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Assessing Service Quality of Pourasava Digital Centre in Bangladesh Using SERVQUAL Model

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Abstract:

The Pourasava Digital Centre (PDC) serves as a pivotal hub for getting a wide range of services and information based on digital technology, aiming at strengthening the efficiency of local governance, promoting transparency, and bringing government services closer to the mass people. This study explores the status of service quality at PDC in Bangladesh by analyzing to what extent citizens meet their expectations after receiving service. It uses the SERVQUAL model based on the literature review of the dimensions of e-service quality parameters and concepts. The paper sheds light on the e-service quality perspective of PDC that a convenient working schedule, properly trained entrepreneurs, and quality customer service representatives can win more customer satisfaction in the electronic service market. It compares the citizenry's expectations and perception of mean values while receiving and consuming services. Moreover, it implies that as the citizens are optimistic about PDC, policy research, innovation, and appropriate modular engagement can enable them to get reasonable quantifiable satisfaction, which is vital for deciding to consume services and establishing trust and loyalty to service providers. The findings of this study present a foundation for strategies and endeavours that can play a significant role in enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of PDCs in meeting the expectations of citizens and assuring sustained satisfaction within the domain of digital and smart governance services.

Keywords: Bangladesh; Expectation; PDC; Perception; Quality; SERVQUAL

1. Introduction:

The evolution of public administration is highlighted in Woodrow Wilson's famous article "The Study of Administration", published in 1887, employing paradigms that offer a solid foundation for dynamic development. In 1975, Nicholas Henry introduced the five public administration paradigms (Mukonza 2014). In the contemporary, the public administration is being reinvigorated across the world to improve the quality of governmental functions by facilitating customer-centered, cost-effective, and deliver citizens' services in a convenient approach and companies that are a growing concern among the governments. Its latest update-E-governance and new public services are comprehended as a critical component of reform, as well as modernization and improvement of government. Electronic Governance, widely known as "E-governance," has been introduced with the primary objective of enhancing efficiency, effectiveness, and rendering accessible services to a broader demographic (Abuosi and Atinga 2013). New public services emphasize democratic governance, serve citizens by empowering them strategically. (Denhardt, R & Denhardt, J.2000). The reflections of the e-governance and new public service paradigms can be seen in the government initiatives that consider empowering citizens in accessing government service fast, effective, and transparently. This innovative approach to public service has opened up new possibilities and significantly increased its ability to provide essentials (United Nations 2003).

The Government of Bangladesh has taken public service to the next level by setting up the Union Information Service Centre (UISC) and Pourasava Digital Centre (PDC) to modernize government administration for providing citizens more efficient and effective services which reflects the amalgamation of the e-governance and new public service paradigms in the context of Bangladesh indeed considering its potentials of empowering citizens through making way of accessing government service in fast, effective, and transparent manner. Thus, initiatives like PDC have made the prospects of Digital Bangladesh visible. Hence, being developed as the proactive indicator of the government, Pourasava Digital Centre (PDC) is not just linking service delivery decentralization and strengthening the local government but also empowering the

community indeed. Primarily, PDCs are government-owned micro-enterprises that act as a one-stop information and service delivery outlets in all Poursava (local governing bodies) throughout Bangladesh. PDCs provide e-services to individuals, such as online birth registration, death certificates, citizenship certificates, computer and English language study, photocopying, scanning, email, internet surfing, Mobile banking, and so on (Access to Information (A2I) Program 2011, 2011a, 2012, 2014). Owing to the theoretical background, as the quality and efficacy of these e-services are mostly determined by local people's satisfaction and their perception, these are the most crucial variable for evaluating quality indeed (Caron and Giauque 2006). Thereby, the SERVQUAL model is used in this study as it is the best fit of the existing quality models for evaluating service quality because it focuses on citizens' views of the services received (Fragoso and Espinoza 2017). Thereby, with a comparison in between the perception and expectation regarding the received services, this study describes the current state of service quality at PDC- Poursava Digital Centre in Bangladesh, as well as the extent to which people's expectations are realized after using PDC's services.

2. Research objectives:

The fundamental objective of this study is to assess the service quality of the Poursava Digital Centre in Bangladesh. More particularly, the specific objectives are-

1. To explore the current status of service quality at Poursava Digital Centre (PDC) in Bangladesh.
2. To analyze the extent of expectations and attainments of service recipients compared to their perception after receiving services at PDC.
3. To identify the challenges of service satisfaction at PDC in Bangladesh.

3. Statement of The Problem:

In the urban landscape of Bangladesh, the Poursava Digital Centres (PDCs) serve as pivotal governmental service entities aimed at delivering a spectrum of services to the local population in spite of being a private entity. With its currently developed function,

PDCs not only provide remote services but also reduce the time consumption of getting a service. However, the prevailing lower knowledge about the PDC among the mass with the prevailing presence of numbered commercial bodies serving similar services, there is a chance of higher dissatisfaction with the quality of services rendered by PDCs indeed. This dissatisfaction dictates a dual challenge, at one side it affects the efficiency of service delivery and on the other hand it interrupts the effectiveness of service utilization by the local people. The existing information gap regarding the services offered by PDCs, with only a limited number of studies addressing this critical aspect, indicates that there is a lot to offer indeed. Particularly the study of service quality of PDC using the SERVQUAL method is very rare. Thereby, this work endeavors to bridge the existing gap by employing the SERVQUAL model by not just revealing the service quality of the PDCs in Bangladesh but also will disclose the perception and expectation of the local people on the services indeed. Furthermore, concentrating on the way forwards and fostering the ongoing development of services offered by PDCs, this paper aims to contribute to further development.

4. Significance of the study:

Bangladesh experiences several challenges in providing quality public services. Citizens' attempts to obtain government information and services are often hampered by the widespread traditional proceedings, bureaucratic reluctance to initiate reforms, and a lack of information itself indeed. According to the Digital Bangladesh manifesto, the government of Bangladesh has already started implementing this Information and communication Technologies with the induction of practices indicating access to information. Consequently, unlike the familiar UDC- the Pournasava Digital Centre is also making its role but for the people living in the semi-urban areas of Bangladesh where they already have access to the services which the PDCs are promising. On this note, this study on assessing the service quality dynamics holds paramount significance for several reasons, elucidating its potential impact on various stakeholders and the broader context of urban governance in Bangladesh. The work of Pournasava Digital Centre has been boosted to a greater level because of the tremendous increase of ICT-based service delivery operations, but some barriers come between the growth of PDC

which creates the difference between the expected and perceived service. This study's significance extends beyond the evaluation of PDC service quality, reaching into the realms of citizen empowerment, informed governance, and strategic urban development planning.

5. Research Design and Methodology:

- 5.1. Research Approach: This study has applied a mixed-method research approach combining both qualitative and quantitative techniques to accomplish the study objective.
- 5.2. Study Area: This study has been conducted based on permanent residents from two Poursava, i.e., Savar Poursava Digital Centre and Jaypurhat Poursava Digital Centre.
- 5.3. Data Sources: Primary data has been obtained with the outright replica from the administered questionnaires. Secondary data sources like - Google Scholar with access to journals like JSTOR and SAGE to collect some pertinent literature and findings to grasp better how service quality parameters are formed and how service quality is measured using the SERVQUAL model.
- 5.4. Sampling and Sample Size: A usual purposive sampling method has been taken for sampling the population of both Poursava. From the non-probability point, purposive sampling has been adopted for further studies. The study has run the power analysis to justify the sample size of purposive sampling. With a 95% power, a median effect size of 0.15 and a maximum of three predictors against any single variable - (this study included- Reliability, Assurance, Tangibility, Empathy, and Responsiveness), it has run the program and found a minimal respondent size of 357. It has taken an additional 69 responses to remove the chances of error and ensure more data accuracy. Forming the total sampling size after 426. The power analysis calculation determines the minimal quantity of respondents required to avoid type 1 (rejecting accurate) and type 2 errors (accepting false). After adjusting the sample sizes, the analysis calculates the possibility of having a significant result for a given population effect (Cohen 1988).

5.5 Data Analysis Method: A compiled- qualitative and quantitative analysis has been followed while analyzing data from the closed-ended e-questionnaire. The open-ended questions have been analyzed synthetically using Microsoft Excel, while the close-ended question has been analyzed statistically by applying IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Licensed Version 26.0.

6. Theoretical framework:

In the consequential times, followed by his conceptual model, Parasuraman et al. (1985) identified 97 attributes mentioned for assessing the quality of service. Later, those 97 attributes were distributed in 10 separate dimensions. Seven dimensions of Parasuraman et al (1988) and after the second purification, those ten dimensions were compiled into 5- which are being used to date.

Table 1: Dimensional Development with SERVQUAL model

10 Dimensions	7 Dimensions	5 Dimensions
Tangibles	Tangibles	Tangibles
Reliability	Reliability	Reliability
Responsiveness	Responsiveness	Responsiveness
Communication	Factor 4	Assurance
Security	-	-
Competence	Factor 5	-
Courtesy	-	-
Credibility	-	-
Understanding	Understanding	Empathy
Access	Access	-

Source: Compiled by authors for secondary study.

Parasuraman et al. (1985) also proposed a 5-point gap widely known as the Gap model. The Gap model addresses the internal gap and its size and direction towards service while measuring the service quality in an establishment; those five gaps are-

Table 2: Gaps in the Development of SERVQUAL model.

Gap 01	Expected service vs. Management perception	The contradiction between the customers' expectations and what the managers believe these expectations are, which relates to the market survey
Gap 02	Management perception vs. Service design	Misalignment between the management knowledge of what customers want and the requirements are created describing tangible products.
Gap 03	Service design vs. Service delivery	Difference between customers-focused service design and service delivery by provider.
Gap 04	Service Delivery vs. Communication	The gap between the actual service and what exactly promised more than it can deliver.
Gap 05	Expected service vs. Perceived service	The whole disparity between the expected and actual received service quality.

At the initials, Parasuraman et al. (1985) documented three characteristics of service. These include-

- Intangibility- service only can be consumed. Cannot feel-touch-smell. Only benefits can be obtained.
- Heterogeneity- indicates the essence of several equipment for generating one service.
- Inseparability- the unavoidable relationship between service production and service consumption.

At the time of 1985, when- Parasuraman et al. (1985) proposed these three characteristics of service, 97 attributes for assessing the quality of service were grouped into ten dimensions (7 dimensions in 1988 and now 5 dimensions from 1991). There needed to be a more quantitative scale at large. In the prior period, they never had any idea about measuring service quality from a customer perspective.

Nevertheless - Parasuraman et al. (1985) found that-measuring customer expectations and perceptions acquired by Focused Group Discussions and Questionnaires based on one-to-one interviews holds the potential for measuring service quality. Thus, compiling the fifth gap with attributes allocated into dimensions A. Parasuraman, Valarie A. Zeithaml and Len Berry, between 1983 and 1988, established the "SERVQUAL" model to measure the service quality in service sectors. The evolution of the model was inaugurated in 1983 through comprehensive research, which later introduced the SERVQUAL model in 1988.

SERVQUAL model is a widely adopted framework in service quality based on the perception difference between the received service and anticipated service quality from the service provider. This model is also familiar to the GAP model and RATER model. The model indicates five fundamental dimensions of service quality. Those are:



With 22 questions, these five dimensions were devised to evaluate customer expectations and perceptions of service quality. If the service quality concept is expressed through the equation:

$$\text{Service Quality} = \text{Customer's perception of the service delivery (P)} - \text{Customer's expectations of the service delivery (E)}$$

So, Service Quality = (P – E)

Therefore, the analytical framework for this study illuminates the underlying process shown in Table No. 4, which is applied to guide this study.

Table 3: Analytical Framework.

	Result	Outcome
Equation: Perception – Expectation (P – E)	Mean difference (+) Positive	Expectations are exceeded, quality of service is assured, satisfaction to the customer is provided, and Sustainability of institution.
	Mean difference (-) Negative	Expectations not exceeded, quality in service not assured, Customer is not satisfied, Sustainability Risk of institution.

7. Data Analysis and Results:

7.1 Demographic Information:

Table 4: Demographic Information of the Respondent

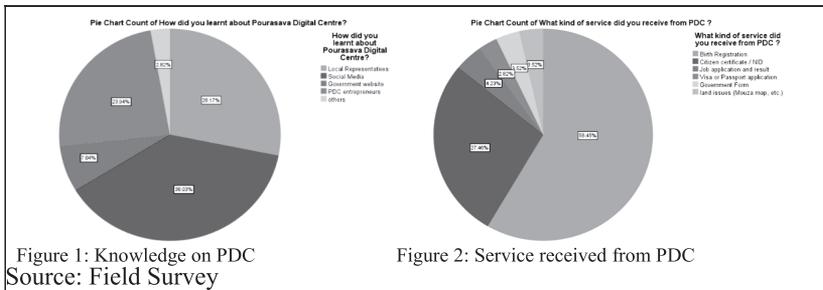
N = 142		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	110	77.5%
	Female	32	22.5%
Age	21 -30	35	24.65%
	31-40	80	56.34%
	41-65	27	19.01%
Working Status	Student	133	93.7%
	Self-employed or Business	2	1.4%
	Government Service	2	1.4%
	Private Job	2	1.4%
	Unemployed	3	2.1%
Education	JSC/ Equivalent	2	1.4%
	SSC/ Equivalent	25	17.6%
	Bachelor's degree/ Equivalent	103	72.5%
	Master's degree/ Above	12	8.5%
How did you learn about Poursava Digital Centre?	Local Representatives	40	28.2%
	Social Media	54	38.0%
	Government website	10	7.0%
	PDC entrepreneurs	34	23.9%
	Others	4	2.8%
What kind of service did you receive from PDC?	Birth Registration	83	58.5%
	Citizen certificate / NID	39	27.5%
	Job application and result	6	4.2%
	Visa or Passport application	4	2.8%
	Government Form	5	3.5%
	Land issues (Mouza map, etc.)	5	3.5%
How likely to recommend PDC?	Very unlikely	4	2.8%
	Unlikely	9	6.3%
	Neutral	50	35.2%
	Likely	49	34.5%
	Very likely	30	21.1%

Source: Field Survey

Table 4 indicates that 77.5% of the respondents were male, and 22.5% were female. Among the total respondents, 24.65% per cent of respondents were under 30, 56.34 per cent were between 31 and 40, and 19.01 per cent were between the 41- and 65 years range. The highest number of respondents (93.7%) were students. The table also revealed that a minor number of respondents (1.4%) centres among Self-employed- people in business and Government service holders. Respondents responded to indicate what type of Education level they are either attended in the past time or attending these days. A higher range (72.5%) were of bachelor's degree/ equivalent grades. Another 17.6% were seen as of SSC/ equivalent level category. Only 8.5% belonged to the master's degree/ above level category. Rest 1.4% to the category of JSC/ equivalent level.

7.2 Understanding PDC:

Figure 1 indicates the percentage of processes from which people learnt about the presence of Poursava Digital Centre. Which portrays the highest (38.0%) are made through social media platforms. PDC entrepreneurs might be given credit for such achievements. Their participation made awareness among the citizens at mass. 28.2% is made by Local Representatives proclaiming their intense effort to promote e-services covering their jurisdiction. Government websites claim a 7.0% of bringing citizenry attention.



Besides social media usage, entrepreneurs play a significant role in e-approaching, considering their in-person advertising receives 23.9%. In Figure 2, the majority of respondents were seen receiving or responding as Birth Registration was their priority section of service preference in PDC, which is 58.5%. After that, the Citizen Certificate / NID correctional services receive 27.5% ratio of the

total percentage. Little service practices were recorded in Job applications and results (4.2%), which is declining as more convenient service makers are becoming available in the surroundings and in terms of becoming the hub of "Government Form (3.5%)" the solo public service modality is being served apart from the commercial services. Very few works (2.8%) were recorded over Visa or Passport application as they bring very complex conditions with the need for sophisticated scheduling, which remains absent in the crowded Pourasava complex compound.

7.3 Factors in Perception of Services at PDC:

Respondents were asked to indicate factors that influence their perception while receiving types of services from the PDCs. 11 parameters were followed by the 22 sets of SERVQUAL questionnaire as shown in Table 5.3.

Table 5: Mean Perception Scores of Services.

Factors	Mean	Rank (Large to small)
P1: Quality of service providing equipment	2.87	7
P2: Appearance of PDC & entrepreneur	2.75	10
P3: Provide services at the times promised	2.91	6
P4: Entrepreneurs showed priority in solving issues	2.85	8
P5: Keep accurate records	2.82	9
P6: Willingness to respond	2.70	11
P7: Entrepreneurs showed interest in solving problems	2.94	5
P8: Employees, trained & showed confidence	3.04	2
P9: Quality of customer service representative	2.96	4
P10: Knowledge of entrepreneurs & trustworthy issues	3.02	3
P11: Convenient working hours	3.33	1

Source: Field Survey.

Recipients perceived that the appearance of PDC and entrepreneurs

needed to be better-taken care of. Willingness to respond is perceived as the lowest (mean score 2.70) among all other ten factors deterring the perception of service consumption. Willingness to be mostly cared after. Discussing such result, a hypothesis emerges upon,

* More Perception = Better experience

* Less perception score = Bad experience.

7.4 Factors in Expectations of Services at PDC:

Respondents indicated factors they expect ahead of their service consumption at PDCs'. 11 parameters followed by the 22 sets of SERVQUAL questionnaire as shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Mean Expectations Scores from Services.

Factors	Mean	Rank (Large to Small)
E1: Necessity of service providing equipment's quality	3.42	10
E2: Appearance must be maintained	3.43	9
E3: Promised time of service delivery must be maintained	3.51	5/6
E4: The resolving Process needed much priority	3.58	3
E5: Keeping records is a must	3.41	11
E6: Entrepreneurs willingness to help is a must	3.54	4
E7: Entrepreneurs must show interest in solving issues	3.59	2
E8: Entrepreneurs must be trained properly	3.47	7/8
E9: Quality of customer service representation must be expressed more	3.47	7/8
E10: Knowledge of entrepreneurs & trustworthy issues	3.65	1
E11: A more convenient working schedule must be addressed	3.51	5/6

Source: Field Survey

People expect more than the neutral view; they seek more for a better orientation. They expect that filling these would solve all their service quality-related affairs and shortcomings in no time. The need for proper training for Entrepreneurs with more expressed quality of customer service representation jointly holds a mean value of 3.47 out of 5.00, which means receivers almost agree that these parameters are needed for effective and efficient service delivery. Maintenance of appearance with a mean value of 3.43 is on the same expectation level, but citizens opinioned a 0.04 decline of expectation- indicating it is indeed less expected.

The necessity of service-providing equipment's quality is expected after another 3.42 mean value, which is comparatively lower than the earlier one. Keeping records is seen at 3.41, valued as the lowest expected parameter. Citizens find that this technical aspect of record keeping is optional, though demand is in the same category. Instead, citizens expected other categories for convenient services at PDC at large. Discussing such result, a hypothesis emerges upon,

* More expectation mean value = Less presence of expected

* Less expectation mean value = Significant presence

7.5 SERVQUAL Inspired Analytical Calculation:

The service quality equation following is shown in Table 7. The perception value and the expectation value renamed after the P value and E value are pointed out in Table 5, and a difference has been calculated following the Analytical Framework.

Table 7: SERVQUAL Inspired Analytical Calculation.

Components	Q.no.	Parameters	P	P-Rank	E	E -rank	P - E	Result
T	1	Service providing equipment's quality	2.87	7	3.42	10	-0.55	Negative
T	2	Appearance	2.75	10	3.43	9	-0.68	
R	3	Maintained time of service delivery	2.91	6	3.51	5/6	-0.6	
E	4	Priority problem resolving process	2.85	8	3.58	3	-0.73	
R	5	Records keeping	2.82	9	3.41	11	-0.59	
R	6	Entrepreneurs' willingness to help	2.7	11	3.54	4	-0.84	

Comp onents	Q.no.	Parameters	P	P- Rank	E	E - rank	P – E	Result
E	7	Entrepreneurs show interest in solving issues	2.94	5	3.59	2	-0.65	Negati ve
A	8	Properly trained entrepreneurs	3.04	2	3.47	7/8	-0.43	
R	9	Quality of customer service representation	2.96	4	3.47	7/8	-0.51	
A	10	Knowledge of entrepreneurs & trustworthy issues	3.02	3	3.65	1	-0.63	
A	11	Convenient working schedule	3.33	1	3.51	5/6	-0.18	

Source- field survey

Upon finding all values negative (-0.55, -0.68, -0.6, -0.73, -0.59, -0.84, -0.65, -0.43, -0.51, -0.63, -0.18), the result outcome can be outlined after, as shown.

Table 8: Satisfaction Mean Scores.

N	Valid	142
	Missing	0
Mean		-.5800
Median		-.2727
Std. Deviation		.91492
Range		5.36
Minimum		-3.18
Maximum		2.18

Source: Data Analysis.

A mean of (-0.5800) declares that even the average satisfaction value of all respondents is negative. So, it can be said to be “Expectations not exceeded, quality in service not assured, citizens are not satisfied, sustainability risk of the institution”. Declaring the risk factors of PDC and later proposed recommendations, aligning the prospects of PDC in the country.

7.6 Analytical Comparison:

Here, coordinating the analytical framework formed upon the SERVQUAL model as basis, results proclaim after as shown in Table 9.

Table 9: Analytical Comparison.

	Result	Outcome
<p>Service Quality Measurement</p> <p>Perception – Expectation</p> <p>(P – E)</p>	<p>Mean difference (-)</p> <p>Negative</p> <p>In all 11 parameters in the following Table 7</p> <p>(-0.55, -0.68, -0.6, -0.73, -0.59, -0.84, -0.65, -0.43, -0.51, -0.63, -0.18)</p>	<p>Expectations not exceeded, quality in service not assured, Customer is not satisfied, sustainability risk of institution.</p>

Source: Study data

7.7 Reasons for poor Services at PDC:

Table 10: Reasons for ineffectiveness of the PDC in Bangladesh (Rank Analysis)

Score (Large to small)	Problem Ranking	Parameter NO	Issues
- 0.18	1	11	Convenient working schedule
- 0.43	2	8	Properly trained Entrepreneurs
- 0.51	3	9	Quality of customer service representation
- 0.55	4	1	Service providing equipment's Quality
- 0.59	5	5	Records Keeping
- 0.6	6	3	Maintained time of service delivery
- 0.63	7	10	Knowledge of Entrepreneurs & Trustworthy issues
- 0.65	8	7	Entrepreneurs show interest in solving issues
- 0.68	9	2	Appearance
- 0.73	10	4	Priority problem resolving Process
- 0.84	11	6	Entrepreneurs' willingness to help

Source: Field Survey.

Table 10 shows reasons for not effectively implementing the PDC in Bangladesh. The responses from the respondents have been ranked with the help of the Likert scale.

8. Discussion:

Although the PDC is a one-stop service centre of urban local government in Bangladesh, the PDC institution is not popularly compared to the UDC at Union Parishad. Nevertheless, the PDC has become an essential service delivery institution in urban areas since it has become less popular among the citizens. The study found that people learn about PDC and its services through social media platforms. The entrepreneurs update the people about the different services provided by the PDC. In the literature and citizen charter, PDC is supposed to provide several services under three major categories, i.e. government services, commercial services and information services. However, the study found that it primarily provides standard services like birth registration, citizen certificate or NID, online application and results, government forms and land issues, etc. PDC does not commonly provide other services under these three categories.

The study used a five-point Likert scale measure to assess people's perceptions and expectations regarding the quality of services and their delivery method. Regarding quality concrete equipment, the study found that the expectation of ordinary people is higher than what exactly PDCs have to provide quality services. Tangible equipment means PDC's physical structure, infrastructural facilities, technological devices, and other furniture required for better service delivery. Regarding the appearance of PDC and its entrepreneurs, there are vast differences between the expectations and perceptions of ordinary people. Ordinary people expect more positive attitudes and appearances than what PDC and its entrepreneurs show, which are not friendly and favourable for better dealings with ordinary people. It is almost four times higher expectations than the perception. In the case of timing of service delivery, PDC is less effective and causes delays in providing services. People expect fast-track and hassle-free services, which are required to ensure service quality, but PDC, to some extent, still needs to improve in this regard. There is also a big difference between the perception of ordinary people

and their expectations from PDC. However, most of the respondents were very neutral in this case. They were in a dilemma to answer this portion of the questionnaire.

