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**LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN BANGLADESH:
AN AGENDA FOR GOVERNANCE**

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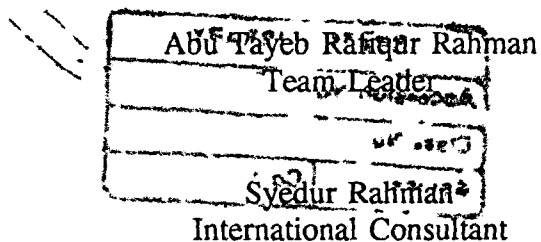
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Prepared by

Division of Public Administration and Development Management
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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ADB	- Asian Development Bank
ADLG	- Assistant Director, Local Government
AL	- Awami League
BADC	- Bangladesh Agricultural Development Council
BARD	- Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development
BRAC	- Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
BRDB	- Bangladesh Rural Development Board
CEO	- Chief Executive Officer
DANIDA	- Danish International Development Agency
DC	- Deputy Commissioner
EPI	- Extended Programme on Immunization
FFW	- Food for Work
FY	- Fiscal year
GOB	- Government of Bangladesh
HQ	- Headquarters
JP	- Jatio Party
KIDP	- Kadla Integrated Development Programme
LG	- Local government
LGD	- Local government department
LGED	- Local Government Engineering Department
LGO	- Local Government Ordinance
LGRD	- Local Government and Rural Development
MIC	- Municipal Improvement Committee

MJSS	- Manikganj Janasankhya Simitokoron Samittee
MP	- Member of Parliament
NGO	- Non-governmental organization
NILG	- National Institute for Local Government
OC	- Officer-in-Charge
ODA	- Overseas Development Administration, UK
ORS	- Oral rehydration saline
PATC	- Public Administration Training Centre
PHED	- Public Health Engineering Department
PS	- Pourashava
PSO	- Pourashava Ordinance
PWD	- Public Works Department
RDA	- Rural Development Academy at Bogra
RDRS	- Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service
RMP	- Road Maintenance Programmes
RPATC	- Regional Public Administration Training Centres
SHLDP	- Small Household Livestock Development Project
STIDP	- Secondary Town Infrastructure Development Project
TDC	- Thana Development Committee
TDCC	- Thana Development Coordination Committee
Tk	- Taka - unit of Bangladesh currency (Tk 1 = US 2.5c) (US\$1 = Tk 40)
TNO	- Thana Nirbahi Officer
UNDDSMS	- United Nations Department for Development Support and Management Services
UNDPD	- United Nations Development Programme, Dhaka
UNICEF	- United Nations International Children's Fund
UNO	- Upazila Nirbahi Officer
UP	- Union Parishad
UPO	- Union Parishad Ordinance
VDP	- Village Development Programme
VGDP	- Vulnerable Group Development Programme
WFP	- World Food Programme

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PREFACE

The study on local government in Bangladesh started in mid-1994 to examine the Union Parishads and Pourashavas and to recommend strategies and programmes for strengthening their management capacities. Between mid-1994 and mid-1996, the context of governance in Bangladesh took a number of different turns, and in the process strengthened the democracy and democratic institutions in the country. This Report on Local Government, while primarily based on an analysis of the Union Parishads and Pourashavas, goes beyond to develop a vision for a local government system based on the emerging trends in democratic institution-building.

The study concludes that there is considerable public interest and support for an autonomous and integrated local government system to promote participatory and representative democracy and economic development and growth. While there are numerous constraints, these can be surmounted. Specific recommendations from the study can be adopted, singly or in clusters, to improve Union Parishad or Pourashava operations. However, the authors recommend that prior to that, there should be an overall consensus on the position of local government in the overall scheme of governance in Bangladesh.

In generating this Report on Local Government, comprehensive support was provided by the Government of Bangladesh. National consultants undertook intensive research on local government. A national consultative committee supported the work of the national consultants. A national management organization provided technical support to the project. In addition the study team sought cooperation from numerous non-governmental organizations and donor agencies and other civic and educational institutions in Bangladesh and abroad. The study team offers its deepest appreciation and sincere gratitude to all institutions and individuals who contributed to the preparation and finalization of this study.

The report contains an executive summary followed by eight chapters. These cover the following topics: recent history and methodology for study, interface, management, participation, training, resource allocation, best home-grown practices, and the future.

The Report hopes to kindle and provoke a national debate on local government towards establishing an integrated and autonomous local government system and, at the same time, offers practical solutions to improve management operations at the local level.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
I. TOWARDS REINVENTING LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN BANGLADESH	20
II. THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT SYSTEM AND ITS INTERFACE: CONFLUENCES AND CONTRADICTIONS	31
III. MANAGING LOCAL GOVERNMENT: ORGANIZING GOVERNANCE	41
IV. PEOPLE'S GOVERNMENT: THE NEED FOR PARTICIPATION	53
V. IMPROVING KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS: PLANNING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING	65
VI. RESOURCE ALLOCATION: THE SEARCH FOR VIABILITY ...	76
VII. BEST HOME-GROWN PRACTICES: THE BUILDING BLOCKS FOR REINVENTION	87
VIII. THE FUTURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN BANGLADESH ..	93
ANNEXES	
I. Laws and Ordinances on Local Government	101
II. Members of the Research Team and Consultative Committee ..	103

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

At present Bangladesh lacks a comprehensive and consistent vision of local government. Little progress has been made in building a consensus on the role of local government, institutionalizing democratic processes for managing local issues and agenda, developing structures of local governance at key subnational levels, and clarifying a realistic division of functions and resource allocation between national government and local governments. The existing local government system in Bangladesh is weak in four key areas: financial, managerial, informational, and personnel. Constant changes in its form and process by successive governments have also destabilized the system, so that it is not integrated with the community and society it serves.

Nevertheless, if one examines the constitution of Bangladesh, its preamble, fundamental principles and articles specifically on local governments, clear guidance exists on the role, structure and processes for autonomous local government. An emphasis on the democratic process to realize economic and social justice as a fundamental aim of state policy is noted in the preamble. Fundamental principles of state policy encourage local government institutions (article 9) at all administrative levels in which effective participation by the people through their elected representatives should be ensured (article 11). More specifically, article 59 reiterates that local government should be vested in elected bodies in every administrative unit, and that the scope of local government work should cover administration and the work of public officers, maintenance of public order and preparation and implementation of plans for public services and economic development. To give full effect to the above, article 60 enjoins Parliament to make laws to confer powers to local government bodies, including the power to impose taxes.

Notwithstanding this clear guidance, significant weaknesses in the implementation of constitutional provisions and building of institutional mechanisms and practices has resulted in a local government system which is poorly functioning and much maligned. The existing local government system is viewed as ineffective because of its inability to serve its constitutional purposes.

This is the conclusion of this study on strengthening of local government in Bangladesh. The study is based on an analysis of 56 Pourashavas, 37 Union Parishads, 10 Thanas comprising of 60 additional Union Parishads, interviews with over 400 people as well as extensive literature review of local government documents and publications. The final report is a synthesis of reports prepared by 17 national consultants in the following areas: (1) participation, (2) organizational efficiency and effectiveness, (3) interface among organizations involved in local activities, (4) management and leadership training, (5) resource mobilization, (6) best home grown practices; and (7) role and function of local government.

More importantly, however, the study also found that despite such shortfalls, there exists strong evidence that the art of self-governance (developing and managing programmes and activities)

at the local level reaches far beyond the confines of the formal local government system. Individuals and small groups from all sectors of society are increasingly involved in organizing themselves around primarily economic, but also social and political activities, and managing these activities. The major thrust for organizing and self-governance initially came from initiatives undertaken by such organizations as Grameen and BRAC, as well as a growing number of national and local nongovernmental organizations with increasing participation from international organizations. The self-governance activities seem to be going beyond these organizations and taking on a life of their own. The study found that these activities are transforming the rural and urban communities in Bangladesh.

It is this second finding that guarantees the success of strong and autonomous local institutions and organizations and consequently the viability of an autonomous local government system. This finding and the constitutional provisions discussed above provide a solid basis for articulating a vision of an autonomous local government system in the next section.

Vision of an Autonomous Local Government

An autonomous local government system is fundamental to develop decentralized and democratic governance in order to achieve economic development and social justice in Bangladesh. As in leading democracies of the world, an autonomous and active local government system is necessary not only as a training ground for political leadership in democratic governance, but also indispensable to provide scope for popular participation in local decision-making and to ensure effective delivery of services. While there is an abundance of talk about local government in Bangladesh, the concept and vision has not been fully spelled out. In this section, an outline of the vision is provided, including the basic vision statements, goals and structures, resources and capacities, and linkages with the national governance system. Some specific suggestions will be made to further refine and develop this vision into practical proposals for initiating and developing an integrated and autonomous local government system.

Statement 1

The individual Bangladeshi is capable and resilient, despite adversities, and is deserving of trust and management of public goods and services.

Most Bangladeshis are trapped in poverty and lack the most rudimentary amenities of life. They have no basic education and no access to health and welfare services, nor do they have three square meals a day. Few if any public goods and services reach them. They live in a harsh environment threatened daily by natural and man-made disasters. Yet they are surviving by maximizing the meagre resources at their disposal, recycling materials and goods and carving out a living.

This skill in managing poverty and surviving deep adversities provides the individual Bangladeshi with a capacity, drive and energy that can serve as a building block for autonomous

local government. What is required is belief and trust in their capacity to manage their environment.

An individual is capable

Mr. Siddique, who won a Presidential Award, used to help his father collect fish seeds from the river Halda, spawn them and sell the fingerlings in the surrounding villages. He took over the trade in 1972 with an initial training in modern methods and began a small hatchery in 1976. Although his first attempt at a fish hatchery failed, he persevered and today his fish hatchery is estimated to be over 400 acres. He and his two brothers and two sons employ nearly 150 permanent workers and an additional 300 on a seasonal basis. Today, Mr. Siddique trains others in fish farming and has trained over 3,000 people. He does not charge them. In 1993 total fish spawn and fingerling production in the private sector was 33,000 kg. and 2,360 million respectively. Mr. Siddique's farm produced 18 percent of the fish fry and nearly 20 percent of the fingerling production. With little or no formal education or scientific knowledge and management training, Mr. Siddique and other members of his family showed a capacity to break out of the cycle of poverty and become contributing members of society, not only increasing their standard of living but also taking on the social responsibility of assisting others to better themselves through his human development programme and training in fish farming.

Statement 2

Self-governance is possible and is desired by people in communities.

In Bangladesh today, the reality is that at the local level there are thousands of small groups who are managing their own affairs, allocating resources and managing debt, making decisions by considering the opinions of all, taking action for the benefit of the entire group, expanding programmes, changing directions, and ensuring a better future for themselves and their children. If we accept the failure of the formal local government system and maintain the position that localities are incapable of governing themselves, we deny the reality that the drive towards self-governance is strong and permeates the local environment. Building on self-governance is what will give rise to a viable and autonomous local government system.

Self-governance, resource mobilization and accountability

One of the findings which corroborates findings of other studies on local government is that local governments cannot or are unwilling to raise revenue. However, the Eliotgong (North) Union Parishad came up with a very innovative way of raising needed revenue. This Union Parishad does not have an economic base, nor any independent source of income. About 50 percent of its households are landless and very poor. In order to meet its revenue needs this Union Parishad does not follow the local government tax ordinance. Should it use the ordinance, total taxes would have to be increased by 50 percent. This would cause great economic hardship. Instead, the Union Parishad used a collaborative and participatory method to decide how much it needs. Meetings are organized in the three wards. During these meetings, the Chairman and members of the parishad discuss future development projects, maintenance costs of current on-going projects, salaries and administrative costs. The meetings are informed about the amount of taxes to be raised and there is discussion about the amount needed. Their experience shows that taxpayers are willing to pay for programmes and activities that benefit them. In 1984 total tax collection was Tk 29,000. Taxes increased to Tk 54,375 in 1990-91, and Tk 81,562 in 1991-92. Ninety-

five percent of the 1990-91 and 1991-92 taxes were realized. Although the economic base has increased, taxes were held to the 1991-92 level for the last three years in order to give the citizens relief. The Union Parishad is considering increasing taxes for 1995-96.

Statement 3

The inclusion of all social groups is fundamental for sustainable autonomous local government.

If the individual is capable and self-governance is possible, then it follows that no individual or group should be denied the right to participate in the functioning of public organization. Because the right to participate is often contradicted by actual practice, the issue of inclusiveness needs to be monitored closely. Strong and understandable mechanisms for inclusion need to be established and consistently implemented in each jurisdiction.

Organizing governance

Bamoil village is located in the Panchtubi Union of Sadar Thana, Comilla. Initially, a cooperative was established to undertake local level planning. Membership grew from 14 to 602. Approximately 275 of 323 households are part of this cooperative. Per capita savings share per male is Tk 2,053, per female Tk 1,158, and per child Tk 311. It has a 9 member governing committee which manages the cooperative and elections are held every two years to elect members of the committee. Weekly meetings where members can inspect accounts, discuss issues, and participate in decision making is the principal management style. In addition, an annual general meeting allow members an additional opportunity to check on finances and progress of different projects. This ensures both accountability and transparency. Implementation of decisions is undertaken by project sub-committees consisting of members of the governing board and general members. In order to ensure smooth operation, the Bamoil Comprehensive Village Development Cooperative maintains both horizontal linkages to other village and local organizations, and a vertical linkage to its federating unit. Its substantive activities include programmes in increasing agricultural production through irrigation, generation of employment, general literacy and education of children, health, nutrition and family planning, livestock and poultry rearing, tree plantation, electrification and law and order. The operating methods of this unit are what should typify a local government body, that is, to carry out its functions in a transparent manner and be responsible to its members.

If local government is to take on an effective and permanent role in Bangladesh society, then it must function in support of programmes and activities taking place in society. More importantly, it must draw its resources from individuals and groups in society and be built around groups and organizations which are involved in managing their own affairs. The study found that in Bangladesh, local government has been used for many purposes and primarily to lead people rather than to aggregate public opinion in order to guide public officials. Rather than primarily function as a unit for centralized planned development projects and programmes, a viable local government needs to provide a supportive climate for all types of initiatives by all types of community members, in order to promote sustainable growth and development.

Statement 4

Local government is an integral part of a comprehensive national governance vision of partnership between central government units and local government units.

A vision of local government needs to be an integral part of the total national governance vision, in which both the central government and local government units work as partners, each carrying out activities with functions and resources assigned within a constitutional and legal framework. Local government units as legal entities can engage in contracts on behalf of their jurisdiction. This vision also provides political, economic and social roles for the local government system and a sharing of financial and administrative powers. The vision also provides a framework for attaining democratic self-governance at both national and local levels.

However, those starting the journey towards an autonomous local government system must consider current realities and make provision for gradual progression towards the goal by local government units, as they acquire experience in political and economic governance. Criteria and rules need to be detailed to allow each local government unit to grow and serve its people according to its capacity, increasing its service and policy-making responsibilities as it meets specified criteria. At the same time, the national government needs to ensure that the provision of basic services and protection of fundamental rights are guaranteed to all individuals in order to ensure justice, equality and equity for all. Similarly, policies of a national scope need to be decided by the national government, which would delegate as far as practicable, decisions about the contents of policy and their implementation to the local government units.

With regard to resources and capacities, local government units must have adequate financial and personnel resources at their disposal to carry out their mandated functions and role, in addition to the resources made available to them by the national government for activities that it wants them to carry out. In most countries, local government units are mandated to be responsible for basic services, regulations and records, such as education, health, water supply, sewage, welfare, birth and death registration, infrastructure and support for economic activities, such as roads, bridges, development of land, irrigation, training for skills and maintaining law and order. The national government has a continuing and important role in these services provided by local government units through setting standards, providing quality controls and ensuring access by all constituents to these services. The national government may also provide a framework for delivery of these services by private and voluntary sources. Even in areas specifically mandated to local government units, the national government plays a key role in providing facilities and services which are usually beyond the capacity of local government, such as large hospitals and universities.

Keeping in view the global experiences and the constitutional provisions, elected local government bodies should be established at union, thana and district levels, and in towns and cities. Based on past experiences, the composition and constituencies of local bodies at thana and district level can be decided. The composition at the thana level may include one directly elected

chairman, a few commissioners for specific subjects, such as education and health, and chairmen of all Union Parishads as ex-officio members. The District Council may be composed of members elected directly by individual voters from constituencies demarcated only for this purpose. The number of constituencies may vary according to the size and population of the district. The Chairman of the District Council and other chairmen of functional committees should be elected by members only. As ex-officio members of the District Council, chairmen of all Pourashavas and mayors of relevant corporations should be included.

The functions of these local government units should be so arranged that each unit is responsible for a well-defined sphere of work. For example, in the area of education, the Union Parishads can be responsible for primary schools, the Thana Parishads for high schools, and the District Councils for colleges, technical schools and training facilities.

Current Realities

The recent history of local government is not conducive to the development of a stable, autonomous local government. This is the end result of structural layering which began when the British first established a system of local government in India. Structural layering has become a standard policy of each successive government in Bangladesh. Previous structures are broken up and new structures are imposed. While the new structures have had little opportunity to develop their roots, the old structures never completely withered away. Consequently what continues to exist is a clutter of structures resembling neither the old nor the new, and unable to generate identification and loyalty in Bangladesh communities. Local communities have repeatedly been given inconsistent signals concerning which unit (district, thana, union) to hold responsible for various services and activities. The structure and processes of local government should not be dependent upon the whims of successive regimes. Rather, participative bodies at each level need to be institutionalized as a framework for government action and an arena for public policy discussion. What is now needed is to agree, through a political consensus supported by major political parties, on a structure of local bodies and key political and administrative levels of the country.

The current processes through which local governments operate is not conducive to the development of a responsive, accountable and transparent local government system. The central and other levels of bureaucracies act as “prescribed authorities”: local government accountability and responsibility is therefore focused upwards toward the bureaucracies and the administrative system rather than to the people. The current distribution of power between the central governments and all other sub-national or local governments is overwhelmingly skewed in favour of the central government. Even within local governments, power is skewed towards the Chairman rather than the legislative body. The individual member’s accountability and responsibility is focused towards the Chairman rather than the people. This highly centralized power structure environment makes transparency difficult to achieve.

With a clear distribution of functions between the central government and local government and within local government among its various units, further specification is required for the processes by which these functions will be performed. More and more, the responsibility and accountability of local government units will be monitored legally and by voters through political means rather than by the national bureaucracy, which is responsible for monitoring/supervising, planning and implementation of programmes and funds allotted by them.

Finance

Local governments have a weak resource base. The study found that, on the average, the per capita revenue for the Union Parishad is only Tk 4, while the average per capita revenues for Pourashavas A, B and C are Tk 85, 58 and 55 respectively. For Local government expenditure, Union Parishads spend Tk 27 per capita, while Pourashavas A, B, and C spend Tk 215, 144, and 182 respectively. Under such a revenue and expenditure pattern, local government cannot be autonomous nor can it undertake all the tasks currently assigned to local government.

Personnel

Similarly, in the area of personnel, the study found that even though the overall numbers of employees are not sufficient, Pourashavas have some flexibility in the size of their personnel, while Union Parishads, irrespective of their size, have the same number of personnel, which comprises only the Secretary and a few village policemen. Staff training is minimal at the Union Parishad level, and it is not much better at the Pourashava level.

It is necessary that local government units receive adequate resources to perform their functions. Adequate financing and staffing of local government would require transferring and allocating to local government units a significant portion of central government resources, including those located/used at various field levels.

Policy and operational information

Local governments have little basic information and understanding about their tasks and responsibilities.

Management

Minimal managerial skills reside at the local government level. Basic skills such as record-keeping, dissemination of information and gathering of information, to more advanced skills in developing of policy and programme information, appropriate decision-making, participatory decision-making, and democratic leadership are minimal at best and severely lacking in most local government units.

Legal framework

Laws, rules and regulations under which the local government system operate are often not clear or precise. Analysis of the Union Parishad and Pourashava ordinances shows many contradictory rules and regulations. Some rules enhance autonomy, independence, participation and responsiveness. Other rules effectively expunge and obliterate these provisions. In the process, the laws, rules and regulations make the local government system weaker and more dependent.

These contradictions create confusion and generally lead to inaction, thereby rendering the local governments weaker and very dependent upon the central government. An urgent need is the compilation and harmonization of all laws, rules and regulations, keeping an eye on redundancy, promotion of autonomy and reducing unnecessary control by the central government.

Participation

The study found that participation at the local level is electoral, rather than continuing. In the electoral process there is high participation. The voter turnout in the latest parliamentary election in 1996 has been officially estimated at 73.5 percent. For instance, the percentage of voters taking part in elections at the local level continues to grow. Voter turnout at the Pourashava election increased from 62.4 percent in 1973 to 80 percent in 1977. Another indicator of participation at the Union Parishad is the number of contestants per seat. In 1964 it was 2.9. It went up to 3.7 in 1973 and 4.5 in 1992. The study, however, found that participation in local government deliberations and in the activities of the committees and sub-committees is negligible.

The study also found that elected representatives to local governments do not represent the full mix of Bangladesh society. Most elected representatives are male and from the wealthier classes. Women have reserved seats, thereby giving them a voice, although the appointment process provides less of a political base than would election. Very few local government chairpersons are women. Representatives from other groups, especially the poor, are not heard in the deliberations of the local government system.

On the other hand, national-level non-governmental organizations (NGOs) though limited in number, are increasingly providing a platform for the under-represented groups to voice their opinions and to participate in development. Increasingly, non-governmental organizations are becoming part of the process of empowering non-represented groups. In addition, a variety of local non-profit organizations are beginning to provide space for participation by those without access to the regular electoral process. It can be expected that groups underrepresented in the formal local government will use the NGOs to voice their concerns and to influence the formal local government policy agenda, thereby eventually leading to greater access to participation in the local government itself.

Empowerment and representation

During the last few years in Bangladesh, a tremendous change has been under way in the empowerment of under-represented groups, especially women. A case in point is the employment of women in income-generating activities. In the garment manufacturing sector, about 90 percent of the labour force are women. With help from NGOs primarily, there exist today over 500 women's organizations with a total membership of 2 million. Of BRAC's target population, 82 percent are women and 74 percent of BRAC's credit is disbursed to them. ASA, another leading NGO, has established education for empowerment centres. Of a total of 11,754 centres, 11,651 are for females and only 63 are for males. The total number of participants in the female centres is 227,969. Male participants are only 1,166. While much more needs to be achieved, this is more than sufficient evidence that with the right incentive under-represented groups can become effective and contributing members. For local government to become an integral part of society, incorporation of under-represented groups becomes critical to its success.

In its current organizational configuration and operational setup, local government strengthening will require a long term commitment on the part of the national government. The national government will need to provide significant transfer of financial and personnel resources, continued managerial and informational support and a gradual process of clarification and delineation between the responsibilities of national and local government.

The study found that individuals, groups and a few communities are deeply involved in discussing local issues and carrying out activities, often bypassing the formal local government system. In taking care of their own problems and in their concern for the community they have shown evidence that there is an inherent capacity within communities to identify issues and carry out appropriate activities. The study found that the most successful activities and programmes involve local initiative, with support from both government and international sources, together with significant cooperation among individuals and organizations operating at the local and national levels.

Co-optation and cooperation

In order to improve the overall growth and development process, the Chairman of the Kasba Union of Brahmanbaria District sought assistance from a variety of sources. The Union Parishad received resources from the following sources: canal excavation from the World Food Programme; improvement of drainage from the Asian Development Bank; power pumps for farmers with less than one acre, and water-sealed latrines from the Rotary Club, Ramna, Dhaka; adult education centre from Manab Unnayan Sangstha, a local NGO; eye treatment and health care from Bangladesh National Society for Blind and Comilla Sadar Hospital; and Union office improvement from the Local Government Division.

Major Thematic Factors

These system-level findings, along with the specific findings detailed in the chapters of this report, lead to the inference that there are three general factors which limit the development of sound, effective and autonomous local government in Bangladesh. Strengthening of these three

factors can create a platform from which an integrated and autonomous local government system can be developed:

Democratic institution-building

For local government to flourish, responsibility for issues relevant to people's lives need to be mandated to communities, and most effectively to community-based local governments whose operations are transparent and accountable to community members. Numerous legal provisions (e.g., Sections 30 and 30 (2) of UPO) provide veto powers to prescribed authorities like the Ministry of Local Government, over the deliberations and actions of local government. These veto powers limit representative democracy at the local level. An example of the lopsided nature of the relationship between the prescribed authority and/or administrative machinery is the finding that in many cases the Union Parishad Chairman will not make any decision without the prior approval of the Thana Nirbahi Officer. Even within the local government system, the centralization of powers in the hands of the Chairman of the local body further limits democratic decision-making. The Chairman is elected with his/her own mandate and is not required to consult the locally elected council to carry out his/her mandate. However, participation, involvement and enthusiasm of council members are little encouraged when the Parishad, in many cases, rubber stamps decisions made by the Chairman.

Lack of awareness of the role and responsibilities of elected officials and permanent officials within a democratic system are also limiting the growth of democratic institutions. Consequently, accountability and responsibility issues are misdirected. Elected representatives, instead of feeling responsive and accountable to the community and citizens, direct their accountability to permanent officials of the central government and district administration. Only during elections do the issues of responsibility and accountability revert back to the citizens.

Participation and representativeness

Although the legal framework provides for participation and representativeness, the current local government system does encourage these values. The system of nominating women members facilitates representation but, at the same time, limits the ability of the women members to be effective in decision-making. Nomination is associated with second-class status and provides for "representatives" without an authentic constituency.

While local governments are mandated to work through committees and sub-committees in which all groups in society, especially the most deprived, are to be represented, the reality is that, on the average, only one or two committees work in each jurisdiction, namely those responsible for resource distribution authority and consequent power and prestige. However, these committees are seldom representative of all social elements in the community. Participation is hampered because there are no avenues for steady and continuous interaction between local representatives, permanent local staff and central government machinery and more especially with citizens at large.

Even people from all walks of life who become members of committees have difficulty in participating. Observation of committees and sub-committees in operation shows that people from under-represented groups speak up less in meetings and chairmen ignore comments contradictory to their point of view. Laws, ordinances and other institutional measures might require council participation, comments and inputs from councillors as well as the general public.

Devolution, deconcentration and reallocation

Although the constitution recognizes authentic local government, authority and responsibility for local government resides, de facto, with the central government. This is especially so when measured in terms of the revenue generation. The central government monopolises virtually all taxes. Without independent resources, local government cannot take responsibility for any activities nor develop autonomy. Currently, local governments are used for a variety of purposes. In some instances they are used to increase participation, in other cases they serve as focal points for mobilization. In other instances, they are used to implement national development programme objectives. In still other instances they serve as local power bases for national political parties. Basically, local government units can be responsible for activities that take place within their jurisdiction to meet community needs. The decision allocating responsibility to levels of government needs to be taken openly, transparently and in relation to criteria of capacity. Where communities are able to finance and staff their local government, as well as plan for development needs, they can assume greater responsibilities, thereby leading to greater eventual autonomy.

Local government units are often responsible for tasks that they cannot fund, but are denied responsibility for some tasks that are of essential interest to the community. With a rational allocation of responsibilities, tax sources and professional personnel, local governments can evolve into strong, viable instruments for their community's social and economic development.

While devolution of power, deconcentration of tasks and reallocation of resources are important, it is equally important to note that development of the local government system in Bangladesh is evolutionary, with a continuing role for central and local administration albeit a very different role. Organizational and training efforts are needed to strengthen local government's operational and managerial practices. Ensuring the transparency of their operations will require refocusing accountability to the citizenry, the regular dissemination of programme activities and information, appropriate financial management and auditing, and proper record-keeping. These will be the key functions of the central administrative units. Providing opportunities to local government officials for professional development and training will be another. In essence, central administrative units will redirect themselves from being controlling authorities which limit growth and autonomy to a supportive and facilitative role in management development and training for local government staff.

Conclusions

More specifically, these limiting factors lead to the following conclusions:

1. Since the role of prescribed authority is a detriment to the development of democratic institution-building at the local level, the role of prescribed authority must be minimized in areas which limit representative democracy and be supportive in areas of general management and service delivery. It is also necessary to explore the benefits of transferring supervision and prescribed authority for local government from a local government ministry to a local government commission which has greater affinity with local government units but avoids the rigidity of a national ministry. The role of central government officials in local government needs to be changed from one of direction and supervision to a supportive and facilitative one. At the same time, without central agencies and field official management and supervisory knowledge and skills, most local governments will not be able to survive.
2. Current power structure in the organization of local government units is counter-productive to democratic practices. Better awareness of the role and responsibilities of public officials, improved distribution of power between the chairman and other members, and vigorous efforts to bring into the local government process all facets of civil society are essential to democratic institution-building.
3. Clarification of laws, rules and regulations which will provide a supportive environment for democratic institution-building is needed to ensure that all the processes are working in a coordinated and cooperative fashion, rather than the current counterproductive fashion.
4. Supervision of operational and managerial practices must be continued and further enhanced in the near future for strengthening managerial and professional capacity at the local level. Such supervision has to be undertaken in local government segments on matters such as the appointment and composition of committees/sub-committees, dissemination of information, regularization of meetings, etc.
5. Participation in decision-making at the local level has to be organized, managed and supervised at the initial stages before participation can become effective. Ensuring diversity and representativeness are keys to participation and current practices impede and obstruct participation, although some scattered examples of effective participation are taking place. Building on these examples through highlighting them should be a key strategic initiative.
6. Establishing a triangular relationship between local representatives, permanent staff and citizens is imperative to institutionalization of democratic practices at the local level. For elected officials, professional development and training in the role and responsibilities (accountability and transparency) of public officials have to be coupled with professional-

ism (management knowledge and skills) among the permanent staff. Cooperative agreements are vital between local government on the one side and individuals and groups in society on the other for consultative decision-making and ensuring appropriate delivery of services.

7. Distribution of work between central government and local government has to be based on capacity and ability, especially in the area of resource mobilization. Central government can serve as a more appropriate level for collection of revenue while local government because of its relative proximity to the people can serve as a more appropriate level for delivery of services. Organizational levels between the central and local levels have to be re-examined for their appropriateness in the development process.
8. While overall managerial capacity has to be enhanced, the area of financial management needs special attention. Proper record-keeping, processing of all financial transactions through the banking system, supervision and management of programme activities and financial audit must be vigorously pursued.
9. Transparency and accountability can only develop through integration of the local government system with the citizenry, regular dissemination of programme activities and information, appropriate financial management and auditing, and realignment of responsibility of representatives from prescribed authority to citizens. Until these changes are effectively carried out, expectations of transparency and accountability will remain elusive and only on paper.
10. Strengthening of local government in Bangladesh cannot take place unless a serious effort is made to develop a multitude of mechanisms of rationalization which will allow the smooth functioning of governance including to a generally accepted constitutional position of local government at the macro-level, regularization of the election process at the mid-level and integration of local government with society at the micro-level.

Recommendations

Recommendations below are arranged under a two-track system: (1) development of an autonomous and integrated local government system covering all key political/administrative units (i.e. district, thana, union, town and city) and systemic relationships with the national level; and (2) improvement of decision-making, management and operations of Union Parishads and Pourashavas themselves. Implementation of the two-track recommendations should be kept separate, as they have different implications and may require different timetables and separate implementing agencies/processes. The system-wide recommendation may be handled by the Prime Minister's Office, since it deals with governmentwide inter-organizational relationships. The recommendations dealing with improvement of local government functioning at the Union and Pourashava level may be assigned to the Ministry of Local Government for implementation.

System-wide recommendation

For the most sustainable strengthening of local government, it is suggested to avoid any ad hoc solutions and instead develop a nationwide consensus on the role, function, structure, resources and relationships of an integrated and autonomous system of local government in Bangladesh. Sufficient ideas and experience are available to develop practical proposals through a deliberative process which could be organized through an ad hoc local government commission. Such a commission should be small, comprising 12 to 15 members, of whom about half should be members of Parliament nominated by ruling and opposition political parties, and the rest from professions (law, education, civil service), NGOs and experienced local government leaders. The commission should be supported by the Prime Minister's Office and should be given between six months and one year to give its recommendations and proposals to the Parliament.

Specific terms of reference for the commission should include, among others, clarification of the role and functions of central government and local government as partners in national governance, composition, functions and resources of specific local government units, delineation of financial and personnel resources between central government and local government units, preparation of draft bills based on consensus proposals, and formation of an autonomous commission with judicial powers (as in the Election Commission) to guide and deal with the operation and development of local government. The ad hoc local government commission should be supported by working groups dealing with the division of financial resources, creation of local government service organizations of various types, relationships between local government units and central government and drafting of specific bills for local government.

Recommendations aimed at union parishads and pourashavas

Recommendations below are grouped in four sections: (1) those dealing with enlarging participation and ensuring representation, (2) those effecting autonomy and resource independence, (3) those increasing accountability, responsibility and oversight, and (4) those improving management and augmenting transparency.

Participation is a function of (a) individuals and groups involvement in the decision-making, formulation, implementation and evaluation of development activities; and (b) the process resulting in interaction, cooperation, and interrelationship between and among organizations—formal and informal, public and private, domestic and international—involved in development activities at the local level. Representation is the process which attempts to embody all segments of society into public organizations. The expectation is that representation of all groups in society in a public organization will bring to bear all the diverse perspectives and take into consideration all diverse needs and bring about ownership for all.

Autonomy refers to the ability of local government to undertake allocated activities and programmes with minimal interference from other levels. To a large extent, autonomy is defined as the ability of local government to have independent financial resources. In the case of

Bangladesh, independent does not necessarily mean separate sources. Rather, it means independent from interference.

Effective local government must be responsible and accountable to its citizens, and its policies and programmes must be subject to oversight and review. Finally, local governments must manage their internal operations in the most efficient manner and in an open and transparent environment. This is essential in any governmental operation, and the local government system is subject to the same requirements.

Developing an effective local government system in Bangladesh will then require the following minimum actions. While some of the recommendations will require legislative actions and consensus building, most of the recommendations fall within the category of “doable” actions, which can be implemented if those involved in the decision-making remind themselves of the fact that the individual is capable and worthy of trust and that self-governance is possible.

1. Enlarge participation and ensure representativeness

Develop public awareness programmes specifically in the operation and management of service delivery activities of local government.

Users and providers of services must form 60 percent of committee membership, especially in such areas as health, education and welfare programmes at the local level.

Institutionalize the practice of seeking citizen volunteers in the operation and management of development projects. Citizen volunteers can be selected from those who have participated at least one year in the citizen forum.

Establish citizen forums at each level of local government. Local government officials and elected representatives, officials from non-governmental organizations, and representatives from other organizations (national, local and international) will present to this committee information about their plans and programmes.

Establish a leadership forum at each level of local government to bring together local government units, field agencies, non-governmental organizations and international community groups. The forum will serve as a platform for exchange and sharing of information regarding development and other activities impacting on the community. The forum can also serve as an informal coordinating body.

Expand the composition of local government to include reserved seats for the landless, women and other deprived groups.

Legislate direct election for reserved seats.

The current law, which does not allow an individual to seek both membership in a local government and Chairmanship of the local government at the same time, is restrictive and should be abolished.

2. Effect autonomy and resource independence

Treat local governments as separate entities of government. Change the reform perspective of local government from administrative mechanisms for central control to evolving a system where the locality and community manage their own affairs.

Implement Constitution of Bangladesh articles 9, 11, 59 and 60.

Letters of resignation by Chairman and members should be submitted directly to UP/PS. Rescind section 12 of LGO (1982).

Establish a procedure to make UP/PS responsible for removal of its chairman. Cancel approval of central government requirement by rescinding section 13(2) of LGO 1982.

Fix a proportion of revenues collected by the central government for automatic transfer to local government bodies as independent revenue.

Update the existing tax schedule to the current economic environment of rural and urban areas by reviewing the Model Tax Schedule of 1960 and Immovable Property Transfer Tax rules.

For demonstrative effect, require all field government agencies to pay back arrears to UP/PS through negotiated payment plans.

3. Increase accountability, responsibility and oversight

Every UP/PS must have a consolidated bank account, and all financial transactions must be made through cheques.

Ensure, through regular inspection, conduct of formal audits of accounts (activate section 50(3) PSO and section 48(3) UPO) and timely (12 months) publication of reports.

Approval of organogram, creation of part or full time staff positions, and recruitment, promotion and disciplinary actions should be the responsibility of local government units.

Union Parishads should receive government grants directly as with Pourashavas.

Local government units should be solely responsible for development projects funded from their own sources.

Field agency management staff should attend monthly meetings of UP/PS and report on activities of their units (effect section 30 of UPO and remove sub-clause (2) of section 32 of UPO).

Invite, once a month, all area NGOs and other local organizations to brief UP/PS on their current and future activities, and inform them about UP/PS programmes and activities.

Local government units should be allowed to approve larger projects and make increasingly higher levels of financial commitment, subject to financial resources and budget.

Provide UP with functional responsibility for the registration of births, deaths, marriages and divorces, which is in tandem with the primary function of settlement of disputes.

4. Improve management and augment transparency

Selections of citizen volunteers to committee/sub-committee are to be made in UP/PS public meetings.

Timely publication of annual reports of UP/PS and their posting in UP/PS office.

Information on all on-going projects to be prominently displayed both at the UP/PS office and project sites.

Monthly status reports on collection of revenues and arrears at UP/PS meetings.

Implement sections 37 and 39(3) of PSO requiring publication of all plans, programmes, budgets, contracts and other development activities through newsletters.

Report irregularities at UP/PS meetings and require correction.

Utilize the Assistant Director Local Government (ADLG) as a resource person for training of UP/PS members. ADLG to offer monthly training sessions for UP/PS members beginning with awareness of basic functions of local government, importance of service delivery, responsiveness to people's needs and demands, and planning of development projects.

Develop contractual mechanisms for utilizing NGOs and other local organizations for service delivery and income generating activities.

Diversify distribution of tender forms from one location to at least three locations.

Require regular morning hours of office time to allow registration activities to be conducted.

Link the receipt of grants beyond the basic minimum to higher levels of tax collection, as an incentive.

In Pourashavas, reduce the number of bank accounts for smoothing out cash flow peaks and bumps.

Maintain funds in interest-bearing accounts to generate income.

Improve resource collection by producing a greater volume of service and more efficient delivery of services.

Re-examine the role of the Chief Executive Officer of the Pourashava in the context of an autonomous and independent local government system.

Improve information gathering and dissemination capabilities of local government units through systematization of record keeping, compilation of statistical information, and reporting mechanisms.

Establish a Municipal Improvement Committee to oversee town improvement and beautification programmes.

In the context of an autonomous local government system, develop appropriate remuneration and compensation packages and ensure regular payment of salaries and benefits.

Create a training cell to define local training needs, develop local training courses, and identify local training resources.

Require training institutes like BARD, NILG, RDA, RPATC, BRAC and TARD to concentrate all training efforts towards local government for a period of three years to cover chairpersons, members, staff and beneficiaries. The specific objective is to develop trainers in local government.

Increase the efficiency of collection of taxes and hire tax collectors on a commission basis

Implement double-entry accounting for financial transactions and record keeping. Separate capital and operating expenses.

Change the Municipal Administration Rules of 1960 and reclassify revenue and objects of expenditures to correspond to the current economic environment.

Consider linking specific revenues to specific expenditures.

Carry out regular assessment and update the schedule of profession, trade, and calling tax rates.

While the recommendations above should strengthen the positions of Union Parishads and Pourashavas, local government in Bangladesh requires systemwide reform. Policy-makers need to articulate their vision of local government by responding to these fundamental challenges:

- (i) Defining what kind of local government system they want for Bangladesh;
- (ii) Articulating what specific political, economic and social development roles local government will play;
- (iii) Thinking through the implications of developing the local government system they want, especially in respect of sharing of powers and services with the national government, and developing working relationships with district and Thana administrations.
- (iv) Adopting appropriate constitutional, legal and administrative approaches and measures to build a viable local government system.

These issues are systemic and are fundamental to nation building in Bangladesh. Just as was done in the adoption of a parliamentary system of democracy, the resolution of local government issues will require extensive debate to arrive at a consensus. Such discussion and agreement on local government will have to be above party politics and should be guided by the national interest. In order to facilitate the development of a sustainable local government system, the fundamental issues should be agreed upon through a wide consensus-building process, leaving partisan politics to be played within the framework of a stable local government.

I. TOWARDS REINVENTING LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN BANGLADESH

Goals

An aspiration for a viable and autonomous local government system, the necessity for making it an effective partner in the development process and the need for expanding the scope for effective popular participation in local decision-makings form the outer parameters for institutionalization of local government within the overall framework of building a fully functional democratic system in Bangladesh. This study, a contribution to the dialogue on how to build a democratic governance system, resulted from discussions between the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (LGRD) of Bangladesh, the United Nations Department for Development Support and Management Services (UNDDSMS), and the United Nations Development Programme, Dhaka (UNDPD).

