

Research Report on
The State of SDG Localization in Bangladesh: Project
Management Practices of Local Government Institutions

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Title Sheet

The State of SDG Localization in Bangladesh: Project Management Practices of Local Government Institutions

Purpose of Submission

The purpose of submission is to evaluate the draft report by the concerned authority of Bangladesh Public Administration Training Centre.

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Declaration of Contributions of the Research Team Members

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As a member of the research team, Mr. Masum contributed to the development of the draft research proposal, formulated the research design and conceptual framework, and prepared the questionnaires and checklist for focus group discussions and one-on-one interviews. He provided guidance to team members and data collectors, supervised data collection, and ensured quality control in data handling and analysis.

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Mr. Shamim supervised field-level data collection, conducted visits to research sites, organized focus group discussions (FGDs), and carried out interviews. He prepared the FGD transcripts and assisted in validating the primary data for analysis. He examined raw data, structured data output formats, reviewed data entries, and performed data analysis. In addition, he prepared Chapters Two (Literature Review), Four (Data Output and Analysis), and Five (Findings and Recommendations), compiled the reference section, reviewed all chapters of the report, and edited the draft report.

Mr. Mohammad Aminul Islam, Senior Lecturer, University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB):

Mr. Islam organized FGDs with key informants and other stakeholders, and prepared the drafts of Chapter One (Introduction) and Chapter Three (Methodology). He also constructed the table of contents, coordinated with all team members, and followed up with them to ensure timely completion of the research tasks.

The State of SDG Localization in Bangladesh: Project Management Practices of Local Government Institutions

Abstract

Bangladesh, having been a successful implementer of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), is optimistic about achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. While the SDGs were adopted globally, their realization depends heavily on local participation, with the pledge to “leave no one behind” at the core. This study examines the state of SDG localization in Bangladesh, focusing on the role of local government institutions (LGIs) in planning and managing development projects at the Union and Upazila levels. Using a conceptual framework based on the UN definition of localization, the research assessed the alignment of LGI project management practices with SDG priorities. The findings indicate that although LGIs are generally aware of the SDGs, they face significant capacity constraints in effectively localizing them. The study highlights the need for stronger policy guidance, capacity-building initiatives, and monitoring mechanisms from the national government to enable LGIs to play a more effective role in advancing SDG localization in Bangladesh.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goals, Localization, Local Government Institutions, Project Management, Institutional Capacity

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Research Team

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background of the Study

Localization of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) lies at the core of SDGs implementation globally. Much of the literature emphasizes that this process is most effectively delivered by local government institutions (LGIs), as they are strategically positioned at the node of multilevel governance and multi-stakeholder cooperation (Bilsky et. al, 2021)¹. Being closest to the citizens, LGIs are better able to understand community needs and priorities and to mobilize opportunities for advancing the SDGs. Against this backdrop regarding LGIs being the primary enabler of SDG localization at the grassroots level, this research was carried out to investigate the state of SDGs localization in Bangladesh context.

Bangladesh was one of the success stories of MDG implementation- the precursor of SDGs. Therefore, it is expected of the country that she will remain at the forefronts of SDGs undertaking. Moreover, Bangladesh has a long history of local government system- enacted by the British during colonial establishment in the Indian subcontinent. Although the local governments have been through many challenges, changes and impediments during different regimes, LGIs in Bangladesh have passed the test of time. Built on a strong legal framework and popular participation, local governments in Bangladesh are responsible for delivering many vital services to the population at the grassroots.

Local government institutions in Bangladesh, especially Union Parishad (Council) or UPs at the bottom tier and Upazila Parishad (Sub-district council) or UPZs at the middle tier have mandates that are directly linked with most of the sustainable development goals. UPs and UPZs have the authority to raise taxes, earn revenues and have agency of taking developmental projects. Most of the LGIs also enjoy handouts from the national government on annual basis. Hence, LGIs specially UPs and UPZs are the most pertinent areas of study to unearth the state of SDGs localization in Bangladesh.

