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Research Paper

People's Satisfaction on the Local Service Government: A Study on the Union Parishads under Kushtia District

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Abstract

This study investigated the people's satisfaction on the local service government keeping lights on the active participation and effective leadership in Union Parishads (UP) under Kushtia district. Active participation and effective leadership are two accepted substantial objects of a well-functioning local government. Without these two ingredients, governance of local government intuitions cannot be satisfied. An emerging South Asian economic country, Bangladesh has already achieved some exemplary developments in many fields, and it is still attempting to establish a strong and vibrant local government by ensuring active participation and effective leadership. In Bangladesh, the functions of the local government are not much people oriented. With a study on UPs, the lowest tier of rural local government, this paper has illustrated the actual performances performed by the UPs keeping a relationship with people's satisfaction in the local government in Bangladesh. Major findings of this study are that a significant number of elected members does not have minimum knowledge about the laws and they do not have the proper understanding on management and their role, and most of the people are not satisfied with the services provided by the UPs.

Keywords

Local Service Government, UP Services**,** People's satisfaction, Causes of dissatisfaction

1. Introduction

In common parlance, local government can be defined to Lincoln's famous quote about democracy. According to Lincoln, "democracy is a government of the people, by the people and for the people". It is also seen as an organized social entity with a feeling of oneness. Today, local government becomes an integral part of the overall governing process of any country which means an intra-sovereign government unit within the sovereign state dealing mainly with local affairs,

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administered by local authorities and subordinate to the state government and also said to be a good device for diffusion of democracy at grass root level for inclusive development. It is one of the schemes of decentralization of power for delivering government service to the door of citizen for their wellbeing. People oriented local government means proper decentralization, e-governance, women's, institutional and individual empowerment, effective leadership and active participation of the elected representatives. Participation is a development approach, which admits the requirement to encompass different sections of the population in the planning and implementation of policies relating to their welfare. But it is factual that the real functions of UPs in Bangladesh is not much satisfied with the mass people due to low academic qualification, strong partisan feelings, poor communication and management skills with little concern on innovation, and moreover the unconsciousness of the root level people. It is needless to say that the local government of Bangladesh is the most important root among the government organizing terms of both power and independence. Everyone emphasizes on the importance of the people-oriented service from the UPs but it has not been materialized yet. Therefore, development of local government through reform is an acknowledged fact among concerned parties in Bangladesh. It is noted that a number of significant studies are available entitled to People's participation on local service delivery but any study on people's satisfaction on local service delivery has been found rarely.

2. Statement of the Problem

All over the country there has been a steady increase in the number of services to be implemented through several tires of the government to satisfy the mass people. Local government is one of the important tiers of the government. The government elect members and chairmen to provide services to the mass people. These elected persons are to work for the satisfaction of the mass people. But, the mass people in Bangladesh are not much satisfied with the services of these local government services. There are some reasons for mass people's dissatisfaction towards the local government services. A significant number of elected members does not have minimum knowledge about the laws and they do not have the proper understanding on management and their roles. For lack of knowledge and proper understanding, the elected members are enabled to line with mass people's satisfaction. And most of the people are not satisfied with the services provided by the Union Parishads. Thus, this paper is a guiding principle by providing some policy suggestions regarding the problem to be minimized so that mass people can be satisfied with Union Parishads' services.

3. Significance of the Study

This section discusses the significance of this study. Rural infrastructural development is one of the thrust areas of development in Bangladesh. But unlike the local government institutions (LGIs) in many Asian countries, such as Indonesian, Philippian and Indian Union Parishads, the oldest and the most important grassroots level LGI cannot play an effective role in Bangladesh (Adnivari 2010. P-7). There is a debate over the performances performed by the UPs properly for ensuring satisfaction of the local people. Previous studies have unfolded the functions, empowerment of women administrative culture and values at local levels. This study has been conducted to find out the effectiveness of Union Parishads' functions on rural development.

To find out the effectiveness of Union Parishads, firstly, this study has measured Union Parishads' role on rural development, and the satisfaction level of mass people on Union Parishads' services. This study is helpful for the government to ensure much satisfaction to the mass people, and the bureaucrats' academicians, civil society researchers for conducting further research or other movements.