The PDC and their entrepreneur were found reluctant to resolve different service-related problems, making the service delivery system more complex. Ordinary people expect them to be active and very friendly in addressing issues, but what the study found, according to the respondents' perception, is far away. In this regard, the study found a big gap between the expectations and perceptions of the respondents. The PDC was found to be in a vague situation regarding record keeping of different documents and service delivery information; they need to keep records of their daily information. How do they measure their past and present to improve future service systems without keeping information? The difference between perception and expectation in the "positive part" about noticeable in expectation frequency is relatively higher than perception. In the case of the problem-solving interest of the PDC and their entrepreneurs, the study found them indifferent, and there is a gap between the expectations and perceptions of the respondents who are taking services regularly.

The entrepreneurs' training program is quite present there, resulting in a need for more skills and expertise to do their jobs. The values and skills that boost confidence in the minds of entrepreneurs to do their jobs accurately are barely available there. The study seriously found that entrepreneurs who are the only service providers are less confident, which leads to a lack of quality service-providing systems in the PDC. Regarding the service representation of PDC before the community, the respondents were primarily neutral. However, the expectation to know about the services is much higher than the reality (Perception) as we see a gap in the proper training of entrepreneurs, creating a knowledge gap for them to do their jobs. Service delivery requires proper knowledge and skills, but the study found the reverse scenario in this context. At the same time, there is a strong correlation between service quality and people's trust in that service. However, unfortunately, the provided services of PDC did not create trust in the community. Though people find the PDC with several limitations, they think the institution should continue as long as possible. The respondents think that if some measures are

implemented, the PDC will work better for the welfare of the community of urban people.

9. Conclusion and Future Implications:

Employing the SERVQUAL model, this study has delved into the assessment of the quality of services which are being served at the Pourasava Digital Centres (PDCs) in Bangladesh and a concerning state of service quality within PDCs indeed. The imperative question emerges: How can we rectify the existing challenges and ensure the delivery of quality services? Here the study responds to this query by proposing pivotal policy measures. The study emphasizes the establishment of a conducive working schedule for PDC entrepreneurs, ensuring timely office attendance and providing customers with clear expectations regarding service delivery timelines. Furthermore, recognizing the significance of well-trained personnel, the study advocates for a comprehensive training program for PDC entrepreneurs to equip them with the necessary skills and expertise. The study further points out the importance of a robust monitoring mechanism for customer service representatives, like- regular performance checks and appraisals. Thereby, through extending the scope of assessing the quality dimensions at PDCs, this study offers actionable policy recommendations, envisioned as a catalyst for the transformation of PDCs into centres of service excellence.

The insights of this study make the foundations for future policy decisions, guiding the development and implementation of either government initiated commercial services or PPP bounded ones as similar challenges will be identified for its common ground. Thus, research like this one can contribute to a more resilient and responsive urban local government structure. For the professionals especially, the findings of this research will serve data-driven insights into the areas that require attention and improvement within PDCs which is crucial for effective allocation of resources visa-vis implementing targeted interventions to address identified shortcomings. Thereby, with the recommendations derived from this research, the concerned professionals can enhance the overall efficiency and effectiveness of Pourasava Digital Centres, contributing to the advancement of urban areas.

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Changing Demand for Services in Rural Areas and Responses of Union Parishad

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Abstract:

The expectation of rural people towards the required dimension of services has significantly changed due to advancements in technology, economy, socio-economic conditions, connectivity, and wider access to information. Local governments are now expected to provide services according to the changed needs. A qualitative study was conducted in eight Unions of three districts, covering three hotspots: riverine and estuaries systems, coastal, and Barind & drought-prone areas. It investigates the changed need of people for services and the capacity of local government to respond according to the changed needs. Findings of Ten FGDs, five KII, and data collected from 14 nation-building departments in each Union and respective Union Parishad were analyzed for the article. The study found that rural people expect services to foster human capital, facilitate economic growth, and intensify social care and relations. Although demanded service areas are available in rural areas, the dimension of required services has changed. Union Parishad's mandate allows intervention in various areas, but inadequate staffing, financial constraints, and lack of specific roles against each service limits their ability to respond effectively. The study recommends coordinated efforts of Union Parishad with Upazila Parishad and nation-building departments. Additionally, the research advocated using informal networks and non-state actors, i.e., individuals or groups agreeing to participate, to provide required services according to rural people's expectations.

1. Introduction:

Changes in technologies, economies, societal relations, and environmental forces stimulate change in the citizen's behaviour and expectation. Due to the increased connectivity in terms of the wider road network, communication technologies, access to information, and mobility, the rural-urban gap has decreased significantly, and

the rural-urban continuum is a reality now. The services in rural areas were predominately related to revitalizing the agricultural base, along with some basic facilities related to livelihood improvement. However, Lipi (2021) found that the urban population has escalated from 7 percent in 1972 to 39.4 percent in 2021, thus creating a challenge for providing need-based service. In such a situation, expanding urban facilities into rural areas is one of the best options for addressing these challenges of unplanned urbanization. Ahmed T (n.d.) mentioned that new societies have already emerged, and cities, towns and villages shouldn't be seen as autonomous growth hubs and isolated settlements; instead, they should be given enough thought to consider complementarities. For this reason, service delivery's relevance, efficiency, and effectiveness got a new dimension. The local government is primarily responsible for providing services to rural areas and can think about restructuring and modifying the service delivery mechanism.

Following the constitutional obligation, there should be a local government in every administrative unit, and these governments should intervene in providing services according to their mandated areas. The rural local government in Bangladesh has three tiers, i.e., Union, Upazila, and District level. GoB (1983) mentioned that the Union Parishad is the lowest tier of local government and is supposed to perform functions related to civic, police, defence, revenue, general administration, and developmental issues. However, many nation-building departments and local governments are involved in service delivery for the livelihood development of the people in rural areas. Considering the nature of services the nation-building department provides in rural areas, Ahmed (2012) found that the local government and line departments broadly provide two types of services. These are services for production and reproduction. The production-related services support the productive sector, especially agriculture and rural industry, physical infrastructure, electricity, irrigation, etc. The services related to reproduction consider education, health, recreation, relief, water supply, and sanitation. Regulatory services related to maintaining law and order for protecting life and property and judicial services for ensuring fairness also fall under reproduction services. The capacity of local government plays a crucial role in effectively performing

responsibilities. In that context, the research question is whether the lowest tier of local government at the grassroots level is equipped enough to capture the changed voices of citizens and translate those expectations into reality by undertaking need-based interventions.

1.1 Literature Review

So far as the provision of services is concerned, Moseley & Owen (2008) found three modes of provisioning, i.e., private, public, and voluntary. However, Been (2012) described that there should be four functions for each service for effective service delivery, i.e., primary, economic, social, and symbolic. The primary function involves directly delivering goods or services, while the social function facilitates citizen interaction, the economic function generates employment, and the symbolic function signifies the community's value in providing services for a quality life. According to the Act of Union Parishad, 39 types of work are identified for UP. The Union Parishad broadly performs four functions related to i) administration and establishment matters; ii) protecting public order; iii) services related to public welfare activities, and iv) formulation and implementation of plans for local economic and social development. However, it is found that the service provisioning mandate of the UP is general in nature, and many government departments, nongovernment, private sector, and voluntary organizations are involved in providing services according to their mandate. Nonetheless, specifying each institution's role in a different service dimension is missing. As a result, the four-dimensional function of each service advocated by Been (2012) is missing, eventually suffering from coordinated efforts for delivering quality services.

Aminuzzaman (2010) found that critical services like education, health care, family planning, irrigation, agricultural services, and feeder / secondary roads are managed by the line department officials and their field functionaries, and the role of UP in the designing and implementation of those projects is very minimal. The institutional incapacity and isolation made Union Parishad a non-responsive institution. Ahmed (2012) found that the Union Parishad relies on hundreds of schemes related to earthwork and repairing and constructing roads. Few people supervise the imple-

mentation, and it suffers from the quality of work. The project culture also forced them to follow each project's resource utilization guidelines. As a result, Union Parishad failed to make itself a dynamic institution for service delivery.

Aminuzzaman (2010) found that the most expected services of the rural people are income-generating interventions, pro-poor support, continued supply of agricultural inputs and supplies, education and community health care services, microcredit etc. However, none of the desired services are directly or indirectly provided by the UP. The above research findings suggest that the Union Parishad should consider many issues for service delivery by balancing citizen expectations and its core competency. The most important thing is that facilitating an environment for inclusive development is essential for UP. Ali (2007) advocated three pillars for inclusive development. These are related to ensuring growth, capability enhancement, and social protection for vulnerable sections of people. For ensuring growth, the study emphasizes productive employment, increased productivity, and increased income. Services related to education, health, and basic infrastructure such as roads, physical infrastructure, clean drinking water, and electricity were persuaded for capability enhancement. Social protection covers the services related to the safety net program. The Union Parishad's multifaceted provisioning modes are crucial for effective service delivery. Though the provisioning modes are multifaceted, they sometimes cover more than one provisioning mode. In that context, designing and implementing strategies for services and assigning the role of each institution is the most crucial element of service delivery to the people.

1.2 Research Problem

The inability of the Union Parishad to capture the changing voices of citizens in the dimension of services is hampered by a lack of institutional mechanisms and capability in the form of appropriate staff and financial resources. In such a situation, the Union Parsiahd confronts a problem in providing people's changing need for services.

1.3 Objective

The study's general objective is to investigate the nature of rural service provisioning of local government at the grassroots level following changed expectations and explore how to address those emerging needs effectively. The specific objectives are as follows:

1. to explore the changed expectations for services in rural people;
2. to analyze the nature of existing services provided to rural people by Union Parishad;
3. to identify the challenges and opportunities for meeting the changed needs of the Union Parishad.

1.4 Methodology

The study used primary and secondary information, and a cross-sectional design was followed for data collection. The study method was qualitative in nature. At first, four districts covering the three hotspots, namely riverine systems and estuaries zone, coastal zone, and Barind /Drought Prone, were selected out of six hotspots considering the ecological vulnerabilities identified in the delta plan. Cumilla and Tangail were selected from the riverine and estuaries systems, Khulna was selected from the coastal, and Rajshai was selected under the Barind and Drought Prone Areas. In the second stage, 04 upazila were selected randomly—Cumilla Sadar South in Cumilla District, Fultala in Khulna, Durgapur in Rajshahi, and Delduar in Tangail. Finally, two Union Parishad in each Upazila were selected for data collection in consultation with officials of NBDs, considering the characteristics of respective hotspots. The Unions are Jur Kanon (West), Bijoypur under Cumillad Sadar South, Joynagar and Pananagar under Durgapur, Atra Gilatola and Damodar under Fultala and Atia and Dubail from Delduar Upazila.

Besides, the nation-building departments providing services in the villages under a Union and officials of respective UP were also consulted. Ten Focused Group Discussions and five KII were conducted. The article is part of a research report prepared under the support of NILG in 2022-23 on the Role of Rural Local Government in Building My Village, My Town. Content analysis was done to analyze the qualitative information.

1.5 Justification

Bangladesh has embarked on the journey to attain an upper-middle-income country; by this time, she has secured the status of a lower-middle-income Country. With this progression, the new generation is growing up with better human capital and a new expectation of more attractive working and living environments. As a result, the dimension of services needs to be changed by reflecting the voice of local people without compromising ecological and environmental harmony. Bangladesh is endowed with rich biodiversity, especially in rural areas; it is essential to conceptualize better services following some principles before any intervention in the rural areas. The principles are, i.e., diversity in development, harmonizing the peasant economy with modern services, biodiversity, ecological balance, etc. The local government is better positioned to identify the changed needs of local people, provided their capacity is enhanced. The government of Bangladesh has set visions for leaving no one behind by achieving SDG 2030, becoming a developed nation by 2041, and reaching the peak of wealth by 2071 through implementing the Delta Plan. However, the range of development under these dimensions may differ from one ecological zone to another or from one circumstance to another. In that case, capturing the villagers' perceptions of the nature of the services demanded will assist policy planners in putting the idea into practice.

1.6 Limitations

One of the limitations of the study is the lack of adequate information at the Union level. It was found that the resource flow of various nation-building departments is not available at the Union Parishad office. Furthermore, because the survey only included eight Unions, the conclusions are limited to assessing the complete situation. Based on the research's findings, a more complete study can be undertaken.

2. Findings

2.1 People's Perception of Improved Services in Rural Areas

In most cases, the respondent of the study in the FGDs has recognized the need to upgrade the existing services in the required dimensions rather than emulate the services of urban areas. The

expectations of people in rural areas can be categorized into three broad themes. The thematic areas are service-related to competency development for grabbing the opportunities created through changes in market forces, ensuring the sustainable progression of rural economy and livelihood, and improving social care and social relations.

2.1.1 Competency Development for Grabbing Opportunities

Humans are the essential assets for changing household and community economies. It is also true that market forces create many opportunities and challenges. A healthy person with updated knowledge and skills in a community with available elementary services can grab the opportunities created through changes in market forces.

2.1.1.1 Service related to the formation of human capital

Quality education that addresses the expansion of knowledgebase, acquiring marketable skills, and an inclusive, improved healthcare system that produces healthy citizens are essential for the formation of human capital. Bangladesh has gained a lot in these two sectors, and institutional mechanism up to the grassroots level is praiseworthy. However, there is a scope for expanding the dimension of each service or restructuring the service areas considering the changing needs of the people. The required health services felt by the people of rural areas are providing equipment for general clinical tests, the opportunity to consult with a qualified doctor, safe and quick transportation of critical patients, and strengthening the institutional framework. The respondents mentioned that organizational setups like community clinics and Union health sub-centres are convenient for primary health care, family planning, and preventing epidemic disease. However, there is an increased trend of non-communicable diseases among the people in society. In that context, some emergency medical equipment for medical checkups and providing qualified medical technicians at the union level is essential. Moreover, the respondents demanded the presence of qualified doctors of both sexes regularly at the Union Health Center.

Some routine physical and clinical checkups are essential for antenatal and postnatal care. However, due to the lack of clinical checkup facilities at the union level, they either need to move to urban areas or be satisfied with only physical checkups. In the one FGD, one health professional said that there is a scope for having an ambulance to transport emergency pregnant women at free cost at Upazila Health Centre. However, this information is hardly known to the people, even the functionaries of UP. Strengthening institutional mechanisms implies that the organization's system should be able to introduce new services according to the changing demands of the people. The emerging services are health insurance and a telemedicine platform. Local committees, community health centres, and Union Health and Family Welfare Centers should be motivated to play their roles effectively.

The primary and secondary education directorate's line department offers services that adhere to the national curriculum. The quality of education, however, is a critical issue for many who live in rural areas. People believe that students in rural areas are less exposed than students in urban areas in terms of ensuring quality education. They struggle to get employment because they lack the skills and knowledge to compete with the students in metropolitan areas. The rural residents recognized a few services in that context that will be geared towards creating high-quality education. An old man in Khulna during the FGD said, "We don't need school buildings because most villages already have a primary school with good infrastructure; instead, we want good teachers and effective instruction methods." The demanded service dimensions are related to the increasing capacity of instructors to increase students' core competency through instituting life skills and technical skills and using attractive teaching methods. Many schools struggle to have an adequate number of teachers.

Modern facilities should be in the laboratory, library, and classrooms, including teaching aids and instructional materials. The need for an institutional mechanism for daycare centres at the local level is demanded by women teachers to concentrate more on teaching. The burden of administrative tasks related to preparing and sending reports and other duties can be reduced by giving authority to hire temporary employees or clerks to handle

administrative tasks. Parents should be more aware of their children's needs and monitor their progress, creating a conducive home environment to ensure a positive learning environment.

2.1.1.2. Livelihood Centric Elementary services

Rural residents recognize some of the most basic amenities, such as those that improve connectivity, safe water supply, improved sanitation, energy supply, and hassle-free public services. The most demanded expectation is supplying piped water with adequate iron, arsenic, and salinity treatment. Regarding sanitation, citizens urged the establishment of public restrooms with separate facilities for men and women in public places. Female participants in a FGD claimed that despite being aware of the adverse effects of not urinating immediately, they must frequently do so because there are no facilities in public places. The respondents also believed that, without a master plan, people construct latrines in line with their choices, harming the ecology and the village's aesthetics. Therefore, a planned sewerage system must be established, and people may be pushed to link their sewerage systems to the central sewerage system.

The uninterrupted provision of electricity in rural regions, the use of solar energy for lighting in public spaces, the introduction of biogas, and the provision of LPG at reduced costs received higher ratings from the public. The Union Parishad and LGED are making significant efforts to build the rural road network, and the distance between rural and urban areas has dramatically decreased. However, people need more roads with drainage and facilities for pedestrians. Additionally, they stated that RCC roads could replace bituminous roads to increase the lifespan of roads. In that regard, maintenance of adequate road height is required. The most crucial issue is that, due to household fragmentation, more land is being used for housing purposes, and courtyards are getting smaller. They are reluctant to keep any free spaces on the roadside. Permanent structures are being constructed frequently, leaving no space for the road network. Moreover, the design of the rural road needs to be changed following the dynamics of the rural economy. A Key Informant said that:

Heavy vehicles run through the village road, ignoring the load-bearing capacity. It would be challenging to restrict the movement of large trucks to meet the increasing demands of the village economy. In addition, the roads are vulnerable to damage since there is no shoulder on any side of the road. Land acquisition on a larger scale would be challenging under that circumstance. As a result, an act requiring the construction of a permanent establishment at a distance of two to three feet from both sides can be enacted. Otherwise, expanding road widths and increasing heights in the future would be difficult.

Availability of broadband-based internet facilities at the household level, maintaining law and order, and hassle-free and timeliness in getting public services are some of the expectations of rural people. Moreover, integrating birth registration with a NID and passport will reduce the suffering of getting public services. Besides service of community policing can be promoted in rural areas. An institutional system of alternative dispute resolution methods and increasing the village court's authority will ensure society's fairness.

2.1.2 Ensuring the Sustainable Progression of the Rural Economy

Increasing productivity in agriculture, the agricultural subsector and the small and Medium enterprises (SMEs) necessitates introducing technology. Moreover, the generation of self-employment and absorption into the labour market as hired labour needs qualified human resources. Eventually, sustainable progression of the rural economy will be possible through increased productivity and employment generation without further degradation of the environment. In Cumilla, it was claimed that the topsoil of the cultivated land was being sold to fulfil the need for the brick field. Although this type of action has created some opportunities for unskilled labourers for employment on some days, it harms the productivity of agriculture, which will ultimately affect the livelihood of that labourer by reducing the demand for labour in the leading employment sector, i.e., agriculture, shortly.

2.1.2.1 Increasing productivity

Agriculture—particularly the crop sector—plays a significant role in Bangladesh. Small farmers produce the majority of the country's

crops. However, making a profit from farming small plots of land and mechanization in small pieces of land is very complex. For this reason, developing new kinds of institutions and practices is crucial to raising agricultural output through mechanization. Consolidating agricultural land and creating smart irrigation systems are the top priorities. The appropriate department needs to step up and take this initiative by convincing the farmers and assuring them of land ownership. Establishing a cropping zone by considering local climate and soil characteristics is crucial. A crucial component of agricultural development is reducing waste in production, harvesting, and marketing. In this regard, mechanization in production, harvesting, and packing is important, as is the introduction of smart irrigation.

Additionally, because the younger generation is uninterested in cultivation, incentives in both financial and non-financial forms can be introduced to motivate them. Farmers lose interest in farming the following season if they do not receive a fair price for their product or if production is lost due to severe weather. The need of Crop insurance is necessary in that regard. Instead of concentrating just on the food security component of agriculture, the agricultural infrastructure can be created considering the requirement for multifunctional agriculture, i.e., rural tourism and ecological balance. For the transportation of agricultural products, cooperatives can take the initiative and work with the local government.

The farmers wanted services for treating sick domestic animals and fishes and facilities for vaccination in fisheries and livestock development. Based on the availability of local agricultural products, SME zones can be formed at the Upazila level by ensuring various services to build a strong foundation for micro and small businesses. Starting a business in rural areas also requires proper training and technological assistance. The Union Parishad and cooperatives can offer potential business owners equity support in their industries.

2.1.2.2 Strengthening Supply Chain

Strengthening the supply chain involves adding features to agricultural products and support marketing. For reducing waste in distribution and delivering products according to the changes and needs of customers, importance is given to strengthening the supply chain.

Lots of informal market agents supply products from the producers to the customers. However, they hardly perform any value-adding activities in the product. The market agents in the supply chain can be motivated to perform some value-adding activities related to cleaning, grading, packaging, storing, and proper product transportation. Rural cooperatives can take on this new role of marketing and supplying products through using the name of cooperatives, which helps to develop the branding of the products.

Although there are some digital platforms for getting information about the price of a product, small farmers have minimal capacity to harness the benefits of information. Most of the time, they depended on the market agents to get information. The cooperative can play a price-making role by introducing a digital marketing platform to avoid manipulated information. If the efforts of price-making are guided by the balanced behaviours of social responsibility and a profit motive, then it would be helpful to develop the brand value of the products.

2.1.2.3 Sustainable Employment Generation

Sustainable employment generation implies creating employment opportunities through respecting the environment. Decent employment ensures the regular flow of income for a decent livelihood. On the other hand, if the employment generation compromises ecological and environmental preservation, the people's livelihood will suffer, and future generations will be affected by this unexpected intervention. Relating the field experiences, it is observed that in Khulna, more cultivated land brought under shrimp cultivation permits the inflow of salt water in the fish farm. Initially, it was a very lucrative venture, earning much foreign currency by exporting outside the country. Employment opportunities were also expanded through this and other supporting industries. However, nowadays, entrepreneurs and people dependent on this industry suffer from a shortage of shrimp demand outside the country. Nowadays, they are not able to do either agriculture or shrimp cultivation. In this regard, income-generating activities for livelihood through self-initiative or hired labour should consider the adverse effect on the environment.

Bangladesh benefits from the demographic dividend because there is currently more working population than dependent people.

However, rural residents are pretty concerned about the higher percentage of unemployment and underemployment in rural areas compared to urban ones. The most crucial factor is that many young people are not in Training, Employment, or Education (NEET). Employment is indeed taken care of by private investment. However, industry-friendly facilities for investment in producing goods having market demand are prerequisites. One participant in a FGD in Khulna said that :

Jute mills in Khulna's Atra Ghiltola employed residents earlier. After the jute mills were closed, the land was used for housing. The cost of the land has significantly increased, and many outsiders are settling here. The local population is engaged in highly unskilled labour, such as auto-rickshaws, and poor rubbish management has harmed the ecosystem. Locals claimed that our expenses have significantly grown while our earning potential has reduced. Therefore, it is more important to establish industries that can generate cash before allowing people to use the increased facility.

The above scenario tells that setting up industries having market demand will create more jobs. However, initiative from both sides, i.e., demand and supply, is essential for sustainable employment generation. If the initiative for setting up an industry does not correspond with the capacity of human resources required for serving the industry, it will not solve the unemployment problem. One Key informant of Tangail said that:

One glass industry has been operating in local areas. However, local people hardly benefited from the initiative because the sector employs highly skilled workers, and locals have no opportunity to work there. People expect an industry that will create employment opportunities for the local people with existing skills.

Self-employment is another way to employ the labour market. Capital support is essential for self-employment services related to their knowledge and skills. Additionally, young people must be inspired to start small businesses in their respective fields early in their life to gain experience in the business world. Otherwise, they would not be confident enough to start a productive business even if they have adequate capital. Participant of FGD in Cumilla said:

There are many expatriates there who have returned from abroad in Cumilla. They are investing more in the transport sector or acquiring land. They may invest in a productive sector and create many jobs provided by technological assistance or determining designated locations for agri-based industries. However, a lack of skill and experience leads them to choose capital investment or business having much competition.

They must take advantage of the opportunities offered by Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and development agencies like the Directorate of Youth Development. One of Union Parishad's Secretaries told in a focus group that the youth are unaware of the resources available for skill development. Compared to male students, female students have more difficulty developing the necessary abilities for their limited mobility to other locations. The educational curriculum must be structured to impart the necessary competencies in line with market demand. However, the experiences show that the industry that would generate employment opportunities for local people will need to be given more priority.

2.1.2.4. Environmental protection

Most rural residents rely on informal employment for living, and occasionally, they do not consider how their activities may harm the environment. Environmental insensitivity results: a dirty living environment and a loss of ecological equilibrium. The waste management system includes everyone's efforts to maintain a clean physical environment, and it should be supported by the local government authority's rubbish collection and disposal system. Under the direction of the Union Parishad, a recycling facility for garbage, particularly waste produced by domestic, agricultural, and other operations, may be established. Strict adherence to the rule of restricting the construction of brickfields, prohibiting housing on agricultural land, maintaining wetlands and common forest areas, and outlawing operations like illicit sand extraction from rivers can all be done to preserve the ecological balance. Some wealthy individuals are trying to protect their homestead land from flooding by giving it an excessive height or filling the natural channel of water flow, resulting in waterlogging for the neighbours. Although

there are some laws governing these matters, their implementation at the local level is relatively lax. To appropriately implement these norms, the Union Parishad may step forward with the assistance of locals and competent authorities.