Since, LGIs in Bangladesh are under legal binding to formulate local five-year plans through a process of democratic deliberation and consultation and the plans are materialized by small and medium sized projects taken by these organizations, this research wanted to look at the how

¹ Bilsky, E., Moreno, A. C., & Fernández Tortosa, A. (2021). Local Governments and SDG Localisation: Reshaping Multilevel Governance from the Bottom up. *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 22(4), 713–724. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19452829.2021.1986690>

through project management the local government institutions are furthering the process of SDG localization in Bangladesh. So far, literatures on localization in Bangladesh context have overlooked the possibility of studying SDG localization process by LGIs through the project management lens. Hence, the current study is undertaken to explore this untouched field in Bangladesh: appraising SDG localization through project management practices by local government institutions i.e. upazila and union parishads.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Despite Bangladesh's strong commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 and its constitutional mandate for participatory local governance, the actual role of Local Government Institutions (LGIs)—especially Union Parishads and Upazila Parishads—in localizing SDGs through project management remains unclear and underexplored. While national-level policies emphasize decentralization, and LGIs are legally empowered to plan and implement local development initiatives, studies and government reports suggest persistent disconnects between policy intentions and field-level realities.

Existing literature identifies that most LGIs lack the institutional capacity, technical guidance, and data systems required for effective project planning, implementation, and monitoring aligned with the SDGs. Furthermore, top-down administrative structures, weak inter-agency coordination, limited community participation, and political interference often hinder the integration of SDG targets into local development plans. Although frameworks such as the Five-Year Plans and Annual Development Plans exist, they are rarely developed or executed in a participatory and SDG-informed manner at the local level.

In this context, project management practices by LGIs represent both a tool and a testing ground for localizing the SDGs. However, there is a critical knowledge gap regarding how these institutions actually manage projects and to what extent their processes reflect the principles of SDG localization—such as inclusion, transparency, and contextual responsiveness. Without such insight, the national ambition of "leaving no one behind" risks being undermined at the grassroots level.

Therefore, this study investigates the extent, process, and quality of SDG localization through project management by LGIs in Bangladesh, identifying barriers and opportunities for

strengthening their role in the sustainable development landscape. The study explores evidences on the following research gaps:

1. Assess the capacity of Local Government Institutions (LGIs) in Bangladesh to manage development projects that align with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
2. Examine the extent to which SDG principles and targets are reflected in the project planning, implementation, and monitoring processes at the Union and Upazila levels.
3. Identify institutional, political, and administrative barriers to effective SDG localization through project management.
4. Recommend actionable policy and institutional strategies to enhance LGIs' role in SDG localization.

1.2 Research Questions

The research aims to identify critical factors and relationships that influence SDGs localization in Bangladesh manifested in project management efforts by the LGIs. The following questions guide this inquiry and structure the investigation:

1. Are local government institutions (LGIs) in Bangladesh actively engaged in localizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?
2. How do LGIs incorporate SDG principles into their development project planning, implementation, and monitoring processes?
3. Are LGIs institutionally capable of implementing projects aligned with the national SDG targets and what are the challenges they face?
4. What measures can improve the effectiveness of LGIs in localizing SDGs through project-based interventions?

1.3 Rationale of the Study

Government of Bangladesh (GoB) is committed to implement the SDG by 2030. Bangladesh had successful track record in implementing the MDGs especially in social sectors. In implementing the SDGs government emphasizes the localization of the goals meaning that the plans adopted at local level are aligned with the national targets of SDGs. Keeping this in view, Government has already provided training to the officials and public representatives of the local government institutions (LGIs). Government has already advanced the need that there should be a guideline for Upazila and Zila level so that these institutions can have a clear vision in localizing the SDGs. The rationale of this study lies in the exploration of the status quo of the SDGs to be localized by

these institutions. Through its findings and comprehensive analysis, it is believed that the gain insights into the current state of LGIs in implementing the projects related to localization of SDGs in Bangladesh will be a handful resources for the professionals along with the policymakers. Thus, the outcomes of the said study will provide valuable input for the formulation of effective policy strategies. Moreover, it has the potential to be an invaluable resource for policymakers, enabling them to identify any existing shortcomings in the current development processes and, consequently, guide future policy adjustments.