Based on internationally acceptable guiding principles the study aimed to explore effective management mechanisms and participative initiatives involved in building a system of local government which is transparent and accountable. The guiding principles are shown below.

Recent history of local government in Bangladesh

Since 1971 there have been three major attempts by successive governments to strengthen local government in Bangladesh and deliver services more effectively. The first experiment began in 1972 and ended in 1975. Bangladesh was divided into 61 Districts. Each District was to be headed by a governor. The purpose was to bring about political control over District administration. However this did not have much impact because the Government was toppled by a military coup shortly after the system was announced.

During the second experiment which began in 1976, local government was to consist of Zila Thana and Union Parishads for the rural areas and Pourashavas for the urban areas. The local government system was to be based on the concepts of Gram (village) Sarkar and Swarnivar (self-reliance), to strengthen local government, provide more autonomy, and help mobilize people at the village level for development works. Gram Sarkars were to be organized around increasing food production, expanding mass literacy, promoting population control/family planning activities and maintaining law and order. However the system of elections to the local bodies was never implemented, so local government was dominated by the bureaucracy. In 1981 a change in the form of the Government did not allow this system of local government to be fully implemented.

A third experiment began in 1982. This upgraded the 464 Thanas of Bangladesh into Upazilas, or sub-district units. The Upazilas were to become the centre of all development activities, policy planning and implementation. Each Upazila had an elected-cum-nominated council, with a separate staff led by an Upazila chief executive officer (Thana Nirbahi Officer) functioning as its secretariat. This plan for strengthening local government brought together, for the first time, two conflicting elements – popular participation and merit-based administrative units

implementing development plans. Local government units were also maintained at the Union level, albeit with reduced powers. Pourashavas in the urban areas were also maintained.

Guiding principles of the study

Effective participation by the people through their elected representative is a fundamental right granted to them by the Constitution of Bangladesh. Applying this to local governance underscores the principles of:

- Free and fair participation of individuals through the electoral process;
- Effective democratic oversight of all levels of local government;
- Participation of individuals and groups in decision-making, formulation, implementation, and evaluation of activities of local government which impacts on them;
- Participation of the people's representatives is effective and representative of the electorate;
- Participation which results from interaction, cooperation and interrelationships between and among organizations involved in development activities at the local level.

As another principle, a strengthened system of transparent and accountable local government would aim at:

- Increased capacity of the system to deliver services equitably and justly to its customers, the people of Bangladesh;
- Enhanced interactions between stakeholders at the local level;
- All administrative and structural institutions and processes to be fully accountable to the electorate and transparent to them and their elected representatives.

That equity and justice should be given especially to the most deprived groups, including women, in accordance with the Constitution's provisions for affirmative action.

Between 1992 and 1996, the Government of Bangladesh focused on how to meet the requirements of Article 11 of the Bangladesh Constitution, which provides that the local government bodies should be composed of elected persons, vested with necessary powers, and able to impose taxes for local purposes.

As an introductory strategy, the first democratically elected government after the change of regime in 1990, constituted a high powered 17-member Local Government Structure Review Commission, to suggest and recommend an effective system of local government. In the process of reviewing and implementing selected recommendations of the Commission, the Government of Bangladesh, determined that the focal point of local government in Bangladesh should be the Union Parishad (Union Council). The Union Parishad has had the longest and most continuous existence of the various tiers of local government – although its name has occasionally changed and its power, authority and responsibilities have been reduced or augmented by successive governments. The Government of Bangladesh also decided to abolish the Upazila (Thana) system in order to ensure that people's participation in decision-making was concentrated at the point of primary contact, namely, the Union.

The current structure includes Union Parishads for the rural areas, Pourashavas for smaller urban areas, and Corporations for the large metropolitan areas. As required by the Twelfth Constitutional Amendment, each of these bodies is headed by elected representatives. The Union Parishads have elected representatives that give them a democratic framework, they have seven standing committees that give them a parliamentary configuration, and they have their own sources of revenue that give them a semblance of independence and autonomy. Pourashavas and Corporations have similar structures.

There are no elected bodies at the Thana and District levels. However, supportive and complementary structures considered to strengthen local government system include a District Parishad and a Development Committee at the Thana level to link Unions and the Districts, as well as villages and Thanass. These committees will be primarily geared at coordination, administrative efficiency, and smooth interaction between elected representatives, national and local bureaucracies, and non-governmental organizations.

However, with new elections completed in June 1996, it is too early to predict the nature of or developments in the local government system. Nonetheless, the issues discussed in this study will provide the parameters within which the framework of local government organization, structure and processes can be established.

A list of the major ordinances and legislation with respect to local government is given in Annex I.

Objectives and Approach of the Study

The principle objectives of the study are to strengthen local governance in Bangladesh by improving the ability of the local government system to better serve the people of Bangladesh, through improved delivery of services, as well as to identify, develop and strengthen mechanisms which allow for effective participation by citizens, especially the most deprived.

The study has three main strategic goals:

To assist the process of establishing effective and strong local governance at the grassroots level;

To strengthen the interface between people's representatives, representatives of local government, and other groups and individuals at various levels; and

To institutionalize local governance through representative democracy, and citizens' participation, along with autonomy and self-reliance.

To achieve this, the study encompasses seven areas:

1. Organizational efficiency and management effectiveness
2. Participation
3. Management and leadership training
4. Administrative and structural interfaces between the central and local governments
5. Pattern, allocation and mobilization of resources
6. Identification of best home-grown practices
7. Consideration of the future of local government

Methodology

The methodological approach was tailored to the requirements of each section. However in all cases the overarching methodological goals were to make extensive use of case studies, to cover the entire geographical territory of Bangladesh, and to use the most consultative and participatory methods possible. In total, the research team carried out nearly 400 individual interviews, visited 97 Union Parishads in all five Divisions, and covered 55 Pourashavas. The team gathered primary data during field visits, as well as secondary data from government archives and many other sources. A Consultative Committee (CC) was organized to interact with members of the research team at various stages of the study. A list of members of the CC and research teams is included in Annex II.

A Snapshot Picture of Local Government

Levels of Local Government

Offering a picture of 4,444 Union Parishads and 114 Pourashavas is a difficult and complex enterprise — there is a severe shortage of analytical work and reliable data. Bangladesh is a unitary state of 143,998 sq.km. with a population of 112 million. The State is divided into 6 Divisions, 64 Districts, 464 Thanas, 4444 Unions and 68,000 villages. Approximately 80 percent of the population live in rural areas.

There is no local government body at the District level currently, although a bill for creating District Council has been in Parliament for some time. The next level down is the Thana which has an appointed body called a Thana Coordinating and Development Council comprising Thana officials and Union Parishad Chairmen. The lowest level of government for the rural areas is made up of the 4,444 Union Parishads. For urban areas, there are Pourashavas covering towns of various sizes. In addition, the four largest cities, namely, Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna and Rajshahi, have been given corporation status.

Size and population

The great variation in the size and population of various territorial sub-units in Bangladesh reflects more a historical evolution than a rational demarcation. The average size of a District is about 2,319 sq. km., but the variation between the smallest (716 sq.km.) and the largest (6,116 sq.km.) is about nine times. Similarly, the average size of a Thana is 303 sq.km., but the variation in the smallest (2.06 sq.km.) and the largest (1,906.03 sq.km.) is 925 times. As regards the size of the Union, the average is 33.3 sq.km., varying between 1.86 sq.km. and 1,771 sq.km., thereby reflecting a 952 times gap between the smallest and the largest. These variations show that the lower the territorial unit, the wider is the variation in the size. This may indicate more the influence of local pressures in creating units closer to the people than any rational process of consolidation and division.

In terms of population, the average in a District is 1.7 million, but the variation between the smallest (243,849) and the largest (6,145,559) is about 25 times. Similarly, the average Thana population is about 0.22 million, but the variation between the smallest (15,984) and the largest (676,955) is about 42 times. The average Union population is 24,700, and the variation is about 111 times between the smallest (1,122) and the largest (125,113). As in the case of geographical size, the pattern of the gap between the smallest and largest for population reflects the same trend — the gap widens as one moves from a higher to a lower territorial unit.

Despite the large variation in size and population among Unions and their differences in needs and resources, all Union Parishads have the same staff and structure. Each has one Chairman, nine Members, three nominated women Members, one Secretary, one Dafadar and seven Chowkidars.

There is also a wide variation in size and populations among the Pourashavas, but the margin is not as wide as in the case of the Union Parishads. Unlike the Union Parishads, a classification has been made on the basis of population, income and other facilities. As noted earlier the largest urban areas have city corporations. For the remaining urban areas, Pourashavas have been classified into categories A, B and C, on the basis of income and population and other facilities. A study of 40 Pourashavas, shows that the average population of class A, B and C Pourashavas is 121,134, 54,861 and 29,222 respectively. In terms of size, the average for Class A is 20.44 sq. km., for class B 17.61 sq. km., and for class C 13.50 sq. km.

Revenue and expenditure

Important to an understanding of the local government system of Bangladesh is the internal revenue-generating capacity of each local government unit relative to government grants and the pattern of expenditure between salaries and allowances and development projects and services. A study of 60 Union Parishads selected randomly for the year 1992-93 shows that the average revenue of a Union Parishad is Tk 88,000, but the variation is about 13 times between the lowest (Tk 20,629) and the highest (Tk 283,707). Added to this own-source revenue is the central government's grant which averages 36 percent of the own-source revenue. Over three-quarters of total Union Parishad revenue is spent on salaries and allowances, leaving very little for services and development projects.

A similar review of 40 Pourashavas selected randomly shows that the average revenue-generating capacity of class A Pourashavas from their own sources is over Tk 10,000,000. For class B, the average is Tk 3,199,000. For class C, the average is Tk 1,606,000.

In order to balance the lower revenue-generating capacity of the smaller Pourashavas, the proportion of government grant as a percent of total revenue increases as the size is reduced. For class A, the grant is 51 percent of total revenue; for class B, it is 62 percent; and for class C, it is 77 percent. Since for rural local bodies the average figure is only 36 percent, there is thus a marked urban bias.

This bias means that the rural areas have less money to spend on services. For Union Parishads salaries and allowances consume over 76 percent of the total revenue, whereas for the Pourashavas, the proportion is much lower: for class A, 33 percent; for class B, 29 percent; and for class C, only 19 percent.

An outline of local services

Services at the local level are provided by local government, by agencies of the central government, and by non-governmental organizations. While Union Parishads are theoretically supposed to provide a large range of services, in reality their activities are generally limited to the following:

- Maintenance of law and order
- Promotion of cottage industries
- Promotion of family planning
- Protection and maintenance of public property, such as roads, bridges, canals and culverts
- Maintenance of birth and death registers
- Lighting of public ways, public streets and public places
- Plantation and preservation of trees
- Maintenance and regulation of cattle pounds
- Maintenance of UP records

- Maintenance of hats and bazaars
- Issue of various kinds of certificates and licenses
- Settlement of petty disputes
- Excavation of derelict ponds for pisciculture

The Pourashavas similarly have a long list of duties, but in practice are more likely to provide the following services:

- Construction and maintenance of roads, bridges, culverts, etc.
- Removal, collection and disposal of refuse, wastes, rubbish, etc.
- Provision and maintenance of street lighting
- Provision of water supply
- Provision and maintenance of graveyards and cremation grounds
- Eradication of mosquitoes
- Registration of births, deaths and marriages
- Maintenance of slaughterhouses
- Provision and maintenance of parks and gardens
- Provision of public toilets
- Issue of certificates

The central government also provides many services locally. These include those of the Local Government Engineering Department, the Bangladesh Rural Development Board, the Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation, the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock, the Bangladesh Small Cottage Industries Corporation, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Ministry of Education, the Directorate of Relief and Rehabilitation and the Rural Electrification Board.

NGOs also offer support in a wide range of areas, including relief and rehabilitation, education, and health, as well as providing credit and promoting income generating activities.

Profile of a Union Parishad

To give some sense of the scale and operations of local government we have offered here a picture of one Union Parishad. This is intended, however, to be illustrative rather than typical.

The Kadla Union is located in Kachua, PS, Chandpur District. This Union comprises about 10 sq. miles and 18 villages, with 31,400 people. Of these, 27,100 are marginal or small agricultural households, the rest are medium or large. The Union has 6 km. of semi-pucca, 41 km. of earthen roads, 9 deep tube-wells for irrigation, and 527 tube-wells for drinking water. The Union has an estimated 1,700 ton deficit in food products. There are three hats; the annual lease value of the largest is Tk 33,000.

The current Chairman of the Kadla Union Parishad is Mr. Mainuddin Majumdar. He was first elected in 1988, and re-elected in 1992. He is 38, and a certificate holder of higher secondary

education. His reported annual income is Tk 150,000. His main occupation is agriculture, but he also has an interest in trading and general contracting.

The Union Parishad has 12 Members, including three women, all of whom come from a lower income strata than the Chairman. The UP office is located in a pucca building constructed about 3 years back using a grant from the Government. The accommodations are adequate, with a hall room, a room for the Chairman, and a room for the Secretary. A sanitary latrine is located nearby. The grant, however, did not cover the cost of furniture. The Chairman has provided a few items of furniture by himself. The Members who come to the UP office usually sit in the Chairman's room.

At present, the approved personnel strength of the UP is one Secretary, one Dafadar, and four Chowkidars. However the post of Secretary has been vacant for over 6 months. The Deputy Commissioner did not post another Secretary after the last one was posted out.

In addition, three tax collectors work for the Union as commission agents. They receive 15 percent of the tax collected as commission, which they deduct before depositing the tax proceeds. The Dafadar is quite old, the Chowkidars have no uniform, and reportedly they are not paid their salaries regularly.

According to the Chairman, UP meetings are held regularly, at least once a month. The attendance of Members, and especially the female Members, is inadequate. The team, however, did not find records of proceedings of these meetings — a failing the Chairman attributed to the absence of a Secretary. The Chairman stated that he attends the UP office every working day of the year, though this was not corroborated either by records or the local people.

In the 12 months preceding the study, the UP conducted 24 dispute arbitration sessions or meetings. These were attended by the Chairman, the local Members and matbars. Of these, according to the Chairman, 20 resulted in amicable settlements.

The Chairman and other Members are all conscious of the development needs of the Union. But the UP has no concrete plan or set of programmes for its development. Discussions with the Chairman, other Members and the local people indicated that the main emphasis is on agriculture and related infrastructure.

They identified some of the major development constraints in the Union. These include traditional custom in land tenure along with poor farming techniques and lack of irrigation facilities. However they also complained of lack of access to farm inputs and marketing, as well as inadequate pricing policies and limited institutional support, including credit, research and extension.

Of the infrastructural facilities, the major emphasis is on schools, roads and electrification. For poverty reduction, the Chairman and Members do not have any definite plans. Instead, they are inclined to take up relief measures. They are not very appreciative of the Government's services

in the fields of law and order, health, education and agricultural extension. Most government functionaries are viewed as indolent, inefficient and corrupt. The Union Parishad also coordinates development efforts with the local MP.

The UP at present collects about Tk 50,000 annually in taxes and rates. The regular payers are the low income earning households. The comparatively high income earners are difficult payers yet demand larger benefits.

The Chairman and Members are concerned about the status of women. They support equal rights for women, want to take them out of their non-participatory veiled existence, and give them education. They are, however, not in favour of opening up or extending income generating activities for women. They support the election of female Members of the UP on universal adult franchise, and are generally opposed to dowry and persecution of women through "fatwah." But are still some way from organizing a social movement against such practices.

Kadla Union benefits from the activities of the KIDP. This is a local arm of the Institute of Integrated Rural Development — an NGO which concentrates on pre-primary schools for destitute children, afforestation of roadsides and backyards, sericulture, and "conscientization" of the poor and neglected. The Chairman and other Members are appreciative of the voluntary efforts which organize an under-5 children's clinic, eye-treatment camps and local teams for treating diseases relating to the ears, nose and throat. These services stand out in contrast to the health services provided by the Government.

Profile of a Pourashava

When the Khagrachari District was set up, the town of Khagrachari was recognized as the District headquarters. In 1984, the Khagrachari Pourashava was established and categorized as class B. The Khagrachari Pourashava is surrounded by hillocks and located in the middle of a sparsely populated valley. In 1995 the population was 48,000 and increasing only slowly.

The total area is 13.03 sq. km. divided in three wards comprising 39 villages. The Pourashava has 49 km. of roads, of which 19 km. are pucca. The length of electric lines passing through the Pourashava is about 35 km. The Pourashava has one college, five high schools (1 for girls), 10 Madrashes (Muslim religious schools) and one technical training institute. It has 17 mosques, 5 Hindu temples, one Buddhist temple, one church and 21 clubs. It has one central bus terminal, one hospital and 5 commercial banks. It also has three hats and bazaars, two cinema halls, one post office, one auditorium, three playgrounds, three graveyards and seven burial places.

The Pourashava has one Chairman and 9 Commissioners directly elected by the people, as well as three female Commissioners nominated by the Government. The Chairman is the Chief Executive of the Pourashava. It has a total of 36 employees (one officer and 35 other employees including assistants, supervisors, clerks and peons).

The Pourashava's income consists of its own income and central government grants. The average annual income is Tk 1,449,000, of which 17 percent comes from government grant, 36 percent from holding taxes and 21 percent from rates and fees. The government grant is given in the form of (1) personnel salaries, (2) a special purpose compensation grant, (3) the octroi compensation grant and (4) the Government's works programme grant. The special purpose compensation grant is given for rehabilitation of tribes who migrated into the Indian state of Tripura and are now coming back. The octroi compensation grant is given because of repeal of the law by the central government relating to imposition of octroi duties by Pourashavas.

For the last three years, the collection of holding taxes has remained almost static. The government and the donor agencies, particularly the Asian Development Bank, are exerting pressure to increase revenue collections to a satisfactory level. But like most Pourashavas, Khagrachari has not been able to achieve the target — about 80 percent. As Khagrachari Pourashava is going to be included in the Secondary Towns Infrastructure Improvement Project financed by the Asian Development Bank, it needs to increase its revenue income to the desired level in the coming years.

Fifty percent of the total income of the Pourashava is used to meet administrative costs. Only 15 percent of total income has been spent for commodities and services. The Pourashava is currently undertaking a substantial number of projects. The current annual development budget is Tk 16,100,000 — an indication of the Government's development support. Moreover, spending on commodities and services has increased in comparison with levels of the previous years. The Chairman stated that identification, selection and prioritization of projects were made with the consent of the majority Members of the Pourashava.

The Chairman said that tenders were published in the newspapers and placed on notice boards, and that all formalities and procedures had been followed. He also said that although there were no "musclemen" involved in the tendering process, the Shanti Bahini had at times claimed kickbacks from contractors engaged in development works, hindering their progress.

Among other concerns, the Chairman and the Commissioners stated that they dealt with complaints and disputes about land, theft, family conflicts, rape, etc. To improve the Pourashava's judicial services, they suggested that the conciliation court should be given more powers to impose punishment. The Chairman stated that residential accommodations for Pourashava staff were needed, particularly for the sweepers. He added that there was a need to improve skills of the employees.

From these two profiles, the following can be noted:

1. In the rural Union Parishad of 18 villages, there are undeveloped facilities, vacancies in the few existing established posts and inability to meet the payroll regularly. It is noted that meetings are held, but no records are kept. Thus transparency is lacking. Although they have ideas for development activities, especially agriculture and infrastructure, they have no formal development plan. While it appears that councillors participate (attend

meetings), this is a elementary form of participation that cannot contribute to management leadership and accountability.

2. For the town Pourashava of 48,000, there is a closer relationship with the central government, as well as on-going debate over distribution of central government support for recurrent and development expenditures. The local revenue base is composed of rates and fees, but revenue generated is below estimates. The town engages in tendering for goods and services, thereby indicating some local control over local governance. Pending issues appear to be (1) lack of housing for staff and (2) felt need for greater judicial authority in both civil and criminal cases.

These two cases illustrate a less developed rural area and a relatively more developed town area. If the rural area could regularize and professionalize its operations, it could partake in more development activities and be more assertive as a community in expressing and meeting their needs. In the Union case, there appears to be a fairly passive relationship with the central government, while for the town, there is more interaction.

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II. THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT SYSTEM AND ITS INTERFACE: CONFLUENCES AND CONTRADICTIONS

All Bangladesh administrations have experimented with the local government system of Bangladesh. During the last two and a half decades, the experiments have been more frequent. This has resulted in both structural and procedural layering of different systems, often causing major disruptions and refocusing in the operation and management of local government. New structures have been imposed on already existing structures, new methods of operations on old methods and new direction on already existing policy and action programmes. While the new system struggles to make itself operational, the old system continues and in some ways impedes the development and institutionalization of the new system. For purposes of facilitating a viable local government system, it is imperative to clearly delineate the structural and procedural confluences and where contradictions exists.

This study outlines the confluences and contradictions by first elaborating on the structural ups and downs of three basic structures of local government: the Union Parishad, the Pourashava, and the Zila Parishad and the development of subsidiary structures. The study also presents national and other structures at the confluences which interact with the local government system. In addition, the study also introduces individuals who operate in the confluence. The structural layering and individual interactions which are to expedite local government operations in effect have become sources of power struggle and have created hybrid organizations and crisscrossed duties and responsibilities so that individuals in the system have no clear picture of these duties and responsibilities. In addition, organizations established to carry out functions are unable to do so because of dual responsibilities with other organizations.

Constitutional merry-go-round

Before discussing the local government structural layering it is necessary to note the benign neglect of local government at the constitutional level. The first constitution of Bangladesh through articles 59 and 60 made a conscious effort to ensure a meaningful local government. However, changes in political mandate and partisan politics compelled the Government to delete those two provisions through the 4th amendment. Two successive military regimes managed and controlled the local government system through the Local Government (Union Parishad) Ordinance of 1976 and the Pourashava Ordinance of 1977. The original provisions of articles 59 and 60 were reinserted in the constitution through the 12th amendment, in 1991 although corresponding changes in the two ordinances through which local governments operate did not take place.

Three Basic Structures of Local Government

Union Parishads

Pre-1972: During the period of Basic Democracy in the 1960s, local government units were openly used as arms of the central government. Nevertheless the system offered scope for the exercise of powers by all tiers, including Union Parishads and Pourashavas. Although intensely criticized during its existence, later assessment of basic democracy showed that the system through distribution and sharing of decision-making powers was able to attract capable people to work in the local bodies.

1972-1982: The structure and procedures of the previous system remained, though some shifts in methods and practices took place. This was a response to the democratic spirit generated by the Liberation War of 1971. The administrative changes included changes in nomenclature and the introduction of new rules and regulations to reflect the new conditions, particularly relating to UPs (President's Order No. 7 of 1972, President's Order No. 22 of 1973 and the Local Government Ordinance of 1976). The 1973 President's Order provided for direct election of one Chairman, one Vice-Chairman and nine Members. The post of vice-Chairman was abolished in 1976. Two representatives each from women and farmers were added.

The period 1972-1982 also saw some structural changes. These included the introduction in 1978 of the Thana Development Committee (TDC), comprising all the Union Parishad Chairmen, with one of them serving as Chairman by rotation every six months. In 1980 a Gram Sarkar (village government) was introduced for each village. This comprised 12 Members including two women, with one person elected Gram Prodhan (head of the village). The Gram Sarkar was designed to maintain law and order, promote social and cultural interactions, and maintain peace and tranquillity through arbitration and conciliation of disputes and conflicts within a village. While it did create a spirit of self-government, the system did not last long enough to have any permanent impact.

The Upazila Concept

In 1982 a military regime abolished both the Thana Development Committee and the Gram Sarkar, disrupting the structure of local government. The 1982 Local Government (Upazila Parishad and Upazila Reorganization) Ordinance made the Thana the focal point of local governance and changed the names of the Thana and the Thana Council to Upazila (sub-District) and Upazila Parishad. The Upazila Parishad was to be responsible for planning and implementation of all development activities. To facilitate the development of the Upazila, rapid support was provided by posting administrative, magisterial, judicial and other officials to the Upazila. The Parishad comprised: an elected Chairman; all the Union Parishad Chairmen within the Upazila; heads of government departments (about 16) based at the Upazila to be non-voting Members; and four Members, including three female Members, nominated by the Government.

All executive powers of the Upazila Parishad were vested in the Chairman, while the Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) and all officers under him in the Upazila headquarters assisted the Chairman. The Chairman was the chief executive of the Upazila, and, for all practical purposes, the UNO was made principal staff officer to him. In effect, the whole Upazila administrative framework — human and material — was placed under the Upazila Chairman. This strained the relations between the Upazila Chairman and the UNO. The latter, a mid-level encadred civil servant presided over all Upazila-based government officers and staff. This resulted in conflict among the different types and levels of administrative staff posted at the upazila level.

The responsibilities of the Upazila Parishad were in two categories. First, “retained” subjects, including as many as 17 items, from civil and criminal judiciary to the compilation of national statistics. Second, an equal number of “transferred” subjects — all related to development activities [Regulation 11 of Local Government (Upazila Parishad and Upazila Administration Reorganization) Ordinances 1982].

The 1982 Ordinance had not only elevated the Upazila, but it also expanded its sphere of activities considerably, empowering it to raise finances from such sources as water bodies, hats and bazaars, ferries, business establishments, and entertainments, which previously used to be major sources of income for Union Parishads. The Union Parishads were thus engulfed by the shadow of the Upazilas. This is evidenced by the fact that the 1989 legislation called the Palli Parishad Act 1989 (Act 33 of 1989) aiming to ensure overall development at the village level was never implemented.

Consequently, the Union Parishad was de-emphasized. The UP with its diminished profile was to consist of one directly elected Chairman, nine Members and three female nominated Members. Functions of the UP included (a) maintenance of law and order, (b) social and economic activities, (c) agro-based functions, (d) mobilization of local resources, (e) roads, communication and other infrastructure, (f) health and sanitation, and (g) registration of births and deaths. Although the UP could still play an important role as the first step in the local government system, the constant intervention of the Upazila authority undermined its activities and most UPs did not perform all their allocated functions.

However in 1991 the Union Parishad was re-emphasized. The change of government in early 1991, resulted in the abolition of the Upazila system in 1992. The name ‘Upazila’ again reverted to ‘Thana’, and the UP was again made the focal point for local development. This was enshrined in the Local Government (Union Parishad) (Amendment) Act 1993. However, the UP is yet to be armed with the necessary constitutional support, and procedural and financial assistance to fulfil its prescribed role.

Pourashavas

Pre-1972: The Basic Democracy Order 1959 and the Urban Administration Ordinance 1960 together created a urban structure consisting of the Union committee, the Thana committee and the Municipal committee. The Thana committee, prescribed for urban centres with populations

not exceeding 15,000, consisted of elected Members, who elected one of their number as Chairman and another as Vice-Chairman. Larger urban areas were divided into a number of Unions, together combining into a municipality. The committee governing the municipality consisted of all Union committee Chairmen within the municipality, an equal number of government-nominated Members, and a number of elected Members. The Chairman was nominated by the Government.

1972-1982: After Bangladesh came into being, the urban structure was reformed with changes in the nomenclature under Presidential Order 7 (1972), which renamed the Union committee as the "Nagar Panchayat", the Thana committee as the "Shadar committee" and the municipal committee as Pourashava. Further structural changes were brought under Presidential Order 22 of 1973, whereby the Shadar committee was upgraded into Pourashava, and it was made mandatory for the Chairman and Vice-Chairman to be elected directly. The 1977 Pourashava Ordinance abolished the post of Vice-Chairman and provided that all 9 Commissioners and the Chairman be directly elected. In addition, it was provided for the first time for three women Commissioners to be nominated by the Government and for one nominated Member to represent the labour group.

During the 1980s and subsequently a number of structural reorganizations were effected. As of now, the number of Pourashavas in the country is 109, in addition to four city corporations created by separate ordinances. For every Pourashava there is a Chairman and three Commissioners for each ward — all directly elected. There are 3 additional women Commissioners in each Pourashava to be indirectly elected by the Chairman and Commissioners.

Pourashavas in Bangladesh are at present governed under the broad dictates of the Pourashava Ordinance 1977, which was subsequently amended under the Pourashava (Second Amendment) Ordinance 1989. Despite certain structural changes introduced over the decades, past practices in procedural terms are still continuing.

Status of the Zila Parishad

Since the 1991 national election, the Zila Parishad is designated as the upper tier of the proposed two-tier local government system. However, the Zila Parishad remains defunct, and its status has yet to be formalized. With a new government taking office in 1996, the entire structure of local government may change once again.

The Zila Parishad in its previous existence was known as the District Board. It was a very useful local government unit during British rule, and in the early years of Pakistan, it played a vital role as the focal local authority for:

Development and maintenance of roads and highways, including bridges, culverts and roadside afforestation

Health and sanitation including establishment and management of hospitals and charitable dispensaries

Maintenance of ferries and ferry ghats
Development and management of hats and bazaars
Establishment and maintenance of dak bungalows and roadside rest houses
Establishment and management of schools and other educational establishments
Management of block lands, ponds and various types of properties and facilities

The District Board authority also used to render a host of other services. There were several District Board dak bungalows at the District and Thana headquarters for use by government officials, dignitaries and public representatives. The District Board's charitable dispensaries offered the sick rural poor a chance of treatment, and its health facilities provided vaccination against smallpox, cholera, and other diseases. The District Board had a well-defined autonomy in relation to the responsibilities it carried out and services it provided. There was close coordination between the District Board and central and provincial government organs.

With the rapid expansion of government machinery, separate ministries, directorates and departments were created successively to take care of various national development and service activities previously performed by the District Boards. The position of the District Board was sharply reduced upon the promulgation of the Local Government Ordinance of 1976. The present Zila Parishad stands completely isolated having no or little interface with either the Union Parishad or the nearby Pourashavas, and thus it has hardly any development or public utility function to perform. The Local Government (Zila Parishad) Act of 1988 (Act 29 of 1988) did not improve the status of the Zila Parishad for any practical purpose. Its relation with LGD and other local government offices, in view of its own shrunken image, is also passive.

In its present defunct position, the Zila Parishad still carries out some development work as an ad-interim arrangement through a tender committee consisting of the Zila Parishad secretary as Chairman, and the executive engineer and LGED, the ADLG, assistant engineer and respective TNOs as Members. Any decisions of the tender committee require approval of the DC.

Other structures and their impact on local government growth, development and operations

1. Upazila versus Thana

When the Upazila was in the focus in the 1980s, considerable efforts and resources were diverted for implementation of Upazila-based development activities. But when the Upazila system was abolished in 1992, the term Upazila was replaced by Thana. Thana in fact means 'Police Station', as defined in subsection (1), section 4 of the code of Criminal Procedure 1898 (Act V of 1898). However, in its present usage, it refers to an administrative unit in between Zila and Union. Both Upazila and Thana refer to the same territorial and administrative configuration.

The role of the Thana in the local government system has yet to be articulated. The study analysis shows that the Thana continues to play the same role in its interactions with the UP as Upazila used to do, except that it is now the government officers at the Thana level, particularly the TNO, who are the key players, instead of the elected Chairman. Notwithstanding what has been said in the LGD handout “New Local Government System in Bangladesh” (clause 9) about the TDCC and TDC, it is still necessary to provide a clear and definite clarification of the role, position and functions of the Thana and the TDCC in the local government system.

2. The Thana Development Coordination Committee (TDCC)

The functions of the TDCC include :

- Assessing the overall development needs of the Thana and fixing area and sector priorities
- Resolving inter-Union and inter-sectoral conflicts and problems
- Coordinating local and national plans
- Performing other responsibilities fixed by the Government

The TDCC under the proper circumstances can become an effective mechanism for providing all the supporting and coordinating inputs required by the Union Parishads, enabling them to play their role as the focal units of local government. For this to happen, however, the TDCC's functions should be more specifically determined, and it should be better equipped in terms of resources — human, material, and financial. More importantly, the relationship between the TDCC and the Union Parishad has to be clearly defined.

At present the voting Members, i.e. the UP Chairmen, become Chairmen of the TDCC by rotation in alphabetical order. This causes tension and is a source of conflict. A UP Chairman is essentially an interested person in the context of the usual business transacted in a TDCC meeting, and it is hard for him to act impartially. Second, things decided during the office of one Chairman may not be to the liking of the next Chairman who might reverse previous decisions, creating conflicts and dislocations. Moreover the role of coordination between local planning and national planning demands some professionalism, and not all Union Parishad Chairmen may be up to the task.

Influence of the TDCC. The Thana Development Coordination Committee (TDCC), established in 1993, further dilutes the power of the Union Parishads. This has a rotating Chairman, the Member of Parliament acting as advisor, and the TNO as the technical adviser. The deliberations of the TDCC in financial matters, or in programme planning also undermine the autonomy and self reliance of the Union Parishads.

3. Local government department

The Government, through the LGD, provides guidance and directives, and maintains checks and balances in the conduct of the local government units at both the Union and the Pourashava levels. In the case of the UPs, these guidelines and directives are processed through the District and Thana authorities. In the case of the Pourashavas they are more or less direct.

The national government operates through “prescribed authority”. At this time, it is not possible to ascertain precisely where the prescribed authority lies for the local government units. As the position stands now, the source of all authority both for the UP and Pourashava is the LGD which is an agent for discharging the central government’s functions in relation to the local government units. The LGD uses the TNO to implement and oversee its policies and plans and deals directly with the Pourashavas.

4. NGOs

NGOs are increasingly involved in the growth and development of local communities. However, the study finds that interaction between local government and NGOs is negligible. Both sides have their valid perspectives and complaints. The study also found that where cooperation has taken place, the results have been mutually beneficial. NGO links with UPs are non-existent. They do have more contact with Thana administration.

NGOs often parallel local government activities. In addition, their income-generating activities, credit provisions and organizing groups outpace most local government activities. However, NGO responsibilities are much narrower than local government responsibilities. Since both operate at the sub-national level, and both lack the necessary capital and personnel, pooling of resources between the local government and NGOs can be mutually beneficial. This kind of coordination will also remove any existing misgivings, improve relations between the UPs and NGOs, and if both are interested in effective delivery of services, will make the delivery of services more effective.

The NGOs may profitably enhance their contacts with the Thana administration. On the one hand, this would facilitate NGO functioning with support of the local authority and, on the other, it would enable the Thana authority to maintain an overview of what support NGOs are providing. Such information and the relevant data are very useful for Thana-level development planning and resource allocation under the Annual Development Plan.

At the Pourashava level, NGOs maintain some contact with the Pourashava authorities in respect of the activities they carry out within municipal limits. But such contact is informal and often at the instance of the Pourashava. The EPI programme is implemented by certain Pourashavas with the assistance of concerned NGOs. But there is further scope for Pourashava-NGO co-operation, particularly in view of the increasing flow of rural-urban migration.

Individuals at the confluence

1. Member of Parliament

The local Member of Parliament (MP) has been designated to act as adviser to the TDCC. The UPs visited for this study reported that MPs take keen interest in local affairs and generally play their advisory role actively. The MP's association is also likely to enhance the ability of the UP Chairmen and Members in their interface with local government offices and agencies. Moreover, the interactions between the MP and the UP Chairmen and Members will enable the former to get a fair view of local problems, and the latter to get a glimpse of national policy issues including national level development planning. This exchange, if carried out objectively and without the dominance of party and individual interests, can help strengthen the working relationships between national and local governments.

The advice of the MP is not, however, mandatory, and the TDCC, if it so decides, can legally override it. One respondent suggested that the MPs should be Chairmen of the TDCCs. In that position, they would be a party to all decisions and would be more careful, particularly because they are accountable to everyone in the respective Thanas. However, it is necessary to sound a note of caution. MPs belong to political parties and may be tempted to advise or influence decisions based on individual or party considerations.

2. Thana Nirbahi Officer (TNO)

The TNOs play a pivotal role in the conduct of the Union Parishads. At the Thana headquarters there are as many as 16 offices representing the central government ministries and divisions, and working under the overall direction of the TNO. These local offices (e.g., engineering, health, family planning, cooperatives, livestock) render their support partly through the TDCC and partly independently. The Engineering Department, for example, supervises all civil construction throughout the Thana. Previously, the Thana-based project implementation officer (PIO) used to look after the development activities at the UP level. But this responsibility has now been transferred to the District-based Local Government Engineering Department (LGED). This distancing of supervision is likely to affect the progress as well as the quality of the development activities. The TNO acts as the controlling field officer for the UPs, and provides advice, guidance and supervision. The TNO also helps resolve conflicts between Unions and between the Chairman and the Members of a Union Parishad. The TNO also has an important role to play as the Chairman of the tender committee, which awards work above a certain value. The TNO also coordinates inputs of concerned officials at the Thana level. As the Member-secretary of the TDCC, the TNO always plays a key advisory role in its meetings.

3. Assistant Director Local Government

The Assistant Director Local Government (ADLG) supervises and monitors UP activities on behalf of the Deputy Commissioner. While the ADLG can play an effective role in strengthening the UP administration by providing logistical support and more importantly by training in local

government management, the ADLG in reality does very little of this. With an average of 630 UPs in a District, if an ADLG visits 13 UPs a month for supervision and monitoring, one round of supervision and monitoring will take at least 6 months. This is not a very effective way of monitoring. The ADLG organizes training for UP Chairmen and Members and provides other advisory inputs and logistics.

Conclusions

The mix of organizations and individual players at the local level is causing significant confusion, clutter and disarray. No one individual or organization is confident or clear about his role or responsibility, thereby resulting in a local government system which is marked by these basic issues.

Limited operational capability. Not all Union Parishads are aware of their duties and responsibilities and even when they are aware, they have neither the administrative nor the financial capacity to undertake those responsibilities. For example, one of the tasks is the registration of births and deaths. In none of the UPs surveyed, was this task being performed systematically. This is largely because the person responsible for reporting births and deaths was the Chowkidar, who receives a modest honorarium for this activity. Since this incentive was abolished, the task of registering births and deaths is no longer conducted.

Dependent organizational unit. Control and conduct of UP affairs, for all practical purposes, rests with the TNO, and then with the DC through the ADLG. The UPs have to depend totally on the TNO for all conduct of business, including decisions related to tender, drawing and disbursement of funds, allocation of FFW wheat, fertilizer distribution, resolution of disputes and complaints, and even disbursement of honoraria to the Chairman and Members. This dependence leaves the UP totally ineffective. UPs tend to “look upwards.”

Development Capacity. Pourashavas often initiate and implement development plans of various kinds except in cases such as the Master Plan or Secondary Town Infrastructure Plan, which are prepared by external consultants. Union Parishads, however, are incapable in most cases of formulating, implementing or evaluating medium or large-scale development programmes.

Intertwined organizations. No clearly defined organizations with designated operational and managerial goals and objectives. Parallel organizations and representatives from the national legislature and national administrative personnel intervene in local affairs, resulting in a diminished role and prospects for growth of local organizations.

Recommendations

1. Outline a clear mission and the goals of each local government level based on a vision of the appropriate position of local government in the overall scheme of democratic governance of Bangladesh.

2. Submit that Union Parishads should be involved in community development, self-policing, and ensuring the people's effective participation in all decisions affecting the community. Elected representatives should function as a legislative body. There should be special reserved seats for under-represented groups like women and the landless.
3. Submit that the Upazila should function as the core implementing body of national development programmes, with flexibility to decide on specific activities for the Upazila. Decisions impacting Union Parishads must be endorsed by the Union Parishad. The Upazila Council should have an elected Chair with representatives from the Union Parishad as members of the council. All field officials should be under the direct supervision of the Chair and Council. Council members should have voting rights.
4. Submit that the elected Zila Parishad should serve as "training ground" for politicians. Zila election should be based on party politics. The Zila Parishad should be charged with managing the social sector, including education, health, affirmative action programmes and equity related issues.
5. Outline clear and appropriate distribution of resources (grants) in support of the responsibilities and functions assigned to each level of local government.
6. Submit that the national government, having the highest level of authority and power, should take on the central role of collection and distribution of revenue.
7. Outline clear role and responsibilities of the Thana Nirbahi Officer, Additional Commissioner Local Government and the Chief Executive Officer at the Pourashava level. Make them subservient to the councils of elected representatives.
8. Separate the role of Members of Parliament from the local government system.
9. Re-examine the role of "prescribed authority" in light of the growing importance of local government. The current prescribed authority being administrative units may not be appropriate review and oversight bodies for local government institutions, which should be autonomous political and administrative bodies. A non-partisan commission as part of the National Parliament may serve as a regulatory body and oversight unit.
10. Form regional coordination bodies to support and facilitate technical and managerial needs of different levels of local government. Regional coordination bodies should have no substantive role and responsibilities. They will act as technical advisory and support staff to local government.
11. Require local organizations involved in service delivery, unless in the private sector, to provide regular reports to local government of their activities, but not subject to oversight and review by local government.