2.1.3 Intensifying social care and strengthening relationships

The expectation for social care of people has two dimensions: one is related to providing material support to the vulnerable section of people, and another is extending psychological support to young and older adults. Developing institutional mechanisms and encouraging the organization of sports and recreational activities falls under strengthening relationships. It is observed that the interaction between the young generation and older people is decreasing due to the excessive use of social media and the shifting of the culture from collectivism to individualism. Eventually, the youth are deprived of the learning opportunity of life management from their ancestral generation, and adults are also deprived of proper care from the younger generation. In such a situation, both generations fail to develop a trusty and reliable relationship due to a lack of quality interaction. Institutional mechanisms for installing quality interaction will help to intensify social care and strengthen relationships among the community's citizens.

2.1.3.1 Social Care

The components of social care are linked to providing material and psychological support from the government. The weaker segments of society, such as widows, orphans, the elderly, the impoverished, individuals with special needs, etc., receive some assistance from formal and informal institutions. While some claim they fail to get support despite having the required criterion, others countered that the assistance is tiny compared to the requirement. It is clear, though, that satisfying the demand on behalf of the state alone would be challenging. A strategy to expand the scope of social care is to strengthen community-based informal social security programs by establishing an institutional framework and adding incentives. On the other side, a shortage of spaces for interaction has made it difficult for young people and older people to interact with one another or between themselves. Due to the best use of land for productivity, there is less open area for interaction today. Tea

shops are transformed into gathering spots at rural hat bazaars, especially for the young. Older people always attempt to stay away from this area to make room for the next generation, yet some youngsters are getting lost by using drugs there. One of the 85-year-old senior folks informed, "We do not have space for leisure; we cannot sit in the hat bazaar or watch TV in our homes. As my daughter-in-law hides her TV-watching from us out of embarrassment". In that situation, a community hall with separate seating areas for young people and the elderly and taking steps to engage both groups for sharing experiences will enhance social care".

2.1.3.2 Sports and Recreation

Some regulations for developing institutional mechanisms and encouraging them to organize sports and recreational activities are two dimensions for sports and recreational activities that ultimately help to develop social relations through quality interaction. Sometimes, the youths of one area face trouble using the playground of other areas due to a lack of playground use guidelines. Students asked for instructions for using the playground by the people of this locality during holidays and after school hours. On the other hand, the young generation becomes reluctant to participate in sports and recreational activities due to the over engagement in social media. In this context, it should be mandatory for the students of all educational institutes to participate in sports and recreational activities. The local government can form some guidelines for organizing social clubs with the participation of the youth generation and the clubs can be provided with sports and recreational materials.

2.2 Resource Flow in Selected Union

On an average, each of the selected Union Parshad has the autonomy to mobilize Tk. 18 million for the expenditure related to salary support of employees and elected representatives and undertaking development activities. However, the contribution of its source to fund generation is minimal and mostly depends on donations from the central government for providing services through undertaking different skims. The share of donations in yearly fund mobilization in UP is 73% (Guha, et al., 2022). Moreover, each sort of donation has its policy for utilizing resources. In such a case, it is not easy to

shift from the conventional ways of service delivery of UP, which sometimes undermine the expectations of rural people. Rahman, Hossain, & Uddin (2016) found that a Union Parishad has the authority to generate revenue Tk. Fifteen million in 2014-15.

The head of expenditures on development related to poverty reduction, physical infrastructure development, earthwork, water supply, and sanitation. Regarding physical infrastructure, the UP often participates in road maintenance and constructing connecting roads and culverts. While the earthwork mainly focuses on increasing road height, constructing small dams, and developing playgrounds or the premises of religious and educational institutions. It has been noted that each UP spends an average of Tk. 15.46 million for development activities in a year. The most significant outlay (60%) is used to construct the physical infrastructure and earthworks. A sizable portion (30%) is spent on various allowances for the most vulnerable members of society. Education, health, nutrition, and sanitation receive virtually little attention. In this sense, it might be claimed that the resource utilization pattern falls far from people's expectations (Guha, et al., 2022).

Besides, the line department of government also implements development programs under the revenue and development budget. On average, Tk. 32 million is spent every year in the villages under each Union by the line department. Although, it is an incomplete picture of expenditure in different unions, as services of some departments could not be captured due to a lack of information. However, it is found that the expenditure on social welfare activities is highest at around 40 percent. The LGED and Project Implementation Officer (PIO) are spending on infrastructure development, which constitutes 25 percent of total expenditure. Bangladesh Rural Development Board, which supports building village organizations and credit support, occupies the third highest amount spender. Health, education, youth development, public health, agriculture and agricultural subsectors, and family planning are other areas of intervention by different government line departments (Guha, et al., 2022).

Roughly speaking, an amount of Tk. Forty-nine million public funds are spent in villages under the selected Union for generating

services related to developing human capital, increasing productivity, and social care (Guha, et al., 2022). Although there are many demands in different aspects of development, the service delivery structure needs to be engineered to increase the effectiveness of services and increase the capacity of the UP to increase their financial capacity.

2.3 Existing Services in Rural Areas

Services related to the line department of the government and the Union Parishad were considered for mapping the existing services into three broad categories of services, namely competency development, Sustainable Economic growth and social care. The services provided by the private and NGO sectors were not reflected in the subsequent analysis.

2.3.1. Competency Development

Government support through different departments under education is related to the supply of materials, awareness development, and instilling of soft skills and infrastructural development. The UP sometimes supports purchasing furniture, especially for private schools. The government health centre distributes medicine and materials in health services and provides treatment and counselling services. The public health engineering department has been supporting installing washrooms in schools and sinking shallow/deep tube wells as a community approach for 10 people in a community on a cost-sharing basis. The rural electrification board is in charge of electrical connectivity regarding energy supply. Most homes have electric connectivity, but load shading is the issue. Popular services for NBDs and UPs are developed physical infrastructure. The skims are related to maintaining earthen roads, supporting religious institutions, and maintaining social assets like graveyards. Online birth registration and other online services are provided through the Union Digital Center at the Union levels. The Upazila level offices provide services for birth registration amendment and issuance of NID in the case of public services, while the UP provides services linked to online birth registration, particularly on government portals. To provide safety and security, the law enforcement agency is assisting at the Upazila level, while the UP works to maintain law and order by using the village police, village courts, and alternate dispute settlement through salsish.

2.3.2 Services for Economic Growth

In the case of economic growth, services connected to both employment and increasing productivity got priority. In the case of increasing productivity, services related to agriculture and the agricultural subsector are the main focused areas of services. In the crop sector, the major services are related to training, distribution of seed and fertilizer on a limited scale, and technology transfer through motivating demonstration farms. The Department of Livestock and Fishery transfers technology, distributes inputs, and increases capability. The most well-liked services for self-employment are facilitating entrepreneurship development, and various departments provide training and credit. To strengthen networking among the farmers, the Department of Cooperatives and BRDB have been facilitating the organizing and managing of producers' organizations. The Union Parishad offer job for unemployed, unskilled labourers during the scarcity of job seasonally in agriculture.

2.3.3 Services Related to Social Care

The Department of Women's Affairs and the Department of Social Welfare provide material support in terms of cash or kind for the vulnerable section of people. These include various types of allowances based on life cycle and personal risks. These are old age allowances, maternity, and widow allowances, allowances for people having special needs, and support for vulnerable women under the Vulnerable Group Development program. Moreover, these two departments provide skill training, soft loans, and advisory services to shift the focus from protection to promoting the vulnerable section of people. The UP has been supporting in selecting beneficiaries and distributing the benefits of a social security program.

2.4 Challenges and Opportunities for Serving People

The Union Parishads lack adequate workforce and financial resources to address the need-based services issue. However, the UP has the strength to engage the community for program design, implementation, and monitoring of the progress of skims. Moreover, the UP can think to engage non-state actors- individuals and organizations willing to collaborate with the UP; additionally, in

collaboration with the Upazila Parishad and different line departments, the UP can transform the challenges into opportunities.

2.4.1 Competency Development

Quality education includes increasing the capacity of teaching staff through training, reducing the administrative burden of sending reports to higher authority for the teachers and developing a daycare centre to give proper attention to female teachers. On the other hand, students and guardians can be motivated to play their respective roles in giving proper value to education. Along with arranging mid-day meals for the students, the community also needs to come forward to establish a tutoring centre to follow up on the lessons, especially for the students of disadvantaged sections. During KII, the study suggests that the students must be equipped with life and technical skills in different areas to absorb the labour market gainfully. Besides, the education system should be unified. In rural areas, there are several systems, i.e., public, private, and madrasa, for education. Sometimes, it creates problems for the students to follow the instructions due to a lack of linkage among the different educational systems. The vigilance role of UP needs to strengthen for the effective utilization of resources.

Arranging tutorial centres at the community level for following up on the homework provided by the school and arranging some facilities for caring for the teachers' children can help develop quality education. In the case of health services, the Up can monitor the services at the community clinic and Union Health Centre. The government can make a complementary working procedure among the community clinic, Union Health Center, and Upazila Health Complex. To serve effectively, medical equipment and adequately qualified professionals must be arranged. The Upazila Health Centre should be equipped to serve the referral services.

Besides livelihood, elementary-centric services related to planned housing, supply of water, hygienic sanitation, environment-friendly energy inputs, and hassle-free services can contribute a lot to the capacity building of people. People urged a proactive role from the regulatory authority for enforcing authority to prohibit the construction of unplanned and unsafe housing in rural areas. They also claimed that an integrated system of water supply and

sanitation should be there in the design of the house. Proper road connectivity requires road construction with a drainage system and a pedestrian facility. Moreover, they need wider roads and connecting village roads in the villages. As agriculture in many areas is shifting to commercial endeavour, heavy vehicles transport the products. The plan for constructing a more comprehensive road network and new design up to the farmland and water bodies should balance the need for the peasantry economy and the city economy. Morshed (2022) advocates for the construction of smart rural roads by ensuring the safety of all users, including rural pedestrians, bicyclists, and livestock. Considering motorized mobility, road width needs to be increased. Most importantly, rural infrastructure must consider climate resilience infrastructure considering flooding, disasters, and other seasonal realities to facilitate efficient connectivity between administrative headquarters and growth centres. Increasing ICT connectivity requires broadband infrastructure, at least in the growth centres.

2.4.2 Economic Growth

To encourage the new generation in agriculture, the UP can set up an agricultural training cell at the union level for imparting agriculture knowledge and disseminating the locality's indigenous knowledge. Increased productivity in the agriculture and agricultural subsector mechanization of crop production and providing advisory and technical support in the agricultural subsector deserve special attention. Policy support for establishing small and cottage industry zones at the Upazila level based on the availability of resources in the local area, value addition in the supply chain, and use of digital platforms for marketing are considered. Improving productivity through mechanization in the crop sector and ensuring technological support in other subsectors of agriculture are also considered. Nevertheless, protecting the environment through preserving natural resources and biodiversity and collecting and disposing of rubbish is crucial for sustainable growth in rural areas. The Union Parishad is mainly involved in employment generation for unskilled labourers under the social safety net program. Union Parishad may motivate people to use UDC to get proper information about the job market and explore the opportunities for competency development available in the market.

In case of value addition in the supply chain, there might be an agricultural processing centre for cleaning, packaging, and grading of products, and the UP can advocate for cooperative formation at the village level and a federation of cooperatives at the Union level. Nevertheless, creating employment through entrepreneurship or hired labour does not compromise the ecological balance. Moreover, due to the small land size, it is not easy to use the machinery for cultivation. As a result, private entrepreneurs are not interested in the context of land consolidation by lifting the isle of cultivated land. In that case, a joint effort is needed in the form of a robust legal base and initiative of local government.

2.4.3. Social Care and Improving Social Relations

Providing some material support for the vulnerable and psychological support for those in isolation due to age, disease, and depression by engaging the community; individual, and private sector will increase the capacity to serve. The Union Parishad can come forward to mobilize some resources from the informal network and motivate people to construct the community hall. Sports and recreational activities are essential for increasing interaction and acquiring managerial and leadership skills. Some institutional mechanisms, supporting the environment and motivating the young generation to participate in these programs are essential. However, sports and cultural programs need to be encouraged to reduce the addiction to social media for the younger generation.

2.5 Recommendations

1. The Upazila Parishad should be the focal point of development works involving engineering, ICT, and urban planning technical personnel. Villages should have a master plan indicating crop zoning, land use, road network, drainage systems, habitation, and landscaping design. Union Parishad must enforce the directives in collaboration with residents.
2. Quality education and inclusive health services are prioritized to address competency development. The Union Parishad may take the initiative to monitor the educational activities and health services in rural areas by engaging its standing committee. Moreover, the Union Parishad may encourage informal initiatives for tutorial and daycare centres at the community level.

3. UP should focus on garbage disposal, sanitation in public places, and existing road maintenance works. Strict adherence to the construction of houses in compliance with the rules needs to be ensured.
4. Along with job creation for unskilled labour, the UP should focus on the needs of skilled and educated unemployed youth. Disseminating job-related information and scope for skill development can be provided by UDC.
5. Union Parishad can collaborate with private sector partners to manage growth centres, storage facilities, and the processing industry and encourage value-adding roles of market actors. In addition, UP can mobilize resources through informal networks for social care and improving social relations.

Conclusion

Rural society has experienced significant changes due to increasing connectedness through infrastructure, electronics, and ICT. The Union Parishad, the smallest local government entity, has assisted with various rural initiatives, including road networks, competency development, productivity, and social care. Despite workforce and investment limitations, the Union Parishad has the potential to serve these areas by building partnerships with private and non-state actors. Policy support for involving the Parishad in designing and implementing projects is crucial, and proper coordination at the grassroots level can ensure effective service delivery.

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Challenges of Local People's Participation in Ward Shava and Open Budget Session: A Case Study on Different Union Parishads at Trishal Upazila

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Abstract

The active involvement of people is of paramount importance in establishing a robust governance framework in Bangladesh. By means of active citizen engagement, individuals have the opportunity to share their perspectives on the process of governmental decision-making. From this perspective, this study investigates the impediments to active community involvement in Ward Shava and Open Budget Sessions within various Union Parishads in Trishal Upazila. The study was conducted based on a quantitative approach. A total of 300 local residents from different Union Parishads (Amirabari, Bailar, Baliparar, Dhanikhola, Mathbari, Rampura, Sakhua, and Trishal) under Trishal Upazila participated in the cross-sectional survey. The findings of the study reveal that a significant majority, i.e., 80% and 83% of the respondents, did not actively engage in this initial and final phase of the budgeting process, respectively, whereas only 39% of individuals residing in rural areas actively engaged in the Ward Shava. The results also show that a number of related factors, such as low levels of awareness, low rates of literacy among rural populations, political influence, intimidation and fear, distrust, bureaucratic complexity, etc., significantly impede people's participation in Ward Shava and Open Budget meetings. In this vein, addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort to raise awareness through community education, capacity building, and inclusive decision-making, promote accountability and transparency, and establish effective communication between local authorities and the community. However, the study findings incorporate both theoretical and practical contribution in the field of local government.

Key Words: People's Participation, Ward Shava, Open Budget Meeting, Local Government, Union Parishads, Bangladesh.

1. Introduction

Participation often pertains to individuals' active involvement in the decision-making process concerning the equitable distribution of development program benefits, as well as their engagement in endeavors aimed at evaluating these programs (Fitzgerald et al. 2016). In each democratic country, people's participation is crucial because it affects people's living standards and governance systems (Begum and Ahmed 2023). In that case, decentralization is often associated with many apparent advantages, including enhanced accessibility to decision makers, increased engagement of diverse social groups in the decision-making process, and heightened responsibility among decision makers (Andersson, Gibson, and Lehoucq 2004). Decentralization entails the direct empowerment of local individuals, whereby the involvement of local residents, including civil society, is solicited in the process of formulating and executing governmental decisions (Uddin 2016). People's participation in decentralized governance is seen as a dynamic procedure by which individuals exert influence on the trajectory and execution of a development initiative with the objective of safeguarding their welfare in relation to sustainable national development (Denhardt et al. 2009).

However, people can participate in the governmental decision-making process in Bangladesh since a parliamentary system governs the country and authority is somewhat delegated to local government entities. Since the local government institutions in Bangladesh practice the participatory governance approach, it provides substantial benefits to its citizens and empowers local government officials to develop independent decisions (Uddin 2019). The Union Parishad (UP) functions as a local government unit that facilitates the active participation of all citizens in decision-making processes. The promotion of people's participation facilitates enhanced service delivery and the implementation of sustainable choices (Hamilton 2013). Nevertheless, there exist several formal mechanisms (avenues) aimed at facilitating general people's participation in the Union Parishad. These mechanisms encompass open budget sessions, which encompass both preliminary and final budget meetings; the Ward Shaba, comprising the electorate of each ward; the village court, consisting of a chairman and four

members; standing committees that address specific functional matters; local elections held on a quinquennial basis; and the provision of access to information, thereby granting individuals the right to obtain relevant information (Uddin 2019).

In the past decade, much research has focused on people's participation and its challenges for the local government system around the globe. Ahmed et al. (2022) conducted a study on the modern practices of people's participation in different avenues of rural local government. The research largely focused on the most recent developments in people's engagement in several local government avenues. According to the study findings, participation in Union Parishads is functional because decentralization makes it easier to transfer power from the national to the local level, but most rural residents find it extremely difficult to engage in the various Union Parishad activities because of political complexities, institutional corruption, inadequate education, and general ignorance (Tanjil Ahmed, Azizur Rahman, and Tamanna Akter 2022). In another study, Ahmed and Akter (2022) articulate that the majority of rural residents were unaware of the Union Parishad Act, open budget meetings, and the UP-standing committee. The study also demonstrates that a significant portion of rural residents did not take part in the Ward Shaba and UP standing committees, the final open budget session, or the pre-open budget session (Ahmed and Akter 2022). In a similar vein, Uddin (2019) asserts that local people are empowered in Bangladesh as a result of their engagement in the local government institution, i.e., Union Parishad. The study's results indicate that the participation of community members in local government institutions serves as both an opportunity and a means for their empowerment. Despite the fact that many rural people expressed their opinion at the different avenues in rural local government (like Union Parishad), the engagement status of individuals in Union Parishad was very disheartening, as a significant number of members were unaware of their rights, illiterate, and could not get sufficient opportunities to engage (Uddin 2019).

The rationale for the people's participation in different avenues in Union Parishads (UPs) is the expectation that local people would actively interact with UPs to address and resolve issues pertaining to their livelihoods. Additionally, these mechanisms provide a

platform for negotiation between the local population and UP officials. Simultaneously, it is expected that the elected representatives possess the capacity to discern their respective domains of priority requirements and ensure collaborative efforts to address the needs of local people. However, among the different avenues of people's participation in the Union Parishad, Ward Shava and open budget session is very crucial since most of the local people share their thought on these two platforms (Ahmed 2023). Nevertheless, several challenges have been observed regarding people's participation in the different avenues of Union Parishad. The impartiality of decision-making based on people's participation is influenced by political pressures, poor communication and bureaucratic complexity. Addressing these challenges is vital for promoting genuine and diverse participation of local people in Union Parishad activities and fostering democratic local governance. Therefore, researchers contemplate that people's participation in the decision-making process and incorporation of stakeholders would help to strengthen accountability, transparency, administrative efficiency, improve citizen awareness, etc. regarding ensuring democratic governance in Bangladesh.

1.1 Executive Summary

A balanced socioeconomic development at the local level in Bangladesh depends heavily on people's participation in the government decision-making process. In spite of this fact, there are still many challenges and facets associated with getting people involved in local governing processes. In many cases, rural people, marginalized communities, women, and individuals with lower socioeconomic status find it difficult to voice their concerns or opinions during the Ward Shava and Open Budget meetings due to societal hierarchies and prevailing norms. In this context, the study aims to investigate the challenges surrounding people's participation in Ward Shava (community meetings) and Open Budget Meetings within the context of different Union Parishads (rural local administrative units) in Trishal Upazila. The study has been conducted using a quantitative approach. The findings of the study predominantly highlight the associated challenges (such as poor access to information, poor literacy rate, poor awareness, inadequate infrastructure and resources, bureaucratic complexity, political

influence, intimidation and fear, etc.) of people's participation at Ward Shava and Open Budget meetings that hinder concrete rural local development. The implications of these findings are significant. To enhance grassroots democracy, it is imperative to implement targeted awareness campaigns, improving citizens' understanding of the importance of these sessions. Transparency reforms within Union Parishads are necessary to build trust, and more open communication channels must be established to foster active participation. However, addressing these challenges would empower local communities to actively engage in democratic processes and contribute to more inclusive and effective decision-making at the grassroots level.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The active participation of people in local governance processes is crucial for fostering democratic practices and ensuring transparent decision-making. In recent years, the concept of participatory democracy has gained prominence, emphasizing the involvement of citizens in decision-making at the grassroots level. Despite the recognition of its importance, people's participation in local governance processes remains a complex and multifaceted challenge. One of the central issues pertains to the accessibility of information and awareness about the meetings themselves. Often, citizens are unaware of the timing, agenda, and purpose of these meetings, leading to limited attendance and engagement. Additionally, elements like socioeconomic disparities and power dynamics undermine the effectiveness of people's participation. This results in an imbalanced representation of the community's needs and preferences, undermining the principle of inclusivity that underpins participatory democracy. These knowledge gap can lead to passive participation or disinterest among attendees, ultimately limiting the potential of these meetings to contribute to informed decision-making. Moreover, bureaucratic obstacles and a lack of accountability mechanisms may hinder the effectiveness of Ward Shava and open budget meetings. Therefore, this study aims to explore these challenges in the specific context of different Union Parishads in Trishal Upazila. By understanding the nuances of these challenges, policymakers, local authorities, and civil society organizations can develop tailored strategies to enhance people's participation in these crucial local governance mechanisms.

1.3 Significance of the Study

The findings of the study incorporate both theoretical and practical contributions. It investigates the socio-economic, cultural, and political factors that impact people's ability to contribute meaningfully to discussions regarding local development plans and budget allocations. By examining the challenges faced by local residents in these participatory processes, the study provides insights into the broader issues of community engagement, transparency, and accountability in local governance. In particular, the researchers analyze the various factors that lead to the limited participation of local people in Ward Shava and Open Budget Meetings. Moreover, the study explores the influence of gender, socioeconomic status, and social norms on individuals' involvement in the decision-making process. Practically, the significance of this study lies in its potential to inform policymakers and local authorities about the existing gaps in citizen participation in Ward Shava and Open Budget Meetings and offer recommendations to enhance the inclusivity and effectiveness of these democratic mechanisms. Theoretically, by identifying barriers, suggesting strategies to overcome them, and developing existing knowledge on that particular issue, the research contributes to the overall goal of strengthening grassroots democracy and fostering more transparent and responsive governance at the local level in Bangladesh.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The principal aim of this study is to explore the associated challenges of local people's participation in Ward Shava and the Open Budget Session in the selected UPs in Trishal Upazila Parishad.

The specific objectives are

- a) To identify the challenges of people's participation in Ward Shava in the selected UPs in Trishal Upazila Parishad.
- b) To investigate the challenges of people's participation in Open Budget Session in the selected UPs in Trishal Upazila Parishad.
- c) To recommend ways for addressing the challenges of people's participation in Ward Shava and the Open Budget Session in the selected UPs in Trishal Upazila Parishad.

2. Methodology

This study is exploratory in nature. In this particular setting, based on the positivism philosophy, a quantitative methodology has been used to perform the research. The data from the survey has been gathered using a quantitative technique. The primary justification for using a quantitative technique is that it yields data that can be numerically stated, allowing the researcher to use statistical tests to prepare assertions based on the data. In addition, the quantitative method is significant since it facilitates the preparation of descriptive statistics (Demetrius Madrigal 2020). However, the survey data was gathered from the local population in Bangladesh who are members of the selected Union Parishads (i.e., Amirabari, Bailar, Baliparar, Dhanikhola, Mathbari, Rampura, Sakhua, and Trishal) in Trishal Upazila. The survey comprised 300 participants in total, drawn from five Union Parishads of Trishal Upazilla. Additionally, data was gathered from a randomly chosen sample using standardized questionnaires. The purpose of the survey was to gather pertinent demographic data as well as particulars about general people's involvement in Ward Shava and open budget sessions, such as how often they attend, what obstacles they face, and how beneficial they believe the sessions to be. Finally, SPSS and MS Excel were used to analyze the data. Correspondingly, all ethical considerations have been closely adhered to in order to guarantee the balance between the potential risks associated with research and its potential benefits.