1.4 Scope of the Study

The present study analyzed the knowledge and practices of LGIs of 4 districts situated in 3 Divisions. The focus was on 7 Upazila and 11 Union Parishads in case of defining and aligning their projects, implementing them and monitoring them effectively. In SDG localization Union and Upazila Parishad are supposed to play key role as government underscored the fact in various documents.

1.5 Ethical issue

Maintaining ethical issue properly is a must for any scientific research especially in social research. Hence, the present study adhered to the standard ethical principles that are upheld in the academic domain. These principles encompass: (a) securing consent from participants; (b) guaranteeing a safe and risk-free environment for participants; (c) safeguarding the anonymity and confidentiality of participants; (d) abstaining from the use of deceptive tactics; and (e) affording participants the liberty to withdraw from participation at any point.

1.6 Limitations/Challenges of the study

Any research on SDGs localization is a long-term process since it is a new area and contextual. However, it is very significant since it portrays the ability and efficiency of the local institutions in case implanting projects and plans related to SDGs in local context. As the present study intended to assess capability and awareness level of the LGIs including way forwards, hence, multi-dimensional feedback is necessary, encompassing input from elected representatives of the LGIs, trained officers, their superiors, subordinates, colleagues, and clients they interact with. This feedback should be gathered after a sufficiently lengthy period of taking and implementing projects for materializing SDGs. On the other hand, identifying the general roles of LGIs can be challenging due to the varying tasks across different elected local bodies. Furthermore, due to the dispersed geographical locations and personal traits of the elected representatives of LGIs, it was not feasible to reach all intended respondents. The research relied on real-world data collected

from three rural areas that were isolated from urban environments. However, gathering data from pastoral regions in the countryside of Bangladesh presented its own set of challenges. The researchers faced constraints related to limited time and resources, difficulties in reaching out to rural communities. Side by side, since Cluster sampling was used to determine the sample of the present study it was difficult to ensure equal number of participants from all stakeholders. Even though application of advanced statistical tools used to ensure more accurate outcome. Finally, due to lack of data from the previous studies and unique characteristics of the study – an exploratory nature observed that can be used in further studies.

1.7 Chapter plan

This report is organized into six chapters, each addressing a distinct dimension of the study. **The first chapter** outlines the background, statement of the problem, research questions, rationale, scope, ethical considerations, and limitations of the study. It sets the context by highlighting the importance of localizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Bangladesh. **Chapter two** (Literature Review) reviews global and national discourses on SDG localization, relevant models and practices, and the role of local government institutions (LGIs) in project management, planning, and implementation. The **following chapter** on conceptual framework presents the conceptual framework guiding this research. The **fourth chapter** explains the research design, approach, study area, sampling techniques, data collection methods, and analytical tools employed. It justifies the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods in capturing diverse stakeholder perspectives. **Chapter five** is findings and analysis part. This chapter presents the empirical findings derived from surveys, interviews, focus group discussions, and document reviews. The analysis focuses on four core aspects: socio-demographic features of respondents, project planning and preparation, implementation practices, and monitoring mechanisms at the LGI level. **The final chapter** (discussion, conclusion and recommendation) synthesizes the findings in relation to the research questions and conceptual framework. It discusses the implications of the findings, identifies gaps and challenges, and draws overall conclusions regarding the state of SDG localization in Bangladesh. Evidence-based recommendations are proposed for improving policy, practice, and institutional capacity. The report concludes with references to all cited works, followed by appendices including research instruments (questionnaires, checklists), focus group discussion transcripts, and other supporting materials.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