4. Objectives

This study has been administered on the elected members of UP and the mass people, and it is a small endeavor to find out the current state of people's satisfaction on the local service delivery. Moreover, this study has attempted to explore the level of participation of mass people of UPs in decision making process, planning, monitoring and implementation.

5. Literature Review

This section discusses the background of the study. The history of local government in our country dates back to 1870 (Khan, 2012). It has a long history with a great legacy. Bangladesh was colonized for a long period of time by the British Empire and it continued with slightest lenient form under Pakistani rule. The tradition of local government system in Bangladesh has a long history in its present form. Its origin can be traced to the demand for self-government in British India (Khan, 2012). None of these foreign rulers made efforts to make local government institutions decentralized and delegate authority to the rural level (Huque, 1988). Local government in Bangladesh has traditionally been dependent on central government for most of its activities (Noor, 1996). By the time the British had to leave India (1947) both the tiers of local government (the union and the District Boards) had become fully elective (Hussain, 2003). After independence of Bangladesh in 1971, it was expected that the above conformation of local government institution would be corrected. Indeed, the constitution of Bangladesh (effective from 16th December 1972) provided in article 59 (GOB, 1990) that Local Governments in every administrative unit of the Republic would be entrusted to bodies composed of person in accordance with law. Everybody such as referred to in clause I shall subject to this constitution and in other law, perform with in the appropriate administrative unit, such functions shall be prescribed by Act of Parliament which may include functions relating to administration and work of public officers, maintenance of public order, the preparation and implementation of plans relating to public services and economic development In article 59 and 60 the constitution provided administrative power to the local government bodies so that it can impose taxes for local purpose to prepare their budgets and maintain funds (GOB, 1990). Today there are two layers of local government institutions exists in Bangladesh, one for rural areas and the other one for urban areas. The local government in rural areas consists of three tiers: Union Parishads, Upazilla Parishads, and Zilla Parishads respectively for village, Upazila and district level, while the urban local government comprises of Pourashavas for small city areas and Municipal Corporation for big cities. Meaningful Local Governments refer to a system of vibrant local democracy through elected local government at each administrative unit. These bodies must be autonomous, transparent, responsive, inclusive and accountable to the people (Zahur, 2011). Even the NGO could not take the initiatives or a firm stance to this end because the local government bodies see NGOs as their rival (Rahman, 2003). Therefore, Local Governmental development through reform is an acknowledged fact among concerned parties in Bangladesh. Today, it is attested that the effective strong local government system is one of the indispensable prerequisites for ensuring good governance. Again, economic progress and development require good governance with accountability delivery mechanisms as much as it needs sound and pragmatic development policies. Adequately empowered and accountable local government institutions are essential vehicles for ensuring formulation and implementation of such policies (Khan, 1999). Historically, Local government bodies have been facing strong control by the interference of central government in various issues which reflects the absence of autonomy. In addition to that local political intervention rose as an obstacle of local bodies to perform their activities. To conduct the research some books, Journals, e-books and other publications related to the research problem

have been viewed for the purpose of better understanding of the problem. Through reviewing the literature, the independent variables likely, scope, time, cost and the patron client relationship in Union Parishads' service delivery have been attempted to be justified. Definitional aspects, nature and scope of local Government, background of local Government in Bangladesh functions of local Government and relationship between elected members and mass people have also been justified.

5.1. Services provided by UP

The aim of this section is to identify the services provided by UPs. According to section 2 of RTI Act 2009, any agency constituted as per the obligation of constitution of Bangladesh (e.g. UP, UZP etc.) are the subjects to disclose and provide information (Section 6, RTI Act 2009 cited in Inter Cooperation, 2011). Similarly, The Local Government (Union Parishad) Act, 2009 clearly indicates that any citizen of Bangladesh has the right to get any information from the UP. Also in each UP, there should have a Citizen's Charter which publicly announces all the services and relevant information about the services including quality, cost, responsible persons and contact details. UP should held ward-level meeting and discuss local issues and tentative projects which should be incorporated in the budget during Open Budget Session to be held in each financial year. The approved budget should be displayed at the UP premise.