III. MANAGING LOCAL GOVERNMENT: ORGANIZING GOVERNANCE

An issue identified by key actors in local governance as critical to strengthening local government in Bangladesh is the need for qualitative improvement in the internal operations of local government, in order to deliver goods and services to meet the demands of the citizens and to manage development activities. In order to examine this question, the study on local government examined the overall issue of organizational efficiency and managerial effectiveness.

Within the total sample of 56 Pourashavas and 37 Union Parishads, managerial practices received focused attention in 15 Union Parishads and 5 Pourashavas. Interviews and discussions were conducted with personnel from all 15 UP and 5 PS. The research team also observed management practices and internal operational style, and analyzed documents related to management practices in all 20 units. In addition, interviews were conducted with 9 other Union Parishad Chairmen, 48 Union Parishad Secretaries, 2 Pourashava Chairmen, 23 Assistant Engineers, and 42 Assessors and Tax Collectors. A limited number of field workers of NGOs as well as women, the landless and the poor were also interviewed in order to have a comprehensive perspective of managerial practices and their effects at the Union Parishad and Pourashava level. In addition, those involved in the best practices segment of the study identified best practices in management at the local level.

The chapter on management practices is divided into three sections. The first section reports on the current state of management practices at the local level. The second segment highlights two cases which demonstrate that despite severe deficiency in current management at the local level, there is potential and enthusiasm for advanced management training. In the third section, conclusions are drawn and recommendations are offered for improving and strengthening management practices at the local level.

Current State of Management Practices in Local Government

The local government system at the Union Parishad and Pourashava levels operates in an environment which is not conducive either for the speedy delivery of goods and services, or for sustainable social and economic development activities. The weak revenue base of both Union Parishads and Pourashavas is well documented. Their power and authority is minimal compared to field administration units, and they experience difficulty in enforcing what little authority they have. Their weak authority is evident by the fact that they are often unable to collect revenue owed to local government by central government units and other semi-autonomous and autonomous public organizations. The limited number of staff and low level of their knowledge and skills make it difficult for the local government to act with efficiency and effectiveness.

It is critical to note that there is great variation in the size/area, population and resource basis of the local government units in each tier. At the Pourashava level, these variations are accounted for with the help of a classification system. At the Union Parishad level, although there are wide variations, they have the same number of staff and structure. It must be noted that

in some local government functions, more area, people and/or wealth require more staff, such as police or tax collectors. Thus, with a standardized system, one cannot match tasks with the resources to perform these tasks. In the smallest jurisdictions, some staff are idle, while in the largest jurisdictions, the staff cannot complete the work.

Another factor, identified by the study, which frustrates development of sound management practice, especially at the Union Parishad level, is poor record-keeping. The non-existence of records in financial as well as in programme areas results in difficulty in assessing performance. The electorate, elected and nominated members, and volunteers seek to judge the effort and commitment of the representatives. Improper record-keeping also frustrates the twin goals of transparency and accountability. While record-keeping is better at the Pourashava level, there needs to be improvement in skills and procedures.

Based on the Pourashavas and Union Parishads studied, the characteristics which best describe the current state of management practices at the local government system in Bangladesh are as follows:

- Non-professional work environment
- Centralization of executive powers and decision-making
- Distorted accountability and sense of responsibility
- Unrepresentativeness and undemocratic practices
- Organizational disconnection defined by inadequate personnel, financial, information, and technological resources
- Policy and programme control of central government over local government units

Non-professional work environment

Local government in Bangladesh may be characterized as minimally professional. Professionalism requires: (1) clear understanding of roles, (2) relevant knowledge, skills and abilities, (3) appropriate resources to work on the roles and tasks, (4) commitment and dedication in doing the tasks well, and (5) interest in improving the perspectives and methods used by the professional.

Efforts are being made to strengthen and provide local governments with more power, authority and responsibility, although lack of professionalism may be a major constraint to achieving these goals. In examining the Union Parishads and Pourashavas, it was evident that there was a lack of understanding of their role in the overall scheme of governance. Rules, regulations and procedures are not followed, meetings are not held regularly, nor is there systematic recording or dissemination of information. In order to adhere to rules, records are falsified and created. This non-professional behavior extends to “informal” maintenance of financial records. There is therefore a marked gap between formal procedures and actual day-to-day operations.

For example, each Pourashava is required to develop plans and programmes, and each Union Parishad to prepare the Union Plan Book and Master Plan, which are to reflect how such activities are part of the overall planning process. Yet in most cases examined, the Union Plan

Book and Master Plan do not exist. While Union Parishads are required to maintain budget and accounting information, most do not have bank accounts. In one case the person in charge of the budget took out a crumpled piece of paper from his pocket when asked to show the budget. This behavior illustrates lack of staff training, commitment and diligence, as well as inadequate oversight. Furthermore, the current insignificant role of the Union Parishad in the overall scheme of governance leads to lack of proper attention to duties, as well as inability to attract and hire the most professional staff.

Centralization of executive powers and decision-making

The system of a directly elected executive to operate a legislatively organized local government system makes the functioning of democratic governance difficult. There is a major disconnection between what is expected of the system and how the system is organized, resulting in the Chairman being the primary and often the sole decision-maker. While there are provisions for legislative standing, ad hoc and special committees, analysis shows that the Chairman makes all decisions and provides all leadership and direction with little or in most cases no input from individual members, let alone the community. It was also found that little use is made of the committees and sub-committees, which could be used to openly investigate and debate issues and generally oversee government operations.

By excessive reliance on the executive and the atrophy of committees as vehicles for transparency and accountability, there is increased likelihood that practices such as increased influence peddling can occur. Decisions are based on personal interest and gain, rather than on the needs and demands of the organization and the community. With accountability flowing upward to the Chairmen and their administrative supervisors, and not to the citizens, the study found that this centralized decision-making led to mal-distribution of grants, poor design of local projects, and preferential contracting-out for work. Corrupt practices in the form of kickbacks and non-transparent decision-making dominate local government operations.

Distorted accountability and sense of responsibility

While citizens elect local representatives they cannot be removed by the elected body nor by those who elected them. Current local government rules state conditions such as absence from three consecutive meetings, refusal to perform prescribed duties, or being found guilty of corruption, misuse of powers or nepotism as reasons for removal from office. However, elected officials cannot be removed from office, even if no confidence resolutions are passed, unless the prescribed authority, i.e., the central administration, concurs with the decision. Once elected, the focus of elected members is more towards the prescribed authority than those who elected them. This has resulted in a shifting of accountability from citizens to the administrative hierarchy. Consequently, as the overall local government system generally operates in an ad hoc manner, dominated by the Chairman, other members of the local government unit and community volunteers do not feel responsible for the actions of the unit. Therefore, they neither attend meetings regularly nor participate actively in deliberations.

Nonrepresentative nature and undemocratic practices

The system of nomination to local bodies of groups such as women, the landless and minorities intended to broaden the representativeness in local bodies, is to some extent being carried forward. The total number of nominated women members in the Union Parishads is 13,365. However, for every three nominated women members at the Union Parishad level, there are one elected Chairman and nine other elected members, an overwhelming majority of whom are male. As a percent of the total elected membership, the number of women representatives is low. Put in the context of the countrywide population breakdown, the representation of women is even lower. Women representation, however, is much better than other groups, such as the landless.

While the nomination system has provided for representation and an opportunity for under-represented groups to voice their concerns and participate in decision-making, it must be recognized that the “nominated” members have lower status and less power. Not being elected, they are viewed as second class citizens, thereby making it difficult for them to play a leadership role. Their active participation in committees and sub-committees is limited.

The position of the Chairman both at the Union Parishad and Pourashava levels makes the process of developing a consensus-building governance unit difficult. Since the concept of widespread community and membership involvement does not exist, and even where it exists is of limited nature, the scope for misuse of power continues to be high. Records are falsified, created and backdated to meet official rules and regulations. Established rules are not followed because in most cases disciplinary actions are not taken.

Organizational disconnection defined by inadequate personnel, financial and leadership resources

While there are cases of a high level of delivery of goods and services within the local government system, most local governments have very limited ability to provide all of the goods and services for which they are responsible. To be effective, local government must have clearly defined tasks and responsibilities; adequate quality and quantity of personnel; a resource base; logistical support; and quality leadership. At the Union Parishad level there is a severe shortage of these elements. Pourashavas fare a little better, but not much.

At the Union Parishad level, there is usually only one professional staff — the secretary. In most cases the secretary has limited training in office management. In addition, the salary and benefit package is limited, and irregularity in payment of salary acts as a disincentive to efficiency in performance. While staffing at the Pourashava level is higher, it is still insufficient, and professional knowledge and skills are lacking.

Another indication of limited ability is the income-generating capacity. The average Union Parishad has a per capita income of Tk 4 and the average Pourashava, Tk 66. Local government therefore does not have adequate financial capacity to undertake many of the activities assigned to them unless they receive large external grants in aid. Results of the study show that basic office equipment and supplies, communication technologies and transportation facilities,

recording-keeping and information manuals and data, library resources and space are all meager. Where these resources are available, the skills and knowledge required to utilize them efficiently and effectively are lacking, furthering the inadequacies for operating and managing the local government system.

Leadership at the local level is comparatively young. In the study's sample of councillors, the average age of Commissioners is 30-35 years and the average age of Chairmen is less than 40 years. Only 33 percent have had working experience at the local level, so they are comparatively new to local government. Most Union Parishad leaders are literate, and urban representatives generally tend to have a graduate degree. Although local elections are not contested on the basis of political parties, most local leaders, especially those contesting for Chairman, have very strong party affiliations. Most of the leaders come from a business and agricultural background. These young local leaders are increasingly coming from a narrow socio-economic base. The average income of Union Parishad Chairmen is Tk 50,000 to 100,000, thereby indicating a trend towards the moneyed class from the traditional landed gentry who used to provide the leadership at the local level in Bangladesh. This narrow base also holds for underrepresented groups. One study shows that among women representatives, most of them are members of the rural elite. Socio-economic status exemplified by the moneyed class and the rural elite tends to skew power and influence toward local elites within the local governance system, making non-elites reluctant to participate actively.

Policy and programme control of central government over local government units

Analysis of the provisions contained in PSOs and UPOs leads to the conclusion that

The Central Government's "general supervision and management control" is not simply general, but detailed, overriding and very restrictive. It is arbitrary and overbearing and does not allow for self-governance.

This conclusion is based on the following findings:

Subsection (3) of Section 136 of the PSO and Section 65 of the UPO: the courts have been debarred from scrutinizing any action taken by the Government in suspending any Chairman of a PS or UP.

Section 135 of the PSO and Section 64 of the UPO makes the position of the "prescribed authority" or government almost totalitarian and that of the local bodies completely subservient.

The authority to make rules is solely entrusted to the central government and its agents. In sections 83 of the UPO and 146 of the PSO which relate to rulemaking, no provision exists to consult with or get consent from those bodies entrusted with implementation of these rules.

Where limited rule and regulation making are provided, they are subject to the approval of the Deputy Commissioner. See sections 147, 148 and 149 of PSO and sections 84 and 85 of UPO.

While UPs are responsible for village law enforcement, effective control of this force is under the local thana, making the UP subservient to the police. Subsections 4, 5, 6, 7 under Section 31 of Part II of the UPO, allow village police to report directly to the Officer-in-Charge (OC) of the police station without going through the Chairman of the UP.

Section 42 of the PSO provides for the appointment of a Pourashava Chief Executive Officer by the central government. Once appointed, all other officers and employees of the PS come under direct control of the CEO. Elected representatives to that extent lose control over administration and management of their personnel.

Eligibility of persons to contest for the two offices of Member and Chairman; appointment of administrators; declaration of any urban area as a municipality; resignation and removal of Chairmen; vacancy; temporary absence of the elected Chairman; and provision for acting Chairman, etc., in both the PS and the UP, are under central control and authority. Under these circumstances it is very difficult to call any PS or UP a self-governing institution. These are more like outposts than a level of government or governance.

Managing Local Affairs: Causes for Optimism, Vote of Confidence

Case 1: Organizing service delivery and managing effectively at the local level

A commonly held view is that local government cannot manage its organization effectively or efficiently. This view is backed up by this study. Nevertheless, it must be recognized that the lack of success at the local government level is often the result of structure and context rather than an inherent inability to manage. The health and sanitation programme of the Bakshipur Union Parishad is a case in point, where this local government system is conducting an effective and efficient programme.

Bakshipur Union Parishad is located under the Sadar Thana of Lakshmipur District. It is 16 km. to the north of the Thana. The total area of the UP is 27 sq.km. The total population of the UP is 26,036, composed of 4,861 households, living in 19 villages. The literacy rate is 47 percent. It is located in a low lying area and is therefore plagued by annual floods. Consequently water-borne diseases and related health and sanitation problems are major concerns of the UP.

The Chairman and Members of the UP, realizing the nature of health problems in the area, focused on drinking water and sanitary latrines as a key to improving the health delivery system within the UP. As a first step, the UP arranged, with the help of the Thana Health Center, to

rapidly bring in oral rehydration saline during an outbreak of diarrhea. The long term strategy focused on developing a strong public awareness campaign to educate the public on the causes and prevention of waterborne diseases. The Union Parishad first learned about preventive and curative measures themselves from area doctors and health experts. Then they organized regional meetings and talked about the importance of boiled drinking water, using tubewell water instead of unsanitary water ponds, the importance of using water-sealed latrines and stopping the use of open latrines. To keep the level of awareness high, the UP used the Family Welfare Visitor to convince the citizens to use tubewell water, boiled water and water-sealed latrines on a regular basis.

To support the changing behaviour pattern, the UP received assistance from the Public Health Engineering Department (PHED). They supplied tubewells and water-sealed latrines. During the last eight years the number of tubewells rose from 400 to 1500 and water sealed latrines from 133 to 400. The UP has one tubewell for every three households and one water-sealed latrine for every nine households. The UP, with the help of the PHED, also set up three centers for manufacturing water-sealed latrines. As part of the partnership between the UP, the citizens and the higher levels of government, the UP asked the more well-to-do members of the UP to buy their own tubewells and water-sealed latrines, to alleviate some of the burden on the local government. The ability of Bashikpur Union to develop a partnership between the local government, other levels of government and the citizens to bear on problem led to the overall success.

Success in the use of tubewells and water-sealed latrines also had ancillary impacts. The UP is more intensively involved in taking care of the numerous canals, drains, ditches, ponds and water tanks so that they do not become clogged or mosquito breeding grounds. Another important result of the success of their health programme effort is increased emphasis on education. The UP realized that success in the health and sanitation sector can be institutionalized if these are integrated into the education system. Therefore, the UP's Universal Primary Education Committee and local committees on primary school were reactivated and are more involved in overseeing the school system. The Chairman and members of the UP have started visiting schools regularly and have become more involved in primary education.

Bakshipur Union is an excellent example of how local government, concentrating on limited service delivery, can bring together resources and effectively solve problems. In the long run, success in management in one area impacts positively on related areas, furthering the effective delivery of many services by the local government. Success in service delivery also contributes to increased confidence on the part of local professionals and leaders.

Case 2: Effectiveness in managing: a basic responsibility of local government

Justice is a pillar of any government. For local government to become an integrated part of the local community, it must be seen as protecting all its citizens. While the study points to the significant lack of local government in numerous areas including law and order, it is important

to note that local government can manage law and order effectively and efficiently. The Mirzanagar Union Parishad is such a case.

Adjacent to the Indian border, the Mirzanagar Union is under the Parashuram Thana of the Feni District. This Union Parishad is 24 sq.km. with 26 villages, 3,346 households and a total population of 19,078. The literacy rate is 37.3 percent. While the economy is primarily agriculture, its proximity to the Indian border foments smuggling and the consequent breakdown of law and order. Smuggling, consequent corruption of government and society, and violence became rampant, seriously endangering the lives of the average citizens of Mirzanagar. Exasperated by the situation the people of Mirzanagar elected a Chairman and Members of the Union whom they considered honest and upright, hoping that the UP would be able to tackle the law and order situation.

Between 1992 and 1995, the period of the study, the Mirzanagar Union Parishad made tremendous strides in improving the law and order situation by restructuring and reorganizing the police and local justice system in the following manner.

Police reorganization

Personnel:	Increased the number of village police from 5 to 10. Improved their service condition by providing them with life insurance.
Reporting:	All village police report weekly to the Thana and at regular meeting of the UP on the law and order situation. In addition village police are required to inform the UP and Thana of any crimes or disturbances.
Information:	Police members are required to gather information on movements in and out of the villages, breaches of public order, violence or crime.
Authority:	In order to be able to conduct their duties without challenge, the village police have written approval from the Thana authorities
Transparency:	Each block (3 to a ward) maintains a watch registry. Any citizen can record any comment about the performance of the village police.
Integration:	Village police, through the Union Parishad, maintains close linkage with the Bangladesh Rifles and the Thana police and inform them about smugglers and thieves. They assist in arrests and support the overall activities of the Thana police and Bangladesh Rifles.

Union parishad reorganization

In order to facilitate the improvement in the law and order situation, the UP formed three committees to address law and order issues impacting on the union. These are:

Law and Order

Committee: The purpose was to maintain law and order and the smooth functioning of village adjudication. Each block within the Union formed a Shalish committee. The member of the ward acts as the chairman of the committee. Members are drawn from the elite of the block.

Smuggling Control

Committee: Under the leadership of the Chairman of the Union, the primary purpose of the committee is to maintain a list of smugglers and track their activities. This committee also maintains liaison with the Bangladesh Rifles and identifies for them smugglers living in the Union.

Women Persecution

Control Committee: The Chairman and women members of the UP form this committee. The primary purpose is to stop harassment, protection against beating by husbands, assistance for filing cases in the village court, and pressure for dowry.

Village court reorganization

While the Shalish court settles disputes locally at the block and ward level, disputes which are not settled at the Shalish court move to the village court. Those not settled at the village court level move up to the next level. The Chairman of the UP is generally the chairman of the village court. There are two additional members, one from each party, involved in the conflict.

The primary focus of the reorganization of the Mirzanagar village court is timely processing of cases. The year prior to this Parishad's inauguration, the village court processed only 59 percent of the cases before the UP. During the two years following the inauguration, the timely processing rate increased to 97.62 and 99.44 percent. Because of the increased trust in the local judicial system, very few cases are being sent forward to the next level.

In assessing the overall success of the Mirzanagar Union Parishad to manage the law and order situation, it was found that the general populace feels much safer now than three to four years ago. During that period shopkeepers could not keep goods in their store overnight, and rickshaw-pullers could not ply the streets at night because of dacoits and hijackers. This improvement in the law and order situation was brought about through collaboration with the Thana police.

Conclusions

The review of current management practices, as well as the cases, leads to the following conclusions:

1. The following limitations restrict the Union Parishads' and even Pourashavas' ability to govern their own communities:
 - (a) Central government oversight, which is practiced extensively;
 - (b) Few specific mandates of authority for local governments, with current mandates interpreted narrowly;
 - (c) Inadequate resources, both from central sources and local rates and fees; and
 - (d) Inadequate personnel, both in numbers and in appropriate, updated training.
2. Power is concentrated in the position of Chairman, thereby ignoring the potential contribution of the councillors, staff and community members. The elite bias of the current informal power structure leaves most decision-making to the Chairman, with others reluctant to participate
3. Poor systems exist for:
 - (a) Managing meetings and other activities to encourage participation, including the general public;
 - (b) Accounting for financial and material resources;
 - (c) Keeping records of meetings, personnel and financial transactions; and
 - (d) Keeping activities on track.
4. Incidence of widespread corruption.
5. Wide variation of conditions, especially among the Union Parishads, which are not graded.

Recommendations

1. Develop professional work environment and management practices.

Develop measures to ensure that all discussion, decisions and transactions in council meetings and for council business be recorded in relevant registers and books of accounts.

Maintain all records and official documents in an accessible manner.

Notify the public of programme, procedure and process information on a regular basis on an official bulletin board.

Develop methods and mechanisms to enforce an annual calendar of events, including the budget cycle, the tax cycle, and the planning cycle.

Increase employment of professional staff and expand total number of staff.

Institutionalize the planning mechanism.

Update rules and regulations and align them with the current local government setting.

Improve service conditions through regularization of salary and benefits, provide professional development opportunities and link career development to performance evaluation.

Develop mechanisms to enforce the observation of basic rules of accounting and auditing.

2. Reduce centralization of executive power and decision-making.

Provide autonomy to local government in budgetary decision-making and programme planning.

Strengthen council committees and sub-committees in order for them to monitor local government operations independently, thereby providing checks and balances between executive and legislative institutions sharing power.

Increase the scope of committees to undertake independent work.

Consider making the position of Chairman constitutional in order to increase the scope for group decision-making and consensus-making.

3. Increase accountability and responsibility.

Establish a professional technical unit to assist local government in the formation, maintenance and operation of committees and sub-committees, holding and management of meetings and maintenance of annual calendar.

Make elected representatives accountable to each other collectively and to the community, including removal of the oversight functions of prescribed authority in the area of recall and discipline.

4. Increase representativeness and reduce undemocratic practices.

Propose laws relating to removal of elected representatives in order to bring them in line with democratic principles and practices.

Elect women directly to reserved seats.

Include women members in all committees and sub-committees.

5. Increase the viability of local government to link to the community.

Determine realistic service responsibilities based on current resource capacity of local government.

Restructure current countrywide revenue generation system in order to increase local resource capacity sufficiently to meet their charge and obligations.

Establish village/mohalla-based committees to increase community involvement in local government activities.

Construct a classification system to rationalize the variations at the Union Parishad level similar to the classification at the Pourashava level.

IV. PEOPLE'S GOVERNMENT: THE NEED FOR PARTICIPATION

Democratic governance has incorporated mechanisms which systematically seek out opinions, views and perspectives from its citizens, thereby allowing government to constantly update its goals and missions to reflect the aggregate of thinking within the community. Two such mechanisms critical to democratic institutions are (1) participation in policy-making and programme management and (2) cooperation between and among organizations of all types in defining policies, development and growth.

The study examines mechanisms which permit people's participation in local government. It analyzes the types and levels of cooperation between local government units and other agencies in the community. It assesses the capacity of local government units and other agencies to promote and sustain participation.

Avenues for Participation

Seven areas provide core opportunities for participation in local government:

Elections

Sections 19 to 26 of the PSO and 8 to 25 of the UPO have stipulated provisions for general elections on the basis of adult franchise for electing both Chairman and Commissioners/Members in these two types of local bodies. In 1978 the Local Representations Act 1973 was amended, authorizing the National Election Commission to conduct the elections for PSs and UPs, besides conducting the election for the Jatiya Sangshad (National Parliament). Voter turnout and number of contestants per seat criteria show that since the late 1970s, when the Election Commission took over the management of the election process, participation in local elections increased significantly.

Election analysis in three Union Parishads, namely Dighi, Alipur and Shualok, at the end of 1992, and also in two Pourashavas, namely Manikgonj and Santahar, in 1993, shows that large numbers of voters participated in the elections and cast their votes. In Dighi and Alipur, the turnout was high in both areas — between 70 and 75 percent. There was a keen contest for the Chairmanship in both these UPs between the ruling party and the Jatiya Party (JP) candidates. At Dighi the opposition JP won by a comfortable margin, in Alipur the ruling BNP candidate defeated his JP opponent by a margin of 2,400 votes.

In Shualok, the turnout was also high — 63 percent (total voters: 5,202, number voting: 3,337). The contest for Chairmanship was based on ethnicity, and a tribal candidate (a Murong) was elected by a small majority. It is significant that so many people travelled very far over difficult terrain with poor transport facilities and communications in order to participate in the electoral process.

Another indicator of participation at the Union Parishad is the number of contestants per seat. In 1964, the number of contestants per seat was 2.9, increasing to 3.7 in 1973 and 4.5 in 1992. The steady increase in number of contestants per seat indicates greater awareness, interest and involvement in local affairs, as well as the increasing importance of the electoral process in the community.

In the 1993 Pourashava elections, the voters in both Manikgonj and Santahar turned out in substantial numbers. This is supported by other studies which show that voter turnout at the Pourashava election increased from 62.4 percent in 1973 to 80 percent in 1977. Since the Pourashava elections are held on party lines, all three major parties nominated candidates in these two Pourashavas. In Manikgonj, the Jatiya Party candidates were elected. In Santahar an Awami League candidate got an overwhelming majority to be the Chairman of the Pourashava.

The analysis shows that citizens of Bangladesh are more aware and are participating more fully in the electoral process. Some voters are deciding to contest for council seats themselves. The rate of participation is increasing, and the nature of that participation is changing.

Interaction with developmental agencies

Sub-section 1(h) of section 30 of the UPO offers considerable scope for popular participation. This sub-section authorizes the Union Parishad to review the development activities of all agencies at the union level and to make recommendations to the higher authority. It also allows for the cooption of members of various segments of the public in such reviewing committees.

However, in practice, such reviews rarely happen. In Dighi and Alipur, all the major governmental agencies are working — including health and family planning, primary education, and agricultural development. As a result of popular pressure, the Union Parishads make some efforts to review the activities of these departments. But the government departments do not respond positively, and try to avoid and ignore the Union Parishads. Some autonomous bodies like the Bangladesh Water Development Board, the Rural Electrification Board, the Bangladesh Forest Industries Development Corporation and the Sericulture Board do occasionally consult the Union Parishad Chairmen, though not the Union Parishad as a whole. Even the non-governmental development organizations (NGOs) do not seem to consult with or seek advice from the Union Parishad. The limited consultation taking place between the NGOs and the Union Parishad is neither formalized nor routinized.

The Pourashavas in Bangladesh have not specifically been given such a review role and authority. However many government agencies do work in most Pourashavas and cannot escape interaction with the municipal authority. Not having a review role limits the ability of the Pourashavas to manage their own affairs. For example, in Santahar a number of governmental and semi-governmental development agencies have not paid their municipal taxes for a number of years. As much as forty lakhs of taka are presently due from only five such agencies. These agencies are BADC (Tk fourteen lakhs), PWD (Tk six lakhs), RAH (Tk ten lakhs), the Bangladesh Railway and the Bangladesh Power Development Board (Tk ten lakhs). The Santahar

Pourashava has tried, but failed, to collect this huge amount of taxes from these agencies for the last few years. A similar situation exists in Manikgonj PS.

Participation in review and oversight activities is new for elected representatives. If election participation is an accurate indicator, then it can be expected that as elected representatives become aware of their role and responsibilities, and as local bodies attempt to gain control over their own future, participation in review and oversight will increase. However, in order to facilitate the review and oversight operations, it will be useful to strengthen the regulatory framework and to ensure that rules and regulation for review are followed.

Committees and sub-committees

Provisions exist for setting up standing, ad hoc and special committees at UP and PS. Section 38 of the UPO and Section 35 of the PSO provide for the appointment of committees and sub-committees. The ability to appoint outside members can make these committees and sub-committees important avenues of popular participation.

Among the different committees at the Union Parishad level, the Project and Works Committee seems to operate the best primarily because of its ability to allocate resources. This committee has the most power and status. Moreover, committees are established for implementing each project, and these project committees offer the largest opportunity for public participation. In practice, however, the Project Implementation Committees of the Union Parishad are comprised mostly of Members and are almost entirely chosen by the respective Chairman. In most cases, committees act at the direction of the Chairman and do not allow scope for participation by others. Most Project Implementation Committees seem to operate at the behest and direction of the Chairman. Participation in the deliberations and decision-making seems to be very limited. Partly because of lack of awareness of what participation entails in a committee setting, and partly because of the centralization of powers in the position of the Chairman, participation at the committee and subcommittee levels is not yet effective.

The size and composition of ad hoc committees are both larger and broader. In Alipur UP the Smuggling Resistance Committee of 1992, the Census Committee of 1986, and the Agricultural Census Committee of 1995 are composed of 13, 16 and 20 members respectively. In Shualok UP, the numbers for the same committees are 14, 15 and 19 respectively. But their method of operation remains like most other committees and subcommittees, restrictive and subject to the direction of the Chairman. The so-called "big" committees include neither independent-minded persons nor representatives of the community. Functionally, therefore, these big committees fail in their purpose of ensuring widespread participation by the community in local government operations.

The operating rules of committees and subcommittees allow for public participation, but participation in day-to-day deliberations is yet to become a common practice. Once again, if election participation is an accurate indicator, with increased awareness that government serves the people and not the other way around, people will become involved in the deliberations of

the committees and subcommittees. It is not only a question of time but, more importantly, it is a question of making sure that avenues for participation are made available and accessible.

Arbitration and settlement of disputes

The most important activities and sources of authority of the Union Parashads is their role in arbitration in family disputes and conciliation. Two laws — the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance and the Conciliation Courts Ordinance of 1961 — empower the Union Council as a local government body to play such a role. The Commissioners of the Pourashava wards sometimes play a similar role in their own localities based on their popular authority.

The total number of disputes settled in the Alipur Union Parishad in 1994-95 was 55. Alipur is followed by Shualok, where in the same period of time 32 cases were accepted by the Union Parishad working as a Conciliation Court. The lowest number of cases were dealt with in Dighi Union Parishad.

In the Alipur Union Parishad about 50 percent of the disputes concerned divorce, with the rest related to demarcation of land as well as monetary transactions. With the introduction and expansion of shrimp cultivation in the area, the incidence of divorce, particularly in the lower strata of the villages, increased markedly. In Shualok, however, most of the disputes centered around monetary and material transactions. A few cases involve matters related to ethnic conflicts. In Dighi, the nature of conflict was monetary transactions.

Petty conflicts and disputes are generally settled amicably at the level of the ward or members level. At this level in Shualok, the karbari (headman) in the para (hamlet) concerned is invariably involved, and sometimes the member may also be present. Only those cases which are complex and cannot be solved at the ward level are brought to the UP level. The Chairman plays the most significant arbitration role and, excepting only a few cases, all disputes are settled at this level. Both in Alipur and Shualok hardly any case gets transferred to the Thana level.

The study established that the effectiveness of the Union Parishads in settling disputes in this manner is one of their strongest attributes. The village court system is therefore an avenue of participation in local affairs by both elected representatives and other members of the community. A village court consists of the Chairman, as head, and two members, each of whom is nominated by one party to the dispute and one of which is to be a member of the Union Parishad. Because the composition of the village court is based on particular dispute, participation in the judicial system is open and ensures fairness.

At the ward level, the Shalish Committee also allows participation, because this committee is composed of the Ward Member as Chairman of the committee with the village elites as members. It is suggested that besides the village elites, a number of other community members should be included in order to ensure representatives from nontraditional and under-represented groups. This will enhance the credibility of the Shalish Committee, which currently is subject to some criticism as representing only the elite.

Innovation in Participation in Settling a Dispute: Protection of the Disadvantaged

To ensure that disadvantaged groups are not treated unfairly or unjustly, the Mirzanagar Union Parishad of Feni District formed a Women's Persecution Control Committee. The primary purpose of the committee was to protect and safeguard women from torture, harassment, beating and abuse. This committee works closely with the Shalish Committee and also with the Village Court. The Women's Persecution Control Committee is composed of the Chairman and women members of the UP.

Budgeting

For a local self-governing institution, the preparation of the budget and its implementation, particularly the development budget, are potential avenues for participation by the taxpayers. But this will happen only if three conditions are met: (a) the method for preparing the budget is democratic, involving discussion among and deliberation by the community, (b) the context of the budget as prepared, particularly its developmental part, is really directed to the delivery of services to the people, and (c) the procedures for implementation of the budget involve as many relevant people as possible.

In practice, the preparation of the budget in the three Union Parishads (Alipur, Dighi and Shaulok) is mechanical and confined to two officials in the UP — the Secretary and Chairman. The Secretary actually prepares it in an hour or two on the basis of the previous year's budget, after some consultation with the Chairman, who signs it and sends it through the Thana Nirbhai Officer to the Deputy Commissioner for approval. Hardly any discussion takes place in preparing the budget or even approving the budget by the Parishad. In certain cases the estimated budget has been sent to the Deputy Commissioner before it was placed in the Parishad for approval and without the required signatures of its Members and Chairman.

At the Pourashava level, in Santahar and Manikgonj Pourashavas, the situation is not substantially different from that of the Union Parishads. In these Pourashavas, in fact three persons instead of two play decisive roles in preparing the budget. They are the Accountant, the Secretary and the Chairman of the PS. A meeting is held for approval, normally, without any lengthy discussions or deliberations by the Commissioners present. The PS does not invite any prominent citizens to participate in deliberations, nor do others attend the budget meeting on their own.

An analysis of expenditure pattern shows that a significant portion of the budget at the three UPs and two PSs is spent on administration rather than on development and service delivery. This finding is confirmed by the analysis of 40 Pourashavas and 60 Union Parishads reported in section 7 on resource mobilization.

Within the current local government system, involvement in the deliberations and decision-making in resource allocation, an important avenue for democratic practice and popular participation, does not exist.

Taxation

Effective participation in tax policy and assessment, as has been shown in a later part of the study on best home-grown practices, and linking revenue collection to delivery of services significantly improve the ability of local government to mobilize resources, collect revenues and improve services.

Serious defects in both horizontal and vertical equity issues have placed the tax burden more heavily on the poor. Consequently, the poor avoid paying taxes and do not think that local government serves their needs. The rich recipients of tax breaks have compounded the inequity by finding ways to avoid paying their full share of the taxes.

In Shualok UP, the tax rate on timber and bricks is much lower than on basic food items, such as potatoes. In Alipur UP, which has 500-700 brick buildings, revenue collected from buildings is only Tk 45,000. In Dighi UP, arrears in taxes is almost 35 percent. While tax rates seem unfair and people try to pay as little as possible, Union Parishads and Pourashavas are not serious in realizing taxes from those who can pay. In Manikgonj Pourashava the 1994-95 tax arrears on houses and lands, amounted to one million taka, on electricity, half a million taka, on conservancy, one hundred thousand taka and on water, seven hundred thousand taka. In 1989-90 the Santahar PS realized only 20 percent of its taxes, and in 1992-93 its tax arrears amounted to about 48 percent.

There is therefore a serious disconnection between the community and the way they think about themselves, and the local government and the way they are required to assess taxes. It is only through building a shared perspective on taxes and service delivery that the community and local government can interact with one another effectively. Unless the community is allowed to participate fully in the resource extraction and distribution system, the local people will not understand why taxes are collected, where the money goes and how expensive it is to provide local services. With full participation, every citizen knows and understands the need for taxes and willingly pays taxes. Moreover, the government collects an agreed-upon amount for providing agreed-upon services. The faster participation is built into the revenue-generation process, the more likely that local government will become less dependent on external grants and consequently more independent.

While these avenues exist and some are utilized more than others, it is important to note that these mechanisms can only function if the legal environment permits such participation. It is here that serious limitations exist. Analysis of two fundamental laws which guide local government — the Local Government (Union Parishad) Ordinance 1976 and Pourashava Ordinance 1977 — are restrictive and effectively stunt the growth of autonomous local government in Bangladesh.

The two ordinances have been designed to provide the central government and its agents full policy and operational control over local government, leaving little opportunity for self-governance and community participation. Significant changes in these ordinances need to be

made in order for local government to become a distinct and separate but interacting level of government.

At a minimum the following clauses have to be revised if not discarded.

Pourashava Ordinance	Union Parishad Ordinance
Sections 42-51 (3)	Section 49 (3)
Sections 130-136	Sections 61-65
Section 142	Section 72
Section 150	Sections 77-78
Section 152	Sections 81-82
Sections 155 and 156	

These sections deal with, among other issues, accountability, responsibility, transparency, relationship with the judiciary, local government and central bureaucracy, rule making, and management and supervision.

Collaboration and Cooperation among Local Governments and Other Agencies and Non-Governmental Organizations

The study concludes that despite shortcomings in local government there exists a high degree of enthusiasm among the local people about LG-NGO and other national and international agency collaborative projects, particularly in income generation. Although less than 20 percent of the people are aware of such collaboration, those who have benefited from these projects have clear knowledge of what projects they were involved with and what mechanisms for collaboration and cooperation were used.

Collaboration with BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee)

BRAC is involved in collaborative programmes with government departments and local government bodies. These include the Vulnerable Group Development Programme (VGDP), through which groups of poor women are given rations of World Food Programme (WFP) wheat. In Dighi, for example, BRAC is collaborating with the UP in providing skill development training to poor women to help increase their earnings.

In the Small Household Livestock Development Project (SHLDP), which started in 1994, BRAC collaborates with GOB in providing poor households with skills and inputs in poultry raising and marketing. In the area of animal husbandry, BRAC collects from the Government livestock department vaccines for cholera, plague and infections and distributes these to its group members. It is also involved in artificial insemination of cattle. In Dighi, both the local government and BRAC have succeeded in implementing the project.

BRAC also distributes silkworm eggs supplied by the government department to its sericulture groups, who pay for the inputs. In 1989, BRAC entered into a lease agreement with Dighi Union for the use of roadside strips. According to this agreement, BRAC would plant mulberry trees along the UP roads and supply the leaves to the sericulture groups as fodder for the silk worms. In return, BRAC would look after the UP roads. Here, the involvement of the beneficiaries in the decision-making and implementation phases of participation is emphasized.

Collaboration with CARE

Dighi and Alipur UPs also run a joint venture with CARE in Road Maintenance Programmes (RMP). This started in 1983 with 15 widow/separated women, who participated in constructing earthworks for maintaining UP roads. For the first ten years, the women received Tk 18 per day, from which they had to save Tk 3 daily in a bank account. After ten years, the women received a total of Tk 10,000 each in two installments, as their savings. A new group of 15 women started the RMP in 1994 under the UP-CARE joint project. UP and CARE selected the women through a lottery from over 50 applicants. In the present programme, the women receive Tk 28 daily, with a Tk 5 savings requirement. Two salaried persons (Tk800 per month) monitor this programme, one from the UP and another from CARE.

Collaboration with VON

VON is a local NGO which is funded by the Ministry of Development Cooperation of the Government of the Netherlands. VON is an example of collaboration with Manikganj PS for improving the municipal water supply and sanitation. It collaborated in distributing sanitary latrine and safe water (by hand tubewells). In addition, VON-Manikganj Pourashava jointly developed and implemented a health education programme for the poor.

Collaboration with MJSS

The Manikganj Janasankhya Simitokoron Samittee (MJSS) (Manikganj Association for Population Control) recently collaborated with the PS in the Expanded Programme for Immunization (EPI) through launching an immunization campaign for local children. Like VON, MJSS is also supporting the PS in its health and sanitation development programmes. The study team found a good working relationship among the PS, VON and MJSS.

Collaboration with UNICEF

Data from Alipur UP and Santahar PS indicates that the Extended Programme on Immunization (EPI), run collaboratively by GOB and UNICEF, was successfully implemented between March and April 1995 with full cooperation from the LG authorities. The level of people's participation was satisfactory. The LG authorities organized a number of volunteers to support the EPI vaccinators in making the day-long programme a success.

Collaboration with MROCHET

In Shualok UP in Bandarban District, MROCHET, a local ethnically-based NGO aims at development of Murong and Khumi ethnic groups. This activity is enjoying some degree of support and cooperation from the UP. The UP provides some physical facilities to the NGO whenever required. The cooperation and support include providing a venue for MROCHET meetings, seminars and rallies. Some Murong college students (all Members of MROCHET), who were evicted from their rented house for not being able to pay rent, were given refuge in the Community Center of the UP for two months. This close cooperation between a UP and an NGO occurred largely because MROCHET has a good relationship with the higher authorities, i.e. local government, army and general administration.

Federation: a third party in collaboration

Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service (RDRS) is a leading NGO operating in the disadvantaged northern districts of Bangladesh. It provides an interesting example of productive collaboration with both local government and citizens. Beginning in 1972 as a relief and refugee assistance programme, RDRS moved away from a welfare orientation towards integrated development and by 1990, it succeeded in developing a people's organization called "Federation" for strengthening the process of grassroots democratization and enhancing people's participation. This has increased the opportunities for collaboration between local people, NGOs and local government, in a number of ways, as noted below.

Disaster preparedness - In 1995, RDRS implemented a massive disaster preparedness project to tackle natural calamities like floods, droughts and river erosion. It believes that the effect of disasters can only be minimized if the whole community, including the LG institutions and federations, are educated on specific short-term preparedness measures and on post-disaster relief actions, as well as on longer term means of reducing their vulnerability. RDRS is therefore, among other things, now carrying on a training programme. The groups receiving the training are members of poor households living in flood prone areas, emergency volunteers to be nominated by the community (mainly from federations), the staff of NGOs operating in the locality and members of local government.