As we embark on this great collective journey, *we pledge that no one will be left behind.* Recognizing that the dignity of the human person is fundamental, we wish to see the Goals and targets met for all nations and peoples and for all segments of society. *And we will endeavor to reach the furthest behind first.*

United Nations General Assembly, 2015, emphasized

Ever since the idea of Sustainable Development Goals was pitched at the UNGA in 2015, the role of local authority has gained extensive traction. The very resolution of UNGA (Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 2015) categorically calls on ‘Governments and public institutions’ to work ‘closely’ among others, with ‘regional and local authorities, subregional institutions’ for the implementation of SDGs. Since two thirds of the 169 targets under 17 goals are directly linked with local level actions, realizing SDGs at local level is ‘key to ensure people at the risk of being left behind are fully accounted’ (UNDP, 2022)². In order for their endemic knowledge, capabilities and homegrown solution to problems, the role of local level authorities is pivotal for SDGs achievement. A bulging body of researches has acknowledged the centrality of local governments in delivering on SDGs aspirations (Reddy, 2016; Masuda et. el., 2022)³. It has been empirically evidenced that meeting sustainable development goals requires multi-stakeholder collaboration which is possible by actions played by local governments as ‘intermediaries’ in the complex development scenario (Masuda et el., 2022)⁴.

It is worth noting that although the resolution adopted by the UNGA on 25th September 2015 had multiple mentions of regional and local authorities for the purpose of mainstreaming SDGs, it did not have a single mention of the word ‘localization’ of the goals or about any process of localization. However, prior to the General Assembly meeting, localizing SDGs was given much thought and a great commitment to that end was shown (Reddy, 2016)⁵. In ‘Developing the post-

² UNDP

³ Reddy, P. S. ‘Localising the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): The Role of Local Government in Context’ in African Journal of Public Affairs, Vol. 9, No. 2, June 2016

⁴ Masuda

⁵ Ibid

2015 Development Agenda' localization was considered as a way of ensuring inclusive development and diversity, a means for 'a more detailed subnational picture of progress' (UNDP, 2014)⁶. Nevertheless, increasing awareness of local and regional governments' (LRGs) advantageous position to leverage localization has lately come to the forefront of discussion. As a result, the approach towards localization of SDGs has evolved from being "the process of taking into account subnational context in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda" (UNDP, 2016) to a more holistic "process of harnessing local opportunities, priorities and ideas (UNDP, 2022). This shift in perspective on localizing SDGs has created an impetus for local authorities so much so that LRGs across the globe are now producing 'Voluntary Local Reviews' independent of their national reviews in an ever-increasing number (UNDP, 2022; UCLG, 2022). Overall, SDGs have become a framework for local level development planning by the local government institutions all over the world (Khan et al., 2018).

There is a caveat though; SDG localization is often conflated with its implementation (UNDP, 2022). The literature on SDG implementation at the local level and SDG localization often overlooks the nuances between the two concepts, using them interchangeably. Since SDG implementation is also a national agenda, national policies may unfold at local levels with top-down supervision without any ownership of the local authorities. It is worthwhile to appreciate the differences between SDGs implementation and SDGs localization. Moreover, SDGs localization is not also 'limited to translating and integrating the global goals into local development and investment plans' (UNDP, 2023). In fact, SDG localization entails the process of defining, implementing and monitoring techniques of sustainable development goals at local level. Thus, SDGs implementation or integrating them in local programmes should be viewed not as the process but rather part of the process.