3. Findings of the Study

On the basis of a cross-sectional survey, this section significantly illustrates the challenges of local people's participation in Ward Shava and the Open Budget Session in the selected UPs in Trishal Upazila Parishad. This research presents and analyzes data using univariate analysis. Bar charts and pie charts were used in this presentation to display the essential facts. Predominantly, percentage analysis and frequency distribution have been applied to present the data.

3.1 Demographic Information of the Respondents

Since demographic information reflects the general position and circumstances of the participants, it is regarded as crucial information in any research.

Table 1: Demographic Analysis

Variables		Frequency	Percent (%)	Cumulative Percent (%)
Gender	Female	220	73.3	73.3
	Male	80	26.7	100.0
Age Range	21-30	56	18.7	18.7
	31-40	132	44.0	62.7
	41- Above	112	37.3	100.0
Education Level	Received Primary Education	92	30.7	30.7
	Received Higher Education	124	41.3	72.0
	Illiterate	84	28.0	100.0
Employment Status	Day Labor	64	21.3	21.3
	Businessmen	104	34.7	56.0
	Government Job Holder	36	12.0	68.0
	Private Job Holder	32	10.7	78.7
	Housewife	48	16.0	94.7
	Unemployed	16	5.3	100.0

[Source: Field Survey on Different Union Parishads under Trishal Upazila, Mymensingh, June 2022]

Table 1 illustrates the demographic information of the respondents including analyzing respondents' gender status, age range, education levels and profession. According to the survey, it was observed that 73.3% (N =220) of the respondents were male and 26.7% (N =80) of the respondents were female. This number in gender representation has a significant implication in the findings, as it suggests that the perspectives and experiences of men are more heavily represented in the results compared to women. Besides, the findings also reveal that 44% (N =132) of the respondents belonged to the age group 31–40, and 37.3% (N =112) of the respondents belonged to the age group 41 and above. These statistics indicate that the study primarily focuses on adults, particularly those in their

thirties and older who belonged to the rural areas of Bangladesh. Accordingly, the survey data reveals that 28% (N =84) of respondents were illiterate, 30.7% (N =92) had just a basic education, and 41.3% (N =124) of respondents had a high level of education.

These statistics suggest that a significant portion of the respondents have some level of education, with a substantial proportion having received higher education. The mentioned occupational diversity in Table 1 suggests that the study encompasses individuals from various walks of life and employment sectors. The inclusion of day laborers, housewives, private job holders, and government job holders adds valuable diversity to the sample, as their perspectives differ based on their respective roles and experiences.

3.2 Challenges of People's Participation in the Pre Open Budget Session and Final Budget Meeting

The study investigated the level of people's participation in the pre-open budget session and the final open budget session. According to the field survey, only 20% (N=60), and 17% (N=51) of rural people participated in the pre-open budget session and final budget meeting in the Union Parishads (See in Figure 1).

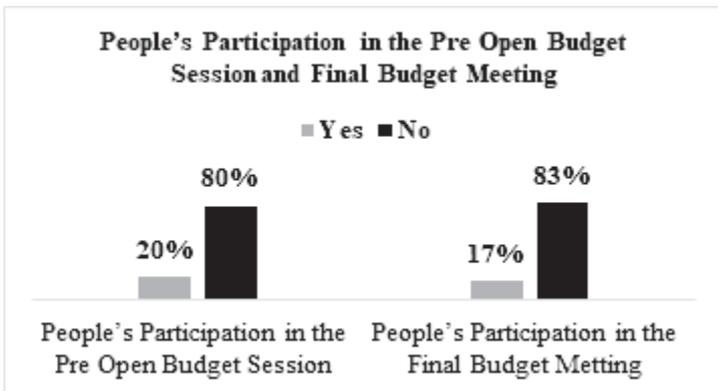


Figure 1: Challenges of People's Participation in the Pre Open Budget Session and Final Budget Meeting [Source: Field Survey on Different Union Parishads under Trishal Upazila, Mymensingh, June 2022]

These findings indicate that a significant majority, 80% (N=240), and 83% (N=249) did not actively engage in this initial and final phase of the budgeting process respectively. One possible

reason and challenge for the low participation rate is a lack of awareness among rural residents about the pre-open budget session and final budget meetings. The researchers observed that rural people are not informed about the significance of this session or how it can impact local development. Another challenge was that the session had not been inclusive enough, failing to involve a wide range of community members, especially marginalized groups. In such instances, the low participation rate among rural residents means that the budget-making process does not fully represent the needs and goals of the whole community. Furthermore, minimal participation raises questions regarding accountability and transparency in the distribution of public funds.

3.3 Challenges of People's Participation in Ward Shava

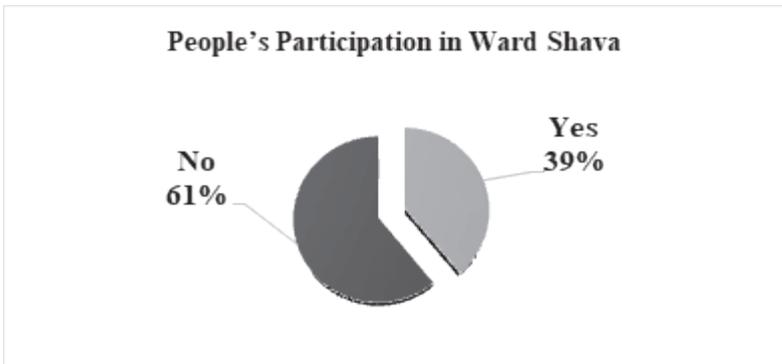


Figure 2: Challenges of People's Participation in Ward Shava [Source: Field Survey on Different Union Parishads under Trishal Upazila, Mymensingh, June 2022]

The study also investigated the level of people's participation in the Ward Shava. The findings of the field study indicate that a mere 39% (N=117) of individuals residing in rural areas actively engaged in the Ward Shava within the Union Parishads. This indicates that a substantial majority, up to 61% (N=183), did not actively participate in the Ward Shava, which serves as a crucial forum for decision-making at the community level. In that case, one significant challenge was how much rural residents recognize and comprehend the significance of Ward Shava in rural development. Moreover, the perception of whether participating in Ward Shava meetings can lead to tangible improvements in the community might influence

people's decisions to attend or not. However, the relatively low participation rate raises questions about whether the Ward Shava accurately represents the views and interests of the entire community.

3.4 Factors Associated with Major Challenges behind People's Participation in Ward Shava and the Open Budget Meetings

Regarding the factors associated with major challenges behind people's participation in Ward Shava and Open Budget meetings in Union Parishads, the survey findings shed light on several barriers that hinder people's participation at the local level of decision-making.

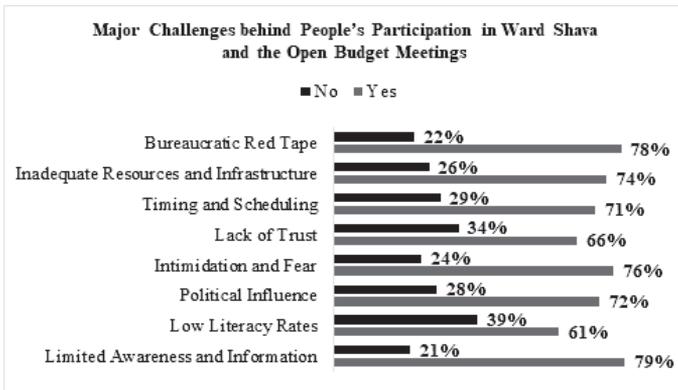


Figure 3: Factors Associated with Major Challenges behind People's Participation [Source: Field Survey on Different Union Parishads under Trishal Upazila, Mymensingh, June 2022]

One of the most prominent challenges identified in the survey is that 79% (N=237) of the respondents had limited information about the Ward Shava and Open Budget meetings. In that case, the lack of effective channels for disseminating information to the community, insufficient communication, and poor outreach efforts by local authorities to inform residents about these meetings were considered as key issues. Besides, a significant portion of respondents, 61% (N=183), had low literacy rates which impede their ability to understand complex budget documents and the purpose of the meetings. Moreover, a substantial majority, 72% (N= 216), reported facing political influence as a barrier to participation which indicates that political pressure or coercion to support specific agendas or candidates.

Similarly, the survey also revealed that a significant 76% (N=228) of respondents faced intimidation and fear when it came to attending Ward Shava and Open Budget meetings. This climate of fear deters community members from attending such meetings.

Conversely, a significant number of respondents (71%, N=213) cited timing and scheduling as issues affecting their participation. Most of the respondents argued that meetings scheduled at inconvenient times which creates conflict with work or family responsibilities. Moreover, 78%, (N=234) of respondents faced bureaucratic complexity which indicates the complex administrative processes that deter or delay participation. In this case, bureaucratic hurdles make it difficult to access information or engage with local government. Overall, the findings suggest that there are multifaceted challenges that deter people from participating in Ward Shava and Open Budget meetings.

3.5 Ways to Enhance People's Participation in Ward Shava and the Open Budget Meetings

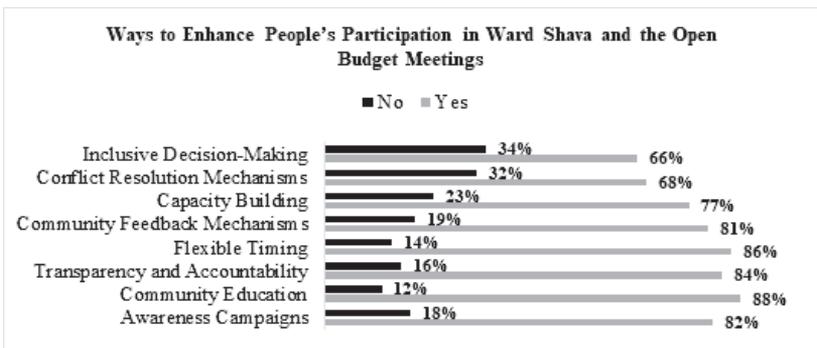


Figure 4: Ways to Enhance People's Participation in Ward Shava and the Open Budget Meetings

[Source: Field Survey on Different Union Parishads under Trishal Upazila, Mymensingh, June 2022]

The study also explored ways to enhance people's participation in Ward Shava and the Open Budget meetings. According to the survey, an overwhelming majority (82%, N=246) suggested that the awareness campaign would be the best measure to address issues related to people's participation. This awareness campaign may include informative workshops, seminars, and community meetings.

Besides, a significant 88% (N=264) of respondents emphasized community education that can enhance civic participation in the local decision-making process. Offering civic education programs to improve residents' understanding of local governance, budgeting, and decision-making processes; providing training on how to read and interpret budget documents; and encouraging critical thinking can boost the people's participation. As well, many respondents, (84%, N=252) recognized the importance of transparency and accountability in promoting participation. In this vein, making budget documents and decisions easily accessible to the public; regularly updating and sharing information on budget allocation, expenditures, and project progress; and creating mechanisms for residents to monitor and hold local authorities' accountability can be the best way to enhance local people's participation in the mentioned avenues.

An overwhelming 86% (N=258) of respondents suggested that flexible timing for meetings would encourage greater participation which emphasizes scheduling meetings at times that accommodate the diverse schedules and responsibilities of community members. Respectively, a substantial 81% (N=243) of respondents emphasized the importance of community feedback mechanisms.

Conversely, many respondents (77%, N=231) recognized the need for community capacity building. This can include training and support to community leaders and representatives on how to effectively engage with residents and facilitate productive meetings. A majority of respondents (68%, N=204) highlighted the importance of having conflict resolution mechanisms in place. This strategy can incorporate promoting open dialogue, a culture of respectful disagreement, and appointing impartial mediators to address disputes that arise during meetings. Correspondingly, 66% (N=198) of respondents emphasized the importance of inclusive decision-making processes. In this context, meetings should be inclusive and open to all community members, regardless of background or status, as well as actively seeking input from marginalized groups and underrepresented communities so that they can ensure their voices are heard.

4. Discussion of the Study

The study demonstrates the obstacles that hinder people's participation in the vital democratic processes of Ward Shava and Open Budget Sessions within the different Union Parishads in Trishal Upazila. Key findings highlight a fundamental lack of awareness and understanding among local residents about the significance of these sessions, a factor impeding their active participation. Bureaucratic hurdles and a lack of transparency within Union Parishads emerge as major barriers, eroding trust and discouraging community involvement. Besides, communication gaps between local authorities and residents further exacerbate the problem. Ahmed and Akter 2022; Uddin 2019; and Ahmed et al. 2022 supported these findings and articulated that rural local people are still struggling to ensure their participation in the different avenues of rural local government (Union Parishads). The implications of these findings are noteworthy. In this vein, implementing focused awareness efforts to increase residents' comprehension of the significance of these sessions (Ward Shava and Open Budget Meetings) is essential to strengthening grassroots democracy. In order to promote active engagement, more open lines of communication must be built, and transparency improvements within Union Parishads are also important to generate rural people's confidence. After all, addressing these challenges is vital to ensuring that the voices and concerns of local residents are integrated into decision-making processes at the union level. By addressing these obstacles and promoting inclusive participation, Trishal Upazila can move towards a more democratic and responsive governance structure that would truly represent its diverse community.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study highlights several significant insights regarding the difficulties faced by local people in participating effectively in Ward Shava and Open Budget Sessions within various Union Parishads in Trishal Upazila. Through a comprehensive discussion of the findings, it becomes evident that a range of factors hampers local people's participation in these crucial decision-making processes. Primarily, the research underscores the lack of awareness and information among the local population about the significance

of Ward Shava and Open Budget Sessions. This deficiency in understanding inhibits active involvement and engagement, hindering the democratic process at the grassroots level. Besides, the study demonstrates that due to several associated factors including political influence, intimidation and fear, lack of trust, inadequate resources and infrastructure, and inconvenient timing hinder the people's participation in the Ward Shava and Open Budget meetings to a greater extent. Furthermore, the study identifies bureaucratic hurdles and a lack of transparency within Union Parishads as substantial obstacles. These challenges create an environment of mistrust and apprehension, deterring residents from actively participating in these sessions. Moreover, the research highlights the importance of bridging the communication gap between local authorities and community members. Improved communication channels and platforms for dialogue can foster trust and encourage greater participation. To end, the research illuminates the multifaceted challenges that impede local people's participation in Ward Shava and Open Budget Sessions in Trishal Upazila. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort to raise awareness, promote transparency, and establish effective communication between local authorities and the community. In particular, inclusive decision-making, conflict resolution mechanisms, community feedback mechanisms, community education, flexible timing of meetings, and rural people's capacity building could be effective measures to address the issues of people's participation in open budget meetings and Ward Shava in local government units in Bangladesh. Overcoming these hurdles is essential for fostering genuine grassroots democracy and ensuring that the voices and needs of local residents are heard and considered in decision-making processes at the union level.

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An Assessment of Pourashava Digital Center: A case Study of 9 Municipalities

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Abstract

The Pourashava Digital Center (PDC) is a one-stop service center in Bangladesh that aims to bring all types of government digital services and ICT facilities to the doorsteps of every citizen living in the country's semi-urban areas. The objective of the study was to give idea about the current state of PDCs and to find out existing challenges and limitation along with an effective way forward for providing essential digital equipment and services to the rural people. After being assessed the 9 municipalities of Bangladesh it was found that the PDCs are not providing all the services it was aimed to provide. Some challenges and limitations prevailing which hindering the services, although these challenges can be reduced if proper inventions are taken. Based on findings the study gave some recommendations such as to upgrade the software and hardware mechanism and in take initiatives to improve the condition of the entrepreneurs.

Keywords: E-service; Pourashava Digital Centers (UDC); Digital Bangladesh; Municipalities; e-governance.

1. Introduction

Aspire to Innovate (a2i) Programme of ICT Division of Bangladesh Government, created the Digital Service innovation fund and implemented a project to build a system on providing the Online Holding Tax & Water Billing Service (payment of local tax related to local government administration), Automated Property Management Service (property management), Online Councilor Certificates Service (issuance of certificates), and E-trade License Service (issuance of licenses). The five services are currently provided by certain Municipalities/City Corporation. The Bangladesh government started this digitalization with an aim to expand the services throughout the country to build an integrated system for Municipalities/City Corporation.

In order to join the ranks of middle-income countries by 2021, the Bangladesh government announced the objectives for Bangladesh Vision 2021 in December 2008. Among the objectives of vision 21, there were objectives to build an efficient, responsible, transparent and decentralized administrative system and develop local economies and commercial hub. These objectives led the government to launch digital municipality or Poursabha service centers. The digital municipality or Poursabha services system is an administration system to enhance convenience by transforming the existing document-based municipality service into one-stop service through ICT.

2. Executive Summery

Poura Digital Center (PDC) is one-stop service center set up in Bangladesh with a view to providing all sorts of government digital services and ICT facilities to the doorsteps of every citizen residing under the municipality of the country. Bangladesh government had an aim to make the country digitally advanced in 2021 and to fulfill this dream different information centers across the country are being set up.

Access to information(A2I) project [which is currently known as Aspire to Innovate] took initiatives to establish Poura Information Service Center (PISC) in 2009 which is renamed as Poura Digital Center (PDC) in 2014.

The purpose of the study is to assess present conditions and effectiveness of Poura Digital Center (PDC) as well as to find out the challenges and gaps to make an effective way forward. The study was conducted among 9 municipalities of 3 districts under 3 divisions. Mixed method of data collection was applied using some specific data collection tools. The quantitative data was analyzed using spreadsheet and SPSS.

Research reveals that the present status of the PDCs is good in terms of facilities and services. Most of the visited PDCs have large room with sufficient spaces for the customers, good internet speed and electricity. Although they have machines and equipment but those are not up to date to satisfy the demand of customers if it been compared with other private digital centers under the municipality.

The research also finds out that most of service receivers visit the PDC for some specific services like birth registration, death registration and for collecting different certificates. As it was expected that PDC will provide all types of online and digital services, was not observed by the research team. It was come out through the analysis of respondents' responses that people under municipality are not much aware about the types of services of PDC.

About the services of PDC at present times, most of the interviewed service receivers said that the services are average to good. Very few expressed their high-level satisfaction. It was observed that to increase the effectiveness of PDCs, some measures should be taken. First of all, advertisement of PDC's different types of services within the community is required. People need to be aware about the services. Good and modern equipment are needed for increasing the quality of services.

As per the recommendations of the respondents, it is very necessary to modify the policy about the entrepreneurs. It was observed that public- private-partnership (PPP) modality is not working effectively at the PDCs. All the visited PDCs started with entrepreneurs under public- private-partnership (PPP) modality, but after a certain period the entrepreneurs left the job. The main reason is that the income through providing services is very low to maintain their entrepreneurship as well as their livelihood. Because of this problem, among the 9 visited municipalities, PDC is not functioning in 2 municipalities. Among the 7 PDCs under this study, except one, assigned staff from municipality is working as entrepreneur.

3. Problem Statement

Building a Digital Bangladesh is an important agenda of the present government. This idea has inspired millions of people specially the young generation. This is also be considered as the key driver of national development. The program for 'Digital Bangladesh' and its implementation will ensure a unique success to our pursuit of transforming Bangladesh into a middle-income country.

In conformity with the Vision-2021, the quality-of-service delivery and its access to the grass root level has been significantly enhanced because of wider application of ICT. Establishment of e-Service

Center in each government office at the Upazilas, in each Paurashava and City Corporation and building ICT infrastructure is essential condition for establishing Digital Bangladesh. With this aim although the PDCs and UDCs started working at the grass root level, it was not checked whether it is giving proper and desired services to the rural and semi urban people. From different research reports and assessments, it was observed that rural people although frequently using the UDCs but PDCs are not being visited by the semi-urban people for taking services. Lack of proper equipment's, skill of entrepreneurs, Public-Private mode, lack of public awareness are concern points are affecting the effective run of PDCs. However, PDCs effectiveness was not measured through proper research or assessments. So, the present status, challenges and limitations also not known from the geo-economic perspectives. For running these rural based ICT frameworks, it is very necessary to evaluate their functions.

4. Rationale of Study

The present government has given its highest priority for achieving desired growth at faster pace by investing in ICT sector. The foremost requirement is to ensure ICT services for the marginalized communities by developing required ICT infrastructure countrywide together with internet connectivity at the grass-root level. At this stage, to stay competitive and relevant, in confronting the challenges of the 21st Century, it is needed sincere efforts and active participation of the Government, NGOs, private sector, development partners and each citizen of the country in the pursuit of turning Bangladesh into a modern welfare state. So, government of the Bangladesh is taking many initiatives in the light of Digital Bangladesh-DB. Pourasabha Digital Center-PDC is one of the priority sectors of those DB initiatives of the country. The Municipality is assigned to provide some specific services such as water and sanitation, infrastructure, health services, providing necessary certification to the citizens, taxation and education related services. Among these services the services that required digital support was assumed to be provided by the PDCs such as providing certificates, online application, giving different types of bills etc. During the formation of PDCs it was anticipated that it will provide sixteen different types of services to the citizens of municipality. To know the actual scenario

of PDC services assessment of these centers is very much needed. This study was trying to find out the present status of the PDCs as well as its existing challenges and limitations for finding out an way forward for increasing its effectiveness.

5. Objectives

- A. To find out the present status of services provided by Pourasabha Digital Centers
- B. To assess the level of effectiveness of Pourasabha Digital Centers in Bangladesh through satisfaction of its users.
- C. To identify the existing challenges and gaps of Pourasabha Digitals center in providing the satisfactory services to the users
- D. Find out a way forward for overcoming the challenges.

6. Methods and Materials

This study incorporates both of the qualitative and quantitative research approach which focuses on asking questions using different statistical tools.

Selection of the Study Area

For the purpose of this study, nine PDCs under three Upazilas of 3 districts (Mymensingh, Barishal and Chattogram) districts have been selected on the basis of purposive and random sampling.

Sources of Data and Sampling

The data was collected from both primary and secondary sources. Secondary data was collected from the existing literatures such as books, newspaper reports, previous research works, seminar papers, reports etc.

Sample Size

A total 180 (One hundred and eighty) respondents have been selected from three categories. The composition of the respondents is as follows:

Sl	Activity	Respondent	Unit Size
1.	Interviews	Entrepreneurs [Uddogkta] of Pourshava Digital Centers	18
2.	Interviews	Service Receivers	117
3.	Key Informant Interviews (KII)	Mayors	9
		Poura Nirbahi Officer [Executive Officer]	9
		Councilors	27
	Total		180

Data Collection Technique

The primary data was collected by using semi-structured questionnaire from the key respondents and asking set of questions. The secondary data was collected through content analysis from the research articles, reports and other relevant papers.

Data Analysis

The collected data was categorized, tabulated, analyzed by using SPSS (Statistical Packages for the social Sciences) MS-Word, Excel for analyzing the data.

7. Findings and Results

According to the Entrepreneurs of PDC, the major services given by them are birth registration and death registration. People frequently come here for these two types of services. Apart from this, tax payment, character certificate and sometimes photocopy and scan is provided by them.

According to the 58 percent interviewed entrepreneurs, the PDC do not have sufficient equipment and machine to run a well functional digital center. They said they need some modern and UpToDate machine for providing good services.

Box 7.1 : Services of PDC Assigned by Municipality

- * Receipt of electricity bill.
- * Various government forms.
- * Application for obtaining copy of land.
- * Checking different types of job ads and online application
- * Checking various test results.
- * University admission information.
- * E-mail exchange.

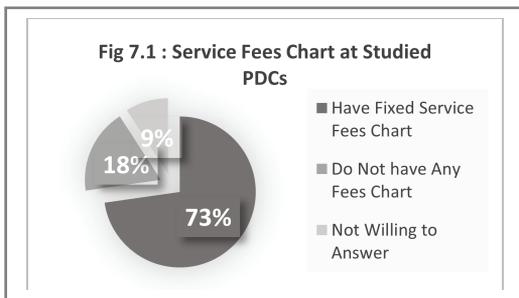
- * Fill the teacher registration form.
- * Internet Browsing.
- * Talking with pictures directly at home and abroad.
- * Providing knowledge through online on agriculture modern farming methods, fertilizers pesticides, application rules of pest infestation in crops,
- * Prevention information.
- * Health information.
- * Information on legal matters.

About 34 percent entrepreneurs opine that they have sufficient machine for running the PDC satisfactorily. While other 8 percent do not want to answer, as they their confused about the situation.

