Participants’ Responses to Outreach Meetings on Compact Townships (CTs)

(Summary of the meetings on Compact Townships held during February through December, 2014).

The Compact Township Foundation (CTF), Dhaka organized Ten meetings at different places of Bangladesh during 2014. The objective of the meetings was to initiate interactive and participatory meetings with the people at large in order to highlight the concept of a compact township and to stress the great urgency of its implementation to provide a shield to the people of Bangladesh, from many disastrous consequences, such as the steady loss of agricultural land.

**2.** It was observed during the course of the meetings, that after CTF’s introduction of the subject, the participants showed a high awareness that the continuing loss of agricultural land boded ill for their future. While there has been no disagreement regarding the disasters that a steady loss of agricultural land would have in store no land for all Bangladeshis, there have been many concerns and ideas how the loss of agricultural land could best be arrested. The concept of Compact Township appears to many people to be a welcome device that would alleviate the deleterious effect of land loss; yet the design, structure and abov all the legal aspects of implementing such a township need to be discussed at length. It seems that the compact township in general is a feel-good device but its implementation poses a thousand questions for the people who participated in the outreach meetings.

**3.** The following paragraphs provide a brief summary of the discussions that took place in ten places of Bangladesh. Lalpure, Natore, Chehelgazi, Dinajpur, Nasirnagar, Brahmanbaria, Chowmohoni, Noakhali, Monohordi, Narsingdi, Nangalkot, Comilla, Raygonj, Sirajgonj, Dumuria, Khulna, Kalkini, Madaripur, Tarakanda, Mymensingh and the summary has been divided under two sub-heads: a) the concept of Compact Township and b) the implementation of Compact Township.

**4.** An attempt has been made to represent every distinct query that was raised. To preserve the sense of the discussions, when some points were repeatedly raised, either in the same meeting or over several meetings, the point has also been repeated, albeit as close to the language of the participants as possible.

**QUERIES OF PARTICIPANTS ON THE CONCEPT OF A COMPACT TOWNSHIP**

1. Government statistics put the loss of agricultural land at, or more than, 1 percent per year.
2. There are many reasons for disappearance of agricultural land. However, the main reason appears to be an increased need of land for dwellings in rural areas and that too is an unplanned way. The increased need or housing arises from the rise in population which is expected to reach 28 crores in 2050.
3. Construction of roads and culverts, industries, economic zones [and accommodation for offices of various tiers of local government] takes away land currently in use for agricultural purposes. Moreover land taken away from the agricultural sector has no proper planning. [Adding to the problem is the loss of agricultural land and rural dwellings each year due to river erosion].
4. In the coastal area of Bangladesh, branches of embankments [and man made conversion of land for prawn culture results is shrinkage of land for paddy and horticulture.
5. The land scarcity of Bangladesh has been increasing everyday due to unplanned urbanization. There would not be any cultivate land in the next 60 to 70 years if the cyrrent rate of destruction of agricultural land continues unabated.
6. A pragmatic way of arresting the staggering loss of agricultural land each year for construction of houses is to adopt the vehicle of compact township (CT).
7. A CT is a place where about 20 thousand people can live and the township can be based on agriculture, farming fishing and other livelihoods.
8. A crude calculation suggests that by the end of 2050, Bangladesh can have about 7500 compact townships across the whole country.
9. It is high time for the people of Bangladesh to decide whether they should take steps to save their land or move with the current unplanned urbanization, which means an unplanned future.
10. At some places, people confessed that they did not know what the CT was about. At present, it seems to be a day-dream. But the people of Bangladsh should look forward and comprehend the consequences of everyone aspiring to construct and own his or her independent dwelling.
11. The concept of CT is undoubtadly a very good and a noble initiative which needs to be publicized widely among the people, including schools and colleges, particularly in rural areas.