One of the main projects implemented through Union Parishad by the Government, is the Social Safety Net Program (SSNP). Government runs around 30 SSNPs, which include 100-day employment guarantee scheme in the lean season, 'Cash for Work', Food For Work (FFW), Vulnerable Group Development (VGD), Allowances for the widowed, deserted, and destitute, 'Fund for Rehabilitation of Acid Burnt Women and the Physically Handicapped, Disability allowance, 'Honorarium for Insolvent Freedom Fighters' scheme, Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF), Community Nutrition Program, 'Maternity Allowance Program for Poor Lactating Mothers', Housing Support, Housing Loan for Homeless, Maternal health Voucher Scheme, Primary Education Stipend Program (PESP), Female Secondary School Assistance Program, Educational stipend for students with disabilities' and 'Food for Education' (UNDP, 2009).

However, not all the programs are known to either local representatives or common people. Among all these programs most popular ones are VGD, VGF, 100 Days' Program, and Senior Citizen Allowance, Widow and Disable People. UP should pro-actively disclose the list of beneficiaries including timeline and the criteria of selection of these programs. In the study, People's access to information was assessed by: -

- looking at the availability of Citizen Charter at Union Parishad.
- examining the fact whether they followed the criteria for selecting beneficiaries for various social safety net program and how far people were aware of that.
- looking at the fact whether they had open budget sessions each year and how did they make people's participation in such event and to what extent people were aware of Open Budget session and Union Ward Meeting.
- exploring how frequent people come to UP to seek information.

6. Methodology

The study has adopted a mixed method approach to achieve the research objective. The study has used primary and secondary data. It has used interview schedule for primary data, located on elected members and mass people of Union Parishads, under Kushtia district in Bangladesh. The sample size was 39 (3 chairmen, 6 male elected members, 3 female elected members, and 27 mass people) and it covered up chairmen, members and mass people of the concerned Union Parishads under Kushtia district in Bangladesh. The qualitative data analysis method has been used to discover the challenges from those aspects. The independent variables of this study were time

management, cost management, scope management and patron client relationship. The dependent variable of the study was local service delivery which was indicated by local people's satisfaction for secondary data books, research articles, projects etc. Descriptive analysis has been used for qualitative data.

7. Findings and Discussion

The section presents and discusses the finding of the study, which has been generated through face to face interview, direct observation, focus group discussion and document review.

7.1. Preservation of Information and Publication

Each Union Parishad should preserve all the relevant information in the most appropriate manner and within a certain period of time. All the information should be properly indexed and catalogued so that whoever is in need of information, can have access to information. Also Section 6, of RTI Act, clearly indicates which kind of information each authority should publish in a report. On the other hand, section 7 describes about information disclosure. This study tried to reflect on how the visited UPs were functioning in terms of preserving information, disclosing information and publishing annual reports with all relevant information included in it.

7.1.1. Preservation of information

This study noticed that, apart from some basic information, there was not too much information available at the UPs. The reason was that, the files were not managed properly. Even, some of the regular activities, for example Word Meeting, Union Development Coordination Meeting, Scheme Assessment Meeting were either were not preserved properly. It was also found that, some of the very important information like list of projects taken at UP, list of beneficiaries under various Safety Net Programs, allotment received from LGSP etc. was not recorded properly and they failed to provide such information.

A Secretary of one UP, during an interview session said,

> "Yes, we do keep records as much as possible. But we do have constraints of resources. For instance, the building we have for UP, is a disputing one. Pourashava (Municipality) is claiming that this building falls within their territory and half of it, is under their control. We even do not have regular electricity and water supply in our UP. Now, when you are asking me to give you particular information, we do not have option but to say no to you. It is really difficult to keep all the records in this circumstance."

7.1.2. Publication of information

Each UP should publish periodic progress report, comprising all necessary information including meeting proceeding, project detail, allotment and grants, progress report of various schemes. Whereas, visited UPs, there was no evidence of such report published. What this study found that, though they did have some proceedings and other basic information recorded, the documents were not properly organized. Also, the practice of producing and publishing report was completely missing in the visited UPs.

Basically, there was no such report being published the time the researcher conducted the study. This study also found that, there was confusion about the role they should be playing and how particularly they could organize all the relevant information and make it published and accessible to people. The Entrepreneur during an interview session said,

> "People are unaware of the fact that to get access to information is a right. People, to some extent do not bother about these things, which make people who work in the UP casual about it. I am not saying that our UP is not keeping records but it should be more systematic and timelier. I'm afraid to say that we are not regular in updating information and specially, publishing such reports."