According to the Entrepreneurs of the PDC, the PDC have sufficient spaces for providing services to the customers.

According to the 8 interviewed entrepreneurs electricity condition is very good at PDC. While 3 said it is good. All of them said they have generator facilities, so although the facing power cut problem sometimes, it not become a big problem.

About 45 Percent (%) entrepreneurs said they are suffering with the internet speed. Speed is not good enough to run the software.



About 73 percent PDCs have fees chart for the services. But not all these 73 percent any has mechanism for displaying the chart. About 18 percent has no fixed fees chart. They take the service charge according to the volume of services.

Total 96 people [Female-36, Male-60] informed that they have taken services from PDC. Among these total 96 respondents, about 80 percent (%) said that they have received the services of issuing their birth certificates and about 60 percent (%) said they received services of collection of the death certificates of their relatives. Some [about 50 percent] informed that they took both services.

Apart from this, people received services from PDCs like issuing character certificate or citizen certificate [15 percent]. Very few, about 10 percent said that they received services like checking the public exam results and others said scan and photocopy [16 percent].

Although the PDC were formed with the aim of providing so many online and offline services, but it was observed that people are only going for issuing certificates mainly. When they were asked why they are not taking other services from the PDC, they said it's easy to take other services from the local digital centers. They said they can take services from the other digital centers whenever they need, but PDC have its own office time with lunch break time, so adjusting time with them sometimes being difficult.

About 80 percent service receivers said that they visited 1 to 5 times within last six months for taking services and about 11 percent said that they visited 6 to 10 times within the last 6 months. More than 11 times within last six months is very few i.e., 5 percent [%]. From this information it was reveal that people under the municipality do not visit the PDC frequently as they do not go to for various services.

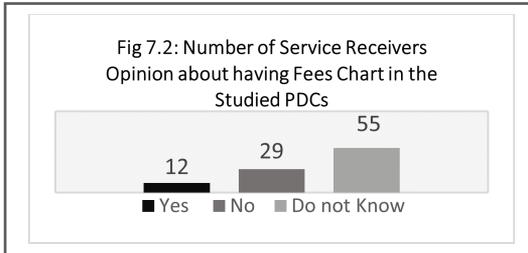
Total 61 respondents opined that, services of PDC at present is average i.e., not so good and not so bad. While 25 respondents said that the services are good, and they are satisfied. About 56 service receivers said that that the spaces at the PDC are good enough for receiving services. The second highest number i.e., 20 respondents said its average or workable. About electricity and internet speed total 69 and 60 service receivers, respectively said that its good enough and they do not face much problem for that. Total 50 people who received services from the PDCs said that the skill of entrepreneurs is average, and they suggested for providing more trainings to them. While total 34 respondents said that their skill is good enough for providing services.

Total 55 respondents said that they do not know whether the PDC has any fees chart or not. They pay for their services as the entrepreneur, or the service provider asked. But 29 respondents said

that the PDC do not have any fixed fees chart. While 12 people said that the PDC has the fees chart.

Existing challenges and gaps of PDC in providing the satisfactory services to the users according to the response of the respondents.

Technical Problems



Internet speed power cut is prominent in rural areas for which uninterrupted service delivery is hampered. Server problems is another is also hampered online services and services cannot be delivered promptly.

Lack of equipment and modern Machine

Lack of Modern Equipment are common problem in PDCs. Because of this quality of services sometimes deteriorates. Good configuration input devices are output devices are very necessary for attaining customers satisfactions.

Remain Open in office time only.

The service receivers opined that PDC remains open in office time i.e., 9 am to 5 pm only. Sometimes even after 9pm it opens. When people need an emergency after 5 pm, they need to go to the other digital centers. If the PDC need to be more effective it's had to consider the timing.

Fixed and visible fees chart

As part of Local government PDC need to have fixed and visible fees chart, If the charts are displayed in the PDC premises people will feel easy to take services according to the chart.

Job Insecurity

The job insecurity is a problem for the entrepreneurs. Sometimes

changes of elected representatives cause the change of entrepreneurs in PDC. In the visited PDC most of them are muster roll employee. Do not have any contract for a specific duration of job.

Lack of ICT related skill

Lack of proper training on ICT. They opined that they need training not only for operating the software and input devices, but they also need to have some training on hardware. If the machine gives technical problem or minute hardware problem, they had to wait for the technicians. If they had operational knowledge on hardware, some hassle may be solved by them.

Low service Charge

Low service charge is a problem for the entrepreneurs. The PDCs have to have a citizen charter containing fees of services according to government guidelines. These service charges are very low to maintain the entrepreneurship and attain a handsome income for livelihood. This is the reason most of the entrepreneurs left within one or two years after starting the entrepreneurship.

8. Discussion

It was told by the respondents that PDC is a unique initiative because it was started with the condition of working under Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) modality and its aim to take digital services to the rural and semi-urban people. The government's aim was to reduce hassle of people through providing all types of services through Ekseba software. Although these types of digital centers are very effective for rural areas, but in semi-urban areas it is difficult to survive, since number of private digital centers are there.

In case of PDC, PPP modality is difficult to maintain. After starting the PDCs, entrepreneurs were recruited and some of them came with their equipment. But surviving only based on what they earned it is difficult for an area where there are other digital centers also. Moreover, the service charges are low, and they have to provide their services within the office time. Sometimes the entrepreneurs taken more charges and what also affects the reputation of the Municipality and elected representatives.

It was also come out from the discussion that, PDC should be operated under the municipality own budget. If the aim of PDC is to giving services, it should be free of cost or with a minimal cost.

For increasing the effectiveness of the PDC modern equipment and orientation with follow-up training is necessary. Rights now entrepreneurs are not very skilled in providing services. Some of them have some trainings but most of them need to build their capacity in ICT. They said entrepreneurs' feel insecure to invest in the PDCs as they are not the permanent employee in the centers. That's why only government or project given apparatus are present in the PDCs which become more competitive in this competitive era of ICT. Maximum machines mainly laptop or photocopier are old enough for providing good and quick services. Entrepreneurs are not curious to repair those as the maintenance is costly. Their negligence is also prominent as they are not permanent employee.

In present days people are coming for receiving birth registration and death registration types of services, but if they need to do any correction, they have to visit the district administrative office, these cause hassle to people. Sometimes people do not want to understand this. They think the entrepreneurs are not willing to do the services.

The respondents opined that if the PDC need to be effective in providing services some changes should be done in policy and practices. First of all, the entrepreneurs and PDC should come under Pura budget. The entrepreneurs' job should be permanent and salaried from municipality. Otherwise, the entrepreneurs will seek better job opportunity always. The PDC should be equipped with modern and all necessary devices. Government can take initiatives in this regard.

Under this study the functioning PDCs are run either by the staffs who are receiving salary from the municipality or by the direct staffs of municipality who are assigned for the services of PDC. This initiative is taken by the municipality authority for running the PDCs after the entrepreneurs under PPP modality left the job.

According to the Mayors of two municipality PDC is not that much necessary as municipality has separate departments for giving services like birth registration, death registration etc. And right now,

all these departments have computers. So, they think its not necessary. Rather giving services against money sometimes brings bad reputation of the municipality and elected representatives. The findings of these two Municipality reveals that, PDC is not as much as necessary as it is in Union or rural areas. Municipality located in semi urban areas, where there are many digital centers for providing these types of services. If PDC's aim is to giving services in low cost or minimal cost, then it's difficult to survive the entrepreneurship. So, functioning effective PDC policy and practice should be revised.

9. Recommendations and Conclusion

To make the PDC effective and to attain its mission some recommendation is given below. Most of the recommendation are come from the respondents who are directly involved with the service giving and receding or related with its functions.

- * Increase ICT facilities, governmental services and other services. Government should take necessary steps for the development of the PDC. Monitoring Mechanism should be developed for checking and monitoring its equipment and machines regularly. The not-functional machines should be replaced timely and need assessment for the machine and equipment should be done yearly.
- * Human Resource Development should be done. The government should pay more attention to human resources development program to make PDCs effective. Human is the main driving force of any development project. Qualified and skilled human resources are the key factors for all development. Activities. Training and follow-up trainings should be done regularly by the relevant institutions such as NILG, ICT Division of Bangladesh Government. Initiatives should be taken to incorporate hardware training along with the software trainings.
- * Budget constraint are a major problem for maintaining PDCs. Every year government should make a proper financial allocation for the smooth functioning of these one-stop information and service centers. This allocation specially needed for maintaining the PDC i.e., servicing the equipment, buying necessary materials, solving technical problems etc.

- * To get the full advantages from PDCs, speedy internet connection is a must. But the present internet speed in the PDC is not that much speedy and smooth. In most cases they have to share the same Wi-Fi services with the municipality. Which reduces the speed. The users are to wait too long for a simple query. Sometimes server problem hampers the service providing activities. Local government authority should take initiatives for this. Separate Wi-Fi with good speed can be provided for the PDC.
- * If the PDC need to run under PPP modality, then handsome Salaries for the entrepreneurs may encourage and make them more dedicated to their duties and responsibilities. This will also help to reduce the frequent change of entrepreneurs because of less income. Handsome salary can make them more mindful of their jobs and they will feel enthusiastic about service delivery.
- * Most of the visited PDCs have assigned staffs for PDC. They get salary from municipality, and they are muster roll staffs. If the PDC have to run by the assigned staffs, then their job needs to be permanent. Their job insecurity hampers their concentration to job.
- * PDC members as well as municipality can arrange publicity programs for making people aware about their services. It was observed that people only come to PDC for certificate types services. Most of them do not know about other online services that PDC can serve. Advertisement and publicity program can help people to know.

Conclusions

Pourashava Digital Centers are the digital and information agencies that help the inhabitants under municipalities to get the real digital and information service to be the active citizens of the state. The study was done with aim of assessing present status and effectiveness and find out gaps and challenges along with way forwards. It was observed that PDCs are as a one-stop Digital Centers contributing much to the massive development of socio-economic growth in the semi urban areas of Bangladesh. PDC essentially helps to reduce the inherent inconsistencies that occur in the process of manual operational procedure during the interactions between different

stakeholders. It was also observed that PDC has a good potential to fulfill the need of people under municipalities in terms of providing government services and other online digital services. Some measurements need to be taken for increasing its effectiveness.

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People's participation in Union Parishads decision making process: A study on selected Union Parishad

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Abstract

People's participation is the sine qua non for development. This study has tried to review the dilemma of the theory and practice of people's participation in decision making at UP level. It has been also tried to explore the level of local people's participation in decision making as well as to identify the factors of low level participation at UP level. The specific objectives of the study are (a) to assess the level of participation of local people in Union Parishad's decision making process and (b) to identify the major issues and causes that affect the participation of local people in union parishad. Both qualitative as well as quantitative method has been used to carry out the research. Findings of the research are (a) People are well known about the activities of Union Parishad. But most of the people are not interested to take part to the activities of Union Parishad's except their necessary issues or services which they need several times. (b) Lack of publicity and awareness among common people and the unwillingness of Union Parishad officials hinders the people to participate in decision-making process. (c) All major decisions about budget preparation, tax collection and assessment, construction work, judicial matters, and agricultural development are predetermined by Chairman and Union Parishad members before the general meeting. (d) Publicity for citizens' participation should be wide-spread to ensure engagement in decision making process. Study team recommended some points are as follows- (i) Make available space for ensuring accountability of Union Parishad representatives to the common people. If the people can question the Union Parishad representatives freely about their query and get answer, it will ensure participation; (ii) People who take part in the different meetings should be paid some money as honorarium from Union parishad especially for those who are poor such as day laborer, rickshaw puller, street hawker etc.;

(iii) Publicity for citizens' participation should be wide-spread to ensure engagement in decision making process. Raising awareness among common people that they have the right to participate in making any decision related to Union Parishad through ward shava, meeting, seminar or workshop.

Key Words : Local Government (LG), Local Government Institutions (LGIs), Local Government and Rural development (LGRD), Focused group discussion (FGD), National Institute of Local Government (NILG), Union Parishad (UP)

1.1 Introduction

People's participation is the sine qua non for development. The notion of people's participation in their development has been gaining momentum in the process of human empowerment and development. Contemporary development scholars have been advocating the inclusion of people's participation in development projects as they believe the avowed objectives of any project cannot be fully achieved unless people meaningfully participate in decision making. Stone (1989) argues that people's participation in decision making for development projects may help bring effective social change rather than impose an external culture on a society. Similarly, referring to the experience of rural development programs, Shrimpton (1989) states that community participation in the design and management of a project greatly enhances the likelihood of project success due to improved goodness of fit and increased sustainability. The most popular and widely adopted strategy for ensuring people's participation in local development is identified as decentralization. There is perhaps no other institution like local government bodies to provide a wide scope for people's participation at the grass root level. In Bangladesh, ever since decentralization has become a major policy concern, the political masters have exploited it as a means of gaining their political goals. As a result, despite numerous reform initiatives in this field by the successive governments, Local Government Institutions (LGIs) have not yet emerged as autonomous and self-governing units. This, in turn, limited the scope of mass people's participation in the local decision-making process as well as development process of rural Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, Union Parishad (UP) is the grass-root institution for integrating local people into the development process. Since independence all the development projects undertaken and implemented at grass-root

level are done with the supervision of UP, the lowest platform of Local Government (LG) as it is run by the people's representatives. Ironically the outcome of development projects is not significantly visible as most of those were not guided by the beneficiaries'. Participatory culture in rural Bangladesh therefore, remained a distant reality.

People's participation is a political process in which previously excluded classes or groups seek to become involved, have a voice in and generally gain access to the benefits of economic and social development. (Website, 2023)

The grass roots reality shows that the local power structure in Bangladesh is concentrated in the hands of local elites. These local elites under the patronage of central and local political leaders of the ruling party mostly controlled the local development programs. Most of the elected UP representatives, though having low educational profile, hail from the upper strata of society. The UP representatives and local political leaders are often labeled as an 'exploitative class' who control the destiny of the rural people by remaining close to the citadel of power (Asaduzzaman,2008) and they often maneuver people's participation to their own benefits. As a result, despite huge external and internal pressure, the elusive phenomenon of people's participation in decision making in local development projects is ignored and remained only in papers as a striking slogan. This study therefore, has tried to review the dilemma of the theory and practice of people's participation in decision making at UP level. It has also tried to explore the level of local people's participation in decision making as well as to identify the factors of low level participation at UP level.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Bangladesh has a long history of Local Government (LG). But it could not achieve the expected level of decentralization and people's participation. The bulk majority of the people particularly the poor and the disadvantaged, enjoyed little or no scope for participation except in electing their representatives (Siddiqui, 1994).

"Union Parishad Training Manual", published by the National Institute of Local Government (NILG), is a government prescribed detailed guidebook for the Union Parishad to operate. All necessary rules and regulations are added in it to enable the UP to operate accordingly. In the sixth chapter of this book titled "Participatory planning at local level", it was mentioned: "Real development has not been achieved because in a top-down method, the demand felt by the people is not reflected and there is no participation and sharing of the people in making plans. In this context, importance has been given in local level participatory planning as well as national planning." (NILG, 2003:225)

The Constitution of Bangladesh categorically emphasizes the need for establishing LG with a representative character. To this end, the representatives of the LGIs are popularly elected. Though this guarantees people's political participation, the present LG structure hardly provides any scope for participation of common people in decision making process. As a result, participatory development through LGIs is still a dream only. Local people see development projects being implemented but they have hardly any stake in those (Sheikh Noor, 2010).

Local level development projects are generally implemented by UP. The level of participation of local people in Union Parishad's decision making process is not known. So, if the people/beneficiaries of local level do not participate or engage to their development activities then the development of local government will not be sustainable. Since independence of the country, many development projects have been implemented by popularly elected UPs, but these have failed to produce desired outcome. The participatory practice has not yet been cultured properly in Bangladesh.

1.3 Rationality of the Study

After independence of Bangladesh, local development were prioritized in Union Parishad level for the improvement of rural people's livelihood integrating them into the web of development. Only a little progress has been marked regarding institutionalization of participatory culture in UP level development program. But so long the beneficiary's ownership has not been established in those development programs, sustainability of the development programs

will be in question. Against this backdrop, any study aiming to explore different dimensions of it is important not only for the development practitioners but also for the policymakers. The study, through its findings, detailed analysis and recommendations will help to bring out the latest scenario of people's participation in decision making process of local government. It would come up with significant policy guidelines emanating from the findings of the study for the policymakers. It may further help the policymakers identify the loopholes if any, in the present system and thereby assist them to formulate proper policies in future.

1.4 Objective of the study

The overall study of the citizen participation in decision making is to find out the understanding how citizens perceive and value services made available by Union parishads.

The specific objectives of the study are:

- (a) To assess the level of participation of local people in Union Parishad's decision making process.
- (b) To identify the issues and causes of participation of local people in union parishad Parishad's decision making process.

1.4.1 Scope of the study: This study has tried to identify and propose a detailed methodology, based on good practices for conducting this citizen perception in decision making process. Reviewed of legal provisions and mandates related to the roles and regulations of UP. Acquired perceptions of the responsiveness of UP. Elicited opinions of the ability of UPs and to effectively represent them and the degree to which representative bodies are held accountable for their decisions. Obtained perceptions of the capacity of UPs to carry out their duties for maintaining law and order. Tried to identify areas and options for actions whereby local governments could contribute to improve participation of citizen in decision making process.

1.4.2 Limitations of the study: In this study, the sample was very low and was only ten UPs which do not give a complete picture of all UPs in Bangladesh. Time & Budget of research were also limitations of this research. Another important limitation was that the respondents of study area were not much aware of the duties and functions of the Union Parishad.

2.0 Research Methods

There were two different sources have been used in data collection such as:

a) Primary source of data: Primary data have been collected through a questionnaire. To ensure the quality data, researchers have conducted face-to-face interview of the respondents through open and close-ended questions.

Focused group discussion (FGD): To confirm the maximum outcome of this study ten FGDs have been done in different Ups.

b) Secondary source of data: Data have also been collected from secondary sources such as literature review and other information related to this study.

Both qualitative as well as quantitative method has been used to carry out the research. Qualitative data has been collected through interviewing two target groups:

- 1) Elected representatives like UP Chairman/member/Secretary (132 respondents)
- 2) Community people (200 respondents)

Respondents	Types of data	Number of respondents	
UP Chairman	Qualitative & Quantitative	09	132
UP Members	Qualitative & Quantitative	113	
UP Secretary	Qualitative & Quantitative	10	
Community people	Qualitative & Quantitative	10x20=200	
Total		332	

2.1 Selection of Study Area

The prime focus of this study is to assess the extent of citizen's involvement in decision making process of Union Parishad's project selection/planning and project implementation. Therefore, the unit of analysis is union level development projects.

Ten union parishads of Bangladesh has been taken purposively for this study. These are:

Si. No	District	Upazila	Union Parishad
1	Sylhet	South Surma	Lala Bazar
2	Moulovi Bazar	Sri-mangal	Satgaon
3	Cox Bazar	Cox Bazar Sadar	Islamabad
4	Chottogram	Lohagora	Lohagora
5	Bandarban	Lama	Lama sadar
6	Pabna	Bera	Hatoria Nakalia
7	Sirajganj	Kazipur	Kazipur Sadar
8	Chandpur	South Matlab	Nayergaon
9	Nator	Singra	Chowgram
10	Rajshahi	Poba	Hargram

3.1 Data Analysis

Opinion of Union Parishad Chairman, Member and Union Parishad Secretary about people's participation in Union Parishad's different activities according to Acts, Rules and Regulations related to Union Parishad. Total 132 respondent's answer is shown here.

3.1.1 Opinion of the respondents taken in decision making process of Union Parishad

Member of the Parishad were asked about taking opinion of people in decision making process of Union Parishad. Respondents gave their reply in the following table-

Response of respondents	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	119	90.15
No	--	0
No comments	13	9.85
Total	132	

Table-1: Opinion of respondents in decision making process

Here total no. of respondent is 132. From the above table we can find that, 90.15% of the total respondents said that opinion of general people is taken to the decision-making process and 9.85% of respondents didn't show any comments. We can also see that any no one of the participant's choose 'no' option and it is a very significant scenario. Thus it shows a positive sign at local area specially in Union Parishad.

3.1.2 Participation in Union Parishad's decision making process.

Member of the Parishad were asked about participation of people in decision making process of Union Parishad. Respondents gave their reply in the following table-

Response of respondents	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	17	12.87
No	108	81.81
No comments	7	05.30
	132	

Table-2: Participation in Union Parishad.

From the above table we can find that only 12.87% of total respondents said that general people participate in the decision making process of Union Parishad. On the other hand, 81.81% of respondents said that they didn't participate and 5.3% of respondents didn't say anything about this question. So from here it shows an important message that is a large number of people is outside of the participation of Union Parishad activities where there is a chance to share their important opinion.

3.1.3 Causes of not participation to the activities of Union Parishad.

Member of the Parishad were asked about causes of not participation to the activities of Union Parishad. Respondents gave their reply in the following table-

Response of respondents	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Unwillingness	56	42.42
Not called from Parishad	03	02.27
No comments	73	55.30
Total	132	

Table-3: causes of not participation.

From the above table we can see that a major portion that is 42.42% of the total respondents said that people are not eager to participate in the activities of Union Parishad (UP) and if called from UP for any important issue people find here for financial opportunities. Only 2.27% of the total respondents said it is not called from UP to participate in the activities of Union Parishad. On the other hand, highest portion of respondents that is 55.30% didn't comment about

this issue. So this table shows here a different scenario about that question.

3.1.4 Sectors where people can participate in Union Parishad.

Member of the Parishad were asked about sectors where people can participate in Union Parishad. Respondents gave their reply in the following-

1. Ward meeting,
2. Open budget meeting,
3. Standing committee meeting,
4. Developments activities of Union Parishad etc.

3.1.5 Giving Opinion of general people in ward meeting of Union Parishad.

Member of the Parishad were asked about giving opinion of general people in ward meeting of Union Parishad. Respondents gave their reply in the following table-

Response of respondents	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	23	17.42
No	63	47.72
No comments	46	34.84
Total	132	

Table-4: Giving Opinion of general people in ward meeting

Here total no. of respondents is 132. From the above table it is shown that a major portion of the total respondents that is 47.72% said that people didn't not give any opinion in the ward meeting. If they are called from the UP for it's regular work on any important issue. On the other hand 17.42% of the total respondents said that people share their opinion in the ward meeting whether 34.84% of the total respondents didn't comment about this question. So this table shows here a different scenario about that question.

3.1.6 Participation of standing committee members in standing committee meeting of UP.

Member of the Parishad were asked about participation of standing committee members in standing committee meeting of Union

Parishad. Respondents gave their reply in the following table-

Response of respondents	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	51	38.63
No	69	52.27
No comments	12	9.09
Total	132	

Table-5: Attendance in standing committee meeting

Here total no. of respondents is 132. From the above table we can see that 38.63% of total respondents said that standing committee member of Union Parishad participate in ward meeting of UP. But highest portion of respondents (52.27%) said that, members of standing committee don't participate in ward meeting. On the other hand, an important number of respondents didn't comment about this question. So from here it shows an important message that is a large number of people is outside of the participation of Union Parishad activities where there is a chance to share their important opinion.

3.1.7 Causes of not participation in standing committee meeting

Member of the Parishad were asked about causes of not participation in standing committee meeting of Union Parishad. Respondents gave their reply in the following:

General people don't find their financial benefit. Normally, to spend time at the Union Parishad isn't an important issue to them. Some of the members don't know that they are member of the standing committee.

3.1.8 Steps may be taken to make people more eager about ward meeting.

Member of the Parishad were asked about what kind of steps may be taken to make people more eager about ward meeting Respondents gave their reply in the following:

Raising awareness among common people that they have the right to participate in any decision making process related to Union Parishad through 'ward meeting' and to raise their vocal about any local interest issue through information sharing, meeting, seminar or workshop.

3.1.9 Causes of not participation to the activities of Union Parishad.

Member of the Parishad were asked about what kind of steps may be taken to make people more eager about ward meeting. Respondents gave their reply in the following:

People are not interested about Union Parishad’s different activities except their necessary issues or services which they need several times. In the activities of Union Parishad where there is a scope of people to involve or participate, most of the cases, they are not well known about their involvement, and if they know, actually not interested. Almost all the cases people find their benefit.

3.1.10 Opinion of the people is taken in the development activities of UP.

Member of the Parishad were asked about Opinion of the people is taken in the development activities of UP. Respondents gave their reply in the following:

Response of respondents	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	87	65.91
No	11	8.33
No comments	34	25.75
Total	132	

Table-6: people’s opinion in the development activities

From the above table we can find that is 65.91% of the total respondents said that opinion of the general people is taken in the development activities of Union Parishad. On the other hand, 8.33% said that opinion of people is not taken. 25.75% of respondents didn’t comment about this question. So it is a significant message for us that a large number of respondents replied a positive answer. So it shows a very optimistic situation for this type of question.