1. While the amount of agricultural land has been declining in the country, even the present agricultural and horticultural practices in many places have been facing problems due to air pollution originating from factories and brick klins.
2. Landless people who have been living in ‘Khas’ land wherever possible welcome the concept of a CT because ‘Khas’ land might be included in the CTs.
3. Some village folks who have had the experience of working abroad (Dubai, Malasia, Kuwait, South Korea and Saudi Arabia) point out that houses cannot be constructed beyond designated areas in those countries and that too requires permission of the proper authorities the countries in question. In South Korea, about 33 percent of the rural people live in CT-like facilities. The Bangladesh government should immedaitely make a law that no one in rural and semi-rural areas can construct dwellings without the designated plan and permission of the government.
4. The concept of CT should be disseminated to as many people as possible because it is for the long-term welfare of the people. The urgency and the underlying rationale of the concept are easily comprehended by the people participating in outreach-meetings.
5. Rich people may not be willing to live in a CT.
6. The CTs may be built at Noakhali’s Subarna Char where there is a large tract of land awaiting development.
7. People feel that a CT will have many positive aspects helping drainage, sanitation, less air-pollution and adequate flood protection
8. The concept of CT has a compulsion behind its founding in Bangladesh. The need of a CT will itself facilitate its adoption by the rural population of Bangladesh. But it should be made apparent by undertaking some pioneer projects.
9. The government should be able to comprehand that founding CTs will facilitiate good governance in the country.
10. The disappearance of agricultural land might take place at an even higher rate than the CTF has estimated. Comparing the recent past when there had been ponds, swamps, marshy-land, water bodies all around in the rural areas, the present sight is one of bill-boards in the name of housing societies even in remote villages along with earth-fillings here and there. These changes in land use would make one comprehend that here is an urgent problem to save the people from an impending danger of food security as well as adverse impact of climate change.
11. The concept of a CT is a national concern and the promotion of the concept should be undertaken by the government itself.
12. If all houses are situated in one area of a village this would not only save land for agricultural use, tis would also make easier and cost effective provision of electricity, water supply and natural gas for cooking purposes. Bio-gas and solar system may be conveniently used in a CT.
13. The prevalent socio-economic and demographic realities of Bangladesh will gradually make the CT a necessity. In rural areas, besides constructing new houses in agricultural plots, people have also been making mosques and madrashas without any proper plan. Rural people in Bangladesh in many places engage in competition to build family mosques, the money received from wage earners remittances fuels such competition.
14. In addition to the pressure to build new dwellings on agricultural land, the coastal areas of Bangladesh are also prone to occasional natural disasters leading to salinity. In the rocess, agricultural land losses its fertility.
15. A farmer, who received an award from the President of the country, pointed out that the government does not have much land of its own to allocate for CTs. On the othe hand, it would be difficult for the poor and landless to pay for land in order to be eligible to reside in a CT.
16. People living in Rural areas of Bangladesh have adopted a particular cultural pattern of habitation for hundreds of years. Changing this habitation pattern could be difficult unless they are forced to do so.
17. On the other hand, some people commented that the Bangladeshi people are blessed with an amazing power of adaptability to new ideas. People by themselves may adopt and accept the positive aspects of a new pattern of habitation. If the idea of a CT can be appreciated by rural people because of CT’s economy and comfort, the future form of rural habitation in Bangladesh is bound to change. The economic compulsion propelling a CT to get started seems to be a great motivating factor for it to take gradual root in rural areas.