Plantation and pond re-excavation - Local government, RDRS and federations have developed a relationship which has been instrumental in planning and implementing a number of collaborative programmes. The level of people's participation in these income-generating and other development programmes is found to be satisfactory. The federations are taking the lead in something they never did before — organizing large-scale projects, involving both local government (Union Parishads) and RDRS. Federations have been negotiating with Union Parishads for leasing out rural roads for tree plantation and leasing ponds for fishery projects. Providing training and some financial support, RDRS is playing an important role in these participatory programmes. This programme has increased opportunities for the beneficiaries to take part in the decision-making and implementation phases.

Drought Response - Although the package of activities carried out under the recently implemented ODA-funded Drought Response Project were not in themselves new, the project had at least one significant feature. Never before had RDRS implemented a project with beneficiaries selected by local government. This project gave the LGs (both UPs and Thana administration) a unique opportunity to select the people to receive relief and developmental support from RDRS. Both LG and RDRS worked efficiently and cooperatively. UPs helped RDRS prepare the list of beneficiaries and the Thana Nirbahi Officer (TNO) approved the list. This active collaborative process sets an example for such participatory strategies in future.

Conclusions

The study concludes that current extent of popular participation in local government operations and management is minimal. While people are increasing their rate of voting, the operations (and laws) of local governments are structured to discourage participation. Councils, committees and sub-committees allow for citizen appointments on a few committees, but these appointments are made by the Chairman. Although people gain some experience of participation in local court systems, there are few opportunities within the current framework of elected local bodies for citizen participation. In fact, there can even be misunderstandings between citizens and local governments when knowledge of how taxes are used to pay for services is not widely spread throughout the community.

Local NGOs are able to fill this gap by providing not only services but also opportunities to participate in decisions about the services. Through these local NGOs, citizens can learn planning, budgeting, project management, accounting and leadership. After participating in local NGOs, citizens may be able and interested in contesting council seats and evaluating councillors' performance.

In reviewing the performance of NGOs, the study also concludes that projects involving cooperation and collaboration among various types of organization at the local level are successful, especially because they consider opinions of all who have a stake in the issues.

While participation is low and sporadic, the study also found sufficient evidence to conclude that the drive for participation is developing a momentum of its own and cannot be stopped. This conclusion is based on the following observations:

- It is only in the last few years that external pressure to channel international assistance toward the sub-national level is finally paying off in creating in these areas a set of beneficiaries who are better prepared, organized and able to demand goods and services from the local government. These beneficiaries are able to take action through the election process or through self-directed involvement in day-to-day operation of local government to ensure that their rights are not suppressed.

- NGOs are playing a leading role in organizing communities and increasing public awareness and consciousness of the rights and responsibilities of citizens and government as they set up income-generating projects at the sub-national level.
- The national political system has recognized that sub-national levels are partners in governance and not a subservient system. Facilitating the development of a local government system, somewhat parallel to the central government, will require more focused attention towards autonomy than has been rendered until now.
- A new breed of political leadership is emerging at the sub-national level willing to challenge national representatives for the right to guide and lead the local community.
- Increasingly, people are evaluating the leadership performance of elected representatives for their ability to produce results by bringing goods and services to the community and are critical of leadership unable to bring resources to the community.

Recommendations

1. Participation and cooperation

Introduce a comprehensive training programme for elected representatives of both UPs and PSs to increase their level of awareness of role, responsibilities, skills and efficiency.

Initiate a comprehensive education programme on the role and responsibilities of citizens, the duties and responsibilities of local government and the relationship between government and citizens.

Increase local bodies' participation in joint ventures between local government bodies and other agencies.

Appoint more women to important committees, with at least one woman for every two men.

Provide NGOs a consultative role in committees of UPs and PSs.

Initiate community political awareness campaigns about the significance and importance of development programmes.

Reserve at least two seats in the UP for landless people.

Establish a regulation requiring that all decisions and deliberations of local governments include attached public comments.

2. Autonomy and management control

Abolish the present legal restriction that no person is allowed to contest for both the posts of Chairman and Member in the UP (under Section 11 of UPO of 1983).

Recognize the Union Parishad as the leading entity in the jurisdiction, to which both the Chairman and the Members of UP should submit their letters of resignation.

Abolish the need for Governmental approval in order to remove the Chairman by the Union Parishad .

Publicize the list of defaulters (taxpayers), including government departments, so that people know about them.

Establish a Municipal Improvement Committee (MIC) in each Pourashava.

Encourage Pourashavas to carry out their own development programmes.

Abolish the present provisions conferring executive authority only to the Chairman of the UP and PS.

Publish plans, programmes, budgets, contracts and information on other development activities for all PSs and UPs.

Abolish LG0 1983 (Clause 3) and PSO 1977 (Clause 3), which empower the central government to exert control over the affairs of local bodies.

Minimize or eliminate legal provisions pertaining to the central bureaucratic control in functional, financial and personnel affairs of local government.

Establish human resources management systems at the PS and UP levels, with the councils having comprehensive control over their personnel.

V. IMPROVING KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS: PLANNING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

Without professional staff trained in local government management at the local level, elected representatives knowledgeable in the art of public service, and volunteers cultivated in democratic governance, no local or national government can function effectively. Training of all types of personnel involved in local government is therefore essential.

The study found that available training is of a very limited nature. It is being channeled from above and is not equipped to handle growing needs for training resulting from the desire to have a strong and viable local government system. The primary local government training institution, the National Institute for Local Government, is expected to develop a user-based training programme for all types of personnel — elected, under-represented, administrative — as well as citizens.

Local government training institutions

A number of training institutions cater to the needs of local government. These include the National Institute for Local Government (NILG), the Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD), the Rural Development Academy at Bogra (RDA), the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED), and the Public Health Engineering Department (PHE). In recent years training at the local level has also been conducted by NGOs.

The NILG is the principal training institution in the area of local government. Between 1969 and 1993 over 70 percent of its participants came from local governments. During 1993-94, NILG offered 14 courses at its main campus in Dhaka. A total of 581 participants attended the courses. Most of the courses (8 out of 14) had a duration of one week, one was for a month and the remaining were short courses of 3 days or less. Sixty percent of the courses were focused towards the Pourashava. NILG also conducts courses at the district level. Between 1992 and 1994, NILG organized a course on local government which was attended by 74 percent of the Union Parishad Chairmen. NILG emphasizes training of Pourashava Chairmen and UP Secretaries.

Training for Pourashava Chairmen

NILG regularly trains the PS Chairmen. Its records show that from 1969 to 1993 NILG trained 576 Chairmen, 245 Commissioners, 45 chief executive officers and 897 administrative and other officers of PSs. During the last fiscal year for which records were tabulated, 1993-1994, it trained 52 PS Chairmen and 108 PS Secretaries, besides others. The duration for PS Chairmen courses was three days while that for the Secretaries was 30 days for foundation training and 7 days for the PS Administration Course. During the last fiscal year there was no training course for Commissioners.

The curriculum for Pourashava Chairmen consists of 10 topics. These include the role and responsibilities of PS Chairmen, Commissioners and other officers, the conduct of meetings, planning and execution, funding, tax assessment and collection, accounts and auditing, as well as the role of the PS in poverty alleviation. Thus far there does not seem to have been any effort to consult with PS Chairmen on the content of their courses.

Training for UP Secretaries

Training for UP Secretaries has been a continuing function of NILG. An assessment of training courses and workshops/seminars organized by NILG from July 1969 to June 1991 shows that 61 courses for Secretaries were held in which 3,300 UP Secretaries participated. The curriculum for the two-week course indicates that it is quite comprehensive.

Participant Preferences for Courses (UP Secretaries)

<u>Type of Course</u>	<u>Preference (percent)</u>
Office management	47
Duties and obligations	24
UP ordinance law	24
Budget and accounts	18
Tax assessment and collection	16
Evolution of UP	03
Planning	03
Women	03
Family planning	04

With the aid of District administrations, NILG organized in 1991 a series of 3-day training courses in 61 Districts for UP Secretaries. This UP Office Management Course was attended by 3,714 UP Secretaries. Most topics preferred by UP Secretaries are covered by the existing office management courses for the UP Secretaries. The UP secretaries expressed the importance of follow-up and retraining. They also felt that a joint course in which UP Chairmen, Members and Secretaries could participate would be extremely useful for effective and efficient functioning of the UP.

NILG also provides very limited training to PS Secretaries. During the fiscal years 1990-1991 and 1992-1993, there were no training programmes for PS Secretaries. NILG records show that between 1969 and 1991, a total of 37 PS Secretaries, administrative officers, and taxation officers were trained. These records group these three categories together so that it is not

possible to identify the number of Secretaries within the 37 officers trained. It appears from the Annual Reports of 1990-1991 and 1992-1993 that the PS Secretaries' training is not on the priority list of the NILG.

Several potential clientele groups have not yet been provided with training. These include the PS Commissioners, UP Members, village police and volunteer members of committees and sub-committees. As the use of volunteers becomes an integral part of the local government system in Bangladesh, the numbers of volunteers will far outnumber the regular staff and elected members. Therefore their training will become even more important.

Currently NILG does not have the staff or capacity to expand its offerings to a wider audience without significant upgrading and technical assistance.

The Need for Trained Personnel: Village Police

Usually a UP has 6-8 village policemen (Chowkidars), including 1 or 2 Dafadars (who supervise Chowkidars). When local government was first introduced in rural areas, it was called Chowkidari Panchayat (1870). Later, it was named Union Board (1885), Union Council (1959), Union Panchayat (1971), and Union Parishad (1973). The Bengal Village Chowkidari Act of 1870 authorized the District Magistrate to appoint a village-level Panchayat consisting of five Members. The Panchayat was given the authority to appoint the village watchmen, called the Chowkidars. They also had authority to assess and collect taxes from the villagers to pay the salaries of the Chowkidars (hence the Chowkidari tax). The purpose of appointing Chowkidars was to help maintain law and order in the rural areas. The institution of Chowkidars has continued ever since with little change in their status and functions. There has been no training whatsoever for Chowkidars and Dafadars. These have a long list of functions. They are expected, among other duties, to run errands for the UP Chairmen and Secretaries, report to the OC police stations every fortnight, keep watch over the Union, identify potential offenders and assist police in apprehending them, and assist UP Chairmen in the performance of official functions. Chowkidars and Dafadars have been entrusted with a large number of functions without any training up to now. Chowkidars are the first government official seen by most rural people. If UP Chairmen, Members and Secretaries are trained to run the UP business, by the same token, the Chowkidars should be trained to assist them. It is of the utmost importance that the Chowkidars properly and fully understand their powers and duties. A short course could be provided at the Union level by the UP Chairmen, Members and Secretaries in collaboration with OC Police and other Thana-level staff.

Other training institutions

Among the other training institutions involved in local government training, the Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD) is the oldest. During the first three years of its existence, it provided training to 255 members of the Union Parishad. Approximately 85 percent of the participants were UP chairmen, while the remaining were UP secretaries. The BARD emphasis is on community organization, planning for development and local planning. However, with a change in its strategic vision, BARD is more involved in research than in training. Its focus is still the sub-national level.

Relatively new to training people at the local level, the RDA at Bogra's training programme focused on orientation for UP Chairman and Members, orientation for rural development and

decentralization, administration and local government organization and management. Since 1977 it has assumed the responsibility for training newly elected UP Chairmen of the Rajshahi Division. In 14 batches 1,030 UP Chairmen have been trained in rural administration and substantive fields such as agriculture, health and family planning, rural electrification and women's programmes.

Two ministerial institutions, LGED and PHED provide training on a regular basis, but primarily to their own field staff involved in rural development programmes and activities. However, since both these agencies have to work closely with local government they are realizing the importance of making members of the local government aware of their activities. Therefore both agencies are setting up seminars and workshops in their substantive areas, in which local government officials participate. LGED conducts the local planning workshop and the Pourashava planning workshop, while PHED conducts workshops on social mobilization for sanitation and training of unemployed youth in maintenance and repair of its water supply system.

User-defined training needs and training assessment

Very often the user assessment of training needs is overlooked. The study therefore made a special attempt to represent user perspectives in detail through two cases each of UP and PS. The two Union Parishads represent the northern and southern parts of the country. Bogra Pourashava was chosen because of the tenure of the Chairman, who has held office for 20 years and as such has experienced many structural and procedural changes, and Mymensingh Pourashava was chosen because it is the oldest.

Case 1: Char Jublee Union Parishad, Noakhali

Char Jublee is a Union Parishad in the southern coastal belt of Bangladesh. It is in the District of Noakhali and is prone to cyclones and tidal waves from the sea. Char Jublee UP has an area of 65.38 sq. km. and is divided into 8 villages. According to the 1991 census, the total population of the Union is 26,098. There are 4 hats/bazaars, 4 km. of pucca roads and 155 km. of kutcha roads in the Union.

The Chairman and twelve Members of the UP have received no training to date. Yet the Chairman and Members present opined that training was necessary and good to have. Asked to specify desired fields of training, they identified six areas (i) agriculture, (ii) family planning, (iii) legal aspects of UP, (iv) justice, (v) tax assessment and collection and (vi) development activities.

While this UP has a well trained Secretary, the elected representatives have had no training whatsoever. One of the UP Members observed, "If we don't have ideas, how can we advise the Chairman?"

The Impact of a Trained Secretary

Training Courses Attended

1. NILG	Office Management	15 days	1982
2. DC	Management	7 days	1989
3. DANIDA	Management	7 days	1990
4. BARD	Planning	3 days	1993
5. PC	Mapping	7 days	1994

The Secretary is the only person who has received some training. He seemed to be highly knowledgeable and spoke more confidently than the Chairman and Members. In 1982, the Secretary participated in a 15-day office management/development course at the Zila Parishad hall, organized by the NILG. Since then he attended four more training courses. In the context of Bangladesh, the secretary has thus received a reasonable amount of training in local government. Using his rather diversified training, the Secretary himself developed an irrigation feasibility plan.

In addition to the Chairmen, Members and Secretaries, this UP, like other UPs, has 6 Chowkidars supervised by a Dafadar. This small force of locally recruited village police, who are expected to ensure rural safety, have never been trained. According to the UP, they require basic training in their profession, including apprehending criminals and reporting to the police. They also need some skill in reading and writing and elementary arithmetic. From the field study, it was obvious that these Chowkidars and Dafadars looked weak and unhealthy, and although they were provided with uniforms, they did not appear to wear them. Their shabby appearances inspired little confidence in their ability to apprehend thieves.

The three women Members of the UP are new and relatively inexperienced. Their colleagues felt they should have some training to enable them to participate more fully in the education and project committees.

Case 2: Rajarhat Union Parishad, Kurigram

Rajarhat UP has been chosen from the northern part of Bangladesh. It is in the District of Kurigram, one of the poorest and most flood and drought-prone districts of Bangladesh. Located about 500 km. to the north of Dhaka, the Union consists of an area of 31.28 sq. km. and is divided into 26 villages with a total population of 22,940. The overwhelming majority of the population depend on agriculture and agriculture-related activities. The communication system of the Union is poor. The Union is not yet fully linked by road with its District HQ, let alone with facilities like education and health care.

Views of a Woman Member

Mrs. Honse Ara Begum, the nominated Member of the UP, put forward her views regarding training. She has taken part in several training courses organized by BARD on issues of village development, and she has a positive view about the role of training. She foresees an expanding role that women Members of UP can play now and in future. She identified some specific areas where the female Members can play a more effective role than the male Members. These include problems of sanitation, and free wheat given to the most disadvantaged women. Population control and control of diarrhoeal diseases through home made ORS are two other important areas. A specially designed course can be arranged covering all the subjects for the women Members of the UP.

The general perspective on training of Chairman, Members and Secretary of the Rajarghat Union Parishad are summed up in the following comments:

Since the Secretary, Chowkidars and Dafadars are the permanent staff of the UP and are working with the people at the grassroots, they can serve the very useful purpose of improving relationships among the people, the UP and the national government. For this they need suitable training.

Women Members should be elected to reserved seats, and not appointed as is being practiced now. Many of them are not highly educated, but they are quite conscientious and capable, and special training will make them more effective.

Training is specifically required for the UP functionaries in the matters of resource mobilization. An overwhelming majority of the taxpayers evade tax payment. This has made UPs financially weak. Taxpayers can be motivated. Training and campaigns can perhaps improve the situation.

Management and skill training is also needed. Specially designed courses can bring about management development of the UPs, while skill development training can help improve the village environment and add to the well-being of the people.

Views of the UP Secretary

Mr. Ali Akbar, Secretary of the UP, was very brief but clear about the need for training for the UP functionaries. He argued that since the independence of Bangladesh, there has been a drastic fall in the realization of UP rates/taxes. As a result, UPs have largely been dependent on the Government financially. People have to be motivated to improve the situation, and the UP Members have to take up a major role in motivating the taxpayers. Special training for the UP Members may be arranged for this purpose. He also believes that training is needed for all functionaries of the UP. However, as the UPs are closely linked with many nation-building departments of the Government (e.g., health, education and agriculture) for local level planning and development, some of their training courses could include the UP functionaries. This will create a better understanding among all partners of development operating at the grassroots level.

Case 3: Bogra Pourashava

Established in 1876, Bogra PS is now headed by a person who has been its Chairman for the last 20 years, a rare phenomenon. The Chairman, Advocate Md. Zahurul Islam, underscored

the need for training for everybody in the municipality. The three points he stressed as the basic rationale for training are: (i) we wish to earn the confidence of the people; (ii) we wish to keep this municipality clean and sweet; and (iii) we wish to learn from our experience. He listed financial stringency as a major factor in hindering the overall progress of the municipality. He admitted that tax collection in the municipality was inadequate — “just enough to meet salary and other expenditures” — and noted that government grants were not sufficient.

Chairman's View of Training

As well as arguing for training for PS officials and staff the Chairman believes that training should be extended to everyone in the community. The PS Chairman identified three types of training needed in this regard: civic consciousness, civic sense and cleanliness. He urged that cooperative committees be formed in every ward led by the ward Commissioner. In his view, such training needed little money, but much leadership and organizational skill. He thought that such leadership was possible once the ward Commissioners recognized their leadership roles and accepted responsibility voluntarily. He argued that no city could be kept clean merely by official initiative and expenditure. The citizens themselves must be willing partners. It was, therefore, necessary to create an awareness and urgency among the citizens. Training can assist in this task. In much the same way, the mosquito menace can be lessened.

Views of the Commissioners: Difference of Opinion

The Ward Commissioners had different perspectives. They believe that, “Training is good only in classrooms and cannot be applied to work situations. As we return, we are not encouraged and assisted. The Commissioners have no status. The Chairman is everything. What are we? We have no powers and no functions.”

The male Commissioners felt that the women Commissioners were new and inexperienced, but that there could be a role in training for them. The women Commissioners could lead in the road cleanliness drive, project-based monitoring etc. They have some resources, and the Asian Development Bank is doing some work. The Government gives some money, but makes little use of local government institutions.

At the end of this interview, two women Commissioners arrived and joined the discussion. They seemed quite willing to cooperate and lead in all aspects in their respective areas under the overall leadership of the Chairman. These two Commissioners showed considerable interest in planning road cleanliness drives with the cooperation of willing citizens of the ward. Like the Chairman, they favoured initiative, leadership and voluntary mobilization of local resources, rather than government grants, foreign aid or top-heavy projects.

The male Commissioners stressed projects, money, aid and grants as being more important in their work than training.

Thus, the two approaches are poles apart. The Chairman focuses on how the minds of the citizen can be changed to keep the city clean with little or no money. The Commissioners, on the other hand, emphasize power relationships, the need for money, projects, foreign aid, and little or no self-help or PS leadership. The Chairman himself has had an extensive training background while his Commissioners have had little or no training. The Chairman had observed municipal administration in many cities abroad and suggested that the Prime Minister, in her trips abroad, should take some municipal Commissioners with her so that they could observe municipal

management and leadership in other places. In particular, they should observe how citizens behave in advanced countries. The Chairman felt that the ADB project — Secondary Town Infrastructure Development — covering ten municipalities, including Bogra, could help in this regard. The training of Accounts Officers, Assessors, Tax Collectors, Conservancy, Secretary and Chief Executive Officers of the PS was likely to lead to institutional strengthening.

The Chairman finally noted with regret that there was considerable dislike of the municipal managers among the citizenry. The people did not seem to realize that taxes levied on them sought to improve their living conditions and that these were to their advantage. He would like to see how to change this attitude and how to manage taxation, funding, budgeting and other unpopular aspects of municipal management. Here, as in other aspects, the Chairman zeroed in on winning over the citizens by changing their minds through training.

Case 4: Mymensingh Pourashava

Established in 1869, Mymensingh is one of the oldest Pourashavas in Bangladesh. It has an area of 21.73 sq. km. and a population of 256,000. In 1994, the assessment of holding tax in Mymensingh PS was Tk 4,263,831. Like Bogra, Mymensingh is another secondary town PS which is receiving Secondary Town Infrastructure Development Project (STIDP) funds for its municipal service improvement. Its Chairman, Mr. Delwar Hossain Khan, well known for his initiatives, was away when the researcher was in Mymensingh. He was represented by Panel Chairman 1 (one of the Commissioners).

Panel Chairman 1 himself received a modicum of training some 18 years back, in 1977. Since then he has had no other opportunities for training. It is surprising that no Commissioner received any training whatsoever in this Pourashava. He felt that it was necessary for training to be organized “on the spot” and that the training topics should include cleanliness, sanitation and water. Training should be imparted by “those who know” — specialists in the trade or job — and be meant for municipal staff working on sites within the municipality. He did not seem to consider management and leadership training for the Chairman and Commissioners. He stressed maintenance functions as much as planning and execution. In his words, “post-planning, looking-after” functions are necessary. He gave the example of tree plantation. Nobody knows how many trees survived. Field staff needed training more than headquarters staff. He felt that some collaboration with NGOs was possible. About the women Commissioners, he thought that a training programme for them might be necessary. These Commissioners might devote themselves to road maintenance, cleanliness and the like.

Panel Chairman 1 was of the opinion that the municipal staff received insufficient training in tax assessment, tax collection, water, computers, etc. The municipality collected only about 50 percent of its taxes. Additionally, the PS Chairman and Commissioners should undergo a short orientation course to appreciate what was being done and what needed to be done.

The Need for Training: Another Perspective

The Pourashava Secretary, Mr. A.F.M. Abdullah, had held his job for a considerable period. He also served another PS, C. Kishoreganj. He was a "training man," who maintained that important problems were highlighted during training sessions and suggestions were made by participants about problem solving. This was a direct benefit of training. Moreover, when senior officers like the Joint Secretary and Deputy Secretary attended, they got an opportunity to exchange ideas with them and seek their cooperation. The Secretary underwent EPI training at BRRI at Gazipur in 1994.

The Secretary kept a record of training he received. He went to his house to bring training certificates and showed these with a sense of achievement. Interview information shows that while the Chairman received three training courses and the Secretary underwent four training courses, more or less in identical fields — municipal administration, orientation etc. — the Commissioners were conspicuous by their complete lack of training whatsoever. The short duration of these courses indicated that they were of a general introductory nature and the source of such training was NILG/LGED.

The four preceding cases highlight the diversity of thought about training, the various needs identified and, more importantly, the fact that one training institution cannot address all the needs. Local government personnel at all levels are quite capable of identifying their shortcomings and defining their needs. The principal emphasis should be on how to meet those needs. A decentralized training system is perhaps the key.

Conclusions

The study identified many categories of people who need to be trained in order for local governance to be effective. These include not only UP/PS Council Chairmen, Secretaries, Members (Councillors) and staff, but also categories such as village police. The size of the task requires that it be divided among several institutions.

Respondents indicated several preferences for curriculum development and planning:

1. Increase the relevance of the curriculum so that the knowledge and skills may be utilized quickly;
2. Establish protocols for introducing new knowledge and skills into the old workplace, when trainees return;
3. Hold training on site at the workplace and include real work in the exercises for a practical viewpoint;
4. Follow-up on training at intervals to measure impact, as well as new needs;

5. Update training as often as desirable.
6. Design training for the entire workplace team so that people who work together can learn together about their own organization's issues, besides improving their ability to work in a team.

Several respondents mentioned the importance of training people to work with the general public and indeed to facilitate the participation of the general public in governance, including elections, community activities and local government. The public should be able to understand and evaluate government policies and operations.

Special training programmes need to be established for women councillors and staff.

Recommendations

1. A training cell should be formed at every Union Parishad and Pourashava.

This should include the Chairman and one of the Members/Commissioners (acting as a Member-Secretary) to plan and organize needs-based training. This could be done with the assistance of the Thana Development Coordination Committee (TDCC), the Thana Nirbahi Officer, the Project Implementation Officer and the Thana Engineer. The Member/Commissioner in the training cell may rotate half-yearly, so that everyone gets an opportunity to work and share responsibilities.

2. Other institutions should also be used for training.

As both the DC's office and NILG will be overcrowded with programmes, institutions like BARD, RDA, LGED and PHE, with considerable experience of local government management and local level planning, should also be used in training newly elected Chairmen. These institutions have accommodations, cafeteria, classrooms, training aids and trained instructors. Before the election, the DC's office can draw up plans so that accommodations and food create no problems. Similarly, NILG can plan well in advance how it is going to handle the training of UP/PS Chairmen in batches.

3. Chowkidars and Dafadars should be trained by the UP Chairmen and the Member-Secretary of the training cell.

The training cell can draw on Thana police resources, as their activities include detection and apprehension of criminals. Topics should include health, physical training, watch and ward, dress, drill etc.

4. Some modifications should be made in the training curricula for Pourashava Chairmen, who should receive training within the first two months in office.

Urban problems have grown considerably in recent years, with a continuing influx of rural poor into urban areas — requiring new roles and responsibilities for PS management. A special task force should be employed to study these problems and suggest modifications in the training curricula for the PS Chairman, with schemes and projects in which the ordinary town dwellers can participate. Enlisting the co-operation of the ordinary voters, the city fathers can call upon their suggestions from time to time so that they can feel they are part of the projects undertaken. Consequently, cleanliness drives, garbage clearance, and water and sanitation projects will lead to specialized training of the citizenry in pro-people technologies. Add office management topics, public relations, field supervision and how to involve citizens in PS-initiated projects.

5. Women councillors and staff should receive special training.

Because it is likely that a few women will find themselves on a council and in meetings full of men, special efforts need to be made so that women are prepared to participate. Special women's courses should focus, among other things, on acquisition of skills, such as planning and budgeting, appreciation of the context of the council (including national government if the woman has been isolated), and confidence-building exercises.

6. Introduce leadership and motivational training

One of the weakest aspects of local government management in Bangladesh is their relative inability to involve the local people in local planning and development activities. This should be addressed through special leadership and motivational training courses for UP/PS Chairmen. Suitable Chairmen could be identified and sent for training to the Regional Public Administration Training Centres (RPATCs) at Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi and Khulna.

VI. RESOURCE ALLOCATION: THE SEARCH FOR VIABILITY

The resource allocation and mobilization segment presents a financial flow analysis of 60 Union Parishads and 40 Pourashavas. Based on the financial flow analysis, a more in-depth analysis of the financial operations of five local government units was conducted. In addition, the financial documents listed below were also analyzed.

Financial document analysis

In attempting to understand the issues related to resource allocation and mobilization, a number of basic documents were examined. These include:

- Union Council Tax Rules 1960
- Model Tax Schedule 1968
- The Municipal Committee (Preparation & Sanction of Budget) Rules 1974
- The Municipal Committee (Taxation) Rules 1960
- The Municipal Committee (Property) Rules 1960
- Municipal Accounts Rules 1932
- The Pourashava Ordinance 1977 (Third Schedule Rule 59)
- The Pourashava Model Tax Schedule 1985

Analysis of these documents shows that many rules and procedures are outdated and tend to treat local government as administrative units under the control of a central administrative machinery. Other rules which are the basis of collection, distribution, and redistribution are not in tandem with the current view of local government and the expectation local governments are being required to meet. Finally, the document analysis also showed that many rules are not followed, and implementation of the rules is very important to the management of the financial system. As a result of the analysis of financial documents, the recommendation segment specifically mentions where rules and regulations need to be changed or enforced, in order to make the financial management system stronger, and where the allocation system has to be modernized to meet with current expectations.

Financial analysis

Financial data is reported in three parts. The information on Pourashavas is reported in two tables on revenue and expenditure. A second group reports on the Union Parishads. The third group is the per capita revenue and expenditure of Pourashavas and Union Parishads.

Pourashava revenue and expenditure pattern

Analysis of Pourashava revenue shows significant differences between the three classes of Pourashavas. The difference in the average revenue-generation capacity between Class C and B is two times, and between B and A, more than three times. It is also important to note that

at the high end, the income-generating capacity of Class A Pourashavas is four or five times that of Class B and C Pourashavas.

One interesting result of the financial analysis is that among the three classes of Pourashavas, Class C Pourashavas seems to be receiving the highest level of government grants. The average Class C Pourashava receives government grants amounting to 77 percent of total revenue. Classes B and A receive 62 percent and 51 percent respectively.

In the expenditure category, the average allocation between salaries/allowances and development and management seems to be around the same level for Class A Pourashavas. Differences between salaries and development for Class B and C Pourashavas are considerably more. Class B Pourashavas seems to spend twice as much on development as on salaries, and Class C spends four times more on development than on salaries.

Given that Class C spends more resources on development, coupled with the fact that they receive on the average more resources from the central government, one can safely assume that current policy for urban local government tends to emphasize Class C Pourashavas more than Class B or A.

Pourashava Revenue Profile
(In Tk thousands)

	<u>Average</u>	<u>High</u>	<u>Low</u>
<u>Own-source revenue</u>			
Pourashava A	10,272	25,017	3,286
Pourashava B	3,199	5,177	1,886
Pourashava C	1,608	4,663	545
<u>Types of revenue*</u>			
Pourashava A			
Taxes	3,265	6,960	639
Rates	1,812	5,390	329
Fees	870	4,080	65
Pourashava B			
Taxes	1,145	3,594	224
Rates	571	1,210	73
Fees	235	844	9

*Some types of revenue do not add up to total own source, as there are other miscellaneous sources.

	<u>Average</u>	<u>High</u>	<u>Low</u>
Pourashava C			
Taxes	343	928	128
Rates	305	878	77
Fees	82	343	1

Government grants

Pourashava A	13,700 (51)**	36,050 (83)	1,895 (22)
Pourashava B	8,970 (62)	61,019 (77)	2,816 (43)
Pourashava C	5,147 (77)	14,630 (90)	2,808 (38)

Total revenue

Pourashava A	23,857	58,127	4,234
Pourashava B	12,078	65,135	4,871
Pourashava C	6,619	16,569	3,430

** Shown as percent of total revenue

Pourashava Expenditure Pattern
(In Tk thousands)

<u>Expenditure</u>	<u>Average</u>	<u>High</u>	<u>Low</u>
Pourashava A			
Salaries & Allowances	10,094	74,404	1,477
Office Maintenance	482	1,490	30
Services	1,254	5,537	98
Development & Management	14,200	32,362	3,849
Miscellaneous	451	1,491	61
Pourashava B			
Salaries & Allowances	2,114	3,716	835
Office Maintenance	159	292	53
Services	446	1,802	68
Development & Management	5,111	11,936	1,904
Miscellaneous	141		226

78

Pourashava C

Salaries & Allowances	909	1,340	400
Office Maintenance	104	228	18
Services	154	480	6
Development & Management	4,115	9,463	2,187
Miscellaneous	73	200	24

Union Parishad revenue and expenditure pattern

Analysis of the financial picture of Union Parishads was complex and difficult. Missing data created the initial problem, but the size and diversity among the Union Parishads also contributed. Financial data was collected for the 60 Union Parishads and then aggregated at the Thana level. The Union Parishad revenue profile then shows the Thana-level average. The expenditure profile shows the ten Thanads being used. Within each Thana, six Union Parishads were selected, giving a total of 60.

The average own-source revenue is only Tk 88,000, most of which comes from taxes on land and buildings and Chowkidar tax. Based on the total revenue and share of government grants at the Union Parishad level, it was calculated that government grants amount to only 36.2 percent of Union Parishad revenue — much less than even class A Pourashavas.

Union Parishad Revenue Profile (in Tk thousands)

	<u>Average</u>	<u>High</u>	<u>Low</u>
Own-Source Revenue	88,724	123,270	65,332
Taxes on Land and Building	50,778	62,543	15,358
Chowkadari Tax	23,960	33,082	12,400
Rates and Fees	7,925	25,233	721
Own Property Taxes	8,268	25,975	1,150
Government Grants	42,379	74,695	29,378
Government Grants (percent)	36.2		

While income is quite meager, the expenditure patterns of Union Parishads reveal an interesting picture. An analysis of the Union Parishad expenditure shows that the single largest expenditure is on salaries and honoraria. A breakdown of average expenditure on salaries and honoraria is provided for each of the ten Thanas. The expenditure pattern shows that average expenditure on salaries is 76 percent, with a high of 88 and a low of 60. This does not allow the Union Parishads to undertake many developmental programmes or service delivery. Of the 38 assigned tasks, UPs are able to carry out 5 or 6 responsibilities.

The most significant indication of the capacity of local government is provided by the per capita revenue and expenditure data. In Bangladesh, per capita revenue is Tk 85 in Class A Pourashavas, Tk 58 in Class B and Tk 55 in Class C. However, local income generation at the rural areas is extremely low — only Tk 4 per capita at the Union Parishad level.

Union Parishad Expenditure Pattern
(percent)

Average Expenditure on Salary and Honoraria by Thana

	<u>Average</u>	<u>High</u>	<u>Low</u>
Alfandanga	88	96	78
Faridpur	74	94	58
Brahmanpara	77	87	65
Daudkandi	73	90	61
Chatmohor	87	93	65
Ishwardi	78	100	53
Jessore	58	92	09
Sharsha	87	98	75
Bakerganj	79	96	71
Ujirpur	60	81	01

Per Capita Revenue and Expenditure
(in Tk)

	<u>Per capita revenue</u>	<u>Per capita expenditure</u>
Pourashava A	85	215
Pourashava B	58	144
Pourashava C	55	182
Union Parishads	4	27

All three classes of Pourashavas as well as Union Parishads show significant deficits. In Class A Pourashavas, expenditure is 252 percent higher than revenue. The figures for Classes B and C are 248 percent and 330 percent respectively. None of these local governments are viable without significant assistance from the central government. At the Union Parishad level, expenditure is 625 percent higher than revenue.

In the final analysis, local government financial data shows that local government will not become self-reliant or semi-autonomous without dramatic financial changes.

Further examination of financial condition through interviews with local government officials identified a number of other areas of concern. These areas will need substantial support and upgrading before local governments can perform as viable systems and partners within the overall structure and process of democratic governance in Bangladesh.

Conclusions

Resource mobilization — Pourashavas do not mobilize sufficient resources and are structurally and procedurally not geared towards resource mobilization. Union Parishads generally have meager resources, and unless substantial financial support is provided or the structure of resource mobilization is changed, they cannot function as service delivery and development systems.

Financial management — While management is somewhat better in the Pourashavas, a number of general financial management and budgeting improvements are still required. These can include changing to double-entry accounting, conducting all financial transactions through banks, improving the classification system, and separating the capital budget from the operating budget. Other financial improvements must deal with grants management.

Assessment — More regular assessment will provide local governments with a level of stability and self-reliance in their own resources and capacity.

Record keeping — Adequate record-keeping is fundamental to effective local government. Improvement in the capacity not only to assess resources, but also to track those resources is necessary.

Tax collection — Collection procedures need to be strengthened through fair and just implementation of tax rules and regulations — backed with punitive measures, such as the enforcement of distress warrants. Any strengthening process must also include proper training for collectors.

Taxes of central government agencies — For community members to pay their fair share of taxes, agencies of the central government should set a good example. When central agencies do

not pay their local taxes, individuals and groups in the local community will have little faith in the local government system.

Good service delivery — Resource mobilization is intricately linked to levels of service delivery. The study found that local governments which were able to provide a high level of service, were also able to collect more taxes.

Recommendations

For Union Parishads only

1. The existing tax sources of the Union Parishads should be applied more rigorously.

Holding tax should be structured so that equity in tax administration is ensured. [The Union Council (Taxation) Rules, 1960].
2. Fees from hats and bazaars should be realized regularly.

These are a good revenue sources for UPs. [The Union Council (Taxation) Rules, 1960].
3. The UPs should mobilize additional revenue from existing sources and try to tap new sources.

Direct taxation in the rural areas may not provide the best answer for the ills of these local bodies, so they should also think through innovative ways to mobilize natural and human resources. The best examples of natural resource mobilization are tree plantation, fisheries projects and other labor-intensive programmes that may be jointly undertaken by local governments and NGOs.
4. Thanas should assist the UPs with assessments.

None of the UPs studied were using the assessment system. They complained about the complexities of the assessment process, and felt that it could be done more systematically with the help of external assessors. [The Union Council (Taxation) Rules, 1960, Rules 22 and 43A].
5. The central grants system should be structured to encourage mobilization of additional resources.

The grant amount currently provided to the UPs is very inadequate for undertaking a reasonable range of activities. Higher grants with proper accountability mechanisms should be devised in order to involve local bodies in the development process. The grant programme should also be made equitable and purposeful.

6. Public services in the rural areas should be extended.

People cannot be asked to pay if they are not provided with a basic minimum of public services. The central government departments, such as the Local Government Engineering Department and the Department of Public Health, should be mobilized to work with the UPs in phases to extend public services to the rural areas. In large-scale projects like embankments, electricity generation and irrigation, UPs should be involved so that they can gather experience. The best way to develop the lost glory of the Union Parishads is to emphasize their importance in every possible way.

7. Land transaction tax should be shared by the Government with the UPs so that local bodies can feel a direct connection with the Government.
8. The tax rate structure should be revised.

The rates were fixed about three decades ago and are now out of date, especially the business and trade taxes. A more realistic tax schedule should be prepared by the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives. [The Union Council (Taxation) Rules, 1960, Rule 44; and Model Tax Schedules, 1968, Schedule 5].

9. UPs should make best use of their own land.

This would ensure that they yield a return and also remain in the possession of the UPs. Lack of use encourages illegal transactions and misuse of land.

Recommendations

For Pourashavas only

1. Pourashavas should establish a proper system of cash management.

The Pourashavas at present operate on a cash flow basis. The annual budget proposes the amount of revenues and expenditures. Several bank accounts are maintained and recurrent expenses are met from the available resources with any one of the accounts. The capital fund is often used for salary payments and the like. Annual planning of total potential resources and a smooth inflow of revenue will help to avoid this situation. Maintenance of a smaller number of bank accounts and keeping funds in interest-bearing accounts will bring in interest income for Pourashavas as well as help smooth out cash flow peaks and bumps. [The Pourashava Ordinance, 1977; The Municipal Committee (Preparation and Sanction of Budget) Rules, 1974]

2. Pourashava budgeting has to be modernized.

Firstly, annual budgeting should be undertaken as part of a longer-term plan of investment and resource generation. With the truncated method of present budget-making, essential linkages between several budgets are lost, and surplus management is seldom planned. Budget-makers should make realistic assumptions about revenue earnings from internal sources. Three-monthly assumptions about expected revenue earnings should be made in line with quarterly billing systems for tax revenues in order to prepare revised budgets. [The Pourashava Ordinance, 1977; The Municipal Committee (Preparation and Sanction of Budget) Rules, 1974]

3. Set up a grants accounting and management system.

Grants make up more than 60 percent of total expenditure in most Pourashavas. In this situation, maintenance of separate disaggregated accounts for grants utilization is absolutely essential. [The Municipal Accounts Rules, 1932]

4. Regular reassessments should be carried out in the Pourashavas.

Property should be assessed on a three-year cycle. This is particularly important where reassessments have not been carried out in the last five years. This should include properties whose rental rate has significantly increased and whose occupancy status has changed from owner to rental. Three-yearly assessment will be better than five yearly assessment to reflect accurately the changes in property valuations.