3.1.11 Different kinds of opinion given by people in development activities.

Normally general people asked about their personal facilities. If they find there is no such type of facility there, they asked about road or culvert near to their home will be built or not. If the answer is no, then they reply with different negative comments.

3.1.12 Advice which make people to more interested about activities of UP.

Member of the Parishad were asked about advice which make people to more interested about activities of UP. Respondents gave their reply in the following:

The people who will take part in the different meetings should be paid some money as honorarium from Union parishad especially for those who are poor such as day laborer, rickshaw puller, street hawker etc. Wide-spread publicity about the importance of people's participation in decision-making process has to be ensured for ensuring general people engagement. Raising awareness among common people that they have the right to participate in making any decision related to Union Parishad and to raise their vocal about any local interest issue through information sharing, meeting, seminar or workshop.

3.2 Data Analysis

Opinion from general people about people's participation in Union Parishad's different activities according to Acts, Rules and Regulations related to Union Parishad. Total 200 respondent's answer is shown in below.

3.2.1 Conception about Union Parishad's activities-

People of the study area were asked about activities of Union Parishad. Respondents gave their reply in the following table-

Response	Total	Percent
Yes	97	48.50
No	84	42.00
Partial	19	09.50
Total	200	

Table-7: activities of Union Parishad.

Here the total number of respondents is 200. The above table shows that majority of respondents (48.5+9.5=58%) replied that they are known about the activities of Union Parishad. On the other hand 42.00% of the total respondents told they didn't know about the activities of the Union Parishad. Since there is a major number is

known about this issue but there is also an important number didn't know. So here we can see a different situation.

3.2.2 Reasons of participation to activities of Union Parishad-

People of the study area were asked about the reasons of participation in the activities of Union Parishad. Respondents gave their reply as they participated in Ward Meeting, UP invited people to participate budget meeting. Respondents also wants to know about different subjects of UP, to tell their demands and the problems of their village.

3.2.3 Reason of not participation to activities of Union Parishad.

People of the study area were asked about the reasons of not participation in the activities of Union Parishad. Respondents gave their reply as they don't know about UP's activities, UP never invites them to participate their activities, no payment for participating, no need to go because all the decisions are predetermined and people are not well known about their involvement.

Above statements indicates that in the activities of Union Parishad where there is a scope of people to involve or participate, most of the cases, they are not well known about their involvement.

3.2.4 Conception about Ward Meeting

People of the study area were asked about the conception about Ward Meeting of Union Parishad. Respondents gave their reply in the following table-

Response	Total	Percent
Yes	122	61.00
No	66	33.00
Partial	12	06.00

Table-8: conception about Ward Meeting

Table-8 shows that majority of respondents (61+6=67%) have concept about Ward Meeting of Union Parishad. It means that people are well known about Ward Meeting of Union Parishad. On the other hand 33.00% of the total respondents told they didn't know about the conception of the ward meeting Since there is a major number is well known about this issue but there is also an important number didn't know about ward meeting. So here we can

see a different scenario about conception of ward meeting of Union Parishad.

3.2.5 People's Participation in Ward Meeting

People of the study area were asked about participation in Ward Meeting of Union Parishad. Respondents gave their reply in the following table-

Response	Total	Percent
Yes	56	28.00
No	144	72.00
Total	200	100

Table-9: People's participation in Ward Meeting

Table-9 shows that majority of respondents (72%) replied that they didn't took part in the meeting/activities of Union Parishad. It means that people are not willing to come to the ward meeting of Union Parishad. On the other hand 28.00% of the total respondents told they didn't they didn't took part in the meeting/activities of Union Parishad. So here we can see a negative scenario about participation of ward meeting of Union Parishad.

3.2.6 Reasons of not coming in the Ward Meeting

People of the study area were asked about the reasons of not coming in the Ward Meeting. Respondents gave their reply that they don't know about Ward Meeting, when Meetings have conducted. UP never invites them to participate to UP activities, no payment for participating the meeting. They also told that no need to go because all the decisions are predetermined.

3.2.7 Giving opinion in Ward Meeting

People who participated in Ward Meeting were asked about giving opinions in Ward Meeting of Union Parishad. Respondents gave their reply in the following table-

Response	Total	Percent
Yes	13	23.21
No	43	76.79
Total	56	100

Table-10: Giving opinion in Ward Meeting

Table-10 shows that majority of the respondents (76.79%) replied that they didn't give any opinion in ward meeting of Union Parishad. On the other hand 23.21% of the total respondent said that people who participated in the ward meeting asked about giving opinion. So the above table shows that people are not willing to give opinion/comment in the ward meeting of Union Parishad.

3.2.8 People's opinion in Ward Meeting (one or more answers)

People who participated in Ward Meeting were asked about what kind of opinions they deliver in Ward Meeting of Union Parishad. Respondents gave their reply in the following-

Opinion	Total	Percent (%)
About personal matter	50	25.00
About different development works	70	35.00
About tax to reduce	11	05.50
About social safety net allowances	35	17.50
About fees of different services	80	40.00

Table-11: People's opinion in Ward Meeting

Table-11 shows that majority of the respondents talk about different development works (35%) and about fees of different services (40%) of Union Parishad in Ward Meeting. 25% wants to know their personal matter, 17.50% asked questions about social safety net allowances and in Ward meeting 5.50% of the respondents requests to reduce their taxes.

3.2.9 Participation in Union Parishad Development Plan

People of the study area were asked about participation in Union Parishad Development Plan. Respondents gave their reply in the following table-

Response	Total	Percent
Yes	23	11.50
No	128	64.00
No any idea	49	24.50

Table-12: Attendance in UP Development Plan

Table-12 shows that majority of the respondents (64+24.5=88.5%) replied that they didn't take part in Union Parishad Development Plan. On the other hand it is shown from the above table that only 11.50% take part to the development Plan of UP. It means that

people have no much idea about development plan of Union Parishad.

3.2.10 Participation in Union Parishad Budget Meeting

People of the study area were asked about participation in Budget Meeting of Union Parishad. Respondents gave their reply in the following table-

Response	Total	Percent (%)
Yes	51	25.5
No	149	74.5

Table-13: Attendance in UP Budget Meeting

Table-13 shows that majority of the respondents (74.5%) replied that they didn't take part in Budget Meeting of Union Parishad. On the other hand it is shown from the above table that only 25.50% take part to the Budget Meeting of UP. It means that lack of importance or knowledge about budget people do not take part in Budget Meeting of UP.

3.2.11 Giving opinion in Budget Meeting

People who participated in Budget Meeting were asked about giving opinions in Budget Meeting of Union Parishad. Respondents gave their reply in the following table-

Response	Total	Percent
Yes	13	25.50
No	38	74.50
Total	51	100

Table-14: Giving opinion in Budget Meeting

Data source: from field

Table-14 shows that majority of the respondents (74.50%) replied that they didn't give any opinion in Budget Meeting of Union Parishad. On the other hand only 25.5% give their opinions to budget meeting. It means that people are not willing to give opinion/comment to the Budget Meeting of Union Parishad.

3.2.12 People's opinion in Budget Meeting-

People who participated in Budget Meeting were asked about what kind of opinions they deliver in Budget Meeting of Union Parishad.

Respondents gave their reply that they want to know about fees of different services, development works, social safety net allowances and types of development project will be done next year.

From the above opinions of respondents who take part in budget meeting they want to know about the fees of different services, development works, social safety net allowances and what types of development project will be done next year. It means that people have many asks about the services of Union Parishad.

4.0 Discussion:

The research has been conducted in ten unions located in different regions of Bangladesh, attempts to address two research objectives, the first of which is-‘to assess the level of participation of local people in Union Parishad's decision making process’ and the second one is ‘what are the the issues and barriers that influences local people in decision making process’. In response to the first objective, it is found that participation of people in decision making process is significantly low (12.87%) whereas the percentage is a bit high (58%) are known about the activities of Union Parishad. In this study it is seen that there are many issues of not participation in the activities of Union Parishad, because common people don't know benefits of participation about UP's activities. People who take part in the different the activities of UP are poor such as day laborer, rickshaw puller, street hawker etc. they do not get any cash economic benefit from UP. Most of the cases people thinks that all the decisions of UP activities are pre-determined. Consequently, the poor and the marginalized are still outside the domain of governance and different participatory processes. In this study monitoring and evaluation stages remained untouched which can be a relevant and interesting areas for future research. After all the researchers have been come up some findings and recommendations as given bellow:

4.1 Findings:

1. People are well known about the activities of Union Parishad. But most of the people are not interested to take part to the activities of Union Parishad's except their necessary issues or services which they need several times.

2. Lack of publicity and awareness among common people and the unwillingness of Union Parishad officials hinders the people to participate in decision-making process.
3. All major decisions about budget preparation, tax collection and assessment, construction work, judicial matters, and agricultural development are predetermined by Chairman and Union Parishad members before the general meeting.
4. Publicity for citizens' participation should be wide-spread to ensure engagement in decision making process.

4.2 Recommendations

1. Make available space for ensuring accountability of Union Parishad representatives to the common people. If the people can question the Union Parishad representatives freely about their query and get answer, it will ensure participation.
2. The people who will take part in the different meetings should be paid some money as honorarium from Union parishad especially for those who are poor such as day laborer, rickshaw puller, street hawker etc.
3. Publicity for citizens' participation should be wide-spread to ensure engagement in decision making process. Raising awareness among common people that they have the right to participate in making any decision related to Union Parishad through ward shava, meeting, seminar or workshop.

4.3 Conclusion: Union Parishad is the oldest institute of Bangladesh. At present Union Parishad have lack of participation. Its local resources mobilization is highly inadequate and is dependent on the national government. The Union Parishad is dependent on national government grants. In most of the cases this institution is failed to ensure participatory local governance because the publicity for citizens' participation is not wide-spread. Most of the people of UP are poor and they are not willing to participate to local government activities without any payment. They do not understand the importance of participation in decision making process. But sustainable approach in the form of people's participation at the grass root level is essential for any meaningful change.

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A Study on Coordination among Rural Local Government Institutions in Development Activities

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Abstract

The local government system in Bangladesh is structured separately for cities and villages, which are often referred to as urban and rural local governments, respectively. The Union Parishad, the Upazila Parishad, and the Zila Parishad are structurally and functionally connected with each other. Therefore, good coordination is often needed for their proper functioning and to achieve their goals. The present study deals with coordination issues in rural local governments, namely Union Parishad, Upazila Parishad, and Zilla Parishad. The main objectives of this research are to find out the mechanisms and challenges of coordination among rural local government institutions. The LGIs are generally required to coordinate with each other to carry out development activities. Legal framework of every organization for coordination are not properly followed. Union level coordination platforms are found to be quite effective but district and Upazila levels are not effective at the desired level. Exclusive training on local government is needed during new postings of DDLGs and UNOs. However, elected public representatives of the LGIs are also important immediately after the elections and after certain periods. Development coordination committee can be formed under the leadership of Zila Parishad at district level and Upazila Parishad at Upazila level to coordinate development. Zila Parishad members can be included as a member of the Development Coordinating Committees of Upazila Parishads, Municipalities and Union Parishads for better coordination.

Key Words: Coordination, rural, local government, Zila, Upazila, Union

1.1 Introduction

The current local government system in Bangladesh is structured separately for cities and villages. There are two types of local government system for major cities viz., City Corporation and Paurashava. Again, the local government system at the village level

is based on three levels namely, Union Parishad, Upazila Parishad, and Zila Parishad. Zila Parishad system is effective in remaining 61 districts except three districts of hilly areas (Khagrachari, Rangamati, Bandarban). Union Parishad is the lowest level of local government system. As per Local Government Act 2009, each union will be divided into 9 wards. The union council will consist of a chairman and 9 members. Besides, three seats will be reserved for women.

All members of the Union Parishad shall be elected by direct vote of adults. The tenure of the council will be 5 years after taking the oath. Every member of the Union Parishad shall enjoy the salary and allowances provided by the Government.

The second tier of rural local government structure is Upazila Parishad. According to the Upazila Parishad Act 2009, each Upazila will consist of a chairman, two vice-chairmen (1 female and 1 male), and female members in reserved seats. Besides, the local parliament member will be considered as an advisor in the Upazila Parishad. Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) is the chief Upazila administrative officer of the government who is directly appointed by the government. Chairman, Vice Chairman will be elected by direct vote of adults. The tenure of the Upazila Parishad will be five years after taking the oath.

According to the Zila Parishad (amend) Act 2022, each Zila Parishad consists of a chairman, one member from each Upazila, One-third women members (reserved seats). The Chairman of Zila Parishad, General Members and reserved female seats shall be elected by Electoral vote of Mayor and Councilors of City Corporations, Municipal Mayors and Councilors, and Chairman and Members of Union Parishads. The term of each Zila Parishad will be 5 years.

Despite the importance of inter-departmental coordination in policy implementation, coordination does not take place properly among departments involved in policy implementation in an Upazila. The existing mechanisms of coordination can hardly produce any meaningful result in ensuring coordination (Ahsan, 2010). However, the lack of proper coordination of development activities slows down the pace of development and hinders sustainable development. (Sharmin, 2014; Ahmed 2002). Although there is scope for

coordination between Upazila Parishad and Zilla Parishad in the existing legal framework, the scope for coordination between Union Parishad and Zilla Parishad is limited.

1.2 Problem Statement

Rural development is an attempt to make the common people of the village self-reliant. And united efforts of government, non-governmental organizations and people are essential for village development. Prominent sociologist Professor Arthur Dunham said, 'It is important to mobilize people and make them self-reliant in rural or rural development. That is why the role of private voluntary organizations is very important in addition to government efforts. According to Sociologist Dr. John Montgomery, development is 'social change desired, generally observed and effected by government action'.

After the independence of Bangladesh, the expectations of the people of this country for development in all areas, especially in the rural society, skyrocketed. Development has not reached the people's doorsteps as expected due to post-independence fragile economy, political instability, overnight development thinking, accelerating development through industrialization, lack of technical skills, lack of skilled manpower, lack of political stability, corruption and nepotism. Union Parishad, Upazila Parishad and Zila Parishad are working as local government institutions for rural development. Although the institutions are different in nature, they have many similarities in their functions. There is also jurisdictional overlap. As a result, overlap is often observed between these institutions in the implementation of various projects (Islam, 2017). This proves the existence of incoherence. On the other hand, as these institutions are elected by the people, they have a responsibility towards the people. Although the Union Parishad Act has a direct instruction to take public opinion in planning, the Upazila Parishad and Zila Parishad Act do not have such an instruction. Various researches have revealed that public opinion is neglected in project implementation and in some cases the opinion is not taken at all (Mahiuddin, et al. 2022).

1.3 Rationale of the research

Over the years, studies on coordination have been conducted both on international and national levels. In the context of Bangladesh, Panday (2004) analyzed coordination and its impact on the policy implementation and urban governance. Shahnaz Khan (1995) analyzed coordination in terms of credit management and linkage among agencies involved. Despite some good studies on coordination in Bangladesh, research on coordination mechanism and the state of downward-upward accountability among rural local government institutions and how the lack of coordination affects policy implementation is hardly available. This research aims to shed light on these issues. In addition, research on coordination problem is not only involved with successful policy implementation, but may also help seek answers to some unresolved questions with regard to the causes of problems pertaining to coordination. In turn, this study may not only be remedy for ensuring sound coordination, but can also resolve other issues in public administration. Nonetheless, despite the availability and adequacy of required components, the implementation cannot be successful unless coordination among those involved takes place.

1.4 Objective of the Research

The main objectives of this research are to find out the coordination among rural local government institutions. Specifically, the research was conduct with following general objectives:

- a) to identify the coordination mechanisms among different tires of Local Government Institutions (LGIs)
- b) to explore constraints and challenges of coordination;
- c) to suggest policy measure to have effective coordination among them.

1.5 Scope of the Study

In rural local governments in Bangladesh, Union Parishad, Upazila Parishad and Zila Parishad is working. Interrelationship is developed on the necessity of having dependency on each other to get things done. The success of the efforts of LGIs depends on the extent to which coordination in their activities is achieved. In this

connection, it is important to ascertain whether coordination exists in among LGIs involved in the development activities. To do so, four Zila Parishads, four Upazila Parishads and four Union Parishads are chosen as an area of development for this study. In order to examine the effects of the lack of inter-LGIs coordination on development implementation, some respondents with direct involvement in the implementation process of rural infrastructure development policy were interviewed while others were interviewed with the aim of exploring information in getting overall picture on the issue of the problems of coordination in rural areas in Bangladesh.

1.6 Research Methodology

Both the primary and secondary data sources were used in this study. For collecting primary data, both qualitative and quantitative method were followed. The qualitative method includes: In depth Interview (II) with elected representatives including Chairman of ZP, UZP, UP and Vice Chairman of UZP. Key Informant Interview (KII) with government officers including Deputy Director Local Government (DDLG); Chief Executive Officer/Executive Officer, Administrative Officer, Assistant Engineer, Accountant of ZP; Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) and UP Secretaries were also interviewed. A semi-structured questionnaire for II and checklist for KII were prepared and used for data collection. Two FGDs (Focus Group Discussion) with elected representatives from different LGIs and others were conducted in each sample area. A guideline was used to conduct the FGD.

The quantitative method includes a structured questionnaire, which was used to collect public opinions. Secondary data were collected through content analysis which includes official records, books, research report, and journals.

Table-1 Category of the Respondents & Data Collection Method

Location	Methods	Category	Each area	Total	
District Administration	KII	DDLG	1	4	
Zila Parishad (ZP)	II	ZP Chairman	1	4	
	KII	Chief Executive Officer/Executive Officer of ZP	1	4	
		Asst. Engineer of ZP	1	4	
		Accountant of ZP	1	4	
		Administrative Officer/Head Assistant of ZP	1	4	
		Members of Zila Parishad	5	20	
	FGD	UP Chairman	3	12	
		Chief Executive Officer (CEO)/ Paura Nirbahi Officer	3	12	
		UP Secretary	3	12	
		Representatives from the civil society	6	24	
		Social Worker (One Male & One Female)			2
		Teacher			1
		Businessman			1
		Religious leader			1
Doctor	1				
Upazila Parishad (UZP)	II	UZP Chairman	1	4	
		UZP Vice Chairman	2	8	
	KII	UNO	1	4	
Union Parishad (UP)	II	UP Chairmen	1	4	
	KII	UP Secretary	1	4	
	FGD	UP Members	12	48	
Sample Area	Sample Survey	General Publics	25	100	
Total			69	276	

1.7 Data processing and Analysis

MS Excel software was used for data entry and processing. The researcher with the help of Data Management Specialist and senior Faculty of NILG designed a format. All the collected data were processed and analyzed in accordance with the objectives of the study. Editing, rechecking, coding and tabulation was done during processing of data.

1.8 Study Area

The study was covered four Zila Parishads (ZP) from four divisions. Firstly, four divisions were selected purposively. In order to achieve the objectives of the study four districts from four different divisions (Rajbari from Dhaka division, Chandpur from Chattogram division, Jessore from Khulna division and Dinajpur from Rangpur division) were selected purposively. In the second step, Simple Random Sampling (SRS) (without replacement) method were used to choose one Upazila Parishad (UZP) from each selected district. As the study basically focused on rural local governments, again SRS (without replacement) method was used to select one Union Parishad (UP) from each selected Upazila. The process of selection of study area is shown in the following figure;

Table 2: Selection of Study Area

Division (Purposively)	Total District	Sample District (Purposively)	Total Upazila	Sample Upazila (SRS)	Total Union	Sample Union (SRS)
Dhaka	13	Rajbari	5	Pangsha	10	Mourat
Chattogram	11	Chandpur	8	Sadar	14	Rampur
Khulna	10	Jessore	8	Sharsha	11	Laksmampur
Rangpur	8	Dinajpur	13	Birganj	11	Sujalpur

1.9 Limitation

In this study, the sample is only four Zila Parishads, four Upazila Parishad and four Union Parishad, which may not give a comprehensive idea of all over the Bangladesh. The voices of general people were collected randomly. Time and budget of the research was also a limitation of this research.

2.0 Overview of the Present Situation of Coordination

This chapter focuses on the present structure and legal obligation of coordination for rural infrastructural development.

2.1 The present legal provision of UP for coordination

Section 87 of the Local Government (Union Councils) Act, 2009

provides for the formation of joint committees by any Union Parishad with any other Union Parishad or Parishads or with any municipality or municipalities or with any local authority or authorities for the purpose of achieving any common interest. may and may delegate to the Committee any power, including the power to make regulations, for the conduct of its functions.

The functions of the Union Parishad are detailed in the Second Schedule. Preparation of Panchshala (Five year) and various long-term development plans (1), taking other measures necessary for the safety, comfort or convenience of the residents of the Union (36), expanding cooperation with other organizations engaged in similar work like the Union Parishad (38).

Rule 3 of Union Parishad (Formulation, Control and Implementation of Development Plan) Rules, 2013 describes the nature of development plan. It has been stated that (1) Union Parishad shall formulate five-year plan and annual development plan for the implementation of its development activities. (2) The Union Parishad shall adopt its annual development plan every year following the Five-Year Plan. (3) The Union Parishad shall include in the development plan in the order of priority the projects which have gained expertise and experience in the implementation of the projects at the local level and the types of projects which are the needs of the people. (4) Projects or schemes transferred by the Government or Zila Parishad or Upazila Parishad to the Union Parishad shall be included in the development plan. (5) National level projects which are under implementation or proposed for implementation or need to be implemented within the area of the Union Parishad shall be included in the development plan. (6) All the projects which are under implementation or are proposed to be implemented by various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) at the Union level will also be included in the development plan. (7) Every project to be implemented by which organization shall be mentioned in the development plan. (8) The development plan shall reflect the goals and objectives of the Government's long-term plan and five-year plan. (9) Physical infrastructure, services, social development, development activities or projects that can be implemented through private development organizations or individual entrepreneurs shall be included separately in the development plan.

In sub-rule (4) of Rule 6, it is stated that the Planning Committee shall provide detailed information on all the projects or activities which have been implemented or are under implementation and are proposed for implementation through the Union Parishad, Upazila Parishad, Zila Parishad and government departments or offices. The committee will also collect and consider information on the activities being implemented locally by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) before formulating the development plan.

2.2 The present legal provision of UZP for coordination

Section 6 of the Upazila Parishad Act mentions the constitution of the Parishad. (1) According to the provisions of this Act, the Upazila Parishad shall be constituted by the following persons, namely: - (a) Chairman; (b) two Vice-Chairmen, one of whom shall be a woman; (c) the chairman of every union parishad in the Upazila area or the person temporarily acting as chairman; (d) the mayor or the person acting temporarily as mayor of each municipality under the Upazila area, if any; and (e) women members of seats reserved under sub-section (4).

Section 42 of the Act states that (1) The Parishad may prepare and implement various long-term development plans including five-year plans in accordance with its funds in any matter under its jurisdiction and in formulating such plans, Union Parishads in the area of the Parishad or non-governmental organizations actively involved in development activities in that area or A person may consider the advice of a specialist. (2) The said plan shall contain the following provisions, namely: - (a) in what manner the plan shall be funded and its supervision and implementation; (b) by whom the plan is to be implemented; (c) other necessary matters relating to the plan.

Section 54 mentions that the Parishad may, together with any other local authority, constitute joint committees for any matter relating to their common interest and may confer any of its powers on such committee.

The second schedule mentions the functions of Upazila Parishad. It has been said that, (1) Preparation of five-year and various term development plans. (2) To implement the programs of various

government departments transferred to the Council and to supervise and coordinate the activities of the said departments. (3). Construction, repair and maintenance of inter-union roads. (14) Coordinating and monitoring the development activities of the Union Parishad and providing necessary assistance.

2.3 The present legal provision of ZP for coordination

Section 49 of the District Council Act 2000 states that (1) The council may prepare and implement various long-term development plans including five-year plans in accordance with its funds in any matter under its jurisdiction, and in formulating such plans, the city corporation within the area of the council, If any, Upazila Parishad, Municipality, Union Parishad or any person's suggestion may be considered. (2) The said plan shall contain the following provisions, namely: - (a) the manner in which the plan shall be financed and supervised and implemented; (b) by whom the plan is to be implemented; (c) other necessary matters relating to the plan. (3) The Parishad shall send a copy of each of its development plans to the Government before its implementation and may publish them in such manner as the Parishad may consider appropriate for public information or may take appropriate action in respect of the said plan, taking into consideration their opinions and suggestions in particular cases.