Furthermore, localization of SDGs is deeply interlocked with the idea of 'leaving no one behind' - an underlying principle of Agenda 2030. Local peoples' participation in this bottom-up approach of development through multi-level governance ensured by local government institutions is regarded as 'a method to achieve a variety of goals, including sharpening poverty targeting, improving service delivery, expanding livelihood opportunities, and strengthening demand for good governance' (Mansuri and Rao, 2013). Centralized and controlled structure of the state which is termed as 'unpredictable, uncertain, restless and volatile' is clearly no match for the presence of a participatory decentralized local government system that 'calls for the use of many

different institutions – market, public services, the political parties, the media and so on’ for development (Roy, 2010).

2.1 SDGs Localization in Bangladesh

Governance Innovation Unit of the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO), associated with the SDG implementation since 2016, terms SDGs as ‘ambitious’ targets (GIU, 2023). In the first Voluntary National Review (VNR, 2017)⁷ it is evident that the notion of localizing SDGs was limited to national level planning (aligning SDGs with ‘domestic development plans and strategies’), was viewed as ‘a big challenge’ rather than opportunity, was discounted for ‘stakeholder’s participation for local level ownership of the SDGs’ (ibid, 2017). However, with time the government has become increasingly aware of the need for localizing SDGs by involving local stakeholders after its first the first national ‘SDGs Implementation Review’ in 2018 (Sarkar et. el, 2022). In December, 2018 the Cabinet approved 39+1 indicators highlighting national priority and a need for localization. One proposition central to Agenda 2030 is ‘leave no one behind’ - ensuring progress for all at a disaggregated level. To respond to leaving no one behind- ensuring progress of all at disaggregated level, local authorities are tasked to set local priority (+1).

However, the rules of engagement for local government institutions in localizing SDGs is still a missing link (Rakiba & Hussein, 2021). Rakiba & Hussein (2021) note that “a clear gap in literature exists with regards to SDG localization and LGIs”. Against this backdrop, the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) emphasizes the necessity of ‘localizing’ the SDGs as an effective approach to achieving these goals, considering two key aspects: (a) the role of local government institutions (LGIs) in SDG implementation, and (b) the adoption of local development policies aligned with the SDGs (GIU, 2023). This study seeks to contribute to the literature by examining the efforts of LGIs in localizing the SDGs within the Bangladeshi context.

2.2 SDGs localization Models in Bangladesh

It is quite interesting to note that the GIU did not hint to the processes for LGIs engagement (GIU, 2023). Even in mapping out +1 priorities, the consideration of keeping the LGIs in the loop has almost been recognized as per laws. Rather these priorities are set in the meetings arranged at local levels by the several administrative bodies. There the gap between defining the localization of SDGs and art of implementing it still remains unresolved and faces dilemma between legitimate local institutional and strong non-local administrative clout.

⁷ Planning Commission, Bangladesh Voluntary National Review (VNR), 2017

This oscillation between local and non-local institutions is reflected in other national documents and plans too. For instance, during the period of 7th FYP (2016 -2020), Ministries/Divisions had already aligned their position with SDGs and started to implement the activities accordingly though FYP did not address SDG localization. Ministries were unprepared at that time as far as data management is concerned (GED, 7th FYP, 2016). This inability in defining the localization of SDGs in time hatched the opportunity for different institutions to develop their own localization model. General Economic Division (GED) has taken the path first in 2018. In their model, the first stage of localization is to formulate an SDG-centric local annual and five-year plans, thereby determining the amount of money, human resources, infrastructure development that will be needed at the Upazila and also at broad-spectrum district and divisional levels to achieve local targets in a coordinated manner. It is necessary to start localization work at the district and Upazila levels using the existing administrative structure of the government. Several committees at different stages of administration are provisioned and made accountable for localization of SDGs at the Upazila, district and divisional levels under the direction of the Cabinet Division.