5. Properties in Pourashavas should be given permanent holding numbers.

A tax cadastre can assign permanent holding numbers to properties. Presently, properties have no number as such and are identified in relation to street or locality address. [The Municipal Committee (Taxation) Rules, 1960, Rule 26]

6. Pourashava assessor(s) may be engaged for base assessment and periodic reassessments.

In some Pourashavas, assessment is carried out with hired persons, although they have permanently employed assessors. The Pourashava assessors remain accountable for their activities, but the hired ones do not. For periodic assessments also, the permanent assessors can provide necessary information. The assessors will report any change in structure or any new construction to the Chief Executive Officer or Secretary for revised property valuation or addition to the tax roll. [The Municipal Committee (Taxation) Rules, 1960, Rule 23]

7. Owner occupancy deduction should be allowed only for residential holdings.

Owner-occupied houses being used for purposes of business, office or industry may be taxed at the normal rate rather than reduced rate, since they can make a profit from their premises. [The Municipal Committee (Taxation) Rules, 1960, Rule 23(ii)]

8. Property records and tax collection records should be kept up to date.

Regular posting of tax collection information on tax registers allows for checking of payment status and makes it possible to serve tax notices in time. [The Municipal Committee (Taxation) Rules, 1960, Rule 30.]

9. Additional tax collectors may be hired on a commission basis.

The rate of commission may be fixed by individual Pourashavas. One Pourashava which engaged tax collectors on a commission basis has been successful in mobilizing arrear taxes. This will also improve the work performance of the permanent tax collectors. [The Pourashava Ordinance, 1977, The Third Schedule, Rule 18.]

10. Distress warrants should be instituted for properties with overdue tax.

In the absence of punitive measures, many taxpayers may not pay. The Government has recently deputed magistrates to Class I Pourashavas for various purposes. These magistrates can use their power to help the Pourashavas in proper assessments of property and tax collection. [The Pourashava Ordinance, 1977, The Third Schedule, Rule 59.]

11. Proper rates should be applied to professions and trades.

There is gross underimposition of tax for large business houses. The government rate revised in 1985 provides some room for variable taxes on traders on the basis of volume of transactions. There is scope for increasing the rates. The traders pay only about 1% of their annual income as trade tax. [The Pourashava Model Tax Schedules, 1985, Schedule 7].

12. Pourashavas undertaking market construction programmes should have profitability considerations for such endeavors.

The returns should include all costs plus profit. The Pourashavas should adopt appropriate pricing policies and tendering procedures to enable maximum returns on investments. [The Municipal Committee (Property) Rules, 1960, Rule 7.]

13. Pourashavas should introduce a double-entry accounting system.

This would mean changing the existing regulations in local government accounts system and training the accounts personnel. The initiative for this change should come from the Pourashavas. [The Municipal Accounts Rules, 1932.]

14. Revenues and expenditures should be more logically classified.

A revision of the classification should be made in the Municipal Administration Rules of 1960 to provide meaningful ordering of heads and subheads. Capital and recurrent expenditures and revenue should be extracted, and separate information for services should be made available, to show the sectoral balance of investments. Development and maintenance expenditures will be shown separately. So will the accounts for markets, shops and buildings. Special project accounts will be separately maintained with every detail. The summary of accounts will be incorporated in the budget books. [The Municipal Committee (Preparation and Sanction of Budget) Rules, 1974]

15. Tax arrangements with government agencies should be improved.

Arrangements should be made with different agencies so that Pourashava tax payments clearance is required for property transfer, erection of buildings, nomination for election, water and electricity connections and so on.

16. Establish periodically new schedules of profession, trade and callings tax rates.

It has been seven years since the latest revision in 1985. The new rates should keep in view the question of tax equity.

17. The Pourashavas should try to enhance the value of their own properties.

This would mean installing the necessary services and, where appropriate, raising the land level by earth-filling. When funds are available, Pourashavas should purchase low-lying land, fill it up and enhance its value. Local governments should also take all measures to secure the land in their possession.

VII. BEST HOME-GROWN PRACTICES: THE BUILDING BLOCKS FOR REINVENTION

Local councils, cooperatives and other formal organizations are often hampered by rules and regulations, or by lack of resources and management capacity. But even in these circumstances many organizations, groups or even individuals continue to set examples of innovative and original work. This chapter looks at some of these achievements which could be duplicated by others.

The search for the best home-grown practices at the local government level was conducted first by identifying public organizations which were recognizing and rewarding practices at the local level. Since the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (LGRD) is the lead organization responsible for local governance, this was a natural choice. Others involved in local activities and offering recognition for outstanding performance include the Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB), the Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD), the Rural Development Academy (RDA), the National Institute of Local Government (NILG), the Department of Cooperatives, the Department of Social Services, and the Small Farmer Development Programme (SFDP). Information was also received from NGOs and leading researchers in the field of local government.

From the pool thus generated, 12 were selected as offering overall best practices at the local level. They all scored very high on five major factors: motivation, mobilization of resources, management patterns, impact, and sustainability. These five factors are derived from analysis of different criteria and variables used by the award granting agencies. A concise analysis of how these five factors are present in the 12 cases chosen as best home-grown practices is offered prior to reporting on the 12 cases in an outline format.

Motivation

One of the most important elements of motivation is the issue of leadership. In each of these cases an individual or group provided outstanding leadership. In 11 of the 12 cases, the initiative for the programme was generated internally, even when ultimately there was external support. In each case the leadership was able to tap into a felt need to 'do something' and encourage people to be enthusiastic about the project and also to be receptive to new ideas, suggestions and improvements. In some of the Union Parishads the starting point was the Chairman's desire to ensure reelection which prompted consideration of innovative activities and ideas.

Mobilization of resources

In all these cases there was a widespread attempt to co-opt individuals and organizations, both locally and externally, into providing support for the project. The Tilottama Women's Organization generated funds from voluntary contributions from their members, and then sought support from outside. The Kasba Union Parishad received support from the Asian Development Bank for construction of roads, canals and bridges, but also looked elsewhere for help with other

activities. They received pumps and water-sealed latrines from the Dhaka Rotary Club and from the NGO, Proshika. For health and eye-care services they appealed to physicians of the Comilla Sadar Hospital and the Bangladesh National Society for the Blind.

Management pattern

Good management involves reliable personnel, efficient management structures, and open and participatory decision-making. The Bomoil Co-operative, for example, developed a sub-committee specifically for development projects. But it also holds weekly meetings, where members can inspect the accounts and participate in decision-making. There is also an Annual general meeting, where members can check on financial management and progress of projects. The Tilottama Women's Organization took a somewhat different approach. They set up an Advisory Committee to provide overall guidance and direction and also hired a Project Director. Here there is much less participation by the field staff and beneficiaries. Despite this limited transparency and openness they have maintained excellent standards.

Impact

In all these projects, the effects went far beyond the primary beneficiaries and were felt by the whole community. The Habilashdeep Union Parishad, for example, brought under afforestation all the 89 km. of roads in the Union, as well as all the available lands belonging to educational and religious institutions. As a result of this success, a youth club in the area planted another 5,000 saplings and individual households also started planting trees. A number of individual nurseries were established to cater for the growing market for saplings. The model fish farm has also had a wide impact. Apart from employing 120 people full time, and an additional 300 on a seasonal basis, it has also provided free practical training on fish cultivation to almost 300 people.

Sustainability

All 12 of these studies demonstrate that they are likely to survive in the long term because their practices are being institutionalized. The Chamata Women's Groups' involvement in income-generating activities and participation in decision-making, for example, has given them a level of independence which will serve as the basis for continuity. Projects such as those for afforestation and cow's milk production are also likely to last because they stimulate both economic independence and social consciousness. Part of the sustainability in these projects is the direct result of income-generation, the multiplier effect, growing self-confidence resulting from success and the belief that it is possible to overcome difficult situations.

In the following sections, the 12 cases are briefly reviewed, and their details with respect to motivation, mobilization of resources, management pattern, impact and sustainability are available in a separate volume.

Case 1: Village development through local level planning:
Bomoil Comprehensive Village Development Cooperative

Bomoil Village is located in the Panchthubi Union of Sadar Thana, Comilla. The total area is 2.59 sq. km., with a population of 2,340. In 1962, influenced by the activities of the Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development, some villagers formed a cooperative. The primary purpose of the cooperative is to develop physical infrastructure, increase farm production, undertake income generation activities, generate employment and increase capital formation. The main driving forces for these activities are local-level planning and a participatory management pattern.

Case 2: Irrigation management through a cooperative:
Panchkitta Comprehensive Village Development Cooperative

Panchkitta Village is located in the Brahmanpur Thana of Comilla District and has a population of 1,523. In 1975 it established a cooperative, primarily to improve the irrigation system using deep tubewells. In 1984 it became part of the BARD Comprehensive Village Development Programme. Since then it has increased the area under production as well as the yields per acre of the main agricultural products — rice and vegetables. The balanced distribution of water resources and the stability of the system have enabled the cooperative to become one of the most successful in the country. Proper utilization of deep tubewells for raising production and income generation has been the main motivation. A participatory and responsible management system, through the Irrigation Sub-Committee and Annual General Meeting, has been a key element.

Case 3: Family planning through an NGO:
Tilottama Voluntary Women's Organization

This was established in 1978 in Rajshahi District by gynecologist Professor Jabaida Khatun and is composed of doctors, college teachers and social workers. The primary purpose is community development through the emancipation of women, particularly through better education and health care. Since 1979 it has also operated in the area of family planning. The organization has made significant increase in contraceptive use, reduced mortality rate of mothers and children, and improved health and education of women.

Case 4: Women's empowerment: Chamata women's groups

Chamata Village is located in Sholy Union of Charchat Thana of Rajshahi District. The women's groups, of which there are ten, were formed in 1990 and are organized under the sponsorship of the Social Services Department of the Government of Bangladesh. The primary purpose is to empower women by raising their awareness, skills and income-generating capacity. The groups receive training in poultry farming, kitchen gardening and tree plantation.

Case 5: Milk cow rearing at the household level: Dishaband small farmer group

This is part of BARD's small farmers and landless labourers development programme (SFDP) initiated in 1979. Dishaband is in Chowara Union of Sadar Thana, Comilla District. The primary purpose of the group is income generation by utilizing credit from local banks. The group rears milk cows and sells calves for Eid ceremonies.

Case 6: Private hatchery for fish production

The Model Fish Farm was established in 1978 by Mr Siddique Choudhury. Mr Choudhury's father used to provide fingerlings to people in the surrounding villages. Mr Choudhury learned the process from his father, but over a period of time changed it into a modern fish farm, through which he is able to generate a significant income for himself and provide employment for 120 persons.

Case 7: Improvement of health and sanitation: Bashikpur Union Parishad

Bashikpur Union Parishad is located in Sadar Thana of Lakshmipur District. The total area of the union is 27 sq. km. There are 19 villages in the union, which has a total population of 26,036. The union is in a low-lying area which is prone to flooding, and transport and communications are not well developed. The union's literacy rate — 47 percent — is above the national average. The Chairman and Members of the Union Parishad organized activities, in cooperation with local school teachers, Imams and NGOs, to raise the awareness of local people about improved health and sanitation. They cooperated with relevant government agencies to spread this awareness, specifically on the use of handpumps and water-sealed latrines.

Case 8: Afforestation: Habilashdip Union Parishad

Habilashdip Union Parishad is located 35 km. from Chittagong. The total area of the union is 13 sq. km. with a population of 26,270. The literacy rate — 55 percent — is much higher than the national average. The main development activity for the union is its afforestation project. The union organized with the help of Forestry Department a massive programme of awareness about afforestation, undertook a plantation programme using fallow land, roadside land and private areas. The Union Parishad used its own funds and other private and government resources and cooperated with various agencies, including the staff of Agricultural Extension, Rural Maintenance Programme, Vulnerable Group Development (VGD), Village Police and VDP Ansars.

Case 9: Realization of local tax: Eliotgong (North) Union Parishad

Eliotgong (North) Union Parishad is located in Comilla District and does not have large-scale economic activities. Nevertheless, it uses a very innovative method of raising revenue to provide local services. It prepared its budget in consultation with local people and three wards, thereby linking its income sources with development projects. Ward committees are formed and ward

members were made responsible for tax collection. Tax realization rose to 95% of assessment. They facilitated regular payment of salary for Secretary and local Police as well as support development activities.

Case 10: Law and order and village courts: Mirzanagar Union Parishad

Mirzanagar Union Parishad is located in the Parshuran Thana of Feni District. It has a total area of 24 sq. km., with a population of 19,078. As it is close to the Indian border, the Union Parishad has special problems with law and order, particularly smuggling. Through organizing local committees and securing cooperation of Thana officials and the Bangladesh Rifles, the Union Council improved the security of the people, controlled illegal activities and facilitated settlement of disputes at the village court at a lower cost and in a short time.

Case 11: Development activities through the Union Parishad: Kasba Union Parishad

Kasba Union Parishad consists of 33 villages in the Kasba Thana of Brahmanbaria District. There are 4,494 acres of cultivable land, of which 2,500 acres have been brought under cultivation. The literacy rate has increased from 32 to 36 percent. The Union Parishad organized development committees in key areas like public works, health and sanitation, education and agriculture, secured the cooperation of relevant government departments and NGOs and organized improvement activities and services. Through these programmes, it developed physical infrastructure, improved health, sanitation and education status, increased the use of contraceptives and contributed to increased agricultural production.

Case 12: Population control: Nowhata Union Parishad

Nowhata Union Parishad is located in the Paba Thana of Rajshahi District. It consists of 41 villages, with a total population of 40,000 and an area of 39 sq. km. The literacy rate is 30 percent. The union has one health centre and one family welfare centre. The Union Council organized mass meetings with the help of family planning officials and created public interest in the increased adoption of family planning methods, which led to a significant reduction of the birth rate in the union.

Capitalizing on best practices

These cases show that in the midst of pessimism about local government there are also grounds for optimism. Systematic dissemination of information about these cases, development of self-learning packages, incorporation in training courses and motivational seminars and workshops to highlight potentials and possibilities are some of the ways in which these cases can be used. These cases can serve as models to show others that it is possible to change, grow and develop despite adversity. A three phase plan is offered to incorporate the findings of the best practices into the process of strengthening the local government system in Bangladesh.

Phase I: Immediate action

A monthly training workshop could be held in each District under the supervision of the District Administration. The findings of the best home-grown practices can be used in such training workshops.

The Government could instruct the relevant training institutions, NILG, BARD, PATC and RDA, to include the experiences of the best home-grown practices in their current training curriculum.

The lessons of the best home-grown practices could be disseminated at the local level through the Thana Development and Coordination Committee (TDCC) and at the Thana level using the Thana Training and Development Centre (TTDC).

The concerned ministry or departments could take immediate steps to document all the best practices and disseminate the major findings to the people in the rural areas through mass media. However, the current selection criteria of the best projects by the Ministry of LGRD need to be reassessed. They should be more detailed and quantifiable.

Phase II: One to three years

An experimental project could be initiated at the Union level, incorporating all the major innovative practices.

A separate cell should be set up at the Thana level (preferably with a local government organization) to collect best home-grown practices information.

Phase III: Five years plus

Workshops and seminars can be organized periodically at the District level to disseminate the findings of the best home-grown practices.

The Planning Commission of the Government may look into the findings for incorporation in the efforts towards participatory perspective planning.

VIII. THE FUTURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN BANGLADESH

The future of local government in Bangladesh depends on the will of elected representatives of the people and key national policy-makers and decision-makers to make informed and hard choices. This study on Local Government in Bangladesh lays the foundations for making such choices.

Governance includes the cooperation and cooptation of all individuals and groups in society, and not merely activities and functions that governments singlehandedly undertake by themselves. The study found that governance is thriving in all corners of Bangladesh. People are organizing themselves. What governments in the past have attempted to do in local administration, however, has and continues to be of limited significance. *Herein lies the first critical choice.* Policy-makers and decision-makers must make a fundamental choice that at the local level the issue is governance and not government.

Governance refers to a process through which all individuals and groups in society can participate in making choices about social, cultural, economic, and political benefits and costs. Government at the local level, on the other hand, refers to the organizations and structures through which governance takes place. Local government without local governance is of limited use. Toying with local government, as has been done in the past, without ensuring local governance is a ready-made formula for failure.

A Vision for Local Governance

The constitution of Bangladesh through its preamble, fundamental principles and articles provides some guidance for both governance and government. Effective participation of people through elected representatives (article 11) and elected bodies (article 59) provides the essential framework for governance, though not a comprehensive framework. Article 9 requires that governmental institutions be set up at all administrative units to provide for basic local government organizations and structure.

This study complements the constitution of Bangladesh by developing a vision for local governance. Four fundamental vision statements arise out of the analysis and findings of the study. These are:

1. The individual Bangladeshi is capable and resilient, despite adversities, and is deserving of trust and management of public goods and services.
2. Self-governance is possible and is a desirable outcome of democratic institution-building.
3. The inclusion of all social groups is a fundamental necessity for autonomous local government.

4. Local government is an integral part of a comprehensive national governance vision of partnership between central government units and local government units.

Turning Vision into Reality

The convergence of the expressions of the articles in the constitution and the vision evolving out of the study provide a comprehensive framework for initiating a system of governance and government structure at the local level which is not only integrated but also in tune with the emerging democratic system of Bangladesh. To turn the vision into reality will require decision-makers and policy-makers to make fundamental changes in their attitude and thinking about governance and local government.

The principal thought and attitudinal change requires them to think and accept that people at all levels are organizing themselves in the pursuit of all their businesses. Governance is going on at all levels for different purposes. These are at times parallel with the local government structure, at times superseding or subordinate, at times independent, autonomous, self-serving, and at times cooperating and coordinating with the formal local government system. Governance and government join at some points and separate at many other points.

Local government is a part of the governance system and must align itself with evolving trends in governance. The study found that there is a growing sense of empowerment among the people for a variety of reasons. At all levels people in Bangladesh feel that they are able to take care of themselves. There is also an emerging realization that governments at all levels must respond to the needs of the people. If governments do not respond to their needs, the people will withdraw their consent. Governments today in Bangladesh can only rule with the consent of the people. Local and national elections have provided sufficient evidence of this concept. Thus, the second attitudinal change, already institutionalized at the national level, and must be institutionalized at the local level, is that governments can govern only with the consent of the people and that this consent is constantly scrutinized and checked.

As people are organizing themselves in groups, the designs of these organizations are unique and unsymmetrical to fit the purpose of the group activity. Therefore the third attitudinal change requires policy-makers to think of local government not as a single administrative entity but as entities which within a broad framework can show many different shapes, sizes and configurations. One can no longer think of a hierarchical local government system where all are doing the same things, at the same time, in the same format and utilizing the same structures.

Experience with local government in Bangladesh has already established that local governments do not necessarily stay within the bound of the restrictive functions assigned to them, nor do they operate in the standardized structure. Even when the local governments are depoliticized, they remain political. Successful local governments have gone beyond the assigned tax structure to form their own tax systems, or have formed management committees reaching all classes of people to formulate and implement programmes and projects.

The fourth attitudinal change will require decision-makers to realize that different levels of local governments can have different functions, or the same function at different levels, with varying scope. It will also require them to accept that even at the same level, local governments will vary in their functional priority and direction. This understanding of governance is critical for designing an integrated local government system. For example, from a purely organizational design perspective, the Union Parishad, which has an average population of 25,000, can serve as a primary level for the economic development and planning function of local government. On the other hand, for community decision-making, participation and community leadership, the appropriate level may be the village or ward. For resource mobilization and allocation purposes, the appropriate level may be at the upazila level. For local government to serve as a training ground for national political leadership, the district may be the appropriate level of local government. All levels are necessary and important to the overall needs of self-governance.

While the attitudinal changes prepare the policy-makers and decision-makers for the future, certain realities of local government must be, at the same time, acknowledged and incorporated into the design of any future local government system. These include:

Historical, constitutional and legal status

The present local government structure is a legacy of the past. Until 1971, local bodies operated within a federal structure under the provincial government. Local bodies like Union boards, District boards and municipalities were adjuncts to the provincial government for the delivery of municipal services at the local level. After 1971, the independent country of Bangladesh became a unitary republic in which the central government is the only level of government. In the true sense of the term there is no local government. But the institutional framework of local bodies that existed before independence, i.e., prior to 1971, still continues. Thus there is an apparent inconsistency between the legacy and the reality. One indication of this historical legacy is that local bodies have a wide variety of names. Rural local bodies are called Parishads or councils (viz. Zila Parishad, Union Parishad). The urban local bodies are called Shavas or meetings/conferences (poura-shava) and 'corporations' (city corporations). On the other hand, local bodies in three hill Districts of Chittagong go by the name of 'Hill District Local Government Parishad'.

The status of local governments is not well articulated and defined in the Constitution. Although the Constitution provides for local governments at various administrative levels, it does not define local government. It does not identify its structure and functions, and does not recognize local government as a level of government with necessary executive and legislative autonomy and a division of functions between the center and the local. Nor does it provide for protection of local governments against arbitrary action by the central government.

Currently local government is covered by various acts/ordinances, rules and regulations, which result in a very complicated legal framework. These instruments have been subjected to many amendments according to political and administrative exigencies. As a result, many of the instruments and the provisions thereunder have lost context as well as relevance, and many of

them are never applied. Many of the weaknesses in the legal framework are highlighted in the study. There is an urgent need to consolidate, simplify and rationalize laws and regulations on local government.

Functions, autonomy and operation

Theoretically, rural local bodies have an impressive list of functions. But in practice, most have been taken over by various government agencies, which have deployed officials locally to carry them out. So far local bodies have essentially been service delivery organizations, and have acted as important agencies for local planning and development. But local government functionaries remain subordinate to the central officials working in the local area. One example is their position with regard to the police. In the absence of any effective function in enforcement matters they always remain subservient to the local police. A similar situation prevails with regard to development officials like the TNO and the Thana Engineer of LGED — particularly those who command resources to be disbursed and distributed, and have projects to be executed. At the same time, new and emerging functions are being taken over by the NGOs. All this leaves local governments with only activities which show little immediate impact or benefit.

At present local government units are 'governments' in name only. They do not enjoy executive autonomy. Most operational matters are regulated by the central government through various rules and executive orders which curb the autonomy of local bodies. These rules, and the power to amend them virtually at will by the Ministry, has made local bodies completely subservient to the central bureaucracy. The officials of some central government agencies working at the local level often enjoy more executive freedom than the local bodies. The law does provide for local bodies to devise their own regulations, but in practice none do so.

The existence of numerous government ministries, departments and agencies with elaborate networks is a dominant feature of public administration. But the central agencies have generally failed to develop a community-based and participatory approach to the delivery of services or implementation of development programmes; as a result, these agencies rely on the rural local governments and use them as their agents. Lacking in resources and substantive functions, the Union Parishads are thus obliged to perform the agency role to the neglect of their own statutory functions. It would, however, be possible to harmonize this conflict between statutory and agency functions by transferring many of the agency functions like education and health services to local bodies, and providing them with accompanying resources, secured by specifying roles of central and local government units with respect to each other's services.

Finance and Personnel

Financing the rural local bodies remains an Achilles heel. None of the existing units of rural local bodies (including the TDCC) has been able to generate enough finance. One reason is that the existing base for local resource generation is split among them very thinly. If local taxes, fees and rates realizable by Union Parishads, TDCCs and Zila Parishads were put together, they would come to a sizeable amount. Besides, the tax base was determined a long time back. It is

only logical that if wider services are expected of them, their tax base has to be widened, definitely by transferring or sharing central tax sources. In addition to widening the tax base, there should also be more serious measures for both assessing and collecting taxes, including the option of centralizing assessment and collection by one tier say the District Council or the central government.

Grants from higher levels of government play a significant role. These grants cover specific services that local government is expected to provide for local areas. They also include general budgetary support, often called an equalizing grant, to maintain the level and quality of services for local government bodies which vary in size and affluence. Continuation of grants will be required if the local government system is to become a viable level of government in Bangladesh.

One common argument cited against the local governments in general is that they do not have the capacity or capability to deliver services or perform assigned functions. Lack of personnel, along with severe restraint on financial resources, does not permit most local governments in Bangladesh to be effective units for service delivery. For example, with only one Secretary and few rural police persons in the Union Parishad, the personnel capacity of the Union Parishad is virtually nonexistent. In the local areas, however, numerous government departments and agencies are represented locally by innumerable officials. The officials command resources and control important regulatory functions. Their presence is often awe-inspiring for local government bodies and their functionaries.

Relationships with the central government

There is an unbalanced relationship between the central government and the local governments. The centre-local linkage occurs in the matters of (i) overseeing the functioning of local governments, (ii) providing financial support and (iii) assigning additional functions, as need be, to be performed on behalf of the central government. In most countries the centre-local linkage is formally defined in a spirit of accommodation and partnership between two 'governments' rather than between superior and subordinate, or between patron and client. In Bangladesh, however, local governments operate more as subordinate agencies of the central government. Every effort should be made to make local government bodies operate as autonomous partners.

Presently the central government controls and regulates local governments through various laws and also reserves unhindered authority to supersede a local body or to suspend an elected Chairman. The existing law provides for the suspension of the Chairman of a Union Parishad, but does not specify the process of disposal or the time limit for such disposal. As a result, a Chairman considered recalcitrant for any reason may remain suspended for an indefinite period. There is no provision for appeal against an arbitrary action in this regard. Besides, in such cases the same authority (i.e. the Secretary of the Ministry) acts both as the prosecutor and the judge. There are also many ways in which the bureaucracy at the local level, particularly the Deputy Commissioner, exercises controlling authority over the local bodies and their elected

functionaries. At present local government is treated as a line function, like any other line function of the central government.

Accountability and Transparency

There is a chronic lack of accountability and transparency in the operations of local bodies. Centralization of executive power results in arbitrary use of power and hinders accountability through public discussion. Local government finances are similarly uncontrolled. Accounting systems are poorly maintained, and many local governments, especially at the Union Parishad level, do not maintain a bank account. Budgets are seldom properly prepared or discussed in the council. Drawn up by the officials, they are usually casually approved. Local bodies do not usually prepare an annual report and publicize their activities for public knowledge. In developing an integrated and autonomous local government system, the issues and practices of accountability and transparency deserve serious considerations.

Reality as the Basis for Programmes

In preparing to introduce an integrated and autonomous system of local government in Bangladesh, a systematic and consensual approach is urgently needed. Any temptation to apply ad hoc solutions should be avoided in favour of developing a national consensus on the role, function, structure, resources and relationships of an integrated and autonomous system of local government in Bangladesh, in congruence with the evolving system of democratic governance.

Constitutional and legislative agenda

Sufficient ideas and experience are available to develop constitutional provisions and necessary legislative measures, ensuring that governance belongs to the people and that autonomous government levels can coexist with one another. An ad hoc Constitutional Commission on Local Government, to outline the role, functions and resources of local government and its relationship with the central government, is needed. Such a Commission may comprise between 12 to 15 members, of whom about half should be members of Parliament, nominated by ruling and opposition political parties, and the rest from professions (law, education, civil service), NGOs and experienced local government leaders. Specific terms of reference for the commission should include, among others, position of local government in the overall scheme of governance in Bangladesh, making local government a separate level of government, and allocating local government with adequate financial resources and personnel. The Commission can also determine the modalities for separation of financial and personnel resources between central government and local government units, preparation of draft bills based on consensus proposals, and the formation of a permanent, autonomous Local Government Commission with judicial powers (as in the Election Commission) to deal with local government matters. The ad hoc Constitutional Commission should be supported by working groups dealing with the division of financial resources, creation of local government service organization of various types, determining the relationships between local government units and the central government, and drafting specific bills for the local government system. The concept of constitutional consensus

is an already established practice in Bangladesh politics, and an agreement on local government is a necessity.

One important aspect of the legislative agenda would be to undertake a comprehensive overhaul of all existing laws and ordinances to bring them in tandem with the new order of governance in Bangladesh.

A Local Government Committee of the Parliament may provide leadership and act as an oversight body to ensure the development of an autonomous local government system. The Local Government Committee can monitor implementation of the recommendations of the Constitutional Commission on Local Government.

The suggestion of a permanent Local Government Commission, as noted above, to be considered by the proposed ad hoc Constitutional Commission, needs some elaboration. It needs to recognize that in preparing to introduce an integrated and autonomous system of local government, it will be necessary to separate political processes from administrative interactions. Matters relating to the dismissal of the elected representatives are basically political or judicial, and should be decided accordingly. Matters relating to discharge of functions and handling of public money are administrative and financial in nature, and they can be dealt with administratively between central bureaucracies and local government. At present, local government is treated as the line function, and all activities relating to local government are the assigned line responsibility of the Ministry of Local Government. The rationale and practicality of considering local bodies as the line function of one particular ministry are debatable.

Local bodies should have access to all ministries on equal terms. The institution with responsibility to supervise, guide, represent, mediate, protect and defend the role and interests of local government cannot be an integral part of the central government. Such an institution needs to be autonomous of the central government and will need to insulate itself from the partisan and short-term political exigencies of the ruling party. One suggestion is to create a permanent Local Government Commission under the national Parliament. Members should be selected from various key walks of life, with a fixed tenure. This Commission will report to the Parliament on the workings of local government. It will have a formal linkage with the Office of the Prime Minister, in which a unit for local government should be established to deal with all matters of jurisdiction, conflict, interpretations and other key matters. The Commission will interact on administrative and financial matters with specific central government ministries.

Executive agenda

While the constitutional and legislative agendas are being addressed, the executive agenda can prepare the groundwork for the future autonomy of the local government system. In this process, the executive agenda may include the following:

- Comprehensive cooperation and management support by the national government to transfer apportioned financial resources to local government.

- Coordination between field offices and local government to develop a strategy for bringing all field offices under the management of local government.
- Developing a local government service.
- Expanding local government services and responsibilities, and providing the financial resources to undertake such responsibilities. A Finance Commission to review periodically (e.g. once in three years) the division of financial resources between the central government and local government may be organized.
- Support the development of an autonomous local government system through appropriate training.
- Organize technical support teams for management and professional development.

In essence, it will be the responsibility of the national government to develop a process through which it will divest itself of many responsibilities that can be better managed at the local level. It should also develop a process through which it will support the local government system in handling its increased responsibilities effectively and efficiently.

In the final analysis, this study reveals that there exists abundance of interest among opinion leaders from all walks of life for an integrated and autonomous system of local government. What has been missing in translating this interest into commitment and support is possibly a clear understanding of what it entails, and the process by which such interest can be articulated, and commitment and support can be mobilized from key institutions and leaders in society. To do this, a vision of local government has been outlined. Various key constraints to current practices and processes of local government have been analyzed throughout the report. At the same time, successes of local governance have been highlighted, from which the vision for local government has evolved.

If an autonomous local government system is the goal, a significant realignment in the thinking of all key actors, a consensus within the political system and cooperation between the executive and legislative branches have to be achieved. While the process is a complex one, the study provides sufficient illustrations to show that an autonomous local government system is not only possible but necessary.

Annex I

LAWS AND ORDINANCES ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

1972

President's Order No.7 (pre-1972 local bodies election declared improper and administrators were appointed)

1973

President's Order No. 22 (authorized elections to local bodies in 1973)

1976

Local Government Ordinance

1977

Paurashava Ordinance

1982

Local Government Ordinance (Upazila Parishad and Upazila Administration
Reorganization)
Chittagong Municipal Corporation Ordinance

1983

Local Government Ordinance (Union Parishad)
Local Government Ordinance (Upazila Parishad and Upazila Administration
Reorganization, Second Amendment)
Local Government Ordinance (Union Parishad Amendment)
Local Government Ordinance (Upazila Parishad and Upazila Administration
Reorganization, Third Amendment)
Local Government Ordinance (Upazila Parishad and Upazila Administration
Reorganization, Fourth Amendment)
Dhaka Municipal Corporation Ordinance

1984

Khulna Municipal Corporation Ordinance

1987

Rajshahi Municipal Corporation Act

1988

Local Government Act (Zila Parishad)

1989

**Rangamati Hill District Local Government Parishad Act
Khagrachari Hill District Local Government Parishad Act
Bandarban Hill District Local Government Parishad Act**

1991

**Local Government Repeal Ordinance (Upazila Parishad and Upazila Administration
Reorganization)**

Annex II

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বাংলাদেশের স্থানীয় সরকার

শাসন ব্যবস্থার এক নতুন কর্মসূচী

জাতিসংঘ উন্নয়ন কর্মসূচী

ইউনাইটেড নেশন্স ডিপার্টমেন্ট অব ডেভেলপমেন্ট সার্পোর্ট এ্যাণ্ড
ম্যানেজমেন্ট সার্ভিসেস

জুলাই, ১৯৯৬

বাংলাদেশের স্থানীয় সরকার

শাসন ব্যবস্থার এক নতুন কর্মসূচী

প্রণয়নকারী

সরকারী প্রশাসন বিভাগ ও উন্নয়ন ব্যবস্থাপনা কর্তৃপক্ষ

উন্নয়ন সহযোগিতা বিষয়ক জাতিসংঘ বিভাগ

এবং ব্যবস্থাপনা সার্ভিস, নিউইয়র্ক।

স্থানীয় সরকার গবেষণা দল

আবু তৈয়ব রফিকুর রহমান

দলনেতা

সায়েরুর রহমান

আন্তর্জাতিক উপদেষ্টা

গবেষণা প্রকল্পের স্থানীয় উপদেষ্টাবৃন্দ :

ডঃ নওশাদ আহমেদ	ডঃ মোফাজ্জল হক
ডঃ সালাহুদ্দিন আহমেদ	জনাব আবদুল করিম
মিসেস সিতারা আলমগীর	ডঃ জরিণা রহমান খান
ডঃ মুহাম্মদ আনিসুজ্জামান	জনাব আলম মিয়া
ডঃ এইচ, কে, আরেফিন	জনাব আবদুল কাদের
ডঃ ডি. সি. বর্মন	ডঃ মোহাম্মদ হাবিবুর রহমান
ডঃ লুৎফুল হক চৌধুরী	জনাব শফিকুর রহমান
জনাব মোহাম্মদ ফয়জুল্লাহ	ডঃ এম. সোলায়মান
জনাব আবিদ হোসেন	

জুলাই ১৯৯৬

উপক্রমণিকা

ইউনিয়ন পরিষদ এবং পৌরসভাগুলো পর্যবেক্ষণ করা এবং সেগুলোর ব্যবস্থাপনা কলাকৌশলকে সবল করে তোলার কৌশল ও প্রক্রিয়া সুপারিশের জন্য ১৯৯৪ সালের মাঝামাঝি সময় থেকে স্থানীয় সরকারের উপর গবেষণার কাজ শুরু হয়। ১৯৯৪' এর মাঝামাঝি থেকে ১৯৯৬'এর মাঝামাঝি সময়ের মধ্যে বাংলাদেশের শাসন ব্যবস্থার প্রেক্ষাপট বার কয়েক বদলে যায় এবং পর্যায়ক্রমে দেশে গণতন্ত্র এবং গণতান্ত্রিক প্রতিষ্ঠানগুলো সংহতি লাভ করে। স্থানীয় সরকারের উপর প্রণীত এই প্রতিবেদন ইউনিয়ন পরিষদ এবং পৌরসভাগুলোর উপর পরিচালিত গবেষণা ও বিশ্লেষণের উপর ভিত্তি করে প্রণয়ন করা হলেও এর পরিধি আরও পরিব্যাপ্তি লাভ করে গণতান্ত্রিক প্রথা- প্রতিষ্ঠানাদি গড়ে তোলার ক্রমবর্ধমান প্রবনতার উপর ভিত্তি করে এবং তা' স্থানীয় সরকার বা স্থানীয় শাসনব্যবস্থার এক নতুন দৃষ্টিভঙ্গী উন্মোচনে সহায়ক হয়।

এই গবেষণা কার্যক্রমের মধ্য দিয়ে এই অভিমত বেরিয়ে এসেছে যে, অংশগ্রহণমূলক ও প্রতিনিধিত্বশীল গণতন্ত্র, অর্থনৈতিক উন্নয়ন এবং প্রবুদ্ধিকে উৎসাহিত করতে একটি স্বায়ত্ত্বশাসিত এবং সমন্বিত স্থানীয় শাসন ব্যবস্থা গড়ে তোলার ব্যাপারে জনগণের আগ্রহ এবং সমর্থন উভয়ই রয়েছে। এই লক্ষ্য অর্জনে অবশ্য অসংখ্য প্রতিকূলতাও রয়েছে এবং সেগুলোকে আমাদের জয় করতে হবে। ইউনিয়ন পরিষদ এবং পৌরসভাগুলোর কর্মতৎপরতার মান উন্নয়ন করতে হলে এই গবেষণায় বিধৃত সুপারিশগুলো এককভাবে অথবা বিবিধ পন্থায় গ্রহণ করা যেতে পারে। যদিও এই গবেষণা প্রতিবেদন প্রণয়নকারীগণের মত হচ্ছে এই যে, সুপারিশগুলো বাস্তবায়নের আগে বাংলাদেশের সার্বিক শাসন ব্যবস্থায় স্থানীয় শাসনের অবস্থান নির্ণয়ের ব্যাপারে একটি সাধারণ ঐকমত্য থাকা উচিত।

স্থানীয় সরকারের উপর এই প্রতিবেদন প্রণয়নে বাংলাদেশ সরকার ব্যাপকভাবে সহায়তা প্রদান করেছেন। স্থানীয় সরকারের উপর দীর্ঘ গবেষণা কার্যক্রম চালিয়েছেন দেশের স্থানীয় উপদেষ্টাবর্গ। জাতীয় উপদেষ্টাদের গবেষণা কার্যক্রমে সহায়তা দিয়েছে এতদুদ্দেশ্যে প্রতিষ্ঠিত একটি জাতীয় উপদেষ্টা কমিটি। জাতীয় পর্যায়ে একটি ব্যবস্থাপনা সংগঠন এই প্রকল্পের কারিগরি সহায়তা বিধান করেছে। উপরন্তু এই গবেষণা দল অনেকগুলো দাতা ও বেসরকারী সংস্থারও সহযোগিতা কামনা করেছেন। তাছাড়া এই রিপোর্ট প্রণয়নের সুবিধার্থে দেশ-বিদেশের বহু সিভিক এবং শিক্ষা প্রতিষ্ঠানের কাছেও সাহায্য প্রার্থনা করা হয়েছিলো। সহায়তাকারী সেই ধরনের সকল প্রতিষ্ঠানের প্রতিই গবেষণা দল এই সুযোগে তাদের কৃতজ্ঞতা এবং অভিনন্দন প্রকাশ করছে এবং ব্যক্তি ও প্রাতিষ্ঠানিক সকল পর্যায়ে যারা এই গবেষণা কার্যক্রমের সাফল্যের পিছনে অবদান রেখেছে তাদের সকলের প্রতিই গবেষণাকারী দলের শুভেচ্ছা ও কৃতজ্ঞতা জানানো হচ্ছে।

এই গবেষণা প্রতিবেদনের রয়েছে একটি নির্বাহী সারসংক্ষেপ এবং তৎপরবর্তী আটটি অনুচ্ছেদ। সেগুলোর মধ্যে বিষয়বস্তু হিসাবে এসেছে : গবেষণার ইতিহাস ও প্রক্রিয়া, ব্যবস্থাপনা, প্রেক্ষাপট নিরূপণ, প্রশিক্ষণ, সম্পদ বণ্টন, নিজস্ব আয়ত্বে অর্জিত বৈশিষ্ট্যাবলী এবং ভবিষ্যৎ সম্পর্কে আলোকপাত।

একটি সুসমন্বিত ও স্বায়ত্ত্বশাসিত স্থানীয় সরকার ব্যবস্থাপনা প্রবর্তন এবং এর পাশাপাশি স্থানীয় ব্যবস্থাপনা ক্রিয়াকলাপের মান উন্নয়নের লক্ষ্যে এই প্রতিবেদন একটি জাতীয় পর্যায়ে বিতর্ক সূচনায় সক্ষম হবে বলে এই প্রতিবেদন প্রণেতাগণ আশা রাখছেন।