Section 63 mentions that a council may form a joint committee with any other local authority for any matter relating to their common interest and may delegate any of its powers to such committee.

Part I of the First Schedule describes the mandatory functions. It has been said that the work of the Zila Parishad is (1) review of all the development activities of the district. (2) Review the implementation progress of the development projects undertaken by the Upazila Parishad and Municipality. (4) Construction, maintenance and development of such roads, culverts and bridges not reserved by Upazila Parishad, Municipality or Government. (5) Plantation and conservation of trees along roadsides and public places. (6) Provision and maintenance of parks, playgrounds and open spaces for public use. (7) Management and control of public, Upazila parishad or municipality-maintained ditches. (8) Provision and maintenance of inns, post bungalows and rest rooms. (9) Co-operation with other

institutions performing similar functions of Zila Parishad. (10) Assistance, cooperation and encouragement to Upazilas and Municipalities. (11) Implementation of development plans entrusted to the Zila Parishad by the Government.

By amending the Zila Parishad Act in 2022, the chairman of each concerned upazila parishad, the mayor of the municipality and, as the case may be, the representative of the mayor of the city corporation, have been made ex-officio members.” Besides, every concerned upazila executive officer and chief executive officer of the municipality has been created an opportunity to participate in the meeting of the council as an official member.

3.0 Analysis of the Research Findings

This chapter deals with the result based on the analysis of primary and secondary data and information which are collected from in-depth interview, Key Informant Interview, FGD, sample survey and from other sources. Primary data were collected through in-depth interview, key informant interview, FGD and sample survey. Secondary data were collected through budget book, plan book, website, meeting minutes, circulars, office memo etc.

3.1 Analysis of data collected through In-depth Interview

3.1.1 Which activities of the Union Parishad require to coordinate with Upazila Parishad and Zila Parishad?

Most of the Zila Parishad Chairman said that they do not know much about the activities of the Union Parishad. The Union Parishad implements its own activities. They have different laws, rules, according to which they are governed. They do not report anything to the Zila Parishad. Zila Parishad also does not want to know anything from Union Parishad. A significant number of Upazila Parishad chairmen mentioned that Union Parishads are autonomous institutions and they do not inform Upazila Parishads about their activities. Rather, Union Parishad Chairman being a member of Upazila Parishad, they know a lot about Upazila Parishad and even participate in the decision making of Upazila Parishad.

Most Union Parishad Chairman said that Union Parishad is the working area of both Zila Parishad and Upazila Parishad. As the Chairman of the Union Parishad, he has a direct opportunity to

select and implement projects of the Upazila Parishad. Moreover, the Upazila Parishad gives a small amount of money to the Union Parishad every year which is implemented through the PIC. Zila Parishad implements projects in union areas but does not inform Union Parishad. In many cases duality of projects is observed. As a result, a complication is created.

3.1.2 How does the Union Parishad coordinate with them?

According to respondents of most Zila Parishads and Upazila Parishads, Union Parishads do not coordinate with other local government institutions in selecting and implementing projects. Most of the Union Parishad chairman said that Union Parishad cannot undertake development projects as per the demand due to limited budget. As a result, there is little scope for coordination with other local governments. A Union Parishad chairman said that the government has formed a union Development Coordination Committee to coordinate development at the union level. Representatives of all government departments at union level are members of this committee. It accelerates development coordination if effective. But it did not become popular due to financial inefficiency, indifference of concerned departments, desire of the Parishad, etc. Moreover, since Upazila Parishad Chairman, Upazila Nirbahi Officer are invited in the budget meeting, they provide their opinion directly. In addition, a copy of the budget is sent to the Upazila Nirbahi Officer 2 months before the beginning of the financial year, which goes through the hands of the District Commissioner and goes to the government.

3.1.3 Which activities of Upazila Parishad require to coordinate with Union Parishad and Zila Parishad?

Most of the Zila Parishad chairman mentioned that they do not know about the activities of the Upazila Parishad. According to the Upazila Chairman and Vice Chairman, one of the tasks of the Upazila Parishad is the construction, repair and maintenance of inter-union roads. There are other responsibilities but it is not possible due to lack of budget allocation. Coordination with the Union Parishad is required in the implementation of other projects including roads. Upazila Parishad does not have to coordinate with Zila Parishad. The chairmen of the Union Parishad opined that all

the development activities of the Upazila Parishad have to be coordinated with the Union Parishad. Otherwise, project duplication may arise.

3.1.4 How does the Upazila Parishad coordinate with them?

In the In-depth Interview, it is found that the Zila Parishad is not aware of the coordination process of the Upazila Parishad. Since Union Parishad chairmen are the members of Upazila Parishad, they have participation in the decision-making process. Thus, they coordinate. The Union Parishad select project excluding the project initiated by the Upazila Parishad while making decisions.

3.1.5 Which activities Zila Parishad needs to coordinate with Union Parishad and Upazila Parishad?

According to the interviewees, Zila Parishad usually undertakes development activities such as minor roads, bridges, culverts, road guide walls, repair of educational institutions, renovation of religious institutions, etc. No opinion of Union Parishad or Upazila Parishad is taken for the implementation of all these works. Rajbari Zila Parishad Chairman informed that in the current financial year, a letter has been sent to all Union Parishads asking for project proposals and the selected projects of Union Parishads have been funded.

3.1.6 How does the district coordinate with them?

Most of the Zila Parishad Chairman stated that there is no coordination between the Zila Parishad and both the Upazila Parishad and the Union Parishad. Zila Parishad undertakes projects within constituencies as per law. The Union Parishad and Upazila Parishad chairmen mentioned that Zila Parishad takes up projects without any coordination. The Chairman of Mourat Union Parishad stated that this year is the first time that a project has been requested from the ZP through a letter.

3.1.7 What are the challenges of coordination?

Most of the Zila Parishad chairmen mentioned that no one is interested in coordination as there are no legal restrictions on coordination. Moreover, each Parishad being a separate entity is quite independent. Moreover, due to the political party-based local

government system, the coordination of dissenting public representatives is very complicated. On the other hand, it also becomes a challenge in many cases because of party grouping even if they belong to the same political party. Chairman of Rajbari Zila Parishad stated "I have just been elected. Our Chief Executive Officer is also acting. However, after reviewing the law, I saw that one of the main tasks of the district council is to review all the development activities of the district. Besides, the construction, maintenance and development of such roads, culverts and bridges not reserved by the Upazila Parishad, Municipality or Government; Plantation and preservation of trees along roadsides and public places; provision and maintenance of parks, playgrounds and open spaces for public use; provision and maintenance of inns, post offices and rest rooms; etc. are the mandatory functions of Zila Parishad. The Act mentions that the Zila Parishad may consider the advice of the Upazila parishad, municipality, union parishad or any person within the area of the parishad, city corporation, if any, in formulating development plans.

After being elected, I have arranged meetings with all members of the parliament (2 people), all Upazila Parishad chairmen (5 people), all municipal mayors (3 people) and all Union Parishad (42) chairmen. That's why I have sent a letter asking for a project to each Union Parishad and given one project to each Union Parishad and municipality. However, although Upazila Parishad chairmen have the opportunity to actively participate in the decision-making process of the Zila Parishad, the Zila Parishad members of the Upazila Parishad do not have the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process of the Upazila Parishad. So, it is also a challenge. Upazila Parishad chairmen feel that one of the challenges of coordination is legal complexity and lack of sincerity. They also opined that the amendment of the Zila Parishad Act in 2022 has paved the way for coordination. Some new posts have been added to the Zila Parishad structure. But both the members (current and newly merged) are not well aware of what will be the role of the newly merged members of Zila Parishad. On the other hand, Union Parishad chairmen actively participate in the decision-making process of Upazila Parishad, but Upazila Parishad chairman and vice-chairman do not have the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process of Union Parishad. Most Union Parishad

chairmen see no challenge in coordination. However, some chairmen think that due to the sincerity of elected public representatives, political ideology, party politics (Group politics), mutual trust and confidence, financial stability, etc., coordination difficulties arise.

3.1.8 Recommendations of respondents for overcoming these challenges

Most of the respondents think that it would be better if the local government division issued a circular clarifying the role of each of the ZP, UZP, and UP for coordination. On the other hand, the training of public representatives should be organized immediately after the election. If the training is organized separately, a session on the responsibilities and management processes of other organizations may be held. At the beginning of the financial year, a day-long workshop can be organized with all the representatives of local government institutions and development institutions of the district in coordination with the NILG or the local government division. Monitoring activities need to be strengthened to monitor whether coordination activities are being conducted properly. DDLG has to play a leading role in this regard. DDLG has to keep a keen eye on whether every organization has done proper development planning, whether it has prepared budget in proper time and manner, whether it has followed development plan in budget formulation and progress in budget implementation, etc. Provisions may be made for rewards to compliant LGIs and penalties to non-compliant LGIs. A budget conference may be held in the month of May every year under the leadership of Zila Parishad.

3.2 Analysis of data collected through Key Informant Interview

3.2.1 Union Parishad, Upazila Parishad and Zila Parishad implement similar activities in the same jurisdiction. Is there any difficulty in implementing these activities? If there are any difficulties, what are they? What steps can be taken to eliminate these difficulties?

According to most of the respondents, various problems are being created due to lack of proper coordination in the development activities of Union Parishad, Upazila Parishad and Zila Parishad. The problems are as follows:

- Inefficient use of resources;
- Creates duplication of projects;
- One beneficiary is benefiting from more than one LGI;
- Resources are not used fairly;
- There are problems in project implementation;
- Cannot undertake large projects;
- maintenance problems;
- The pace of development is slow;
- An abundance of small but less permanent projects is observed;
- An excess of similar projects is observed;
- Sustainable development is hindered.

Following are the suggestions of the respondents to solve the above problem:

- Preparation of five-year plans by all local government institutions as the provision of the law;
- To organize training, workshops, seminars, round table meetings on the relevant laws, rules, circulars, etc. for the elected public representatives of the local government institutions immediately after the elections and after certain periods.
- Development coordination can be facilitated under the leadership of Zila Parishad at district level and Upazila Parishad at Upazila level to coordinate development.
- Every local government institution has provision for development planning. There are also clear instructions. There are also Union Parishad Development Planning Rules for Union Parishads. So, there will be automatic adjustment if the law is properly followed.
- Inclusion of Zila Parishad members as members of Development Coordinating Committees of Upazila Parishads, Municipalities and Union Parishads.
- To exchange monthly and development reports of all local government institutions with each other.
- Exchanging project lists with each other.
- Making a database by providing unique ID number of each road, bridge, culvert.

- Storage of pictures at three stages (pre-project, project ongoing and project completion) by attaching location map followed by LGSP project in project formulation and implementation.
- Providing detailed training on local government organization management during new postings of DDLGs and UNOs.

3.2.2 Is there any coordination platform between Union Parishad, Upazila Parishad and Zila Parishad? What are they? How effective is this platform? What steps can be taken to make these platforms more effective?

According to the respondents there are some direct and indirect coordination platforms as per existing laws and rules and government directives. The platforms are as follows:

Table-3: Coordination Platforms

LGIs	Platforms
UP	Ward Meeting, UDDC Meeting, Budget Meeting, Development Planning Meeting
UZP	Monthly Meeting, Budget Meeting, Development Planning Meeting
ZP	Monthly Meeting, Budget Meeting, Development Planning Meeting

Most of the participants mentioned that the platforms mentioned above are moderately effective. They recommend the following to make these platforms more effective:

- Providing detailed training on local government organization management during new postings of DDLGs and UNOs.
- To organize training, workshops, seminars, round table meeting on the relevant laws, rules, circulars, etc. for the elected public representatives of the local government institutions immediately after the elections and after certain periods.
- Inclusion of Zila Parishad members as members of Development Coordinating Committees of Upazila Parishads, Municipalities and Union Parishads.
- Strengthen monitoring activities.

3.2.3 Which activities of the Union Parishad require to coordinate with Upazila Parishad and Zila Parishad?

The Deputy Director of Local Government stated that Union Parishad, Upazila Parishad, and Zila Parishad work within the same jurisdiction. Their mode of operation is also almost similar. However, coordination is required in undertaking any development project. Union Parishad does not coordinate with others as there is no legal obligation. As the Union Parishad Chairman is a member of the Upazila Parishad, there is an opportunity for coordination through him. However, it depends on the effectiveness of the Upazila Parishad. That is, regular meetings are held, standing committees are active. Sincerity of the chairman of the Parishad acts as such factor.

During the discussion with the officers and employees of the Zila Parishad, it is known that they know very little about the activities of the Union Parishad. The Chief Executive Officer said that although he knows about the Union Parishad because of being an administration officer, he has no opportunity to know about the Union Parishad officially. Because, Union Parishad is not obliged to send any report of Zila Parishad. The Zila Parishad also never asks for or sends any information from the Union Parishad. Although both operate within same jurisdiction. On the other hand, the relationship between Union Parishad and Upazila Parishad is also unknown to them. So, their concept of coordination is very low.

During the discussion with the UNOs, it is known that since the upazila administration has control over the union parishad, UNO is well informed about the activities of the union parishad. In summary: Union Parishad with Upazila Parishad and Zila Parishad need to coordinate in implementation of development projects.

The UP secretaries mentioned that implementation of development projects and avoiding duplication of projects mainly requires the coordination of Union Parishads with Zila Parishads and Upazila Parishads. Secretary Mourat UP said "Rule 6(4) of Union Parishad (Formulation, Control and Implementation of Development Plans) Rules, 2013 states that all projects or activities implemented through Union Parishad, Upazila Parishad, Zila Parishad and government departments or offices or under implementation and

proposed for implementation information will also be considered by the committee on the eve of formulation of the development plan. So, due to legal obligation Union Parishad has to coordinate with Upazila Parishad and Zila Parishad.

3.2.4 How does the Union Parishad coordinate with them?

Deputy Director Local Government, Upazila Nirbahi Officer and UP Secretaries stated that there is a Union Development Coordination Committee (UDCC) in the Union Parishad which consists of all development support organizations at the Union level. There is a provision to hold meetings of this committee every bimonthly. It ensures coordination with Upazila administration and central government. However, the UDCC cannot be active due to the awareness and interest of the elected representatives, financial ability to bear the cost of organizing meetings etc. In addition to that, the annual budget of each Union Parishad has to be sent to the Upazila Nirbahi Officer, which reaches to the government through the hands of the District Commissioner. Although there is coordination with the government, there is no direct coordination with Upazila Parishad and Zila Parishad.

Officials of the Zila Parishad mentioned that the Union Parishad does not coordinate with them. Due to the financial constraints and legal complications of Zila Parishad, they also do not involve the Union Parishad in any work. Chief Executive of Rajbari Zila Parishad said that the present Parishad held a meeting with all Union Parishads, Municipalities, Upazila Parishads and Hon'ble Members of Parliament after taking charge. Besides, all Union Parishads and Municipalities have been invited for projects by letter and each organization has been given one project.

3.2.5 Which activities of Upazila Parishad require to coordinate with Union Parishad and Zila Parishad?

While talking to DDLG and UNO, it is found that Upazila Parishad has the provisions to prepare and implement various long-term development plans including five-year plans. In formulating this plan, the Upazila Parishad may consider the advice of the Union Parishad in the area of the Upazila Parishad or the private institutions actively involved in development activities in the said

area or any special person. The said plan shall provide for the following matters, namely- (a) the manner in which the plan shall be financed and monitored and implemented; (b) by whom the plan will be implemented; (c) other necessary matters relating to the plan. To implement the programs of various government departments transferred to the Upazila Parishad in the second schedule of the Upazila Parishad Act and to supervise and coordinate the activities of the said department; Construction, repair and maintenance of inter-union roads; Coordinating and monitoring the development activities of the Union Parishad and providing necessary support; etc. functions are described. Accordingly, the Upazila Parishad has the opportunity to coordinate with the Union Parishad and other departments. But due to the lack of clear understanding of the law, the elected representatives are less inclined to coordinate. The UP secretaries feel that Upazila Parishads should coordinate with union parishads and Zila Parishads to implement all development activities. Officers interviewed at Zila Parishad expressed the same opinion.

3.2.6 How does the Upazila Parishad coordinate with them?

DDLGs and UNOs said Union Parishad chairmen are members of Upazila Parishads and participate in the decision-making process. Therefore, the coordination is done automatically. However, the UP secretaries said that most of the UP chairmen do not inform the Union Parishad about the issues discussed in the Upazila Parishad meeting. Even the minutes of the monthly meeting of the Upazila Parishad are not discussed in the Union Parishad. Because of this, the secretary of the Union Parishad and other members are not aware of the Upazila Parishad. However, when the Upazila Parishad asks to submit the project through PIC, the matter is known. In many cases the secretaries come to know about the issue while reconciling the bill vouchers after the implementation of the project. Officials of the Zila Parishad stated that Upazila Parishad does not coordinate with the Zila Parishad and they are not aware of the coordination process of the Upazila Parishad.

3.2.7 Which activities Zila Parishad needs to coordinate with Union Parishad and Upazila Parishad?

DDLGs while giving the interview pointed out that they have jurisdiction to inspect the development projects of Upazila Parishad, Municipal Council, Union Parishad, but they do not have the jurisdiction to inspect the development projects of Zila Parishad. That's why there is less idea about the activities of Zila Parishad. According to them, the Zila Parishad generally implements development activities such as small roads, bridges, culverts, road guide walls, repair of educational institutions, renovation of religious institutions, etc. which need coordination with the Union Parishad and Upazila Parishad. UP secretaries feel that the Zila Parishad undertakes development activities like construction of small roads, educational institution rooms, supply of furniture, etc. and renovation of religious institutions (mosques, temples, churches), social institutions (cemeteries, cremation grounds, playgrounds). All these activities have to be coordinated with all other local government institutions.

According to the respondents of Zila Parishad, one of the main functions of Zila Parishad is: review of all development activities of the district; Review the implementation progress of development projects undertaken by Upazila Parishad and Municipality; Construction, maintenance and development of such roads, culverts and bridges not reserved by Upazila Parishad, Municipality or Government; provision and maintenance of parks, playgrounds and open spaces for public use; Management and control of non-maintained public, Upazila Parishads or municipalities; provision and maintenance of inns, Daak Banglo and rest rooms; Cooperation with other institutions performing similar functions of Zila Parishad; Providing assistance, cooperation and encouragement to Upazilas and municipalities; Implementation of the development plan entrusted to the Zila Parishad by the Government. The implementation of these functions must be coordinated with all other local government institutions.

3.2.8 How does the ZP coordinate with them?

According to DDLG, UNO, Zila Parishads generally: do not coordinate with both Upazila Parishads and Union Parishads. UP

Secretaries also gave the same statement. However, the secretary of Mourat Union Parishad said that in the financial year 2022-2023, a project has been requested through a letter from the ZP, which is the first time.

ZP officials mentioned that they take up projects within the constituency as per the rules of the ZP. ZP members and local leaders are consulted in taking up the project. A ZP informed that they have started collecting project proposals by sending letters to UP, municipalities and UZP from this year. Moreover, as all the members of Parliament of the district are advisors, projects are taken in consultation with them.

3.2.9 What are the challenges of coordination?

Most of the DDLGs and UNOs mentioned that although there are legal guidelines for coordination, there is no detailed explanation. They also said that the awareness and sincerity of public representatives is also one of the challenges of coordination. Moreover, each council being a separate entity is quite independent. Moreover, as the local government system is based on political parties, it is also a challenge to coordinate among the representatives of different opinions. On the other hand, the level of coordination also depends on the party grouping and the sincerity and activity of the parliamentarians. Because MP is the advisor of all organizations. A DDLG pointed out that due to lack of project database, identification of project duplication, triplication is difficult. He pointed out as an example: "Suppose Mr. A and Mr. B lives in the house next door and Mr. Y and Mr. Jade lives in the house next door. Suppose a road project is taken up from Mr. A's house to Mr. Y's house in the current financial year. In the following year, a road project was taken up from Mr. B's house to Mr. Z's house. The same project was taken up twice on the same road. It is difficult to identify on paper even by visiting the onsite." Most union council secretaries do not see any challenge in coordination. They mention the challenges of sincerity of public representatives, political ideology, group politics, mutual trust and confidence, economic solvency, etc.

The Zila Parishad Act states that the Parishad may prepare and implement various long-term development plans, including the five-year plan, and may consider the advice of the City Corporation

(if any), Upazila Parishad, Municipality, Union Parishad or any person under the Parishad's area in formulating this plan. The law also states that one of the main functions of the ZP is to review all the development activities of the district; Review the implementation progress of development projects undertaken by Upazila Parishad and Municipality; Construction, maintenance and development of such roads, culverts and bridges not reserved by Upazila Parishad, Municipality or Government; provision and maintenance of inns, post offices and rest rooms; Co-operation with other institutions performing similar functions of Zila Parishad. Providing assistance, cooperation and encouragement to Upazilas and municipalities; Implementation of development plans entrusted to Zila Parishads by the Government; etc. Zila Parishad officials mentioned that one of the challenges of coordination is the lack of sincerity. They also added that the amendment of the Zila Parishad Act in 2022 has paved the way for coordination. Some new posts have been added to the Zila Parishad structure. But both the members (current and newly merged) are not well aware of what will be the role of the newly merged members of Zila Parishad.

3.2.10 What are your recommendations for overcoming these challenges?

Organizing training for public representatives immediately after the election. A session on the responsibilities and management processes of other organizations can be held if training is organized separately for each. At the beginning of the financial year, a day-long workshop can be organized with all the local government institutions and development aid institutions of the district in coordination with the NILG or the local government department. Monitoring activities need to be strengthened to monitor whether coordination activities are being conducted properly. DDLG has to play a leading role in this regard. DDLG has to keep a keen eye on whether every institution has done proper development planning, whether it has prepared budget in proper time and manner, whether it has followed development plan in budget formulation and progress in budget implementation, etc. There should be a system of rewards for compliant organizations and penalties for non-compliant organizations.

A member of Zila Parishad can be made a member of Upazila Parishad. In consideration of the new legal framework, a circular should be issued clarifying the role of each of the district councils, Upazila councils, and union councils. A UNO suggested budget conference at Upazila and district level. According to his proposal, the budget conference can be organized under the supervision of Zila Parishad at the Upazila level every year in January-February. Four persons (Chairman, Secretary, General Constituency Member, Reserved Constituency Member) will be invited from each Union Parishad. In the day-long conference, each Union Parishad will present their good work and present a project proposal. Zila Parishad Chairman, Upazila Parishad Chairman, UNO, DDLG will be present as guests in the conference. The local member of parliament will inaugurate and conclude the conference as the chief guest. Upazila Nirbahi Officer will present the main article. Upazila Parishad Chairman, Zila Parishad member of concerned Upazila, DDLG will serve as negotiator. There will be a selection panel headed by the Chief Executive of the Zila Parishad. The Selection Panel will rank the good works of all the Union Parishads. Zila Parishad and Upazila Parishad budget formulation committee will be present and they will select projects for their own parish from the projects presented by UP. Zila Parishad or Upazila Parishad or both can organize the conference jointly.

A DDLG recommends making a database of projects. Where the list of all projects executed at district level based on financial year will be preserved. Each organization will have a separate ID and password to access the database. Organizations can get the necessary information and ideas from the database while undertaking the project. Therefore, duality would be easy to quantify. He also said that all the roads will have a unique name and the length and width location will be mentioned. No one can do partial work on any project. Then there is benefit in supervision. The database will be open to the public. Anyone can access the database to get information about their area.

A UP secretary provides a sense of coordination to avoid duplication of projects. He said the union council makes the union budget with the demand from the ward meeting. But due to financial incapacity all the requirements cannot be included in the budget. Therefore, if

the remaining demand is sent to the Upazila Parishad after the UP, the Upazila Parishad can make the Upazila budget considering the demand sent from the Union Parishad. Then the remaining demand of Upazila Parishad can be sent to Zila Parishad. After that, the district council will prepare the district budget by scrutinizing the demand sent by the Upazila council.

3.3 Analysis of data collected through Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

3.3.1 Which activities of the Union Parishad require to coordinate with Upazila Parishad and Zila Parishad?

According to the participants of the FGD, coordination with Upazila Parishad and Zila Parishad is necessary for carrying out the development activities of Union Parishad. According to them, the Union Parishad generally implements development activities such as: roads, road guide walls, drains, culverts, ponds, sanitary latrines in schools, etc.

3.3.2 How does the Union Parishad coordinate with them?

Union Parishad Chairman coordinates with Upazila Parishad and Zila Parishad on personal initiative. Being an ex-officio member of the Upazila Parishad, he participates and coordinates all meetings of the Upazila Parishad. There is no coordination between Zila Parishad and Union Parishad.