7.2. Information Disclosure

Information disclosure shall be mandatory with few exemptions. Every authority should disclose necessary information to the people, except those concerned with national security (ibid). In the study, the researcher found that there was not much information displayed in the visited UPs. There was even no such effort to make information displayed for people to understand, what was happening in UP. Also, it was found that UP representatives and UP staff members, responsible for delivering services, were completely unaware of information disclosure. Only, the information related to UP Structure and contact details were displayed in UP premises. Information about budget, various projects either run by UP's own funding or with the money they received from LGSP, standing committee, list of services were completely missing. There was a notice board with no circular or notice hanging on it. Basically, there was no proactive disclosure of information in UPs and what we understood while interviewing with them or through observation that, they never had such practices in their UPs. A member of one UP during an interview session expressed his feeing in such a way,

> 'Actually, you may not find anything special in terms of disclosure of various kinds of information but this is not something come out of ignorance. Yes, I do agree with the fact that to some extent we are not aware of what kind of information we should be disclosing, but we have our limitations. We neither have an office which we can claim ours completely nor the resources to back up such activities. To let people know what is happening around, is a practice which need time to be popular.'

7.3. Information Disclosure on-Demand/Request for Information and appeal

There was no single case identified, where a person filed a formal application for any kind of information. Neither the people's representatives nor common people were aware of application procedure on demand. Even there was no NGO or CBO working on the issue. A chairman said,

> "Actually, I heard about the Act in Chairman's forum in Kushtia. Though I have heard about it, I am not very clear about the kind of provisions it has, since I have not read it properly and also the copy of Act has not been sent to us from the central government yet. Since the Act was introduced, we have not received any orientation about the Act at Union level. In some Unions there are NGOs like Sharique, organizing workshop with people's representatives and also with common people but they are not working in my Union. So, we are completely unaware about the application procedure or other provisions in the Act. However, if people have anything to know about UP, we always try to help them with whatever capacity we have in our Union."

In totality, there was no sign of such practices where people were asking for information or submitting queries regarding services available in the visited UPs.

7.4. Union Information and Services Center (UISC)

In this section, this study tried to look into the fact how UISCs have managed to provide range of information and services to people in these visited UPs. The visited union Parishads did not have the structure in place, to make the services accessible to people. They shared their office with the Municipality. The supply of electricity was also a point to worry. Since everything was computerized and when they did have electricity, people had to wait a long time to get the services.

There was no information displayed about kind of services available in UP. However, that didn't mean that they were not providing any services in the UP. The UP was involved in providing certificate, forms, trade license, tax collection, Salish (Dispute settlement) and other activities. However, I wonder how a person would know what kind of services the UP was providing and who s/he should ask about these services, when no information was disclosed. A woman during FGD session said,

> "I have never been to UP. Actually, I have no idea what is happening there. There is a woman member in my ward and she never comes here. Normally, when we have some issues like settlement of disputes within the family or with neighbor, we went to Chairman's house which is not far away from ours and he settles the issue. I am even not sure what to expect from Union Parishad."

It is found that, there was no Citizen Charter prepared at the visited UPs. Most of the representatives this study interviewed were unaware of such provision. Basically, the main problem with UP representatives was lack of understanding about how to bring more people closer to the services they provide. They had no idea of legal provisions and laws, that gave them the guideline on how to respond to things like Citizen Charter or basic service provisions they were to provide at UP.

7.5. Open Budget Session and ward level meeting

According to Local Ordinance (UP) Act, 2009, each Union Parishad should hold an Open Budget session in each year, to make budget accessible to people and ensure people's participation in the process. They have not organized any Open Budget session for the mass people. However, ward level meeting at ward level, was not organized on a regular basis. This gave an indication that, the demands that were presented in Open Budget were discussed with common people. The projects were decided mostly on the basis of recommendations made by UP representatives. Most of the people were unaware of what was included in the budget or what specific projects have been approved in the budget.