শব্দ সংক্ষেপ

এডিবি	- এশীয় উন্নয়ন ব্যাংক
এডিএলজি	- সহকারী পরিচালক, স্থানীয় সরকার
এএল	- আওয়ামী লীগ
বিএডিসি	- বাংলাদেশ কৃষি উন্নয়ন সংস্থা
বিএআরডি	- বাংলাদেশ পল্লী উন্নয়ন একাডেমী
ব্র্যাক	- বাংলাদেশ রুরাল গ্র্যাডভাসমেন্ট কমিটি
বিআরডিবি	- বাংলাদেশ পল্লী উন্নয়ন বোর্ড
সিইও	- প্রধান নির্বাহী কর্মকর্তা
ড্যানিডা	- ড্যানিশ ইন্টারন্যাশনাল ডেভলপমেন্ট এজেন্সি
ডিসি	- ডেপুটি কমিশনার
ইপিআই	- সমন্বিত টিকাদান কর্মসূচী
এফ এফ ডব্লু	- কাজের বিনিময়ে খাদ্য কর্মসূচী
এফ ওয়াই	- অর্থ বছর
জিওবি	- বাংলাদেশ সরকার
এইচ ফ্লিউ	- হেড কোয়ার্টার
জেপি	- জাতীয় পার্টি
কেআইডিপি	- কাদলা সমন্বিত উন্নয়ন কর্মসূচী
এলজি	- স্থানীয় সরকার
এলজিডি	- স্থানীয় সরকার বিভাগ
এলজিইডি	- স্থানীয় সরকার প্রকৌশল বিভাগ
এলজিও	- স্থানীয় সরকার অধ্যাদেশ
এলজি আর ডি	- স্থানীয় সরকার ও পল্লী উন্নয়ন
এম আইসি	- পৌর উন্নয়ন কর্মসূচী
এম জে এস এস	- মানিকগঞ্জ জনসংখ্যা সীমিতকরণ সমিতি
এম পি	- সংসদ সদস্য
এনজিও	- বেসরকারী সংগঠন
এন আই এলজি	- ন্যাশনাল ইনস্টিটিউট ফর লোকাল গভর্নমেন্ট
ওসি	- ভারপ্রাপ্ত কর্মকর্তা
ওডিএ	- যুক্তরাজ্যের বহির্বিষয় উন্নয়ন প্রশাসন
ও আর এস	- ওরাল রিহাইড্রেশন স্যালাইন
পিএ টিসি	- পাবলিক গ্র্যাডমিনিষ্ট্রেশন ট্রেনিং সেন্টার
পিএইচডি	- জনস্বাস্থ্য প্রকৌশল বিভাগ
পি এফ	- পৌরসভা

পিএসও	- পৌরসভা অধ্যাদেশ
পিডব্লুডি	- গণপূর্ত বিভাগ
আরডিএ	- বগুড়াস্থ পল্লী উন্নয়ন একাডেমী
আরডি আর এস	- রংপুর-দিনাজপুর রুরাল সাভিস
আর এমপি	- রোড মেইনটেন্যান্স প্রোজেক্ট
আরপিএটিসি	- রিজিওনাল পাবলিক এ্যাডমিনিষ্ট্রেশন ট্রেনিং সেন্টার
এস ইইচ এল ডিপি	- স্মল হাউজহোল্ড লাইভস্টক ডেভেলপমেন্ট প্রোগ্রাম
এস টি আই ডিপি	- সেকেন্ডারী টাউন ইনফ্রাস্ট্রাকচার ডেভেলপমেন্ট প্রোজেক্ট
টিডিসি	- থানা উন্নয়ন কমিটি
টিকে	- টাকা (বাংলাদেশী মুদ্রা) মান = ২.৫ মার্কিন সেন্ট
টিএনও	- থান নির্বাহী কর্মকর্তা
ইউ এন ডি ডি এস	- ইউনাইটেড ডিপার্টমেন্ট ফর ডেভেলপমেন্ট সার্পোর্ট এ্যান্ড ম্যানেজম্যান্ট সার্ভিসেস
ইউএনডিপিডি	- জাতিসংঘ উন্নয়ন কর্মসূচী, ঢাকা
ইউনিসেফ	- জাতিসংঘ আন্তর্জাতিক জরুরী শিশু তহবিল
ইউ এন ও	- উপজেলা নির্বাহী কর্মকর্তা
ইউপি	- ইউনিয়ন পরিষদ
ইউপিও	- ইউনিয়ন পরিষদ অধ্যাদেশ
ভিডিপি	- গ্রাম উন্নয়ন কর্মসূচী
বিজিডিপি	- ভালনারেবল গ্রুপ ডেভেলপমেন্ট প্রোগ্রাম
ডব্লু এফপি	- বিশ্ব খাদ্য কর্মসূচী

বাংলাদেশের স্থানীয় সরকার

শাসন ব্যবস্থার এক নতুন কর্মসূচী

বিষয়বস্তু

নির্বাহী সারসংক্ষেপ

১। বাংলাদেশের স্থানীয় সরকার সম্পর্কে পূণর্মূল্যায়ন প্রসঙ্গে	১-১১
২। স্থানীয় সরকার ব্যবস্থা এবং এর অন্তর্নিহিত সত্ত্বা : সম্মিলন এবং সংঘাত	১২-২১
৩। স্থানীয় সরকার ব্যবস্থাপনা : শাসন সংগঠন	২২-৩৩
৪। জনগণের শাসন : অংশগ্রহণের আবশ্যিকতা	৩৪-৪৫
৫। জ্ঞান এবং দক্ষতা বৃদ্ধি : পেশাগত উন্নয়ন এবং প্রশিক্ষণ পরিকল্পনা	৪৬-৬৮
৬। সম্পদ বন্টন : টেকসই ধারণার সন্ধান	৫৮-৬৮
৭। নিজস্ব আয়তে অর্জিত অভিজ্ঞতা : পূণর্মূল্যায়নের প্রেক্ষাপট	৬৯-৭৪
৮। বাংলাদেশের স্থানীয় শাসনের ভবিষ্যৎ	৭৫-৮২

সংযোজনী

১। স্থানীয় সরকার সম্পর্কিত আইন ও অধ্যাদেশসমূহ	৮৩
২। গবেষণা দল এবং উপদেষ্টা কমিটির সদস্য পরিচিতি	৮৫

বাংলাদেশের স্থানীয় সরকার

শাসন ব্যবস্থার এক নতুন কর্মসূচী

নির্বাহী সারসংক্ষেপ

মুখবন্ধ

বাংলাদেশে স্থানীয় সরকার সম্পর্কে একটি বিষদ এবং ধারাবাহিকতাসম্পন্ন দৃষ্টিভঙ্গীর অভাব রয়েছে। স্থানীয় সরকারের ভূমিকা, স্থানীয় ইস্যু কিংবা কর্মসূচী বাস্তবায়নের জন্য গণতান্ত্রিক প্রক্রিয়ার প্রতিষ্ঠানিক রূপান্তর, গুরুত্বপূর্ণ জাতীয় পর্যায়ে স্থানীয় সরকার কাঠামোর উন্নয়ন, জাতীয় ও স্থানীয় সরকারসমূহের কর্মক্ষেত্র স্বতন্ত্রিকরণ এবং সম্পদ সমাবেশের ক্ষেত্র নির্বাচনের ন্যায় গুরুত্বপূর্ণ বিষয়াদিতে খুব কমই অগ্রগতি অর্জিত হয়েছে। চারটি প্রধান ক্ষেত্রে বর্তমানে বাংলাদেশের স্থানীয় প্রশাসন ব্যবস্থার সীমাবদ্ধতা বহুলভাবে অনুভূত হয়। ক্ষেত্রগুলো হলো, আর্থিক, ব্যবস্থাপনাগত, তথ্যসম্পর্কিত এবং জনশক্তিগত। বিভিন্ন সময়ে বিভিন্ন সরকারের গৃহীত স্থানীয় সরকার কাঠামো ও ব্যবস্থাপনাগত রূপান্তরের ফলে স্থানীয় শাসন ব্যবস্থায় অস্থিতিশীলতা সৃষ্টি হয়েছে যার কারণে এই ব্যবস্থার মধ্য দিয়ে সমাজ ও স্থানীয় পর্যায়ে যে সেবা নিশ্চিত করার কথা, সেই লক্ষ্য-মাত্রা অর্জন করা কঠিন হয়ে পড়ে।

কিন্তু এতদসত্ত্বেও কেউ যদি বাংলাদেশের সংবিধান পর্যালোচনা করে, তাহলে দেখতে পাবে যে, এর মুখবন্ধ, মূলনীতি এবং বিশেষ করে স্থানীয় সরকার সম্পর্কিত ধারণাগুলোতে স্বায়ত্ত্বশাসিত স্থানীয় সরকারের ভূমিকা, গঠন বিন্যাস এবং প্রক্রিয়ার সুস্পষ্ট দিক দর্শন রয়েছে। সংবিধানের উপক্রমণিকায় রাষ্ট্রের অন্যতম প্রধান মূলনীতি হিসাবে অর্থনৈতিক ও সামাজিক ন্যায়বিচারের অধিকার প্রতিষ্ঠার জন্য গণতান্ত্রিক প্রক্রিয়ার উপর গুরুত্ব দেওয়া হয়েছে। সংবিধানের নবম অনুচ্ছেদে রাষ্ট্রের অন্যতম মূলনীতি হিসাবে স্থানীয় সরকারের প্রতি উৎসাহ প্রদানের নীতি এবং নির্বাচিত জনপ্রতিনিধিদের মাধ্যমে রাষ্ট্রের সকল পর্যায়ের জনগণের অংশগ্রহণের নিশ্চয়তার কথা (অনুচ্ছেদ ১১) বলা হয়েছে। ৫৯ তম অনুচ্ছেদে সুস্পষ্ট করে বলা হয়েছে, প্রতিটি প্রশাসনিক ইউনিটে স্থানীয় সরকারের নির্বাচিত কাঠামো নিশ্চিত করতে হবে। নির্বাচিত কর্তৃপক্ষের দায়িত্বের অর্ন্তভুক্ত রয়েছে স্থানীয় সরকারের প্রশাসনিক ব্যবস্থাপনা, স্থানীয় সরকারে নিয়োজিত সরকারী কর্মী ও কর্মকর্তাদের চাকুরী ও এলাকার অর্থনৈতিক উন্নয়নে পরিকল্পনা প্রণয়ন ও বাস্তবায়ন প্রভৃতি। উপরোক্ত কার্যাদি সঠিক ভাবে সম্পাদনের স্বার্থে সংবিধানের ৬০তম অনুচ্ছেদে সংসদকে স্থানীয় সরকারের ক্ষমতায়ন এবং এর কর আরোপের অধিকার প্রদানে উপযোগী আইন প্রণয়নের নির্দেশ দেওয়া হয়েছে।

এধরনের সুস্পষ্ট দিক নির্দেশনা সত্ত্বেও স্থানীয় সরকারের ক্ষমতায়ন সম্পর্কিত সাংবিধানিক বিধিবিধানের বাস্তবায়নগত দুর্বলতা এবং এসম্পর্কিত কার্যাবলীর প্রাতিষ্ঠানিক কার্যকারিতার সীমাবদ্ধতা এই প্রশাসন ব্যবস্থাটিকে করে রেখেছে দুর্বল এবং যথেষ্ট বিভ্রান্তিকর। বিদ্যমান স্থানীয় শাসন ব্যবস্থাকে অকার্যকর বলে মনে করার অন্যতম স্কারণ হলো এর সাংবিধানিক লক্ষ্য অর্জনের ব্যর্থতা।

বাংলাদেশে স্থানীয় সরকারকে সবল করে তোলার উপর পরিচালিত গবেষণা কার্যক্রমের উপসংহার হলো এটাই। এই গবেষণা কার্যক্রম পরিচালিত হয়েছে ৫৬ টি পৌরসুভা, ৩৭টি ইউনিয়ন পরিষদ, ১০টি থানা এবং অতিরিক্ত ৬০টি ইউপি'র উপর পরিচালিত জরিপের উপর ভিত্তি করে। এই গবেষণার অন্যতম প্রধান ভিত্তিতে এছাড়াও রয়েছে স্থানীয় সরকারের প্রমাণ্য দলিলপত্র, প্রকাশনা এবং সংশ্লিষ্ট প্রায় ৪০০ ব্যক্তির সাক্ষাৎকার। চূড়ান্ত প্রতিবেদনটি প্রণীত হয়েছে ১৭ জন জাতীয় বিশেষজ্ঞের প্রতিবেদনসমূহকে গড় করে। এই গবেষণায় যে ক্ষেত্রগুলির উপর আলোকপাত করা হয়েছে, তার মধ্যে রয়েছে : (১) অংশগ্রহণ, (২) প্রতিষ্ঠানিক দক্ষতা এবং কার্যকারিতা, (৩) স্থানীয় কর্মতৎপরতার সাথে যুক্ত সংগঠনের মধ্যকার সমন্বয়, (৪) ব্যবস্থাপনা এবং নেতৃত্ব প্রশিক্ষণ (৫) সম্পদ সমাবেশিকরণ (৬) নিজস্ব আয়ত্বে অর্জিত তৎপরতা এবং (৭) স্থানীয় সরকারের ভূমিকা ও কর্মতৎপরতা।

তারচেয়ে বড় কথা হলো, এই গবেষণা চালাতে গিয়ে দেখা গেছে যে, উপরোক্ত সীমাবদ্ধতা সত্ত্বেও স্বায়ত্বশাসনের একটি নিজস্ব বৈশিষ্ট্যের অস্তিত্ব অস্বীকার করা যায়না। বিশেষ করে কর্মসূচী এবং তৎপরতা পরিচালনা ও মান উন্নতিকরণের ক্ষেত্রে। এই বৈশিষ্ট্যের গুণে স্থানীয় সরকার ব্যবস্থায় আনুষ্ঠানিক গতি বা বৃত্তের চেয়েও এই কর্ম তৎপরতার ব্যাপকতা, ও পরিব্যাপ্তি অনেক বেশী বিস্তৃত।

ব্যক্তি এবং সমাজের ছোট ছোট গ্রুপগুলো ক্রমান্বয়ে তাদেরকে প্রথম পর্যায়ে অর্থনৈতিকভাবে এবং সামাজিক ও রাজনৈতিকভাবেও সংগঠিত করে তুলছে এবং তাদের কাজ কর্মের ব্যবস্থাপনা উন্নয়নে প্রয়াসী হচ্ছে। এ ধরনের সংগঠিতকরণ এবং স্বায়ত্বশাসনের ধারণা এবং গতিবেগ সঞ্চারিত হয় গ্রামীণ ব্যাংক এবং ব্র্যাকের মত সংগঠন কর্তৃক সূচিত কর্ম তৎপরতার মধ্য দিয়ে। এ ছাড়া অন্যান্য আন্তর্জাতিক সংগঠনের সহায়তা ও অংশ গ্রহণের মধ্য দিয়ে সফলভাবে পরিচালিত উদ্যোগসমূহও সংগঠিত হওয়া এবং স্বায়ত্ব শাসনের অধিকার বাস্তবায়নে প্রেরণা যুগিয়েছে। এ সকল সংগঠন স্বায়ত্বশাসনমূলক তৎপরতার উদ্যোক্তা হলেও ক্রমেই মনে হচ্ছে এই ধারণা এ সংগঠনগুলোর পরিধি অতিক্রম করে বৃহত্তর সমাজে ছড়িয়ে পড়ছে ও স্থান করে নিচ্ছে। এই গবেষণায় দেখা গেছে যে, স্বায়ত্বশাসনমুখী এই তৎপরতাগুলো বাংলাদেশের গ্রামীণ ও শহুরে সমাজের পরিবর্তন সূচনা করেছে।

এই শেষোক্ত ধারণা থেকেই একথা বদ্ধমূলভাবে মনে হয় যে, স্বায়ত্বশাসনের ধ্যানধারণা সফল এবং সুসংহত স্বায়ত্বশাসিত স্থানীয় প্রতিষ্ঠান এবং সংগঠনের নিশ্চয়তা দিচ্ছে এবং এই সাফল্যের মধ্য দিয়েই সূচিত হবে একটি কার্যকর এবং টেকসই স্বায়ত্বশাসিত এতদসম্পর্কিত সাংবিধানিক স্থানীয় সরকার বা শাসন ব্যবস্থা। এই অনুসন্ধান এবং এতদসম্পর্কিত সাংবিধানিক সংস্থান, (যা উপরে উল্লেখ করা হয়েছে) মিলিয়ে এমন একটি দৃষ্টিভঙ্গীগত রূপরেখার গোড়াপত্তন করা সম্ভব যার উপর ভিত্তি করে আমরা পরবর্তী অনুচ্ছেদে একটি স্বায়ত্বশাসিত স্থানীয় সরকার ব্যবস্থার ধারণা প্রস্ফুটন করতে সক্ষম হবো।

একটি স্বায়ত্বশাসিত স্থানীয় সরকারের ধারণা :

বাংলাদেশের অর্থনৈতিক উন্নয়ন এবং সামাজিক ন্যায় বিচার প্রতিষ্ঠার লক্ষ্যমাত্রা অর্জন করার বিকেন্দ্রিকৃত এবং গণতান্ত্রিক শাসন ব্যবস্থা প্রতিষ্ঠার ক্ষেত্রে একটি স্বায়ত্বশাসিত স্থানীয় সরকার ব্যবস্থা প্রবর্তন করা অত্যন্ত জরুরী। পৃথিবীর অন্যান্য নেতৃস্থানীয় গণতান্ত্রিক দেশগুলির ন্যায় গণতান্ত্রিক শাসনের যোগ্য নেতৃত্বের গুনাবলী অর্জনের ক্ষেত্রে স্থানীয় সরকার কেবল একটি চমৎকার প্রশিক্ষণ ক্ষেত্রই নয়, স্থানীয় সেবাকর্ম পরিচালনায় নৈপুণ্য এবং স্থানীয় পর্যায়ে সিদ্ধান্ত গ্রহণ প্রক্রিয়ায় জনগণের অংশ গ্রহণের পথ করে দেবার ক্ষেত্রেও স্থানীয় সরকার একটি অপরিহার্য প্রতিষ্ঠান। বাংলাদেশে স্থানীয় সরকার নিয়ে কথাবার্তা বেশ জোরে শোরে বলা কওয়া হলেও এই ধারণা এবং পূর্ণাঙ্গ একটি দৃষ্টিভঙ্গি এখনো উন্মোচিত হয়নি। এই অনুচ্ছেদে সেই ধরনের একটি দৃষ্টিভঙ্গীর রূপরেখা তুলে ধরা হয়েছে এবং তার সাথে সন্নিবেশিত হয়েছে ধারণাগত বিবরণী, লক্ষ্য এবং কাঠামো, সম্পদ এবং ক্ষমতা এবং জাতীয় সরকার বা সামগ্রিক শাসন ব্যবস্থার সাথে এর সংযোগগুলো। এই দৃষ্টিভঙ্গীকে একটি সমন্বিত স্বায়ত্বশাসন এবং স্থানীয় শাসন ব্যবস্থায় রূপান্তরের লক্ষ্যে চিন্তাকে বাস্তব প্রস্তাব আকারে করণের জন্য এতদসঙ্গে কতিপয় সুপারিশও সংযোজন করা হলো।

চার দৃষ্টিকোণ সম্পন্ন বিবরণী

বিবরণী : ১

প্রতিকূলতার মধ্যেও বাংলাদেশের জনগণ যোগ্য এবং সরকারী সম্পদ ও সেবামূলক কর্মতৎপরতা পরিচালনায় তারা আস্থা ও বিশ্বাসযোগ্য।

অধিকাংশ বাংলাদেশীই দারিদ্রের দুষ্টচক্রে বন্দী এবং জীবনের ন্যূনতম সাধারণ সুযোগ-সুবিধা থেকেও তারা বঞ্চিত। অধিকাংশই মৌলিক শিক্ষা, স্বাস্থ্যসেবা ও কল্যাণমূলক উদ্যোগ থেকে বঞ্চিত। দিনে তিন বেলা মোটামুটি আহারের সংস্থানও তাদের অনেকের ভাগ্যে জোটেনা। প্রাকৃতিক ও মনুষ্য সৃষ্ট দুর্যোগের নিত্যদিনের আনাগোনার মধ্যেই তাদেরকে এক বৈরি পরিবেশের মধ্য দিয়ে জীবনের ঘানি টেনে নিচ্ছে যেতে হয়। তাদের আয়ত্বাধীন অতি সীমিত সম্পদকে বৃদ্ধি করে, সম্পদের স্থানান্তর বা এদিকের মাল ওদিক করে, এইভাবে কোনো মতে তারা জীবন ও জীবিকার একটা মামুলি সংস্থান করে নেয়। দারিদ্র মোকাবেলার এই দক্ষতা এবং শত প্রতিকূলতার মধ্যেও টিকে থাকার কঠিন আত্মপ্রত্যয় বাংলাদেশের মানুষকে দিয়েছে যোগ্যতার শক্তি এবং কর্মস্পৃহা। সেই মানসিক শক্তিই হতে পারে স্থানীয় শাসনের ভিত্তিমূল নির্মাণের শক্তিশালী উপাদান। যা দরকার তা হচ্ছে জনগণের প্রতি এই আস্থা এবং বিশ্বাস যে, তারা তাদের পরিবেশ-পারিপার্শ্বিকতা নিয়ন্ত্রণে সক্ষম এবং উপযুক্ত যোগ্যতাসম্পন্ন।

ব্যক্তিই যেখানে যোগ্য

রাষ্ট্রপতির পুরস্কার বিজয়ী সিদ্দিক মিয়া তার বাবাকে হালদা থেকে মাছের রেনু সংগ্রহ করে সেগুলোকে বড় করে আশে পাশের গ্রামে সেই পোনা মাছ বেচাবিজির কাজে সহায়তা করতো। ১৯৭২ সালে ব্যবসাটি সে-ই হাতে নেয়। আধুনিক মৎস্য চাষ পদ্ধতির উপর প্রাথমিক প্রশিক্ষণের দক্ষতাকে সম্বল করে সে কাজে হাত দিলো এবং ১৯৭৬ সালে সে একটি 'হ্যাচারী' খুললো। প্রথম 'হ্যাচারী' উদ্যোগটি তার বৃথা গেলেও সে অধ্যবসায়ের সাথে এই কর্মোদ্যোগে যুক্ত হয়েই থাকলো। আজ তার 'হ্যাচারী' ৪০০ বিঘা ব্যাপী বিশাল জলাভূমিতে পরিব্যাপ্ত। সে তার দুই পুত্র এবং দুই ভাই এখন প্রায় দেড়শত লোককে কাজে খাটাচ্ছে এবং এ ছাড়াও মাছের মৌসুমে বাড়তি আরও শ' তিনেক মানুষ তাদের মৎস্য খামারে কাজ করে। আজ সিদ্দিক মিয়া অন্যান্য মানুষকে মৎস্য চাষের নিয়ম প্রণালী সম্পর্কে তালিম দেয়। এ পর্যন্ত সে হাজার তিনেক মানুষকে এই প্রশিক্ষণ দান করেছে। কিন্তু শিখিয়ে সে, কারো থেকে কোনো অর্থকড়ি নেয়না। ১৯৯৩ সালে বেসরকারী খাতে মোট মাছের রেনু চাষ হয়েছে ৩৩ হাজার কেজি এবং পোনা আবাদ হয়েছে ২৩৬ কোটির মতো। এই মোট পরিমানের ১৮ শতাংশ রেনু এবং প্রায় ২০ শতাংশ পোনা শুধু সিদ্দিক মিয়ার হ্যাচারীতেই আবাদ হয়েছে। বলতে গেলে কোনো আনুষ্ঠানিক শিক্ষা, বৈজ্ঞানিক জ্ঞান কিংবা ব্যবস্থাপনাগত দক্ষতা ছাড়াই সিদ্দিক মিয়া ও তার পরিবার পরিজন দারিদ্রের দুষ্টচক্রে ভেদ করে বেরিয়ে আসার এক সাহসিকতাপূর্ণ দৃষ্টান্ত সৃষ্টি করেছে। এখন সে সমাজে অবদান রাখার যোগ্যতা রাখে। তারা আজ শুধু নিজেদের জীবনের মানই বৃদ্ধি করেনি, মানব উন্নয়ন কর্মসূচীতে, বিশেষ করে মৎস্য চাষে অন্যান্যদেরকে সাহায্য সহযোগিতার মাধ্যমে এই পরিবারটি এক চমৎকার সামাজিক দায়িত্ব পালন করে চলেছে।

বিবরণী : ২

আত্মশাসন সম্ভব এবং সমাজের মানুষজনও তা প্রত্যাশা করে

আজকের বাংলাদেশে বাস্তবতা হলো এই যে, স্থানীয় পর্যায়ে হাজার হাজার সামাজিক গ্রুপ রয়েছে যারা নিজেদের ভালমন্দ নিজেরাই নিয়ন্ত্রণ করছে, সম্পদ বন্টন করছে, ঋণ পরিশোধের ব্যবস্থা করছে, সবার মতামত সাপেক্ষে সিদ্ধান্ত গ্রহণ করছে, গোটা গ্রুপের মঙ্গলের জন্য কর্মসূচী হাতে নিচ্ছে, কর্মসূচীর প্রসার ঘটচ্ছে, গতিপথ বদলাচ্ছে এবং নিজেদের ও সন্তানসন্ততির জন্য একটি সমৃদ্ধ ভবিষ্যৎ নির্মাণের জন্য কাজ করে যাচ্ছে। আমরা যদি আনুষ্ঠানিক স্থানীয় সরকারের ব্যর্থতার কথা স্বীকার করে নেই এবং এই বিশ্বাসে অটল থাকি যে সত্যিই এলাকাগুলো নিজেদের নিয়ন্ত্রণে অপারগ, তাহলে আমরা আত্মশাসনের প্রতি ব্যাপক আগ্রহ এবং অঙ্গীকারকে অস্বীকার করবো এবং স্থানীয় পরিবেশকে এই আগ্রহ কতখানি প্রভাবিত করছে তা অনুধাবন করতে ব্যর্থ হবো। আসলে আত্মশাসনকে ভিত্তি করেই এদেশে গড়ে উঠবে একটি স্বায়ত্তশাসিত স্থানীয় সরকার বা স্থানীয় শাসন ব্যবস্থা।

আত্মশাসন, সম্পদের সমাবেশ এবং জবাবদিহিতা

এই গবেষণাকর্মের একটি পর্যবেক্ষণ, যার সাথে স্থানীয় সরকার সম্পর্কিত অন্যান্য গবেষণারও সাদৃশ্য রয়েছে, তা হলো এই যে, স্থানীয় সরকার রাজস্ব সংগ্রহে অক্ষম অথবা অনিচ্ছুক। তবে এক্ষেত্রে দৃষ্টান্তপূর্ণ ব্যতিক্রমের স্বাক্ষর রেখেছে ইলিয়টগঞ্জ (উত্তর) ইউনিয়ন পরিষদ। তারা প্রয়োজনীয় পরিমাণ রাজস্ব উপার্জনের এক চমৎকার পছন্দ উদ্ভাবন করেছে। এই ইউনিয়নটির তেমন কোনো অর্থনৈতিক ভিত্তি নেই। উপার্জনের স্বতন্ত্র কোনো উৎসও নেই। এই ইউনিয়নবাসীদের প্রায় অর্ধেকই হলো ভূমিহীন এবং অতিশয় দরিদ্র। স্থানীয় ব্যয় সংকুলানের জন্য প্রয়োজনীয় রাজস্ব উপার্জনের ক্ষেত্রে স্থানীয় সরকারের জন্য নির্দিষ্ট খাজনা সংগ্রহ অধ্যাদেশ অনুসরণ করেনা। যদি তারা স্বথাবিহিত আইন অনুসরণ করতো, তাহলে হয়তো খাজনার পরিমাণ শতকরা ৫০% ভাগ বেড়ে যেতো। কিন্তু তাতে জনসাধারণের সঙ্গতি ও সামর্থের উপর ব্যাপক চাপ পড়তো। তা না করে তারা সহযোগিতা ও অংশগ্রহণমূলক প্রক্রিয়ায় এলাকার প্রয়োজন সম্পর্কে ঐকমত্য প্রতিষ্ঠা করেছে এবং ইউনিয়নের তিনটি ওয়ার্ডে এ নিয়ে বহু বৈঠকও অনুষ্ঠিত হয়েছে। এসকল বৈঠকে ইউনিয়ন পরিষদের চেয়ারম্যান ও সদস্যবর্গ পরিষদের ভবিষ্যৎ কর্মসূচী নিয়ে আলোচনা করেছেন, চলমান প্রকল্পগুলোর রক্ষণাবেক্ষণ বাবদ খরচপাতি নিয়ে আলোচনা করেছেন এবং পরিষদ কর্মকর্তা-কর্মচারীদের বেতন ও অন্যান্য প্রশাসনিক ব্যয় বরাদ্দের উপরও আলোকপাত করেছেন। এসকল বৈঠকে যেমন ব্যয়ের রূপরেখা প্রণয়ন করা হয়েছে, তেমনি ন্যূনতম প্রয়োজনকে সামনে রেখে চলনসই হারে খাজনা আরোপের উপরও সাধারণ ঐকমত্য প্রতিষ্ঠিত হয়েছে। এই অভিজ্ঞতা থেকে তারা দেখতে পেয়েছেন যে, অংশগ্রহণমূলক প্রক্রিয়ার গুনে মানুষ খাজনা দিতে অধিকতর উৎসাহ বোধ করেছে। কেননা তারা দেখেছে যে, গৃহীত কর্মসূচীগুলো তাদের জন্যই প্রণীত হয়েছে এবং এগুলো তাদেরই কল্যাণের জন্য। এই ইউনিয়নে ১৯৮৪ সালে সংগৃহীত হয়েছিলো ২৯,০০০/= টাকা। সেই খাজনা ১৯৯০-৯১তে এসে সংগৃহীত হয়েছে ৫৪,৩৭৫/= টাকা এবং ১৯৯১-৯২তে ৮১,৫৬২/= টাকা। ১৯৯০-৯১ এবং ১৯৯১-৯২ সনের ধার্য খাজনার প্রায় ৯৫% ভাগ আদায় হয়েছে। এখন সেখানকার অর্থনৈতিক ভিত্তি কিছুটা শক্তিশালী হলেও গত তিন বছরে খাজনা ১৯৯১-৯২ স্তরেই রাখা হয়েছে, যাতে জনসাধারণের বোঝা লাঘব হয়। এই ইউনিয়ন পরিষদ ১৯৯৫-৯৬ সালের খাজনা বাড়ানোর কথা বিবেচনা করেছে।

বিবরণী : ৩

টেকসই স্বায়ত্তশাসিত স্থানীয় সরকারের জন্য সকল সামাজিক গ্রুপকে অন্তর্ভুক্ত করা অত্যন্ত জরুরী

মানুষ যদি যোগ্য হয় এবং আত্মশাসন যদি সম্ভব হয়, তাহলে সরকারী সংগঠনের কর্ম পরিচালনার জন্য কোনো ব্যক্তি বা গ্রুপের সংশ্লিষ্টতাকেই অস্বীকার করার কোনো উপায় থাকেনা। যেহেতু এই অংশগ্রহণের ব্যাপারটি কার্যক্ষেত্রে বিরোধের সন্মুখীন হয়, তাই বিষয়টির উপর গভীরভাবে আলোকপাত করা দরকার। প্রতিটি ক্ষেত্রে এহেন অংশগ্রহণের নিশ্চয়তার জন্য চাই শক্তিশালী কর্ম প্রক্রিয়া কৌশল এবং প্রতিনিয়ত তার বাস্তবায়ন।

শাসন সংগঠিতকরণ

কুমিল্লা সদর থানাধীন পঞ্চডুবি ইউনিয়নভুক্ত একটি গ্রাম বাটমেল। স্থানীয় পর্যায়ে পরিকল্পনা গ্রহণের জন্য প্রাথমিক পর্যায়ে এখানে একটি সমবায় গড়ে তোলা হয়। এর সদস্যপদ ১৪ থেকে ৬০৩তে উত্তীর্ণ হয়। এই সমবায়ের অধীনস্থ প্রায় ২৭৫ থেকে ৩২৩ টি ঘর। প্রত্যেক পুরুষ সদস্যের সঞ্চয়ের পরিমাণ ২,০৫৩/= টাকা; মহিলাদের ১,১৫৮/= টাকা এবং শিশুদের ৩১১/= টাকা। এই সমবায়ের নেতৃত্ব দিচ্ছে নয় সদস্যের একটি পরিচালনা কমিটি। প্রতি দুই বছর অন্তর এই কমিটির সদস্য নির্বাচিত হয়। এই সংগঠনের প্রধান ব্যবস্থাপনাগত বৈশিষ্ট্য হলো এর নিয়মিত সাপ্তাহিক সভা, যেখানে সদস্যগণ হিসাব-নিকাশ পর্যালোচনা, বিষয়বস্তু আলোচনা বা বিভিন্ন সমস্যার উপর আলোকপাত করা এবং কোনো সিদ্ধান্ত গ্রহণে অংশগ্রহণের মাধ্যমে সংগঠনকে কার্যকর রাখা হয়েছে। তা ছাড়া বছরে একবার অনুষ্ঠিত হয় বার্ষিক সাধারণ সভা। এই সভায় সদস্যগণ তহবিল সম্পর্কিত বিষয়ে যেমন পুঙ্খানুপুঙ্খ হিসাব-নিকাশ নেওয়ার সুযোগ পান, তেমনি বিভিন্ন প্রকল্পের অগ্রগতি সম্পর্কেও বিস্তারিতভাবে অবহিত হন। এর মধ্য দিয়ে জবাবদিহিতা এবং স্বচ্ছতা উভয়ই প্রতিষ্ঠিত হয়। ব্যবস্থাপনা কমিটি এবং সাধারণ সদস্যদের মধ্য থেকে গঠিত প্রকল্প-উপকমিটির কাজ হচ্ছে গৃহীত সিদ্ধান্ত বাস্তবায়ন করা। সুষ্ঠুভাবে কাজ কর্ম পরিচালনার স্বার্থে বাটমেল বহুমুখী গ্রাম উন্নয়ন সমবায় সমিতি অন্যান্য পার্শ্ববর্তী গ্রাম ও স্থানীয় সংগঠনগুলোর সাথেও যেমন সমান্তরাল সম্পর্ক রক্ষা করছেন, তেমনি এর সহযোগী প্রতিষ্ঠানগুলোর সাথেও অনুরূপ যোগাযোগ রক্ষা করে চলেছে। এই সংগঠনের মৌলিক কর্মসূচীর মধ্যে রয়েছে সেচ সুবিধা সম্প্রসারণের মাধ্যমে কৃষি উৎপাদন বাড়ানো, কর্মসংস্থানের সুযোগ সৃষ্টি, গণসাক্ষরতা বৃদ্ধি, শিশু শিক্ষা, স্বাস্থ্য, পুষ্টি, পরিবার-পরিকল্পনা, গবাদিপশু পরিচর্যা, হাঁস মুরগি প্রতিপালন, বৃক্ষরোপন, বিদ্যুতায়ন এবং আইন শৃংখলা জোরদার করা প্রভৃতি। এই সংগঠনটি তার কাজকর্ম যেভাবে পরিচালনা করছে, স্থানীয় সরকারের কার্যাবলী ঠিক এর দ্বারাই সনাক্ত করা যায়- অর্থাৎ স্বচ্ছতার মধ্য দিয়ে কাজ পরিচালনা করা এবং এর সদস্যবর্গের নিকট দায়ী থাকা।

বাংলাদেশের সমাজে স্থানীয় সরকারকে যদি একটি কার্যকর এবং স্থায়ী ভূমিকা নিতে হয়, তাহলে অবশ্যই তাকে সামাজিক কর্মসূচী এবং ক্রিয়াকলাপের সহযোগী হিসাবেই কাজ করতে হবে। তার চেয়েও বড় কথা হলো একে সম্পদ সংগ্রহ করতে হবে ব্যক্তি এবং সামাজিক গ্রুপের কাছ থেকে এবং সেই গ্রুপ বা সংগঠনকে ঘিরেই তাকে বিন্যস্ত হতে হবে, যে সংগঠনগুলো তাদের নিজেদের ভালমন্দ নিজেরাই দেখাশোনা করতে সক্ষম। এই গবেষণায় দেখা গেছে যে, বাংলাদেশে স্থানীয় সরকারকে বিভিন্ন উদ্দেশ্যে ব্যবহার করা হয়। তবে জনমত গঠন করে সরকারী কর্মচারীদের পরিচালনা করার চেয়ে জনগণকে নেতৃত্বদানের কাজই এখন স্থানীয় সরকারকে দিয়ে বেশী করানো হয়ে থাকে। কেন্দ্রীয় ভাবে পরিকল্পিত প্রকল্প বা কর্মসূচী বাস্তবায়নের বাহন না হয়ে, স্থানীয় সরকারের উচিত টেকসই প্রবৃদ্ধি এবং উন্নয়নের লক্ষ্যে সমাজের সকল সদস্যের সর্ব প্রকার উদ্যোগের প্রতি সহযোগিতামূলক পরিবেশ গড়ে তোলা।

বিবরণ : ৪

কেন্দ্রীয় ও স্থানীয় শাসন সংগঠনের মধ্যকার অংশিদারত্বের সুদূরপ্রসারী জাতীয় দৃষ্টিকোণের একটি অবিচ্ছেদ্য অংশ হলো এই স্থানীয় সরকার।

সামগ্রিক জাতীয় শাসনের দৃষ্টিভঙ্গির একটি অবিচ্ছেদ্য অংশ হলো স্থানীয় সরকার সম্পর্কিত রূপরেখা। এই অভিন্ন দৃষ্টিকোণ থেকে দেখলে স্পষ্ট দেখা যাবে যে, কেন্দ্রীয় এবং স্থানীয় উভয় শাসন সংগঠনই অংশিদার হিসাবে কাজ করে এবং উভয়েরই কর্ম পরিধি এবং সম্পদ ব্যবহারের সীমা সাংবিধানিক এবং আইনগত কাঠামো দ্বারা নিয়ন্ত্রিত। আইনসিদ্ধ সংগঠন হিসাবে স্থানীয় সরকারসমূহ তাদের এখতিয়ার অনুযায়ী চুক্তি সম্পাদনও করতে সক্ষম। এই দৃষ্টিভঙ্গীতে স্থানীয় সরকার ব্যবস্থার রাজনৈতিক, অর্থনৈতিক ও সামাজিক ভূমিকার বৃহত্তর তাৎপর্য ফুটে ওঠে। তাছাড়া এই দৃষ্টিভঙ্গীতে জাতীয় এবং স্থানীয় উভয় পর্যায়েই গণতান্ত্রিক স্বায়ত্বশাসন কার্যকর করে তোলার রূপরেখা প্রতিভাত হয়।

সে যাই হোক, স্বায়ত্বশাসিত স্থানীয় সরকার ব্যবস্থাকে কার্যকর করে তোলার লক্ষ্যে যারা ইতোমধ্যেই যাত্রা শুরু করেছে, তাদেরকে অবশ্যই বর্তমান বাস্তবতাগুলো সবার আগে বিবেচনা করতে হবে, এবং রাজনৈতিক ও অর্থনৈতিক ক্ষেত্রে অভিজ্ঞতা অর্জনে মধ্য দিয়ে স্থানীয় সরকার প্রতিষ্ঠানগুলোর লক্ষ্যমাত্রা হাসিলের লক্ষ্যে বৃহত্তর ও পর্যায়ক্রমিক অগ্রগতির জন্য তৈরি হতে হবে। প্রতিটি স্থানীয় সরকার সংগঠনের বিকাশ এবং সাধ্যমত জনগণের প্রতি সেবাদানের সীমা ও বিধান প্রণয়ন করতে হবে এবং সুনির্ধারিত কর্মপরিধি অর্জনের মধ্য দিয়ে এর সেবা এবং নীতি নির্ধারণী দায়িত্বসমূহ বৃদ্ধি করতে হবে। এর পাশাপাশি জাতীয় সরকারকেও সকল নাগরিকের প্রতি সুবিচার, সমানাধিকার, সাম্য ও সুসম সম্পদ বন্টনের স্বার্থে মৌলিক অধিকার ও ন্যূনতম চাহিদা পূরণের নিশ্চয়তা দিতে হবে। সেইভাবে জাতীয় পরিমন্ডলে প্রণীত নীতি জাতীয় সরকারকে যতটা সম্ভব হস্তান্তরিত করতে হবে স্থানীয় সরকার কাঠামোর অধীনস্থ সংগঠনগুলিকে, যাতে সেই সব নীতিমালা আরও সুষ্ঠু এবং সুচারুভাবে বাস্তবায়িত হয়।

সম্পদ এবং যোগ্যতার বিবেচনায় স্থানীয় সরকারের অধীনে প্রয়োজনীয় অর্থ এবং জনসম্পদের সমাবেশ ঘটতে হবে, যাতে তারা তাদের উপর ন্যস্ত দায়িত্ব ও ভূমিকা সুষ্ঠুভাবে বাস্তবায়ন করতে পারে। জাতীয় সরকার তাদের দ্বারা যে কর্মসূচী বাস্তবায়ন করাতে চায় সেজন্য প্রয়োজনীয় অর্থের বাইরেও তাদের বাড়তি