3.3.3 Which activities of Upazila Parishad require to coordinate with Union Parishad and Zila Parishad?

Upazila Parishad to construct, repair and maintain inter-union connecting roads; Roads, road guide walls, drains, culverts, pond culverts, etc. The implementation of all these activities requires coordination with the District Council and the Union Parishad.

3.3.4 How does the Upazila Parishad coordinate with them?

Chairman of all Union Parishads under Upazila and Mayor of Municipality is the ex officio members of Upazila Parishad. Upazila Parishad coordinate with Union Parishad through monthly meeting of Upazila Parishad, development coordination meeting, budget meeting, etc. But does not coordinate with Zila Parishad. As a result of the amendment of the Zila Parishad Act in 2022, the Upazila

Parishad Chairman and Municipal Mayor are members of the Zila Parishad, but they do not participate regularly in the meetings. Even if they participate, they do not inform the district council about any matter of the Upazila parishad.

3.3.5 Which activities Zila Parishad needs to coordinate with Union Parishad and Upazila Parishad?

Zila Parishad generally: implements the Construction, maintenance and development of such roads, culverts and bridges not reserved by Upazila Parishad, Municipality or Government; provision and maintenance of parks, playgrounds and open spaces for public use; Management and control of non-maintained public, Upazila parishads or municipalities; provision and maintenance of inns, post offices and rest rooms; etc. Coordination with Upazila Parishad and Union Parishad is necessary for the implementation of all these activities.

3.3.6 How does the district coordinate with them?

From the FGDs held in Union Parishads, it is identified that the ZP generally: does not coordinate with both the Upazila Parishad and the Union Parishad. From the FGDs held in the Zila Parishad, it is found that the Zila Parishad takes the advice of Zila Parishad members and local leaders in taking up development projects. Moreover, the Zila Parishad Chairman being a district elder and a top politician has a personal relationship with the Chairman of all Upazila Parishads, Municipalities and Union Parishads. On the other hand, all members of parliament in the district are advisors to the district council. Therefore, the Zila Parishad takes up the development project after discussing with all these people's representatives.

3.3.7 What are the challenges of coordination?

When participants of FGD were asked questions about the challenges of coordination, the following challenges identified by them:

- a) Union Parishad, Upazila Parishad, Zila Parishad both institutions are not subordinated to one another as they are entities created by separate laws. As a result, coordination is optional. Therefore, everyone is working as they like.
- b) The culture of sharing information among themselves is not practiced. As a result, no one knows who is doing what.

However, the RTI Act requires every organization to publish the Citizen Charter offline and online. Many organizations also publish their project list and other important information on the website. But no one seems to see anyone's information.

- c) In many cases, the public representatives are not sufficiently aware. The public is also not aware enough. As a result, people cannot find out the faults/mistakes of the local government institutions.
- d) Elected representatives may have political differences. Therefore, they are not interested in coordinating with each other.
- e) Positive attitudes of local parliamentarians and government party leaders and workers.
- f) If the demand is taken from the Union Parishad, there is no scope for project duplication.

3.3.8 What are your recommendations for overcoming these challenges?

In the FGDs the respondents discussed in detail how to overcome coordination challenges. Their recommendations are as follows:

- a) Member of Zila Parishad can be the member of Upazila Parishad, Union Parishad and Municipal Development Coordination Committee.
- b) Zila Parishad may issue letter to Union Parishad seeking project;
- c) Campaign should be carried out about the role of Zila Parishad.
- d) Zila Parishad may hold meetings consisting of Members of Parliament. Upazila based coordination meeting can be organized in this coordination meeting.
- e) Budget review meeting may be organized every year under the leadership of Zila Parishad.
- f) The District Development Coordination Committee may be headed by the Zila Parishad with the Chairman of the Zila Parishad having the rank of Deputy Minister and the Chief Executive Officer having the rank of Joint Secretary. All department heads of the district engaged in development activities can be the members in the said committee.

- g) In Upazila Parishad the Chairman of Zila Parishad may be adviser.
- h) MIS project entries of Union Parishads are there where Zila Parishads and Upazila Parishads have the opportunity to enter, they can get information about the projects undertaken by the Union Parishads.
- i) There may be fiscal year wise database listing candidate projects and pending projects and updating the implementation progress every three months.
- j) Training to raise awareness of public representatives and campaigns and workshops to raise awareness of stakeholders can be organized. Concerned agencies of Government will take measures for training work and concerned local government bodies can play a role in promoting the campaign.
- k) Prepare priority list every year and seek feedback from others.
- l) Coordination meeting may be held on priority list.

3.4 Sample survey

A total of 100 general citizens, 25 from each district, were surveyed through questionnaires to support the qualitative data collected. The survey revealed that the common people know a little about the activities of the Union Parishad, but they are not aware of the Upazila Parishad and the Zila Parishad. According to a significant number of respondents, the Union Parishad implements construction and repair of roads, culverts, road guide walls, drains etc. in rural areas along with various types of allowances such as: old age allowance, widow allowance, disabled allowance, low price rice, etc. While conducting these activities they organize meetings from time to time. But its frequency is negligible. Respondents stated that Upazila Parishad and Zila Parishad cooperate in the development and reform of educational institutions and religious institutions. There is no visible activity of them to take public opinion.

3.5 Content Analysis

At this stage, the research team has tried to verify the effectiveness of coordination by reviewing various documents of Union Parishad, Upazila Parishad and Zila Parishad such as: budget book, monthly meeting proceedings, minutes, development plan book, etc.

The analysis shows that most of the Upazila Parishad organize ward meetings. Although the budget is prepared and sent to the government, the draft budget is not published on the notice board or on the website for public opinion. Even if the development plan is formulated, it is only a formality. Although there is a provision to prepare the budget according to the development plan, no match was found between the development plan and the budget. The only coordination platform at the union level is the Union Development Coordination Committee which is nominally functioning at 50% of the Upazila Parishad. UDCC Meetings are held but minutes are not prepared and distributed.

Table 8: Coordination status of Union Parishad

Platforms	Indicators	Lakshmanpur UP	Mourat UP	Sujalpur UP	Rampur UP
Ward Meeting	Organize at least 2 meetings (Yes/No)	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
	Quorum (Yes/No)	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
	Minutes Prepared (Yes/No)	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
	Distribution of Minutes/Publication on Web Portal (Yes/No)	No	No	No	No
Budget	Organize open budget meeting (Yes/No)	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
	Publish draft budget on notice board/website for public opinion (Yes/No)	No	No	No	Yes
	Approve Budget in Parishad Meeting (Yes/No)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Preservation in book form/printed copy (Yes/No)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Timely sent to UNO (Yes/No)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Platforms	Indicators	Lakshmannur UP	Mourat UP	Sujalpur UP	Rampur UP
Development Plan	Formation of Development Planning Committee (Yes/No)	No	Yes	No	Yes
	Development Plan Approved in Parishad Meeting (Yes/No)	No	Yes	No	Yes
	Have Development Plan Register (Yes/No)	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
	Preservation in book form/printed copy (Yes/No)	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
	Development plans are registered and regularly updated (Yes/No)	No	Yes	No	Yes
	Publication on Notice Board/Website (Yes/No)	Yes	No	No	Yes
	Project from development plan is included in budget (Yes/No)	Yes	No	No	No
UDCC Meeting	Organize at least 6 meetings (Yes/No)	Yes	No	No	No
	Quorum (Yes/No)	Yes	No	Yes	No
	Minutes Prepared (Yes/No)	Yes	No	Yes	No
	Distribution of Minutes (Yes/No)	No	No	Yes	No
	Publication on Web	No	No	No	No

Development coordination of Upazila Parishad is usually done in the monthly meeting of the Parishad. Since the chairman of all Upazila Parishads of the Upazila, the mayor of the municipality are present as ex-officio members in the said meeting. Apart from this, officials of 17 government departments at the Upazila level are present as non-voting members. The review shows that regular monthly meetings are held at Upazila level and minutes are prepared and distributed.

However, Although the budget is prepared and sent to the government, the draft budget is not published on the notice board or on the website for public opinion. Even if the development plan is formulated, it is only a formality. Although there is a provision to prepare the budget according to the development plan, no match was found between the development plan and the budget.

Table 9: Coordination status of Upazila Parishad

Platforms	Indicators	Sharsha	Pangsha	Birganj	Chandpur Sadar
Monthly Meeting	Organize at least 9 meetings (Yes/No)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Quorum (Yes/No)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Minutes Prepared (Yes/No)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Distribution of Minutes (Yes/No)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Publication on Web Portal (Yes/No)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Budget	Organize open budget meeting (Yes/No)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Publish draft budget on notice board/website (Yes/No)	No	No	No	No
	Approve Budget in Parishad Meeting (Yes/No)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Preservation in book form/printed copy (Yes/No)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Timely dispatch to DC	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Development Plan	Formation of Development Planning Committee (Yes/No)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Development Plan Approved in Parishad Meeting (Yes/No)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Platforms	Indicators	Sharsha	Pangsha	Birganj	Chandpur Sadar
Development Plan	Have Development Plan Register (Yes/No)	No	No	No	No
	Development plans are registered and regularly updated (Yes/No)	No	No	No	No
	Publication on Notice Board/Website (Yes/No)	No	No	No	No
	Project from development plan is included in budget (Yes/No)	No	No	No	No

Since 2022, the Zila Parishad has been constituted in a new way. Now the chairman of all Upazila parishads located within the district and the mayor of the municipality are present as ex-officio members. Apart from this, the Upazila Executive Officer, Chief Executive Officer of the municipality are present as non-voting members. Regular monthly meetings are held in the Zila Parishad and minutes are prepared and distributed. However, the attendance of Upazila level members is significantly low. Although the budget is formulated and approved and sent to the ministry on time, the draft is not published on the notice board or website for public opinion. No development plan was found in the Zila Parishad of the sample area. But they have project register and it is updated regularly.

Table 10: Coordination status of Zila Parishad

Platforms	Indicators	Jashore	Rajbari	Dinajpur	Chandpur
Monthly Meeting	Organize at least 9 meetings (Yes/No)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Quorum (Yes/No)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Minutes Prepared (Yes/No)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Distribution of Minutes (Yes/No)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Publication on Web Portal (Yes/No)	No	No	Yes	No

Platforms	Indicators	Jashore	Rajbari	Dinajpur	Chandpur
Budget	Organize open budget meeting (Yes/No)	No	Yes	Yes	No
	Publish draft budget on notice board/website for public opinion (Yes/No)	No	No	Yes	No
	Approve Budget in Council Meeting (Yes/No)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Preservation in book form/printed copy (Yes/No)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Dispatch to Ministry in due course (Yes/No)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Development plan	Formation of Development Planning Committee (Yes/No)	No	No	No	No
	Development Plan Approved in Parishad Meeting (Yes/No)	No	No	No	No
	Preservation in book form/printed copy (Yes/No)	No	No	No	No
	Have Development Plan Register (Yes/No)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Development plans are registered and regularly updated (Yes/No)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Publication on Notice Board/Website (Yes/No)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Project from development plan is included in budget (Yes/No)	No	No	No	No

4.0 Discussion of the Research Findings

Zila Parishad, Upazila Parishad and Union Parishad are the players in rural infrastructure development. Though Zila Parishad is a district-level, important LGI and plays a significant role in rural

development, it remains isolated from all other LGIs. This study was conducted with the motive of finding out the integrated relationship in rural infrastructural development among different LGIs by examining the present planning and implementation practices. The result has been drawn by analyzing the respondents' perceptions and other relevant documents related to the development activities of LGIs. In this chapter, the result of the study is critically analyzed, considering the objectives of the study, and identified for its relevance and acceptability.

4.1 Coordination Mechanisms

Local Government Institutions (LGIs) are supposed to prepare and implement various periodical development plans including five-year plans considering needs of the citizen as per the present acts and rules. Most of the respondents from union Parishad stated that Union Parishad is the working area of both Zila Parishad and Upazila Parishad. As the Chairman of the Union Parishad, he has a direct opportunity to select and implement projects of the Upazila Parishad. Moreover, the Upazila Parishad gives a small amount of money to the Union Parishad every year which is implemented through the PIC. Zila Parishad implements projects in union areas but does not inform Union Parishad. In many cases duality of projects is observed. As a result, a complication is created. They opined that if Local Government (Union Parishad) development Planning Rules properly followed Union Parishad could have the opportunity to get information about the development activities. Most of the respondents from ZP replied that though it is the highest level LGI yet it has no authority to look after the activities rather Upazila Chairmen are questioning about the activities of Zila Parishad as members of the Zila Parishad Development Coordination Committee. Therefore, they think that for proper coordination Zila Parishad needs authority to supervise activities of other LGIs. ZP prepares development plan without taking public opinion, because they don't have any idea about development plan. However, most of the respondents stated that ZP does not prepare development plan and does not consult with other LGIs during formulation of development plan. Most of the respondents opined that ZP prepares budget in time and official documents also shows that it requires to prepare and send budget within a time frame directed by LGD but

respondents from other LGIs admitted their ignorance about it. Official records of ZP show that every year it prepares budget in the prescribed form and bind copies of it and sends to LGD and other related offices. But some ZP members expressed their dissatisfaction about the process of budget preparation. They said that their opinions were not considered and they have not given any scope to take public opinions before budget preparation; they even did not get copies of budgets. Most of them claimed that the chairman with government officials prepares the whole budget where only chairman's opinion and desire are reflected. In fact, there is no provision to take public opinion by holding open budget meeting. Therefore, most of them suggested that ZP might hold budget meeting to take public opinion.

Union Parishad and Upazila Parishad have specific Development Planning Rules but Zila Parishad has no such permanent rules, it prepares yearly planning after getting development fund from the government and prepares development plan as directed by the ministry. Actually, budgets and planning of the LGIs are prepared in the office to fulfill the Members official requirements. Development program is formulated in the office without taking consideration of the citizen's needs; even opinions of representatives from different areas are given less importance in selecting development projects. Most of the respondents reported that almost all projects are selected without their consent and they came to know about the project lists after getting the meeting minutes. The result clearly shows that LGIs prepare budgets without taking public opinion and ignoring other members desire to meet up the official obligation. It also needs not to consult with other LGIs for budgeting and planning though harmonious development is not possible without proper democratic practice. To pave the way of effective and fruitful coordination among different LGIs district budgeting and district planning system is required where all LGIs of the district have to participate and put their opinion during the preparation of budget and planning.

4.2 Constraints and Challenges of Coordination

Most of the respondents from all LGIs said every LGI has its own rules and regulations to run the development activities. Therefore,

they need not to consult with others during planning and implementing development activities. Though there are provisions of planning rules to prepare planning in consultation with the people and other LGIs. Most of them actually did not understand the spirit of the planning rules. Zila Parishad Chairmen said that they do not know much about the activities of the Union Parishad. They added that “Union Parishad implements its own activities. They have different laws, rules, according to which they are governed. They do not report anything to the Zila Parishad and Zila Parishad also does not want to know anything from Union Parishad.” A significant number of Upazila Parishad chairmen mentioned that “Union Parishads are autonomous institutions and they do not inform Upazila Parishads about their activities. Rather Union Parishad Chairmen being members of Upazila Parishad know a lot about the planning of the Upazila Parishad and also participate in the decision-making process of Upazila Parishad.” Most of the Union Parishad Chairmen stated that “Union Parishad is the working area of both Zila Parishad and Upazila Parishad. As the member of the Upazila Parishad, he has the opportunity to intervene in development planning and implementation process of Upazila Parishad. In the present legal system coordination between Union Parishad and Upazila Parishad is prevalent but coordination with Zila Parishad is not apparent. A large portion of the respondents reported that “in addition to Zila Parishad, Union Parishad and Upazila Parishad also work to develop infrastructure in rural areas. Therefore, in most cases, it is not clear who did the work. Sometimes the same work is seen to be claimed by Zila Parishad, Upazila Parishad and Union Parishad. Consequently, works of Zila Parishad are rarely visible.” According to the law, the Zila Parishad is to review the progress of implementation of development projects undertaken by Upazila Parishad and Municipality is given top priority in the law. But that provision of law is ignored totally. Recently Upazila Chairmen are included in the Zila Parishad Development Coordination Committee to bridge the coordination gap but this provision is not cordially accepted by the Zila Parishad authority due to member’s concern about their share in the development fund. Upazila chairmen as members of the committee get the chance to know and discuss about the development activities of Zila Parishad but Zila have no way to intervene in the planning and implementation process of

Union Parishad and Upazila Parishad. Respondents from Union Parishad and Upazila Parishad stated that Zila Parishad does not consult with them in selecting development projects but they are indifferent about their consultation with Zila Parishad regarding their development activities. Therefore, the main barrier in coordination is mind-set of the authority of the LGIs. The provision to co-operate with other organizations that are performing similar functions and to provide support, cooperation and encouragement to Upazilas and municipalities is also mandatory in the law but that is also not known to the respondents. Mandatory activities cannot be implemented by ZP alone but it requires guiding all LGIs to make effective cooperation with one another by following the provision of the law but the mandatory provision of law is totally ignored. If the provisions of the law are followed properly ZP might be the center of district development. Now Zila Parishad merely a small project implementing LGI and gets less importance both to the people and to the government. Effective coordination is possible if the provision of the development planning rules of Union Parishad and provision of Zila Parishad Act strictly followed. Provision of open budget meeting for Zila Parishad and Upazila Parishad may be introduced where representatives from other LGIs and peoples from all walks of may participate to make development activities transparent and public.

4.3 Respondents' Suggestions for effective coordination among the LGIs

Perceptions of respondents' regarding coordination challenges faced by the LGIs in rural infrastructure development are collected through in-depth interviews with structured questionnaire, FGDs and one-to-one discussions and analyzed to out the way to solve the problem. Suggestions based on their perceptions are mentioned below.

- a) More than eighty percent of the respondents mentioned that there is gap in coordination between ZP and other Local Government Institutions which is prevalent all over the country. Since these institutions are created by separate laws, one institution has no control over another. Every organization tries to fulfill their mandated responsibilities. Each organization

prepares a separate budget and plan. Their sources of income are also different. Integrated development planning is necessary for harmonious development. In some cases, same projects are included in the budgets of several LGIs due to lack of coordination. The local government bodies working in the rural areas are Union Parishad, Upazila Parishad and Zila Parishad. since UP Chairmen are members of the Upazila Parishad coordination is somehow prevalent but Zila Parishad have no way to intervene in other LGIs activities. Most if the respondents opined that for effective cooperation with other LGIs, members of the ZP may be attached to Union Development Coordinating Committee (UDCC) at the Union Parishad, Town Level Coordinating Committee (TLCC) at the Municipality and Upazila Development Coordinating Committee at the Upazila Parishad. If members ZP will be in those committees it is possible for ZP to know about the development plan of those organizations and will be able to take development projects accordingly avoiding overlapping or duplication. Therefore, the suggestion is appropriate and may be considered by the authority.

- b) Most of the respondents suggested that duties and responsibilities shall be made clear-cut for every member and oblige them to follow strictly. To make the provision known to every member of the LGIs, training of public representatives should be organized immediately after the election. If the training is organized separately, a session on the responsibilities and management processes of other organizations may be included in the course. At the beginning of the financial year, a day-long workshop can be organized with all the representatives of local government institutions and development institutions of the district in coordination with the NILG or the local government division. Monitoring activities need to be strengthened to monitor whether coordination activities are being conducted properly.
- c) The significant number of members said all of their proposed projects are not approved for implementation. There are standing committees in the LGIs but those committees are less effective. Therefore, the importance of standing committees should be upheld and followed properly to face coordination problem within the LGI.

- d) Most of the participants suggested that to ensure civic engagement in LGIs activities Upazila wise meetings with different stakeholders such as UP chairmen/members, traders, farmers, professionals, teachers, social workers, day-labors, etc. and open budget meeting may be arranged before finalizing development plan and budget of different LGIs. That is way to engage local people in planning and budgeting activities but it is somehow costly. Since these are the way to gather public opinions and make the budget pro-people incorporating citizen's demand and ensure participatory development plan authority may consider this suggestion ignoring its cost.
- e) Different LGIs prepare their budgets without having any discussion with others but work in the same area. Especially Zila Parishad, Upazila Parishad and Municipalities are preparing plan and implementing development projects separately without having any discussion or coordination with one another. Therefore, to overcome the problem every LGI may invite other LGIs representatives in the budget and development planning meeting. A district budget-sharing meeting may be held in the Zila Parishad with all LGIs and other government departments before finalizing their annual and other periodical budget. In this meeting draft budget of all those offices may be discussed to avoid duplication and overlapping. This is a good suggestion and Local Government Division may take step to introduce it in the legal system. All LGIs and other departments performing development activities within the district may be directed to send a copy of their development plans and budgets to ZP. It may not be necessary to control or monitor activities of other departments and LGIs but exchange of information creates good relationship among the offices and also creates congenial transparent working environment which is beneficial for the country as well as for the people.

4.4 Major Findings of the study

The following are the findings that the researchers were able to draw by analyzing the data collected through personal interviews, key informant interviews, FGDs, sample surveys, content analysis etc.

- a) Union Parishads, Upazila Parishads and District Parishads are generally required to: Coordinate with each other to carry out development activities.
- b) Although there is provision in the legal framework of every organization for coordination, it is not properly followed.
- c) Union level ward meeting, budget meeting, five-year plan formulation committee, UDCC meeting; There are monthly meeting, budget meeting, five-year planning committee at Upazila level and monthly meetings, budget meeting, five-year planning committee etc. at the district level.
- d) Union level coordination platforms are found to be quite effective but district and Upazila levels are not effective at the desired level.
- e) Lack of proper coordination of development activities slows down the pace of development and hinders sustainable development. Duplication of projects is occurring and a plethora of smaller but less permanent projects is being observed. A plethora of similar projects are observed year after year.
- f) Union Parishad, Upazila Parishad and Zilla Parishad one institution does not have adequate understanding about the activities of other institutions.
- g) Chairman of Upazila Parishad of Zilla Parishad and Mayor of Municipality and Chairman of Union Parishad in Upazila Parishad are ex-officio members but their duties and responsibilities are not well defined. Moreover, they have not been provided awareness training by any institution.
- h) There is scope for coordination between Upazila Parishad and Zilla Parishad, but there is no scope for coordination between Union Parishad and Zilla Parishad.

5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

Coordination is not a separate function of management; in fact, it is known as the “essence of management.” It is like the thread to synchronization of different managerial functions. Coordination is

to be performed right from the planning stage till the controlling stage. Absence of this function will turn to be ineffective and will weaken the effect of authority-responsibility hierarchy relationship in an organization. Coordination initiates every function of management and makes them solid and effective which serves a purpose for the organization. It creates harmony among the individual efforts for achieving the organizational goals. This is present in all the departments of an organization such as the production, sales, finance etc. Coordination minimizes the conflicts, rivalries are ended, wastages, delays, indifferences and other organizational problems. It ensures smooth function of the organization. Hence, with the help of coordination an organization can fulfil its objectives promptly. Also, coordination functions help in improving the relationship in an organization. Top Level coordinate their activities with the middle level and this helps in developing good relations among them. Likewise, the middle level coordinates their activities with the lower level and this too develops good relations with them. A country's future economic base depends on its ability to adapt quickly to changing global conditions. Therefore, if appropriate steps are taken in tune with the times, the development trend of the country will continue. For this, problems should be systematically identified and solved. Those who are proficient in this work will be more successful.

5.2 Recommendations

- a) Ensuring formulation and follow-up of five-year plans by all local government institutions as per law. DDLG can play an active role in this regard. Manpower can be increased in DDLG office if required. As the workload of Upazila Nirbahi Officer is high, separate officers can be assigned for each Upazila under DDLG's leadership.
- b) Organizing training, workshops, seminars, round table meetings on the relevant laws, rules, circulars, etc. for the elected public representatives of the local government institutions immediately after the elections and after certain periods.
- c) Providing detailed training on local government organization management during new postings of DDLGs and UNOs.

- d) Development coordination committee can be formed under the leadership of Zila Parishad at district level and Upazila Parishad at Upazila level to coordinate development.
- e) Inclusion of Zila Parishad members as members of the Development Coordinating Committees of Upazila Parishads, Municipalities and Union Parishads.
- f) Exchange monthly and development reports of all local government institutions with each other.
- g) Exchanging project lists with each other.
- h) Making a database by providing unique ID number of each road, bridge, culvert.
- i) Preserving photos at three stages (pre-project, project ongoing and project completion) with location map attached to LGSP project in project formulation and implementation.

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