2.2.1 Natore Model

Using local resources, Natore district, located in the northern part of the country formed with seven Upazilas and eight municipalities, spearheaded the localization of SDGs in 2017 for the first time based on their local data. This effort has been titled as 'District Model' of SDG localization. Though Natore district administration maintained a rigorous consultative process at local level and has drawn national and international attention for 'empowering the local people to participate in the accomplishment of the SDGs in their daily lives' (Daily Star, 2019)⁸, it ignored the formal institutional mechanism of LGIs. This model has been more horizontal, and over bureaucratic in nature. Instructed primarily by the Cabinet Division, the district administration has modelled this framework on simple four steps – problem identification (priorities), identifying the potentials, adoption of development agenda/action plan and distribution of responsibilities among govt. Departments and NGOs (sector-wise distribution). Though GIU later spent much time in updating the model for other districts, it did not sustain longer (GIU 2023).

⁸ <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/perspective/news/looking-at-the-sdgs-bangladesh-1825186>

2.2.2 Bangladesh Model/ GED MODEL

There has been no model as such Bangladesh model. These models lavish much attention on committee-based tasks. The analysis of these models and tasks would place spotlight of our coming of an age with defining the localization of SDGs.

The General Economics Division (GED) of the Government of Bangladesh has developed a framework for localizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the Upazila level. The model can be replicated at the district level with the help of Deputy Commissioners. The GED is a lead government unit that coordinates and implements the SDGs across ministries.

2.3 SDGs Localization and Project Management by LGIs

In Bangladesh, ministries/divisions generally carry out development projects under the Five-Year-Plan (FYP) – rationalized and implemented in each financial year (FY), generally termed as Annual Development Plan (ADP). Planning commission issues the guidelines/instructions of planning, preparing and implementing the projects in public sector at national level.

Same way of implementing development projects is copied and reproduced in LGIs. At rural level, Union Parishads and Upazila Parishads prepare their own development plans. Bangladesh has LGIs in rural (Union, Upazila and Zila) and urban areas (Paurashava and City Corporation) (Table: 2.3).

Table-2.3: Local Government Institutions in Bangladesh

Sl.	LGIs	Acts	Planning Provision	Kinds
1	Zila Parishad	Zila Parishad Act, 2009	• Five Year Plan	Rural
2	Upazila Parishad	Upazila Parishad Act, 2009	• ADP	
3	Union Parishad	Local Government (Union Parishad) Act, 2009		
4	City Corporation	Different Acts		Urban
5	Municipalities (Pourashavas)	Local Government (Pourashava) Act 2009		

Local Government Division (LGD) has issued circulars for the project management at LGIs. Circulars are executive orders unmatched in terms of legal status than act or policies. It has been addressed on ad-hoc basis to meet the temporary demands. This gap between enactment and

managing reality by executive handedness for adopting projects has created anomalies in the area. For example, there has been provision of holding *WS*. But the process has not been clarified yet how *WS* will be made more effective and functional to the cause of SDG localization.

In Bangladesh, for last more than two decades, ideas are borrowed and experimented in LGIs. But these techniques are not aligned in the structure. Academics have highlighted that these interventions are biased being heavily bureaucratic and centralized meaning that they have flawed the spirit of local governance and decentralization dysfunctional (Ahmed, Chowdhury)

2.4 Development Planning at Rural LGIs

The LGIs are supposed to take long and short-term plans. The recent development in development planning at LGIs in terms of extending policy support from the national level is worth mentioning: Local Government Division (LGD) has issued a guideline providing the overall framework of the FYP. This is a standard formatting of the development planning at LGIs (GoB 2014).

According to *Upazila Parishad Act 2009*, at Upazila level, the Upazila Parishads shall prepare the Five-Year Plan (FYP) and the annual development plan (ADP) based on their situation analysis, local needs and priorities, capacity and available resources.