সম্পদ এবং জনবল দ্বারা শক্তিশালী করে তুলতে হবে। অন্যান্য অনেক দেশে শিক্ষা, স্বাস্থ্য, পানি সরবরাহ, পয়ঃনিষ্কাশন, জনকল্যাণ, জন্ম-মৃত্যু নিবন্ধন, যোগাযোগ অবকাঠামো যেমন সড়ক, সেতু, ভূমি উন্নয়ন, সেচ, স্থানীয় আইন শৃংখলা ব্যবস্থাপনার ন্যায় মৌলিক সেবাসমূহের দায়িত্ব স্থানীয় সরকার কাঠামোর উপরই ন্যস্ত করা হয়। এসকল সেবাকর্মের মান নিয়ন্ত্রণ, সমন্বয় ও সুবিন্যস্তকরণের দায়িত্ব স্থানীয় সরকার পর্যায়ে তত্ত্বাবধানের পরবর্তী পর্যায়ে এগুলিকে চালু রাখা এবং বৃহত্তর নিয়ন্ত্রণের দায়িত্ব পালন করে জাতীয় সরকার। বেসরকারী এবং স্বেচ্ছাসেবী উৎস দ্বারা এসকল সেবা প্রদানের বিষয়ে জাতীয় সরকার একটি কর্মকাঠামো প্রণয়ন করতে পারেন। এমন অনেক এলাকা আছে যেগুলোর উন্নয়ন স্থানীয় সরকারের দায়িত্বে ন্যস্ত হওয়া সত্ত্বেও সম্পদ ও কাঠামোগত সীমাবদ্ধতা এবং টানাপোড়েনের কারণে সেখানে বড় হাসপাতাল, বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় প্রভৃতি প্রতিষ্ঠানের মত উদ্যোগে জাতীয় সরকার মূখ্য ভূমিকা পালন করে থাকে।

অন্যান্য দেশের অভিজ্ঞতা থেকে এবং সাংবিধানিক বিধি-বিধানের সাথে সঙ্গতি রেখে ইউনিয়ন, থানা, জেলা পর্যায়ে এবং ছোট শহর ও মহানগরীগুলিতে স্থানীয় সরকার গড়ে তোলা যেতে পারে। জেলা ও থানা পর্যায়ের স্থানীয় সরকার কাঠামোর গঠন বিন্যাস এবং কার্যকারিতার অতীত ইতিহাস ও অভিজ্ঞতার আলোকে চূড়ান্ত করতে হবে। থানা পর্যায়ের সংগঠনে প্রত্যক্ষ ভোটে নির্বাচিত একজন চেয়ারম্যান, শিক্ষা, স্বাস্থ্য প্রভৃতি সুনির্দিষ্ট খাতের জন্য কয়েকজন কমিশনার এবং সকল ইউনিয়ন পরিষদ চেয়ারম্যানকে পদাধিকার বলে সদস্য হিসাবে গ্রহণ করা যেতে পারে। জেলা পরিষদের জন্য নির্দিষ্ট উদ্দেশ্যে জনগণের প্রত্যক্ষ ভোটে নির্বাচিত সদস্যদের নিয়ে জেলা পরিষদ কাঠামো গড়ে তোলা যেতে পারে। এসব নির্দিষ্ট নির্বাচক মন্ডলীর সংখ্যা জেলার আয়তন বা আকারের উপর নির্ভর করবে। জেলা পরিষদের চেয়ারম্যানগণ সদস্যদের ভোটে নির্বাচিত হবেন। পদাধিকার বলে জেলা পরিষদের সদস্য হিসাবে সকল পৌরসভার চেয়ারম্যান এবং সংশ্লিষ্ট কর্পোরেশনের মেয়রকে অন্তর্ভুক্ত করা হবে।

এসব স্থানীয় সরকার প্রতিষ্ঠানের কার্যাবলী এমন ভাবে বিন্যস্ত করতে হবে যাতে প্রতিটি ইউনিট একটি সুনির্দিষ্ট কাজের জন্য দায়ী থাকে। দৃষ্টান্ত বিকল্প বলা চলে, শিক্ষা ক্ষেত্রে ইউনিয়ন পরিষদসমূহকে প্রাথমিক বিদ্যালয়ের দায়িত্ব দেওয়া যেতে পারে। থানা পরিষদকে দায়িত্ব দেওয়া যেতে পারে উচ্চ বিদ্যালয়ের এবং জেলা পরিষদকে দেওয়া যেতে পারে কলেজ, কারিগরী বিদ্যালয় এবং প্রশিক্ষণ স্থাপনাসমূহের দায়িত্ব।

বর্তমান বাস্তবতা

স্থানীয় সরকারের সাম্প্রতিক ইতিহাস একটি স্থিতিশীল এবং স্বায়ত্তশাসিত স্থানীয় ব্যবস্থার অনুকূল নয়। স্থানীয় সরকার হলো শাসন স্তর-বিন্যাসের সর্বশেষ ফল। এই স্তর বিন্যস্ত হয়ে ছিলো ভারতে ব্রিটিশ সরকার কর্তৃক স্থানীয় শাসন ব্যবস্থা প্রণয়নের ফলে। বাংলাদেশের বিগত দিনের সরকারসমূহের নীতি হয়ে দাঁড়িয়েছিলো স্থানীয় শাসন ব্যবস্থার কাঠামোগত রূপান্তর ঘটানো। এর মধ্য দিয়ে পূর্বতন কাঠামো ভেঙ্গে তদন্তে নতুন কাঠামো আরোপ করা হতো। নতুন কাঠামো অবশ্য শিকড় প্রসারিত করার সুযোগ পায়নি। কিন্তু পূর্বতন কাঠামোকেও কখনো পুরোপুরি বাতিল করা হয়নি। এর ফলশ্রুতিতে যে অবস্থাটা চলতে থাকে তাতে একটা জগাখিচুড়িই বলা চলে। কেননা এমন এক ধরনের মিশ্র কাঠামো এর মধ্য দিয়ে রূপ লাভ করে, যার লক্ষণ না পুরানো ব্যবস্থার, না নতুন ব্যবস্থার। ফলে এই ধরনের ব্যবস্থা জনসাধারণ বা

লোকসমাজের মধ্যে আপন বৈশিষ্ট্য সনাক্ত হয়নি কিংবা সমাজে স্থানীয় শাসন সম্পর্কে অস্থায়ীতাও সৃষ্টি হয়নি। স্থানীয় সমাজ বিভিন্ন সেবাকর্ম নির্বাহের জন্য যথোপযুক্ত স্থানীয় কর্তৃপক্ষ গড়ে তোলার ব্যাপারে বারবার তাগিদ দিচ্ছে (জেলা, থানা অথবা ইউনিয়ন পর্যায়ে)। কিন্তু স্থানীয় সরকার কাঠামোর স্থিতিশীল কার্যকারিতা বা কাঠামোগত বিন্যাস সরকারের খেয়ালখুশী মাফিক হওয়া উচিত নয়। বরং স্থানীয় পর্যায়ে অংশগ্রহণকারী সংগঠনগুলোকে সরকারী কর্মসূচী বাস্তবায়ন এবং সরকারী নীতিমালা আলোচনার জন্য প্রাতিষ্ঠানিক ভাবে আরও সবল ও শক্তিশালী করে তোলা দরকার। এখন তাই বিশেষভাবে প্রয়োজন অর্থনৈতিক ও প্রশাসনিক স্তর-বিন্যাসের ব্যাপারে বিভিন্ন রাজনৈতিক দলের সমন্বয়ে একটি কার্যকর ঐকমত্য গড়ে তোলার মধ্য দিয়ে এই লক্ষ্য সাধারণ সম্মতি প্রকাশ করা।

বর্তমানের স্থানীয় সরকার সংস্থাগুলো যে প্রক্রিয়ার মধ্য দিয়ে এগিয়ে চলেছে, তা' কোনো দায়িত্বশীল, জবাবদিহিমূলক এবং স্বচ্ছতাপূর্ণ স্থানীয় শাসন ব্যবস্থা প্রতিষ্ঠার অনুকূল নয়। জাতীয় এবং অন্যান্য পদসোপানের আমলাতন্ত্র নির্ধারিত কর্তৃপক্ষের ন্যায় আচরণ করে। স্থানীয় সরকারের পক্ষে জবাবদিহিতা এখন আর জনগণের জন্য নয়, বরং তার জবাবদিহিতা এবং দায়-দায়িত্ব প্রশাসনিক প্রয়োজনে এবং আমলাতন্ত্রের সাথে সংজ্ঞাপূর্ণ হিসাবেই গণ্য করা চলে। বর্তমানে কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার এবং বিভাগীয় বা জেলা প্রশাসন এবং স্থানীয় সরকারগুলোর মধ্যে ক্ষমতার যে বিন্যাস তাতে দেখা যায় যে, ক্ষমতার উৎস ব্যাপকভাবে কেন্দ্রীয় সরকারের অনুকূলেই ঝুঁকে থাকে। এমনকি স্থানীয় সরকারের মধ্যেও দেখা যায় যে, ক্ষমতা চেয়ারম্যানের দিকেই ঝুঁকে থাকে-নির্বাহী পরিষদের দিকে নয়। আবার সদস্যদের জবাবদিহিতা এবং কর্তব্য দেখা যায় চেয়ারম্যান কেন্দ্রিক। জনগণের প্রতি নয়। ক্ষমতার এহেন কেন্দ্রমুখী প্রবণতা স্বচ্ছতা প্রতিষ্ঠা করার ক্ষেত্রে প্রতিবন্ধকতা সৃষ্টি করছে।

কেন্দ্রীয় এবং স্থানীয় সরকারের মধ্যে স্থানীয় সরকারের বিভিন্ন শাখার মধ্যে যদি ক্ষমতা ও দায়িত্ব সুচারুভাবে বন্টন করতে হয়, তবে তার জন্য বিস্তারিত রূপরেখা এবং কার্যকর প্রক্রিয়া সম্পর্কে আরও ধারণার প্রয়োজনীয়তা রয়েছে। ক্রমান্বয়ে স্থানীয় সরকারের জবাবদিহিতা ও দায় দায়িত্ব জাতীয় আমলাতন্ত্রের নিয়ন্ত্রণমুক্ত করে স্থানীয় ভোটার এবং রাজনৈতিক প্রক্রিয়ার মাধ্যমে কার্যকরী করতে হবে। বর্তমানে স্থানীয় সরকারের জন্য বরাদ্দকৃত তহবিল এবং কর্মসূচী বাস্তবায়ন, পরিকল্পনা, তত্ত্বাবধায়ন এবং নিয়ন্ত্রণের দায়িত্ব আমলাতন্ত্রের উপরই ন্যস্ত।

অর্থ :

স্থানীয় সরকারের সম্পদের ভিত্তি বেশ দুর্বল। গবেষণায় দেখা গেছে ইউনিয়ন পরিষদভুক্ত জনসাধারণের গড় রাজস্ব মাথাপিছু মাত্র ৪ টাকা। অপরদিকে 'ক' 'খ' ও 'গ' শ্রেণীর পৌরসভাভুক্ত জনগণের গড় মাথাপিছু রাজস্বের পরিমাণ যথাক্রমে ৮৫/=, ৫৮/= এবং ৫৫/= টাকা। স্থানীয় সরকার হিসাবে ইউনিয়ন পরিষদের ব্যয় গড়ে মাথাপিছু ২৭/= টাকা। অপরদিকে 'ক' 'খ' এবং 'গ' শ্রেণীর পৌরসভার সেখানে গড় মাথাপিছু ব্যয় ২১৫/=, ১৪৪/= এবং ১৮২/= টাকা যথাক্রমে। রাজস্ব এবং ব্যয়ের অসঙ্গতি চলতে থাকলে স্থানীয় সরকার স্বায়ত্তশাসিতও হতে পারবেনা বা তার উপর অর্পিত দায়িত্ব ও কর্তব্যগুলিও পালন করতে পারবেনা।

জনশক্তি :

অর্থের ন্যায় জনশক্তির ব্যাপারেও এই গবেষণায় দেখা গেছে যে, স্থানীয় সরকারের নির্বাহী দায়িত্ব পালনে কর্মীসংখ্যার স্বল্পতা রয়েছে। তবে জনশক্তির প্রাচুর্য না থাকলেও পৌরসভাগুলির কর্মী সংখ্যায় যেখানে কিছুটা শৈথিল্য দেখা যায়, সে তুলনায় ইউনিয়ন পরিষদগুলোর আকার যেখানে যেরকমই হোকনা কেন, তাদের সকলেরই সদস্য সংখ্যা এক রকম, যার মধ্যে রয়েছে সম্পাদক এবং তার অধীনস্থ কয়েকজন গ্রামীণ পুলিশ কনেষ্টেবল। ইউনিয়ন পরিষদ পর্যায়ে কর্মীদের প্রশিক্ষণের সুযোগ সুবিধা খুবই অপ্রতুল। তবে পৌরসভা পর্যায়েও এই সুযোগ সেই তুলনায় আশানুরূপ নয়।

স্থানীয় সরকারের কার্যক্রম পরিচালনার জন্য স্থানীয় সরকারের পর্যাপ্ত সম্পদ পাওয়া উচিত। স্থানীয় সরকারের তহবিল এবং জনশক্তি বাড়াতে গেলে অবশ্য কেন্দ্রীয় সরকারকে কেন্দ্রীয় সম্পদ, যা মাঠ পর্যায়ে বিক্ষিপ্ত রয়েছে, সেইগুলিসহ অন্যান্য সম্পদের একটি উল্লেখযোগ্য অংশ স্থানীয় সরকারের উদ্দেশ্যে হস্তান্তরিত করতে হবে।

নীতি এবং কৌশলগত তথ্য :

স্থানীয় সরকারের তথ্যগত ভিত্তি খুবই দুর্বল এবং স্থানীয় সরকার সম্পর্কিত দায়িত্ব ও কর্তব্য সম্পর্কে সাধারণ ধারণাও সন্তোষজনক নয়।

ব্যবস্থাপনা :

স্থানীয় পর্যায়ে ব্যবস্থাপনাগত যোগ্যতার মান অনেকটা পশ্চাদপদ। সার্বিক পর্যায়ে রেকর্ডপত্র সংরক্ষণ, তথ্য বিন্যাস, তথ্য সংগ্রহ, নীতিমালা প্রণয়ন এবং কর্মসূচী সম্পর্কিত তথ্য-উপাত্ত, যথার্থ সিদ্ধান্ত প্রণয়ন এবং অংশগ্রহণমূলক সিদ্ধান্ত গ্রহণ পদ্ধতি কিংবা গণতান্ত্রিক নেতৃত্ব প্রভৃতির মান নিম্ন পর্যায়ের এবং এবং বেশির ভাগ স্থানীয় সরকারে এগুলোর কোনো বালাইই নেই।

আইনগত কাঠামো :

যে সকল আইন, বিধান ও নিয়মনীতি দ্বারা স্থানীয় সরকার ব্যবস্থা পরিচালিত হয়, সেগুলি অধিকাংশ ক্ষেত্রেই হয় অস্পষ্ট অথবা অতি সংক্ষিপ্ত। ইউনিয়ন পরিষদ এবং পৌরসভা অধ্যাদেশগুলো পর্যালোচনা করলে দেখা যাবে এমন অনেক আইন ও বিধি বিধান আছে, যেগুলো একটি অন্যটির সাথে অসঙ্গতিপূর্ণ। কিছু আইনে হয়তো স্বায়ত্তশাসনের মাত্রা বৃদ্ধির কথা বলা হয়েছে কিংবা আরও অধিকতর স্বাধীনতা, অংশগ্রহণ ও দায়িত্বের উপর জোর দেওয়া হয়েছে। আবার এমনও কিছু আইন আছে যেখানে এসকল বিধান বা বৈশিষ্ট্যকে সচেতন ভাবেই বাদ দেওয়া হয়েছে বা বিধানগুলিকে বিলুপ্ত করা হয়েছে। কার্যক্ষেত্রে এটাই দেখা যায় যে, আইন-কানুন ও বিধিবিধানগুলি স্থানীয় সরকার ব্যবস্থাকে আরও দুর্বল এবং আরও বেশী মুখাপেক্ষী করে তুলছে।

এধরণের অসঙ্গতি বা স্ববিরোধিতায় বিভ্রান্তি সৃষ্টি হয় এবং পরিণতিতে কর্মক্ষেত্রে সৃষ্টি হয় ব্যাপক শৈথিল্য। ফলে স্বাবলম্বী বা স্বনির্ভর হবার বদলে স্থানীয় সরকারগুলো কেন্দ্রীয় সরকারের প্রতি আরও বেশী মুখাপেক্ষী এবং দুর্বল হয়ে ওঠে। এজন্য সংশ্লিষ্ট আইন ও বিধি সমূহের অর্থয়োজনীয়তা, অপ্রাসঙ্গিকতা ইত্যাদি পরিহার করা ও স্বায়ত্তশাসন বৃদ্ধি কিংবা কেন্দ্রীয় সরকারের নিয়ন্ত্রণ হ্রাসের প্রয়োজনীয়তাকে সামনে রেখে সেগুলির পুনর্বিন্যস্তকরণ ও সুসমকরণ খুবই জরুরী।

অংশগ্রহণ :

এই গবেষণায় দেখা গেছে যে, স্থানীয় পর্যায়ে অংশগ্রহণের ভিত্তি যতটা না ধারাবাহিকতাপূর্ণ, তার চেয়ে বেশী হলো ভোটাভুটিসর্বস্ব। নির্বাচনী প্রক্রিয়ায় জনসাধারণের অংশগ্রহণের মাত্রা খুব বেশী দেখা যায়। ১৯৯৬ এর সংসদীয় নির্বাচনে ভোটার টার্নআউট সরকারীভাবে ৭৩.৫ শতাংশ বলে ঘোষণা করা হয়েছে। স্থানীয় পর্যায়ে অর্থাৎ গ্রামাঞ্চলে ভোটারদের অংশগ্রহণের মাত্রা ছিলো বেশী। পৌর নির্বাচনেও জনগণের অংশগ্রহণের মাত্রা বাড়ছে। ১৯৭৩ সালের পৌরসভা নির্বাচনে যেখানে ভোটারদের অংশগ্রহণের শতকরা হার ছিলো ৬২.৫ ভাগ; ১৯৭৭ সালে এসে সেই হার দাঁড়ায় ৮০ শতাংশে। ইউনিয়ন পরিষদ পর্যায়ের ভোটে আসন প্রতি প্রতিদ্বন্দ্বিতাকারী প্রার্থীর সংখ্যা বৃদ্ধির প্রবণতাও এক্ষেত্রে একটি বড় সূচক। প্রতি আসাব এক্ষেত্রে ১৯৬৪ সালে প্রার্থীর হার ছিলো ২.৯ শতাংশ। ১৯৭৩ এর নির্বাচনে তা' হয় ৩.৭ শতাংশ এবং ১৯৯২ এর নির্বাচনে ৪.৫ শতাংশ। এই গবেষণায় অবশ্য এটাও দেখা গেছে যে, স্থানীয় সরকারের আলোচনা চক্র কিংবা অন্যান্য তৎপরতায় কিংবা স্থানীয় সরকারের বিভিন্ন কমিটি ও উপকমিটিগুলোর বিভিন্ন কর্মতৎপরতায় জনগণের অংশ গ্রহণের মাত্রা অত্যন্ত অনুল্লেখযোগ্য।

এই গবেষণার আরও লক্ষ্য করা গেছে যে, স্থানীয় সরকারের বিভিন্ন পদে নির্বাচিত প্রতিনিধিরা বাংলাদেশের গোটা সমাজকে প্রতিনিধিত্ব করেননা। অধিকাংশ নির্বাচিত সদস্যই পুরুষ এবং উচ্চবিত্ত সমাজ থেকে আগত। মহিলাদের আসন সংরক্ষিত এবং এই সংরক্ষিত আসনের মধ্য দিয়েই তারা তাদের দাবী দাওয়া তুলে ধরেন। খুব কম সংখ্যক স্থানীয় সরকার প্রধানই মহিলা। স্থানীয় সরকার ব্যবস্থায় দরিদ্র সমাজ বা এ ধরণের অন্যান্য অংশের দাবী দাওয়া শ্রবণের কোনো ব্যবস্থা নেই।

অপরদিকে সংখ্যা কম হলেও জাতীয় পর্যায়ের বেসরকারী সংগঠনগুলো (এনজিও) সমাজের অপ্রতিনিধিত্বশীল দুর্গত মানুষগুলোর দাবীদাওয়া তুলে ধরার ব্যবস্থা করছে এবং উন্নয়নে তাদের অংশগ্রহণ নিশ্চিত করেছে। অপ্রতিনিধিত্বপূর্ণ সামাজিক অংশের সবল বা শক্তিশালীকরণ প্রক্রিয়ায় এনজিওগুলো ধীরে ধীরে ক্রমবর্দ্ধমান হারে সহযোগী হয়ে উঠছে। তাছাড়া নিয়মিত নির্বাচনী প্রক্রিয়ায় যদের অংশ নেবার বা ভূমিকা রাখার সুযোগ নেই স্থানীয় অলাভজনক সংগঠনগুলো তাদের অংশগ্রহণের সুযোগ করে দিচ্ছে। তাই আশা করা যায় যে, আনুষ্ঠানিকভাবে স্থানীয় শাসনব্যবস্থায় যাদের প্রতিনিধিত্বশীলতা নেই, তারা তাদের আবেগ অনুভূতি প্রকাশের জন্য এনজিও গুলিকে ব্যবহার করবে এবং আনুষ্ঠানিক স্থানীয় সরকারের কর্মসূচী ও নীতিমালাকে প্রভাবিত করার চেষ্টা করবে, যার দ্বারা একপর্যায়ে তারা স্থানীয় সরকারের সাথে ঘনিষ্ঠ ভাবে সংশ্লিষ্ট হতে পারে।

শক্তিশালীকরণ এবং প্রতিনিধিত্ব

বিগত কয়েক বছরে বাংলাদেশে অপ্রতিনিধিত্বশীল গ্রুপ, বিশেষ করে মহিলাদের সামাজিক অবস্থান শক্তিশালীকরণের ক্ষেত্রে ব্যাপক পরিবর্তন সংঘটিত হয়েছে। এক্ষেত্রে একটি বিশেষ ব্যতিক্রম হলো উপার্জন বৃদ্ধি তৎপরতায় মহিলাদের কর্মসংস্থানের ক্রমবর্ধমান সুযোগ সৃষ্টি। তৈরি পোশাক প্রস্তুতের ক্ষেত্রে কর্মজীবীদের ৯০% ভাগই হলো মহিলা। আজ বাংলাদেশে নারী সংগঠনের সংখ্যা ৫০০ এরও বেশী, যাদের সদস্য সংখ্যা হবে বিশ লাখের মতো। প্রথম প্রথম এসব সংগঠনের অনেকেগুলিই এনজিওদের সহযোগিতা পেয়েছে। BRAC এর অভীষ্ট জনগোষ্ঠীর মধ্যে ৮-২ শতাংশই মহিলা এবং এ সংগঠনের ৭৪% ঋণ মহিলাদের মধ্যেই বিতরণ করা হয়। অপর একটি নেতৃস্থানীয় এনজিও 'আশা' এর রয়েছে শক্তিশালীকরণ শিক্ষা বা সচেতনতা কেন্দ্র। এ ধরনের ১১,৭৫৪টি কেন্দ্রের ১১,৬৫১টি কেন্দ্রই মহিলাদের জন্য এবং মাত্র ৬৩টি কেন্দ্র পরিচালিত হয় পুরুষদের জন্য। মহিলা সচেতনতা কেন্দ্রগুলিতে অংশগ্রহণকারীর সংখ্যা ২লাখ ২৭ হাজার ৯৬৯ জন। পুরুষ অংশগ্রহণকারীদের সংখ্যা মাত্র ১,১৬৬। যদিও এখনও অনেক কিছু করণীয় বাকী, তথাপি এই দৃষ্টান্তগুলিই একথা প্রমাণের জন্য পর্যাপ্ত যে, সঠিক উৎসাহ পেলে এই সব অপ্রতিনিধিত্বশীল দরিদ্র জনগোষ্ঠীও হতে পারে সমাজের সক্রিয় এবং অবদান রাখার মতো উপযুক্ত সদস্য। স্থানীয় সরকারকে সমাজের অবিচ্ছেদ্য অংশে পরিণত হতে হলে সমাজের এই সব ভাগ্যবিড়ম্বিত ও অপ্রতিনিধিত্বশীল অংশকে সাথে নেওয়া অত্যন্ত জরুরী।

বর্তমান স্থানীয় সরকারের যে কাঠামোগত আকার আকৃতি এবং সাংগঠনিক ও কর্মপদ্ধতিগত বিন্যাস, তাতে জাতীয় সরকার যদি তাকে শক্তিশালী করে তুলতে চায়, সেজন্য প্রয়োজন দীর্ঘমেয়াদী অঙ্গীকার। জাতীয় সরকারকে এজন্য স্থানীয় সরকারের দিকে পর্যাপ্ত আর্থিক ও জনশক্তিগত সমর্থন নিয়ে এগিয়ে যেতে হবে। এছাড়া অব্যাহতভাবে ব্যবস্থাপনাগত ও তথ্য সম্পর্কিত সহযোগিতা এবং জাতীয় ও স্থানীয় সরকারের ভূমিকা ও দায়িত্ব সুস্পষ্ট সুস্পষ্ট সংজ্ঞা ও দায়িত্বের রূপরেখা নির্ণীত হওয়া প্রয়োজন।

এই গবেষণায় আরও দেখা গেছে যে, কিছু কিছু ব্যক্তি, দল বা সমাজ নিজ নিজ পরিমন্ডলে স্থানীয় সমস্যাাদি নিয়ে গভীর ভাবে সংশ্লিষ্ট রয়েছেন এমনকি আনুষ্ঠানিক স্থানীয় সরকার কাঠামোর বাইরেও তারা সমাজের উন্নয়ন ও কল্যানার্থে বেশ কিছু কর্মসূচী চালিয়ে যাচ্ছেন। এসব উদ্যোগ ও কর্মতৎপরতার মাধ্যমে তারা প্রমাণ করেছেন যে, সমাজের মধ্যেই এমন অনেক সম্ভাবনা লুকিয়ে আছে, যারা সমাজের সমস্যাবলী চিহ্নিত করতে এবং প্রয়োজনীয় বা সমন্বিত তৎপরতা চালিয়ে যেতে সক্ষম। এই গবেষণায় এটাও প্রতিভাত হয়েছে যে, সরকার এবং আন্তর্জাতিক উৎসের সমর্থন থাকলেও সফল উদ্যোগের জন্য প্রয়োজন স্থানীয় উদ্যোগ এবং স্থানীয় ও জাতীয় পর্যায়ে মধ্যে ব্যক্তি ও সাংগঠনিক পর্যায়ের সহযোগিতাপূর্ণ সম্পর্ক।

কো-অপ্টকরণ এবং সহযোগিতা

সার্বিকভাবে প্রবৃদ্ধি ও উন্নয়ন প্রক্রিয়ার মান উন্নয়নের স্বার্থে ব্রাহ্মণবাড়িয়া জেলাধীন কশবা ইউনিয়নের চেয়ারম্যান বিভিন্ন সূত্রের কাছে সহযোগিতা প্রার্থনা করেছিলেন। ইউনিয়ন পরিষদটি নিম্নলিখিত সূত্র সমূহের কাছ থেকে সম্পদ ও সহযোগিতা লাভ করে : খাল খননের ব্যাপারে বিশ্বখাদ্য কর্মসূচী, নিকাশন ব্যবস্থার মান উন্নয়নে এশীয় উন্নয়ন ব্যাংকের সহযোগিতা, ঢাকাস্থ রমনা রোটারী ক্লাব'এর কাছ থেকে এক একরের কম জমির মালিকদের জন্য বিদ্যুৎচালিত নলকূপ এবং পাকা পায়খানা; স্থানীয় একটি এনজিও 'মানব উন্নয়ন সংস্থা' এর কাছ থেকে পাওয়া গেছে বয়স্ক শিক্ষা কেন্দ্র স্থাপন বিষয়ক সহযোগিতা, বাংলাদেশ জাতীয় অন্ধ সমিতি ও কুমিল্লার সদর হাসপাতালের কাছ থেকে চক্ষু চিকিৎসা ও স্বাস্থ্য পরিচর্যা বিষয়ক সহযোগিতা এবং স্থানীয় সরকার বিভাগ থেকে পাওয়া গেছে ইউনিয়ন পরিষদ ভবন উন্নয়নের বাবদ সহযোগিতা।

প্রধান ধারণাগত পটভূমি

এই গবেষণা-যা বহুলাংশে কাঠামোগত পর্যালোচনার পর্যায়ভুক্ত কিংবা এই রিপোর্টের অন্যান্য অনুচ্ছেদে যে সকল পর্যবেক্ষণ তুলে ধরা হয়েছে, তাতে এটাই সাব্যস্ত হয় যে, বাংলাদেশে কার্যকর এবং সুষ্ঠু স্থানীয় শাসন প্রবর্তনের সুযোগ প্রধানতঃ তিনটি কারণে সংকুচিত হয়ে রয়েছে। এই তিনটি হেতুকে যদি বিষদভাবে বিশ্লেষণ করা যায় তাহলেই সম্ভব স্বায়ত্তশাসিত ও সুসমন্বিত একটি স্থানীয় শাসন ব্যবস্থা প্রবর্তনের একটি পরিবেশ বা পরিস্থিতি গড়ে তোলা। এই তিনটি বিষয় হলো :

- ☐ গণতান্ত্রিক প্রতিষ্ঠানাদি গড়ে তোলা
- ☐ অংশগ্রহণ ও প্রতিনিধিত্ব
- ☐ বিকেন্দ্রীকরণ, পুনর্বিন্যাস ও পুনর্বিন্টন

গণতান্ত্রিক প্রতিষ্ঠান গড়ে তোলা :

স্থানীয় সরকারকে বিকশিত করতে হলে জনগণের জীবনযাত্রার সাথে সম্পর্কযুক্ত ইস্যুগুলির দায়দায়িত্ব সংশ্লিষ্ট সমাজের উপরই অর্পণ করতে হবে, বিশেষ করে স্থানীয় সমাজভিত্তিক স্থানীয় সরকারের উপর ছেড়ে দিতে হবে যাদের কার্যপ্রণালীতে রয়েছে স্বচ্ছতা এবং সমাজের সদস্যবর্গের প্রতি জবাবদিহিতার বাধ্য-বাধ্যকতা। স্থানীয় সরকারের উপর সংশ্লিষ্ট মন্ত্রণালয়ের মত উচ্চকর্তৃপক্ষের নির্দেশ বা চাপিয়ে দেওয়া কোনো ব্যবস্থার দ্বারা স্থানীয় সরকারের কোনো উদ্যোগের বিরুদ্ধে বেশ কিছু আইনগত ব্যবস্থা রয়েছে (যেমন ইউপিও'এর ৩০ নং ধারা এবং ৩০ (২) নং ধারা)। এই ধরনের ভেটো' ক্ষমতা স্থানীয় পর্যায়ের গণতান্ত্রিক প্রতিনিধিত্বশীলতাকে সংকুচিত করেছে। সংশ্লিষ্ট কর্তৃপক্ষ এভাবে স্থানীয় সরকারের উপর ছড়ি ঘোরানো অব্যাহত রাখার ফলে অবস্থা এমন দাঁড়ায় যে, কোনো ইউনিয়ন পরিষদ চেয়ারম্যান হয়তো সংশ্লিষ্ট থানা

নির্বাহী কর্মকর্তার পূর্ব অনুমতি বিহনে কোনো সিদ্ধান্ত গ্রহণই করতে চান না। এমনকি স্থানীয় সরকার ব্যবস্থার মধ্যেও স্থানীয় সংস্থার চেয়ারম্যানের হাতে কেন্দ্রীভূত ক্ষমতা গণতান্ত্রিক পন্থায় সিদ্ধান্ত গ্রহণের সুযোগগুলো সংকুচিত করে তোলে। চেয়ারম্যান নির্বাচিত হন তার প্রতি প্রদত্ত গণসম্মতির ভিত্তিতে। ফলে তিনি স্থানীয় ভাবে নির্বাচিত পরিষদের অন্যান্যদের সাথে শলাপরামর্শ করার প্রয়োজন বোধ করেন না। নির্বাচিত পরিষদ প্রায়ই কোনো সিদ্ধান্তের ব্যাপারে চেয়ারম্যানের একক সিদ্ধান্তের প্রতি অন্ধ সমর্থন দিতে বাধ্য হন। অর্থাৎ পরিষদের অপরাপর সদস্যবর্গের অংশগ্রহণ, সংশ্লিষ্টতা এবং অনুভূতির প্রতি খুব সামান্যই মর্যাদা দেওয়া হয়।

একটি গণতান্ত্রিক ব্যবস্থায় নির্বাচিত কর্মকর্তা এবং স্থায়ী কর্মকর্তা বা কর্মচারীদের ভূমিকা ও দায়িত্ব সম্পর্কে সচেতনতার অভাব থেকেও গণতান্ত্রিক প্রতিষ্ঠানসমূহের বিকাশের গতিরুদ্ধ হয়। এর পরিণতিতে জবাবদিহিতা এবং দায়িত্ব পালনের মত ইস্যুগুলি প্রায়শঃই ভুল পথে পরিচালিত হয় বা এগুলোর ভুল ব্যাখ্যা করা হয়। জনগণের নির্বাচিত প্রতিনিধিরা সমাজ বা নাগরিকদের প্রতি দায়িত্বশীলতা বা জবাবদিহিতার প্রয়োজন বোধ করার চেয়ে তাদের জবাবদিহিতাকে স্থানান্তরিত করেন কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার ও জেলা প্রশাসনের স্থায়ী কর্মকর্তাদের বরাবরে। জনগণের প্রতি দায়িত্ব ও কর্তব্যের মত বিষয়গুলি উচ্চারিত হতে শোনা যায় কেবল নির্বাচনের সময়।

অংশগ্রহণ এবং প্রতিনিধিত্বশীলতা

আইনগত কাঠামোতে শাসন ব্যবস্থায় জনগণের অংশগ্রহণ এবং প্রতিনিধিত্বশীলতার বিধান থাকলেও স্থানীয় সরকারের বর্তমান ব্যবস্থা এসব মূল্যবোধকে উৎসাহিত করেনা। বর্তমানে মহিলাদের সদস্যপদে অন্তর্ভুক্ত করার মধ্য দিয়ে প্রতিনিধিত্বশীলতার লক্ষ্য বেশ কিছু অর্জিত হয় ঠিকই, তবে সিদ্ধান্ত গ্রহণে তাদের ভূমিকা এর ফলে সংকুচিত হয়। সদস্যপদে কাউকে মনোনীত করা হচ্ছে এক ধরনের দ্বিতীয় শ্রেণীর মর্যাদা। এই ধরনের মর্যাদাসম্পন্ন “প্রতিনিধিদের” সত্যিকার এবং অর্থপূর্ণ কোনো নির্বাচকমন্ডলী থাকে না।

স্থানীয় সরকারের কমিটির ও উপকমিটিসমূহের মাধ্যমে কাজ করার জন্য গণরায় প্রদান করা হয় যাতে সমাজের সর্বস্তরের মানুষ বিশেষ করে যারা অবহেলিত এবং ভাগ্যহত, তাদের প্রতিনিধিত্বের ব্যবস্থা করা যায়। কিন্তু বাস্তব অবস্থাটি এরকম দাঁড়ায় যে, গড়ে মাত্র হাতে গোনা দুই/একটি কমিটি স্বাধীন বিবেচনা মার্কিন কাজ করতে পারে। বিশেষ করে যারা সম্পদ বিতরণের দায়িত্বে থাকে। তারা তাদের বিবেচনাশক্তিপ্রয়োগ করতে পারে এবং এর ফলে ক্ষমতা ও মর্যাদারও অধিকারী হয় তারা। কিন্তু এ ধরনের কমিটিতে সমাজের সর্বস্তরের মানুষের প্রতিনিধিত্ব খুব কম ক্ষেত্রেই থাকে। অংশগ্রহণের প্রক্রিয়া ব্যাহত হবার আর একটা বড় কারণ নিরবচ্ছিন্ন যোগাযোগের সুযোগ না থাকা। এই যোগাযোগের অভাবে স্থানীয় সরকার এবং কেন্দ্রীয় প্রশাসনের স্থায়ী কর্মচারী এবং জনগণের মধ্যে ব্যবধান ক্রমেই প্রশস্ত হতে থাকে।

এমনকি যে সব কমিটিতে সমাজের বহুপাক্ষিক প্রতিনিধিত্বশীলতা নিশ্চিত করা যায়, সেখানেও অংশগ্রহণের ক্ষেত্রে সমস্যা সৃষ্টি হয়। কর্মরত কমিটি ও উপ-কমিটি সমূহের উপর পর্যবেক্ষণ চালিয়ে দেখা গেছে যে, সমাজের অবহেলিত শ্রেণী থেকে আগত সদস্যবর্গ সভায় খুবই কম মুখ খোলে এবং চেয়ারম্যানগণ যদি তাদের বক্তব্য কেউ খন্ডন করার চেষ্টা করে, সেদিকে খুব একটা পান্ডা দেন না। আইন, বিধিবিধান, অধ্যাদেশসহ সকল প্রকার প্রাতিষ্ঠানিক বা আইনগত পদক্ষেপ বাস্তবায়নে স্থানীয় সরকার পরিষদের অংশগ্রহণ, মতামত ও ভূমিকা প্রয়োজন এবং সে ভূমিকা আসতে হবে পরিষদের সদস্য ও জনসাধারণের মধ্য থেকেই।

বিকেন্দ্রীকরণ, পূর্ণবিন্যাস ও পুনর্বন্টন

সংবিধানে প্রকৃত স্থানীয় সরকারের স্বীকৃতি থাকলেও কার্যতঃ ক্ষমতা, কর্তৃত্ব ও দায়দায়িত্ব রয়ে গেছে কেন্দ্রীয় সরকারেরই হাতে। রাজস্ব বৃদ্ধির মত পদক্ষেপ গ্রহণের ক্ষেত্রে এটা আরও সম্যকভাবে উপলব্ধি করা যায়। কার্যতঃ সর্ব প্রকার কর খাজনাই কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার একচেটিয়াভাবে প্রয়োগ করে থাকে। নিজস্ব সম্পদ ছাড়া স্থানীয় সরকারের পক্ষে কোনো কর্মসূচী পরিচালনা বা স্বায়ত্তশাসনের অধিকার অর্জন করা সম্ভব নয়। বর্তমানে স্থানীয় সরকারকে বিভিন্ন অংশগ্রহণের সুযোগ বৃদ্ধির জন্য কাজে লাগানো হচ্ছে সম্পদ সমাবেশ করার লক্ষ্যে। এমনও দৃষ্টান্ত আছে যেখানে স্থানীয় সরকারকেই কাজে লাগানো হচ্ছে জাতীয় উন্নয়ন কর্মসূচীর লক্ষ্যমাত্রা অর্জনের বাহন হিসাবে। আবার এমনও স্থানীয় সরকার আছে যেগুলো জাতীয় পর্যায়ের রাজনৈতিক দলের ক্ষমতার ভিত্তি (Power base) বা ক্ষেত্র হিসাবে কাজে লাগানো হচ্ছে। প্রধানতঃ স্থানীয় সরকারের উপর দায়িত্ব অর্পণ করা যেতে পারে স্থানীয় সমাজের চাহিদা পূরণের উপযুক্ত সংস্থা হিসাবে। স্থানীয় পর্যায়ে সিদ্ধান্ত গ্রহণের দায়িত্ব বন্টনে উন্মুক্ত নীতি, স্বচ্ছতা এবং যোগ্যতার শ্রেণী বিন্যাস মোতাবেক দায়িত্ব ন্যস্ত করা উচিত। যেখানে স্থানীয় সমাজ তাদের স্থানীয় সরকার পরিচালনার আর্থিক এবং জনশক্তিগত সমর্থন বেশী দিতে পারবে এবং নিজেদের উন্নয়ন চাহিদা পূরণের পরিকল্পনা করতে সফল হবে, তাদের উচিত বেশী দায়িত্ব গ্রহণ করা এবং এই ভাবেই পর্যায়ক্রমে অধিকতর স্বায়ত্তশাসন অর্জন করা সম্ভব হবে। স্থানীয় সরকারকে অনেক সময় এমন সব কাজের দায়িত্ব দওয়া হয়, যেগুলোর জন্য প্রয়োজনীয় আর্থিক সঙ্গতি তাদের নেই। আবার সমাজের জন্য প্রয়োজন এমন বহুবিধ কাজ আছে যেগুলো করা থেকে তাদেরকে বিরত রাখা হয়। দায়িত্বের যুক্তিসঙ্গত বন্টন, কর খাজনার উৎস এবং পেশাদার ও দক্ষ জনশক্তি থাকলে স্থানীয় সরকার সংশ্লিষ্ট সমাজের কল্যাণ ও অর্থনৈতিক উন্নয়নে শক্তিশালী এবং টেকসই সংগঠন হিসাবে আবির্ভূত হতে পারে।

