways to move forward and work in the area of studying public service systems of the Bengaluru Metropolitan Region.

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