**QUERIES ABOUT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF COMPACT TOWNSHIPS**

1. It was pointed out by a participant that the engineering solution of building multistoried settlements in the alluvial land of rural Bangladesh needs to be found out.
2. The name township does not necessarily imply that people of villages will adopt an urban lifestyle. There could be a possibility of constructing multistoried buildings using local materials. Different construction methods might be viable for different rural areas without compromising rural lifestyle. The central purpose is to abandon the unplanned construction of dwellings and save agricultural land.
3. A question was raised how people of different economic strata of the same village can live in the same housing complex. People might not be willing to give away their land without ‘adequate’ economic compensation to be provided by the government.
4. Before the people get convinced about the utility of a CT, it might have to be built in some places on a pilot basis.
5. A question was raised about who would take the initiative to implement the concept of CTs. Who would provide financing to build a CT?
6. It was asked by a participant whether it would be viable to live in a two or three storied building and how farmers would process their agricultural output in a CT?
7. Rural households possess different amount of land. When these households opt for a CT how will the distribution of land for a CT be handled?
8. It was discussed in an outreach meeting that the government will adopt a land use policy. However, in Bangladesh a new law or act is not enough. The consensus of the people about the implementation of a project, as is a CT, is a foremost necessary element.
9. Living together in a CT like agglomerate should come out from people’s own conviction and these should be a campaign based on the reality of the current demographic situation to convince the people.
10. A participant commented that rural people are very sensitive about their ancestral grave-yard. Some way must be found in a CT to live up to such sensitiveness of the people.
11. It was opined in a meeting that the concept of a CT might be implemented if the people could demonstrate their patriotism. It is a commitment about the future generation, people and the viability of the country itself.
12. The idea of a CT should be incorporated in the government plan.
13. If the people are to be urged to move to a CT, education, health and other facilities within the CT should be planned ahead.
14. The concern regarding the landless people to be accommodated in a CT seems to be a problem that needs to be addressed.
15. In order to make for gradually address the problem of implementation, CTF may make members around the country in exchange of giving forms at a token price.
16. A question was asked regarding the attitude of law makers towards the concept of a CT and it was argued that the government should read the pulse of the people. Without the assistance of the government, CTs might not be implemented.
17. NGOs may be involved in implementing the CTs
18. It was apprehended in several outreach meetings that rich people either will not allow the poor to be accommodated. Those who have money would try to uphold their status.
19. A question was raised about where the land for a CT would come from and there should be a study about what should be the structure of an ideal CT that the people of each particular place would like to have
20. The expatriate may contribute to implementing the CT because they might be familiar with the concept of agglomeration in the country they have been workings.
21. How will the CT be implemented, on a cooperative basis or by way of initiative taken by the government? It would be accepted if the government takes the initiative.
22. If a CT is founded in an effective way, people will not feel the urge to move into towns and cities. If CTs are implemented in rural areas, the pressure of population on bigger towns and cities will gradually decline. People abhor living in the slums of big cities. But they migrate to cities under compulsion.
23. A question was raised about who would finance the implementation of a CT, plots or plots of land would e sold in a CT? A CT may get started with 40-50 bighas of land.
24. For implementing CTs, there is a need for having organizers and activists working for CTs implementation.
25. What will be the air and oxygen conditions in a CT? What will e the forest cover? Has the CTF done research about these and other related issues? Environmental issues related to a CT should be given a due consideration.
26. The implementation of CTs is not going to be an easy task. However, where there is a problem there should be a way out. It might take a long time to implement a CT.
27. In the ‘Haor areas people live in a CT like arrangemnt due to lack of open space. It might be better to start implementing a CT from a ‘Haor’ area.
28. For whom will a CT save land? Farmers do not want their children to remain farmers. They want decent jobs for their children.
29. The topic is very timely and important. But in order to grasp the issue, people need to be highly educated.
30. Some CT should be built as a model to convince the people about the utility of a CT. CTF should first demonstrate the concept by making some CTs happen.
31. CTF may make district level committees. The slate machine may be utilized. People’s participation is of course the foremost requirement.
32. The government initiative is required for policy planning.
33. Public-Private Partnership may be thought for implementing of a CT.
34. The concept of CTs should be considered as a political agenda.

**Source:** Minutes of CTF’s outreach Meetings held in 2014

**Upazila District** **Meeting date**

1. Lalpur Natore 20-12-2014
2. Chehelgazi Dinajpur Sadar 30-11-2014
3. Nasirnagar Brahmanbaria 21-11-2014
4. Chowmohoni

Begumgonj Noakhali 17-10-2014

1. Monorhardi Narsingdi 19-09-2014
2. Nangalkot Comilla 29-08-2014
3. Raygonj Sirajganj 20-06-2014
4. Kalkini Madaripur 22-05-2014
5. Tarakanda Mymensingh 17-04-2014
6. Chaknagar

Dumuria Khulna 22-02-2014