ক্ষমতা সম্পদ ও দায়িত্বের পূর্ণবিন্যাস যেমন প্রয়োজন, তেমনি একথাও স্বীকার করতে হবে যে, বাংলাদেশে স্থানীয় শাসনব্যবস্থা বিবর্তনের মধ্য দিয়েই এগিয়ে চলেছে এবং এ ব্যাপারে কেন্দ্র ও স্থানীয় সরকার উভয়ই কাজ করে চলেছে, যদিও তাদের ভূমিকা ও কার্যপরিধির মধ্যে ব্যাপক বেশকম রয়েছে। স্থানীয় সরকারের ব্যবস্থাপনাগত মান উন্নয়ন ও শক্তিশালীকরণের জন্য প্রতিষ্ঠানিক এবং প্রশিক্ষণগত উদ্যোগের প্রয়োজন রয়েছে। স্থানীয় সরকারের কাজ কর্মে স্বচ্ছতার সৃষ্টি করতে হলে তাদের কাজকর্মকে জনগণের কাছে উন্মুক্ত এবং দায়ী করে তুলতে হবে এবং কর্মসূচী ও তৎপরতার বিষয়ে জনগণকে অবহিত করতে হবে। এছাড়া উপযুক্ত হিসাব নিকাশ সংরক্ষণ, রেকর্ড সংরক্ষণ ও অডিট করার ব্যবস্থা রাখতে হবে। এগুলোই হবে কেন্দ্রীয় প্রশাসনিক কর্তৃপক্ষের দায়িত্ব। আর যে কাজটি করতে হবে তাদের তা হলো স্থানীয় সরকার কর্মকর্তাদের এবং উন্নয়নকর্মে সংশ্লিষ্ট কর্মীদের নিয়মিত প্রশিক্ষণের ব্যবস্থা করা। মোট কথা, কেন্দ্রীয় প্রশাসনিক বিভাগের কাজ হবে স্বায়ত্তশাসনকে সংকোচন করে, এমন কোনো নিয়ন্ত্রণ সর্বস্ব নীতি অনুসরণ করার স্থলে স্থানীয় সরকার ও কর্মকর্তা ও কর্মীদেরকে সহায়তাদানের লক্ষ্যে ও তাদের ব্যবস্থাপনা মান উন্নয়নের জন্য প্রয়োজনীয় প্রশিক্ষণ কর্মসূচী পরিচালনা করা।

উপসংহার

উপরেল্লিখিত আলোচনা ও পর্যালোচনার আলোকে এখানে কতিপয় উপসংহার টানা হলো :-

১। সুনির্দিষ্ট কর্তৃপক্ষের ভূমিকা যেহেতু স্থানীয় পর্যায়ে একটি গণতান্ত্রিক প্রতিষ্ঠান গঠনের পরিপন্থী, তাই যে সকলে ক্ষেত্রে উপরস্থ কর্তৃপক্ষের ভূমিকা গণতান্ত্রিক প্রতিনিধিত্বশীলতাকে খর্ব করে, সেগুলো সংকুচিত করা উচিত। বরং তাদের ভূমিকা ও কর্মপরিধিকে ঐ সব ক্ষেত্রে বৃদ্ধি করা উচিত যেখানে সার্বিক ব্যবস্থাপনা ও সেবাকর্মের সুষ্ঠু নির্বাহের প্রশ্ন জড়িত। স্থানীয় সরকার মন্ত্রণালয়ের কাছ থেকে তদারকি ও নিয়ন্ত্রণমূলক দায়িত্ব স্থানীয় সরকার কমিশনের কাছে স্থানান্তরের সুযোগকে কাজে লাগানো উচিত। স্থানীয় সরকার কমিশন স্থানীয় শাসনের সাথেও তুলনামূলক ভাবে বেশী ঘনিষ্ঠ এবং মন্ত্রণালয়ের কঠোর নিয়মনীতি কাঠামো থেকে বেশ কিছুটা মুক্ত। স্থানীয় সরকারে নিযুক্ত জাতীয় সরকারের কর্মকর্তা/কর্মচারীদের ভূমিকাও পরিবর্তন করা দরকার। এখন এই ভূমিকার প্রবণতা হলো নির্দেশমূলক এবং তদারকিমূলক। এই ভূমিকাকে হতে হবে সহায়তামূলক এবং সমর্থনসূচক। এর পাশাপাশি একথাও সত্য যে, কেন্দ্রীয় বিভাগসমূহের সংশ্লিষ্টতা এবং মাঠ পর্যায়ের সরকারী ব্যবস্থাপনা তদারকীজ্ঞান, যোগ্যতা প্রভৃতি ব্যতিত অধিকাংশ স্থানীয় সরকারই টিকে থাকার যোগ্যতা হারাবে।

২। বর্তমানে স্থানীয় সরকার সংস্থার সাংগঠনিক ক্ষমতা কাঠামোটি গণতান্ত্রিক রীতি-নীতির পরিপন্থী। গণতান্ত্রিক ব্যবস্থাকে সত্যিকারের প্রাতিষ্ঠানিক রূপ দিতে হলে সরকারী কর্মকর্তাদের ভূমিকা ও দায়িত্ব সম্পর্কে উন্নততর সচেতনতা সৃষ্টি, চেয়ারম্যান ও অন্যান্য সদস্যদের মধ্যে ক্ষমতার প্রয়োজনে স্থানীয় শাসন প্রক্রিয়াকে সংশ্লিষ্ট করে তোলা খুবই জরুরী।

৩। গণতান্ত্রিক প্রতিষ্ঠান নির্মিতির সহায়ক পরিবেশ প্রতিষ্ঠার লক্ষ্যে আইন, বিধি ও নিয়মাবলীর সুস্পষ্ট ব্যাখ্যা থাকা অপরিহার্য। এতে কার্যপ্রক্রিয়া অধিকতর সমন্বিত ও সহযোগিতামূলক হবে। বর্তমানে অনুসৃত এই প্রক্রিয়ার ধরন আশাব্যঞ্জক নয়।

৪। কাজের সক্রিয়তা ও ব্যবস্থাপনাগত কার্যক্রম তত্ত্বাবধায়ন অবশ্যই অব্যাহত রাখতে হবে। অদূর ভবিষ্যতে স্থানীয় পর্যায়ে ব্যবস্থাপনাগত ও পেশাগত দক্ষতা আরও বাড়াতে হবে। স্থানীয় সরকারের বিভিন্ন ক্ষেত্রে, যেমনঃ নিয়োগ, কমিটি, উপকমিটি গঠন, তথ্যাবলী বিতরণ, নিয়মিত সভা অনুষ্ঠান ইত্যাদি, পর্যবেক্ষণ ও তদারকি নিশ্চিত করতে হবে।

৫। স্থানীয় পর্যায়ে সিদ্ধান্ত গ্রহণের ক্ষেত্রে অংশ গ্রহণ সংগঠিত, নিয়ন্ত্রিত ও তত্ত্বাবধায়নসাপেক্ষ হতে হবে, যাতে ঐ অংশ গ্রহণ অধিক ফলপ্রসূ হয়। বহুমুখিতা ও প্রতিনিধিত্বশীলতা হলো অংশগ্রহণের মূলকথা। বর্তমানে এ ধারার অনুসৃতি কম। অবশ্য ব্যতিক্রম হিসাবে কার্যকর অংশগ্রহণের দৃষ্টান্তও আছে। অনুরূপ দৃষ্টান্ত স্থাপনের ক্ষেত্রে ঐ সব দৃষ্টান্তকে ব্যাপকভাবে তুলে ধরা যেতে পারে। একে কৌশলগত উদ্যোগ হিসাবে বিবেচনা করা যেতে পারে।

৬। গণতান্ত্রিক আচার বলতে যা বুঝায় তার প্রাতিষ্ঠানিক রূপদানের ক্ষেত্রে স্থানীয় পর্যায়ে জনপ্রতিনিধি, স্থায়ী কর্মচারী ও নাগরিকদের মধ্যে পারস্পরিক সুসম্পর্ক প্রতিষ্ঠা খুবই গুরুত্বপূর্ণ। স্বচ্ছতা ও জবাবদিহিতা নিশ্চিত করার জন্য সাধারণ কর্মচারীদের পেশাগত উন্নয়ন ও দক্ষতা বৃদ্ধির পাশাপাশি স্থায়ী কর্মচারীদের ব্যবস্থাপনাগত জ্ঞান-দক্ষতাও বৃদ্ধি করতে হবে। কাজের ক্ষেত্রে সহযোগিতামূলক দৃষ্টিভঙ্গী স্থানীয় সরকার পর্যায়ে থাকা খুবই আবশ্যিক। আলোচনা ভিত্তিক সিদ্ধান্ত গ্রহণ ও প্রকৃত সেবা সুনিশ্চিত করার জন্যেও সমাজের ব্যক্তি ও বিভিন্ন গ্রুপের মধ্যে অনুরূপ দৃষ্টিভঙ্গী থাকা প্রয়োজন।

৭। কেন্দ্রীয় ও স্থানীয় সরকারের মধ্যে কাজের বিভাজন সামর্থ ও যোগ্যতা বিশেষতঃ সংগৃহীত সম্পদের নিরিখে করতে হবে। কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার করতাজানা সংগ্রহের দায়িত্ব খুব ভালো ভাবে পালন করতে পারে। পক্ষান্তরে স্থানীয় সরকার সর্বোচ্চ সেবার নিশ্চয়তা বিধান করতে পারে। কেন্দ্রীয় ও স্থানীয় সরকারের মধ্যে সাংগঠনিক সম্পর্ক ও পারস্পরিক অবস্থানের বিষয়টির পুনঃনিরীক্ষা হওয়া প্রয়োজন। এটা দরকার উন্নয়ন প্রক্রিয়ায় তাদের সামর্থকে সর্বোত্তম পর্যায়ে কাজে লাগানোর জন্যেই।

৮। সামগ্রিক ক্ষেত্রে ব্যবস্থাপনাগত দক্ষতা বৃদ্ধির পর অর্থনৈতিক ব্যবস্থাপনার উপর বিশেষ নজর প্রদান করতে হবে। যথাযথভাবে রেকর্ডপত্র সংরক্ষণ, ব্যাংকের মাধ্যমে সকল অর্থনৈতিক লেন দেন পরিচালনা, কর্মসূচী কার্যক্রম তত্ত্বাবধায়ন ও ব্যবস্থাপনা এবং হিসাব-নিকাশের অডিট অবশ্যই নিশ্চিত করতে হবে।

৯। স্থানীয় সরকার পদ্ধতিতে নাগরিকদের অংশগ্রহণের সমন্বয় সাধনের মধ্য দিয়েই কেবল স্বচ্ছতা ও জবাবদিহিতার উন্নয়ন ঘটতে পারে। কর্মসূচী কার্যক্রম তদারক ও তথ্যাবলীর বিনিময়, কার্যকর অর্থনৈতিক ব্যবস্থাপনা, স্বচ্ছ হিসাব-নিকাশ, প্রতিনিধিদের যথাযথভাবে অর্পিত দায়িত্বপালন প্রভৃতি ক্ষেত্রে অংশগ্রহণের এই সমন্বয় থাকতে হবে। এহেন পরিবর্তন সাধিত না হলে স্বচ্ছতা ও জবাবদিহিতার ব্যাপারটি কাগজ কলমেই আবদ্ধ হয়ে থাকবে।

১০। বাংলাদেশে স্থানীয় সরকার শক্তিশালীকরণ কখনই সম্ভব হবে না যদি না যৌক্তিক কার্যকারণপদ্ধতির বহুমুখী উন্নয়নের ঐকান্তিক প্রয়াস চালানো হয়। এর মসৃণ কার্যব্যবস্থা বিশেষতঃ বৃহত্তর পরিমন্ডলী, সাধারণভাবে স্বীকৃত সাংবিধানিক অবস্থান, মাধ্যমিক পর্যায়ে নির্বাচন প্রক্রিয়ার নিয়মিতকরণ এবং নিম্ন পর্যায়ে সরকার ও সমাজের বিবিধ স্তরের সাথে সম্পর্ক প্রতিষ্ঠা এবং সরকার ও মানুষের নিকট সম্পর্ক ও উপর নির্ভরশীল।

সুপারিশমালা

নিম্নবর্ণিত সুপারিশমালা দ্বিমুখী পদ্ধতির : ১. সকল গুরুত্বপূর্ণ রাজনৈতিক/প্রশাসনিক ইউনিট (যেমনঃ জেলা, থানা, ইউনিয়ন, শহর, নগর) সহ একটি স্বায়ত্তশাসিত ও অখণ্ড স্থানীয় সরকারের উন্নয়ন এবং জাতীয় বিভিন্ন পর্যায়ের সঙ্গে এর পদ্ধতিগত সম্পর্কের উন্নয়ন। ২. সিদ্ধান্ত গ্রহণ, ব্যবস্থাপনা ও পরিচালনা ক্ষেত্রে ইউনিয়ন পরিষদ ও পৌরসভাকে সক্ষম করে তোলা। এই দ্বিমুখী পদ্ধতির সুপারিশমালার বাস্তবায়ন পৃথক পৃথকভাবে করতে হবে যাতে এদের পৃথক সুফল পাওয়া যায়।

প্রয়োজনে এদের পৃথক সময়সূচী এবং পৃথক বাস্তবায়ন সংস্থা ও প্রক্রিয়াও থাকতে পারে। এই পদ্ধতিভিত্তিক সুপারিশমালা প্রধানমন্ত্রীর অফিসের মাধ্যমে নিয়ন্ত্রিত হতে হবে যতদিন না তা সরকার ভিত্তিক আন্তঃসংস্থা সম্পর্কে প্রাতিষ্ঠানিক রূপলাভ করে।

পদ্ধতিভিত্তিক সুপারিশমালা

টেকসই ও শক্তিশালী স্থানীয় সরকারের জন্যে এডহকভিত্তিক ব্যবস্থা এড়িয়ে চলা উচিত। এর পরিবর্তে স্বায়ত্তশাসিত ও অখণ্ড স্থানীয় সরকারের ভূমিকা, কর্ম কাঠামো, সম্পদ এবং সম্পর্কের ব্যাপারে জাতীয় ভিত্তিক ঐকমত্য গড়ে তুলতে হবে। এ ব্যাপারে প্রচুর দৃষ্টান্ত ও অভিজ্ঞতা রয়েছে যা বাস্তব প্রস্তাবের উন্নয়ন সাধনে সহায়ক হতে পারে। এ ক্ষেত্রে অবশ্যই সতর্ক প্রক্রিয়া অনুসৃত হতে হবে। এটা সংগঠিত করতে পারে একটি এডহক স্থানীয় সরকার কমিশন। এ ধরনের কমিশন আকারে ছোট এবং ১২ থেকে ১৫ সদস্যের মধ্যে হওয়া উচিত। এর অর্ধেক সদস্য পার্লামেন্টে সরকারী ও বিরোধীদলের সদস্যদের মধ্যে থেকে পার্লামেন্ট কর্তৃকই মনোনীত হতে হবে। বাকীদের নিতে হবে পেশাজীবী (আইন, শিক্ষা, সরকারী কর্মবিভাগ) এনজিও এবং অভিজ্ঞ স্থানীয় সরকার নেতৃবৃন্দের মধ্য থেকে। কমিশন প্রধানমন্ত্রীর কার্যালয় থেকে অনুমোদিত হতে হবে এবং এই অনুমোদন ৬ মাস থেকে ১ বছরের মধ্যে দিতে হবে। এটি পার্লামেন্টে প্রস্তাব আকারে পেশ করতে হবে।

কমিশনের সুনির্দিষ্ট কার্যপ্রণালী বিধি থাকতে হবে। অন্যায়ের মধ্যে কেন্দ্রীয় সরকারের ভূমিকা ও কার্যাবলীর ব্যাখ্যাসহ শাসন পরিচালনার অংশীদার হিসাবে স্থানীয় সরকারের বিভিন্ন অংশ বা বিভাগের গঠন, কার্যাবলী, সম্পদ সংস্থান, অর্থনৈতিক কার্যক্রম, কেন্দ্রীয় ও স্থানীয় সরকারের ইউনিটগুলোর মধ্যে সম্পদ সংস্থান, ঐকমত্যভিত্তিক খসড়া বিল প্রস্তুত, স্থানীয় সরকারের উন্নয়ন ও কার্যক্রম পরিচালনার পথ প্রদর্শন ও দিকনির্দেশনাদানের জন্যে বিচার বিভাগীয় ক্ষমতা সম্পন্ন একটি স্বায়ত্তশাসিত কমিশন গঠন প্রভৃতি বিষয় থাকতে হবে। এডহক স্থানীয় সরকার কমিশনকে অর্থনৈতিক কার্যক্রমের সঙ্গে যুক্ত বিভিন্ন গ্রুপের সহযোগিতা বা অনুমোদন পেতে হবে। স্থানীয় সরকারের আওতায় বিভিন্ন সেবামূলক সংস্থা গঠন, স্থানীয় সরকার ইউনিটগুলোর সঙ্গে কেন্দ্রীয় সরকারের সম্পর্ক, স্থানীয় সরকারের জন্য বিশেষ খসড়া তৈরির বিষয়ও থাকতে হবে।

ইউনিয়ন পরিষদ ও পৌরসভার জন্য সুপারিশ

নিম্নবর্ণিত সুপারিশ মালা ৪টি ভাগে বিভক্ত।

১. অধিকতর অংশগ্রহণ বিস্তৃতকরণ ও প্রতিনিধিত্ব নিশ্চিতকরণ সম্পর্কিত।
২. কার্যকর স্বায়ত্তশাসন ও সম্পদ স্বনির্ভরতা বিষয়ক।
৩. জবাবদিহিতা, দায়িত্বশীলতা ও তত্ত্বাবধায়ন সংক্রান্ত
৪. ব্যবস্থাপনার উন্নয়ন ও স্বচ্ছতা বৃদ্ধিকরণ সম্পর্কিত।

অংশগ্রহণ : অংশগ্রহণ অর্থ (ক) উন্নয়ন কার্যক্রমের ক্ষেত্রে সিদ্ধান্ত গ্রহণ, বিধিবদ্ধকরণ, বাস্তবায়ন ও মূল্যায়নের সঙ্গে যুক্ত ব্যক্তি ও গ্রুপের কাজ; (খ) স্থানীয় পর্যায়ে উন্নয়ন কর্মকাণ্ডে নিয়োজিত বিধিসম্মত, বিধিবহির্ভূত, সরকারী, বেসরকারী, দেশীয়, আন্তর্জাতিক সংস্থাসমূহের মধ্যে আন্তঃ প্রতিক্রিয়া, সহযোগিতা, আন্তঃ সম্পর্ক ইত্যাদি প্রক্রিয়া।

প্রতিনিধিত্ব : প্রতিনিধিত্ব একটি প্রক্রিয়া যা সরকারী সংস্থাসমূহে সমাজের বিভিন্ন অংশকে একত্রিত করে। এর লক্ষ্য হলো, সমাজের সমস্ত গ্রুপকে সরকারী সংস্থায় অন্তর্ভুক্ত করা যাতে তা বৈচিত্র্যপূর্ণ হয়। এর ফলে সমাজের বিচিত্র চাহিদা ও প্রয়োজনকে বিবেচনায় আনা সম্ভব হবে এবং এই চাহিদা ও প্রয়োজন পূরণের দায়িত্ব সকলের উপর অর্পণ করা সম্ভব হবে।

স্বায়ত্তশাসন : স্বায়ত্তশাসন স্থানীয় সরকারের সক্ষমতাকে বৃদ্ধি করে যাতে সে নির্ধারিত কার্যক্রম ও কর্মসূচী অন্যান্য পর্যায়ে থেকে আসা কম হস্তক্ষেপে বাস্তবায়ন করতে পারে। স্থানীয় সরকারের স্বাধীন অর্থনৈতিক সম্পদ সামর্থের সীমা নির্দেশ করে স্বায়ত্তশাসন। বাংলাদেশের প্রেক্ষিতে একে পৃথক অর্থনৈতিক উৎস হিসাবে গণ্য করার প্রয়োজন নেই। এর অর্থ মূলতঃ হস্তক্ষেপ থেকে মুক্ত থাকা।

কার্যকর স্থানীয় সরকারের ক্ষেত্রে এটা বিশেষভাবে প্রাধান্যযোগ্য যে, তাকে তার নাগরিকদের কাছে অবশ্যই দায়ী থাকতে হবে এবং জবাবদিহি করতে হবে। এর নীতিমালা ও কর্মসূচী নিয়ত তত্ত্বাবধায়ন ও পুনঃনিরীক্ষা করতে হবে। শেষতঃ স্থানীয় সরকারকে অবশ্যই তার অভ্যন্তরীণ কার্যক্রম নিয়ন্ত্রণ এবং উন্মুক্ত ও স্বচ্ছ পরিবেশে অত্যন্ত দক্ষতার সঙ্গে সম্পাদন করতে হবে। এটা যে কোনো সরকারের কার্যক্রম পরিচালনার জন্যে অপরিহার্য এবং স্থানীয় সরকারের ক্ষেত্রেও তা সমান প্রযোজ্য।

বাংলাদেশে কার্যকর স্থানীয় সরকার পদ্ধতির উন্নয়নে নিম্নবর্ণিত কার্যব্যবস্থা আবশ্যিক। কিছু সুপারিশের ক্ষেত্রে আইনগত সংস্কার ও ঐকমত্য প্রতিষ্ঠার প্রয়োজন হবে। বাকীগুলো সম্ভাব্য ক্যাটাগরীর মধ্যে পড়বে, যা বাস্তবায়ন করা সহজ হবে যদি কিনা সংশ্লিষ্ট সিদ্ধান্ত গ্রহণকারীগণ এটা সব সময় স্মরণে রাখেন যে, ব্যক্তির পক্ষে যদি আত্মশাসনের ধারণা সম্ভব হয় তাহলে বৃহত্তর অর্থেও স্বায়ত্তশাসনের ধারণা বাস্তবায়িত হওয়া সম্ভব।

১। অংশগ্রহণ বিস্তৃতকরণ ও প্রতিনিধিত্ব নিশ্চিতকরণ

স্থানীয় সরকারের কার্যাবলী ও সেবা সরবরাহ ব্যবস্থাপনা সম্পর্কে গণসচেতনতা বৃদ্ধি করতে হবে। কমিটি সদস্য পদের ৩০ শতাংশ গঠন করতে হবে সেবা ব্যবহার ও যোগানদারদের মধ্য থেকে। এই ব্যবস্থা সেইসব ক্ষেত্রে বিশেষভাবে কার্যকর করতে হবে যে সব ক্ষেত্রে এর প্রয়োজন অধিক। যেমন : স্বাস্থ্য, শিক্ষা এবং জনকল্যাণ। কর্মসূচী বাস্তবায়ন ও ব্যবস্থাপনা প্রকল্পের জন্যে নাগরিক স্বেচ্ছাসেবক খুঁজে বের করার ব্যাপারে বিশেষ গুরুত্ব দিতে হবে। নাগরিক স্বেচ্ছাসেবক তাদেরকেই মনোনীত করতে হবে যাদের অন্ততঃ এক বছর কোনো নাগরিক ফোরামে কাজ করার অভিজ্ঞতা আছে।

স্থানীয় সরকারের প্রতিটি স্তরে নাগরিক ফোরাম গড়ে তুলতে হবে। স্থানীয় সরকারের কর্মকর্তা, নির্বাচিত প্রতিনিধি, বেসরকারী সংস্থার প্রতিনিধি এবং জাতীয় ও আন্তর্জাতিক সংস্থাগুলোর প্রতিনিধিদের এই কমিটির কাছে তাদের পরিকল্পনা ও কর্মসূচীর বিবরণ পেশ করতে হবে।

স্থানীয় সরকারের বিভিন্ন পর্যায়ে নেতৃত্বের ফোরাম গড়ে তুলতে হবে যাতে তারা স্থানীয় সরকার ইউনিট, মাঠসংস্থা, বেসরকারী সংস্থা এবং আন্তর্জাতিক সংস্থাসমূহের কাজের সমন্বয় বিধান করতে পারে। ফোরাম একটি প্ল্যাটফর্ম হিসাবে কাজ করবে যার মধ্য দিয়ে সমাজের উন্নয়ন সম্পর্কিত তথ্যাবলী ও অভিজ্ঞতা পরস্পরের মধ্যে বিনিময় সম্ভব হবে। ফোরাম মূলতঃ একটি অনানুষ্ঠানিক সমন্বয়কারীর ভূমিকা পালন করবে।

স্থানীয় সরকারের গঠন বিন্যাসে পরিবর্তন আনতে হবে এবং সেখানে ভূমিহীন নারী ও অন্যান্য বঞ্চিত গ্রুপের লোকদের আসন সংরক্ষণ করতে হবে।

সংরক্ষিত আসনে সরাসরি নির্বাচন অনুষ্ঠানের ব্যবস্থা ও পদক্ষেপ নিতে হবে এবং তা বিধিভুক্ত করতে হবে।

বর্তমান বিধানে কোনো ব্যক্তি একই সময়ে স্থানীয় সরকারের সদস্য ও চেয়ারম্যান পদের মনোনয়ন চাইতে পারেন না। এই বিধান বাতিল করতে হবে।

২। কার্যকর স্বায়ত্তশাসন ও সম্পদ স্বনির্ভরতা

স্থানীয় সরকারকে পৃথক অস্তিত্বশীল একটি সরকার হিসাবে গণ্য করতে হবে। যেখানে এলাকা ও গোষ্ঠী তাদের নিজেদের ব্যাপারগুলো দেখছে সেখানে কেন্দ্রীয় নিয়ন্ত্রণ তাদের হাতে দিতে হবে। বর্তমানে সরকার বা প্রশাসনে যে নিয়ন্ত্রণ ব্যবস্থা বলবৎ আছে তার পরিবর্তন ঘটাতে হবে।

বাংলাদেশ সংবিধানের ধারা ৯, ১১, ৫৯ ও ৬০ -এর বাস্তবায়ন করতে হবে।

চেয়ারম্যান ও মেম্বারদের পদত্যাগপত্র সরাসরি ইউপি/পি এস রিজাইন্ড সেকশন ১২ অব এল জিও ১৯৮২ বরাবরে পেশ করতে হবে।

এই ব্যবস্থা প্রবর্তন করতে হবে যাতে ইউপি/পিএস তার চেয়ারম্যানকে অপসারণ করতে পারে। সংশ্লিষ্ট সেকশন ১৩(২) অব এলজিও ১৯৮২ বাতিল করতে হবে।

কেন্দ্রীয় সরকারের আদায়কৃত রাজস্বের একটি অংশ স্থানীয় সরকারের বরাবরে ছেড়ে দিতে হবে, যা এর স্বাধীন রাজস্ব হিসাবে গণ্য হবে।

১৯৬০ সনের আদর্শ কর নির্দেশিকা এবং স্থাবর সম্পত্তি হস্তান্তর কর-আইন পর্যালোচনা করে প্রচলিত কর নির্দেশিকাকে গ্রাম ও শহরাঞ্চলের চলতি অর্থনৈতিক পরিস্থিতি মোতাবেক যুগোপযোগী করতে হবে।

প্রদর্শনমূলক প্রভাব সৃষ্টি জন্য মাঠ পর্যায়ের সকল সরকারী প্রয়োজন সমঝোতা ভিত্তিক পরিশোধ পরিকল্পনা অনুযায়ী ইউনিয়ন পরিষদ/থানার পূর্ব বকেয়া প্রদান আবশ্যিক।

৩। হিসাবে দায়, দায়িত্ব ও তত্ত্বাবধায়ন তৎপরতা বৃদ্ধি

প্রত্যেক ইউনিয়ন পরিষদ/থানার অবশ্যই একটি সুসংহত ব্যাংক হিসাব থাকতে হবে এবং সকল অর্থনৈতিক লেনদেন চেকের মাধ্যমে হতে হবে।

নিয়মিত পরিদর্শনের মাধ্যমে হিসাবের রীতিমতো অডিট করানো [দফা ৫০(৩) পিএসও এবং দফা ৪৮(৩) ইউপিও এর সক্রিয়করণ] এবং সময়মতো (১২ মাসে) প্রতিবেদন প্রকাশ নিশ্চিত করতে হবে।

স্থানীয় সরকার ইউনিটের দায়িত্ব হবে প্রাতিষ্ঠানিক কাঠামো অনুমোদন, খণ্ডকালীন বা সার্বক্ষণিক কর্মচারী তালিকা তৈরি, লোক নিয়োগ, পদোন্নতি এবং শাস্তিমূলক ব্যবস্থা গ্রহণ।

ইউনিয়ন পরিষদ পৌরসভার পাশাপাশি সরাসরি সরকারী অনুদান লাভ করবে।

স্থানীয় সরকার ইউনিটসমূহ নিজস্ব সূত্র থেকে অর্থায়নকৃত উন্নয়ন প্রকল্পগুলোর ব্যাপারে এককভাবে দায়ী থাকবে।

মাঠ পর্যায়ে সংস্থার ব্যবস্থাপনা কর্মীকে অবশ্যই ইউনিয়ন পরিষদ/ থানার মাসিক সভায় উপস্থিত থাকতে হবে এবং তাদের শাখাসমূহের কর্মকাণ্ড সম্পর্কে প্রতিবেদন প্রদান করতে হবে। (ইউপিও-এর ৩০ দফা বলবৎ এবং ইউপিও-এর ৩২ দফার উপধারা (২) অপসারণ) করতে হবে।

মাসে একবার সকল এনজিও এবং স্থানীয় সংগঠনগুলোকে ডেকে ইউনিয়ন পরিষদ/থানা সম্পর্কে তাদের চলতি ও আগামী কার্যক্রমের ব্যাপারে অবগত করাতে হবে এবং ইউনিয়ন পরিষদ/থানার কর্মসূচী ও তৎপরতা সম্পর্কে জানাতে হবে।

আর্থিক সংস্থান এবং বাজেট সাপেক্ষে স্থানীয় সরকার ইউনিটগুলোকে বৃহত্তর প্রকল্প অনুমোদন এবং উত্তরোত্তর আর্থিক অঙ্গীকার করতে দিতে হবে।

ইউনিয়ন পরিষদকে কার্যকর দায়িত্ব দিতে হবে জন্ম, মৃত্যু, বিয়ে এবং তালাক নিবন্ধীকরণের যা বিরোধ মীমাংসার প্রাথমিক কার্যক্রমের পরবর্তী ধাপে পড়ে।

৪। ব্যবস্থাপনার উন্নয়ন এবং স্বচ্ছতা বর্ধিতকরণ

কমিটি/উপ-কমিটিতে নাগরিক স্বেচ্ছাসেবক মনোনয়ন করতে হবে ইউনিয়ন পরিষদ/থানার জনসভায়।

ইউনিয়ন পরিষদ/থানার বার্ষিক প্রতিবেদন যথাসময়ে প্রকাশ এবং ইউনিয়ন পরিষদ/থানা অফিসে প্রেরণ করতে হবে।

সকল চলমান প্রকল্পের তথ্যাদি ইউনিয়ন পরিষদ/থানা অফিসে এবং প্রকল্পস্থলে দৃশ্যগ্রাহ্যরূপে প্রদর্শনের ব্যবস্থা করতে হবে।

ইউনিয়ন পরিষদ/থানার সভায় কর আদায় এবং বকেয়ার মাসিক পরিস্থিতির প্রতিবেদন পেশ করতে হবে।

সকল পরিকল্পনা, কর্মসূচী, বাজেট, চুক্তি এবং অন্যান্য উন্নয়ন তৎপরতা সর্বোদম বুলেটিনের মাধ্যমে প্রকাশ করার আবশ্যিকতা, সম্পর্কিত পিত্রসও' এর দফা ৩৭ এবং ৩৯ (৩) কার্যকর করতে হবে।

ইউনিয়ন পরিষদ/থানার সভায় অনিয়মের বিষয় উত্থাপন এবং সংশোধনী চাওয়া যেতে পারে।

ইউনিয়ন পরিষদ/থানা সদস্যদের প্রশিক্ষণে স্থানীয় সরকার বিভাগের সহকারী পরিচালককে 'রিসোর্স পারমেন' হিসেবে ব্যবহার করা যেতে পারে। সহকারী পরিচালক, স্থানীয় সরকার ইউনিয়ন পরিষদ/থানার সদস্যদের জন্য মাসিক প্রশিক্ষণ অধিবেশন আহ্বান করবেন-যা শুরু হবে স্থানীয় সরকারের মৌলিক কার্যক্রম সম্পর্কে সচেতনতা সৃষ্টি, সেবা প্রদানের গুরুত্ব, জনগণের প্রয়োজনীয়তা, চাহিদার প্রতি দায়িত্বশীলতা ও উন্নয়ন প্রকল্প পরিকল্পনায়।

এনজিও এবং অন্যান্য স্থানীয় সংস্থার সেবা প্রদান এবং উপার্জনশীল কর্মকাণ্ড পরিচালনার স্বার্থে ব্যবহার করার জন্য চুক্তিমূলক প্রক্রিয়া গড়ে তুলতে হবে।

টেভার ফরম বিতরণ ব্যবস্থাকে একটি কেন্দ্র থেকে অন্ততঃ তিনটি কেন্দ্রে বিস্তৃত করতে হবে।

নিবন্ধীকরণের কাজ চালানোর জন্য অফিস সময়ের সকালের দিকটা নিয়মিত ব্যবহার করা আবশ্যিক।

উৎসাহব্যঞ্জক বিষয় হিসেবে অনুদানপ্রাপ্তিকে মৌল ন্যূনমত প্রয়োজনের মাত্রা ছাড়িয়ে উচ্চতর কর আদায়ের সাথে যুক্ত করতে হবে।

পৌরসভাসমূহে নগদ অর্থ প্রবাহের ওঠানামাকে মসূন করে তোলার জন্য ব্যাংক হিসাবের সংখ্যা কমিয়ে আনুন। আয় বাড়ানোর জন্য সুদ প্রদানকারী হিসাব খুলুন। সেবার পরিমাণ ব্যাপকভাবে বৃদ্ধি এবং সেবা প্রদানে অধিকতর দক্ষতা সৃষ্টি করে সম্পদ সংগ্রহের উন্নতি সাধন করতে হবে।

সায়ন্ত্রশাসিত ও স্বাধীন স্থানীয় সরকার পদ্ধতির নিরিখে পৌরসভার প্রধান নির্বাহী কর্মকর্তার ভূমিকা পুনঃনিরীক্ষা করতে হবে।

নথিপত্র সংরক্ষণ, পরিসংখ্যান তথ্যাদি সংকলন এবং প্রতিবেদন প্রক্রিয়াকে রীতিবদ্ধ করার মাধ্যমে স্থানীয় সরকার ইউনিটসমূহের তথ্য সংগ্রহ এবং প্রচার দক্ষতার উন্নতি সাধন করতে হবে।

শহর উন্নয়ন ও সৌন্দর্যবদ্ধন কর্মসূচী দেখাশোনা করার জন্য একটি পৌর উন্নয়ন কমিটি প্রতিষ্ঠা করতে হবে।

স্বায়ত্তশাসিত স্থানীয় সরকার পদ্ধতির নিরিখে যথাযথ সম্মানী ও ক্ষতিপূরণের মাত্রাবৃদ্ধি এবং নিয়মিত বেতন ও সুযোগ সুবিধাদি প্রদান নিশ্চিত করতে হবে।

স্থানীয় প্রশিক্ষণ চাহিদা নির্ধারণ, স্থানীয় প্রশিক্ষণ কোর্সের উন্নয়ন এবং স্থানীয় প্রশিক্ষণ সম্পদ সনাক্তকরণের জন্য একটি প্রশিক্ষণ সেল তৈরি করতে হবে।

বার্ড, এনআইএলজি, আরডিএ, আরপিএটিসি, ব্র্যাক এবং টি এ আর ডি এর মত প্রশিক্ষণ প্রতিষ্ঠান প্রয়োজন স্থানীয় সরকারের চেয়ারপার্সন, সদস্য, কর্মচারী ও অনুদানগ্রহণকারী ব্যক্তিদের সকলের সব প্রশিক্ষণ উদ্যোগ ৩ বছরের জন্য সুসংহত করার জন্য সুনির্দিষ্ট লক্ষ্য হলো, স্থানীয় সরকারের প্রশিক্ষক গড়ে তোলা।

করাদি আদায়ে দক্ষতা বৃদ্ধি কমিশন ভিত্তিক কর আদায়কারী নিয়োগ করতে হবে।

আর্থিক লেনদেন তথ্য প্রদান লিপিবদ্ধকরণ নিয়ন্ত্রণ ব্যবস্থা মূলধন এবং পরিচালনা খাতের ব্যয় আলাদা ভাবে দি. ক. হবে।

১৯৬০ সনের পৌর প্রশাসনিক আইন পরিবর্তন সাপেক্ষে বর্তমান অর্থনৈতিক পরিবেশের অনুরূপ করে খাজনা এবং ব্যয়ের বিষয় পুনর্বিদ্যস্ত করতে হবে।

সুনির্দিষ্ট খাজনার সাথে সুনির্দিষ্ট ব্যয়ের সংযোগ সাধনের বিষয়টি বিবেচনা করতে হবে।

মিয়মিত মূল্যায়ন এবং পেশা, ব্যবসা, নির্দেশিকা এবং করের হার হাল নাগাদ করার তৎপরতা চালিয়ে যেতে হবে।

উপরে উল্লেখিত সুপারিশমালা যেমন ইউনিয়ন পরিষদ ও পৌরসভাসমূহের অবস্থান শক্তিশালী করবে, তেমনি বাংলাদেশে স্থানীয় সরকারের জন্য প্রয়োজন ব্যাপক প্রক্রিয়াবদ্ধ সংস্কার। নিম্নের মৌলিক চ্যালেঞ্জসমূহ মোকাবিলায় জন্য নীতি-নির্ধারকদের প্রয়োজন স্থানীয় সরকার সম্পর্কে তাদের দৃষ্টিভঙ্গি সুস্পষ্ট ও সুবিন্যস্ত করা :-

ক. বাংলাদেশের জন্য তারা কি ধরনের স্থানীয় সরকার পদ্ধতি চান তার সংজ্ঞা প্রদান;

খ. স্থানীয় সরকার কোন বিশেষ ধরনের রাজনৈতিক অর্থনৈতিক এবং সামাজিক উন্নয়ন-মূলক ভূমিকা পালন করবে তা সুস্পষ্টরূপে বিন্যস্ত করা;

গ. স্থানীয় সরকার উন্নয়নের ক্ষেত্রে যে ধরনের সংশ্লিষ্টতা তারা চান তা ভেবে দেখা; বিশেষ করে, জাতীয় সরকারের সাথে ক্ষমতা ও সেবায় অংশগ্রহণ এবং জেলা ও থানা প্রশাসনের সাথে কর্ম সম্পর্ক উন্নয়নের বিষয়;

ঘ. যথাযথ শাসনতান্ত্রিক, আইনগত এবং প্রশাসনিক রীতি এবং একটি উপযোগী স্থানীয় সরকার পদ্ধতি নির্মাণ প্রক্রিয়া অবলম্বন করা।

এই বিষয়গুলো রীতিসিদ্ধ এবং বাংলাদেশে জাতিগঠনের জন্য এগুলো অত্যন্ত মৌলিক বিষয়। সংসদীয় গণতন্ত্র পছন্দ করার সময় ঠিক যা করা হয়েছিল, স্থানীয় সরকার বিষয়ক প্রস্তাবের ক্ষেত্রেও অনুরূপ চেতনায় উদ্বুদ্ধ। ঐকমত্যে পৌঁছার জন্য সেরকম ব্যাপক শ্রমিক আবশ্যিক। স্থানীয় সরকার সম্পর্কে এ ধরনের আলোচনা এবং ঐকমত্যকে থাকতে হবে দলীয় রাজনীতির উর্ধ্বে এবং অবশ্যই জাতীয় স্বার্থে একটি টেকসই স্থানীয় সরকার পদ্ধতি উন্নয়নকে সহজ করার লক্ষ্যে মৌলিক বিষয়গুলো সম্পর্কে ব্যাপক ঐকমত্য সৃষ্টির প্রক্রিয়ার মাধ্যমেই একমত হতে হবে এবং একটি দৃঢ়বদ্ধ স্থানীয় সরকার কাঠামোর আওতায় যে ধরনের পক্ষপাতমূলক রাজনীতি আবর্তিত হয়, তা পরিত্যাগের মাধ্যমেই এটা করতে হবে।

84203