The projects in most of cases were determined by the members themselves. Then projects were finalized on priority basis. Despite of the fact that, there was a big arrangement for this year's budget and many (UNO and other GLA representatives, business men etc.) participated in the event, the idea of open budget was, somehow missed out. Most of the people, who we interviewed and had discussion with either didn't attend the event or if attended, didn't understand the concept. What we understood from the study that, Open budget needed time in Maria UP to get popular among people and for that, UP needs to strengthen their activities at grass-root level. Ward meeting should be organized regularly and they should involve people in the process so that they feel encouraged about the practices. In general, the process that was followed was faulty, since the demands were not coming from the community and approved without any real explanation and bargaining. The question of transparency in terms of making information about process of selecting projects was not addressed in the visited UPs.

7.6. Social Safety Net Program (SSNPs)

Referring back to the objective of this study, one of the operational measures was to see, how people have access to information regarding services and whether information regarding the criteria of selection and list of beneficiaries were disseminated among common people. The selection and distribution of cards have always been questioned in Bangladesh. Often, there were cases found of misappropriation during the distribution of Cards in the Newspapers. This study tried to look onto the status of SSNP in terms of information about these services and access of common people to information about these services.

The study found that the visited UPs had a weak system on Board. There was neither information about the selection criteria nor they had a planned process to select beneficiaries. The beneficiaries were selected on the basis of recommendations from local representatives and local elites, not through a formal procedure, rather informally. As far as the record management is concerned, it was not managed properly in terms of keeping all the records of lists of beneficiaries. A UP secretary on SSNP lists, said.

> "We are struggling with the infrastructure here. We don't have enough space in the UP. Half of our place is occupied by another government office and it is difficult to work in

> this environment, when we are in continuous pressure from outside. We have these information but I can't give it right now because it is so disorganized"

People in general had a very limited or no information about how SSNPs were operating and who and how much they were entitled to receive. A woman member during a FGD session said,

> "Actually, most of the members whether male or female members of UP spend lot of money during election and they have their own people who they usually distribute cards to."

The process of selection was not clear to most of the people and there was no initiative from the UP to let people aware of these kinds of services. That's why, people who were in real need of such allowance, sometimes hesitate to ask about it. A woman respondent during a FGD session responded,

> "My mother-in-law is an old woman and she even couldn't walk properly. I came to know that, there is an allowance for Elderly people run by the Government through UP. But I have never been to UP. The only person I knew was the female member of our ward, whom I asked to include her in the list. She got angry with me and replied harshly that, she now has to sell her land to give my mother- in-law such support. I was very disappointed and till now I never spoke her about it."

In general, people were not well informed about SSNPs and there was not too much information for the people and their access to information regarding SSNPs, which were denied in the visited UPs.

7.7. Information about Special Fund and Donation

Often, Union Parishad receives special allocation under TR, Annual Development Program, Local Government Support Program and thematic funding from donors. These funds usually come from central government for development projects at Union level. There is also thematic funding, for example, Sharique provides funds for Local Governance Programs, Swiss Red Cross and DASCOH provides funds for WATSAN projects. The visited UPs had no such special allocation, except funds from LGSP, TR and ADP. Interesting fact about two UPs was that, the UP Chairmen of this UPs were from opposition but the Chairman of Upazila, Pourashava (Municipality) and the MPs were from the ruling party. It was found that, there was no special allocation from the MP. Though there was record of all the allocation received from different sources, there was no sign of disclosure of such information to public. As far as common people were concerned, we found that most of them were completely unaware of such funds or any other allocation coming to their UP.

8. Conclusion

Union Parishad, being the lowest tier of local government system is closely connected with the people living in rural areas and is the main agency, working at the community level to provide various kinds of services to people. The RTI Act has been a significant policy to create that platform, where people can ask for their right to information from public authorities. It gives public institution like Union Parishad, an opportunity to restore transparency in service delivery system through free flow of information and making information accessible to people. The study revealed that, lack of understanding about the policy, inappropriate implementation structure as lack of commitment and cooperation among people, who works inside the UPs or various actors and institutions who work in association with UPs, led to implementation failure. Also, inadequate resources both financial and managerial resources, poor economic condition, closed social environment and conflicting political condition also lead to poor implementation performance. Also, how people respond to a policy and their perception towards the implementing agency is a key element for a policy to be successful. The study result reflected that the mass people were dissatisfied with the services of UPs in most of the cases.

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