In a middle-tier local government institution like Upazila Parishad, the importance of vertical and horizontal linkages and collaborations are emphasized. The vertical linkages refer to the Upazila development plans being aligned not only with the district development plan and the overall national development's strategic directions and sectoral development goals and perspective plans, but also with the development initiatives of the Unions and the Pourashavas. This gives the Upazila development plans consistency and coherence. The horizontal linkages refer to the Upazila development plans being linked with other development activities financed by other development funds (e.g., national development plans, Members of the Parliament, NGOs, CSOs, the private sector and other funding organizations). Here the development activities funded by Union Parishads and Pourashavas should also be considered with a view to ensure a broad-based resource mapping. It can be said that localization of SDGs can be considered from this perspective.

It is found that the share of the development funds managed by Upazila Parishad are approximately 5-7% of the total development resources spent in that Upazila in any financial year. Some 80-90% of the total development resources come from the national development plans. That is why importance for Upazila development plans creating maximum synergy and avoiding duplications is given.

2.5 Project Planning at LGIs

Planning as a useful tool in national and local governance, is recognized by the development practitioners. Since independence in 1971, Bangladesh took the trajectory of a socialist economy after the socialist ideals enshrined in one of the state principles of the constitution. But the reality is that the success of implementing development plans in Bangladesh is very limited. The attitude of the government was a major factor in the eventual failure of these plans. Poor mobilization of resources and their allocation, absence of administration reforms, and weak financial management of the government appeared to protect group interests rather than protecting peoples' right to govern (Hasnat, 1987)⁹. Nexus among the politicians, the bureaucrats and the planners has been considered as one the causes. This gap between people and the policy makers has become evident in the policy regime of Bangladesh. The above introduction to the limited success of national development plans in Bangladesh has been suggestive to stories understand the of local development planning of Bangladesh.

In development practices, the process of engagement of the citizens is enhancing, changing and all grasping in nature. It means that peoples' participation in development practices of locality is evolving fast (Mansuri and Rao 2013)¹⁰. This engagement of the people with LGIs originates generally from awareness of the local issues/problems— social or infrastructure or ecological in nature. To put simply, peoples' participation begins with awareness of the problem and the process of engagement. If people are trained and informed, they can decide what decisions they are going to take about the problems they are encountering in the locality.

2.5.1 Awareness of the Projects

Though there are formal institutions for decentralized informed decision making at LGIs in Bangladesh, these institutions have become dysfunctional as bureaucracy and elected representatives are locked in debate over disproportionate distribution of power among them. Elected representatives criticize that having the agency of the central government the bureaucracy has a natural tendency to undermine their roles in decentralized planning at all levels. On the other hand, bureaucracy finds the disorientation and inefficiency of the elected representatives as plea to curb their authority in different forms of decentralized planning. The rationale is that the more authoritative an executive, the better implementation of development plans of LGIs (Zamil,

⁹ Syed Abu Hasnath. "The Practice and Effect of Development Planning in Bangladesh." Public Administration and Development, vol. 7, no. 1, 1 Jan. 1987, pp. 59–75, <https://doi.org/10.1002/pad.4230070105>. Accessed 25 Apr. 2023.

¹⁰ Mansuri Ghazala and Rao, Vijayendra. *Localizing Development: Does Participation Work*. A World Bank Policy Research Report, World Bank, 2013.

2012)¹¹. This clear bias lies at the core of administrative system of LGIs not to execute the provisions of the UP Act, 2009, impede peoples' participation in the local governance (Chambers, 2014)¹².

2.5.2 Consultation with Stakeholders and Significance of *Ward Sabha*

If people are consulted, their awareness level is enhanced and this can contribute to decentralized planning process. Practical and deliberative sessions with stakeholders are designed to that end: either officials train people or seek a thoroughly argumentative opinions from the participants of an issue. They receive theme-based briefings that help form their opinion. In Bangladesh, there are instances of such deliberative training sessions organized by the health and family welfare office. These are called *Uthan Boithak* or Session of yard on different themes of their health and nutritional aspects. Sometimes, officials of LGIs approach people for their opinions. Budget session of the Ups are the examples of this kind of session. So, this is the formative phase of a people for their participation in local development.

Development practitioners are concerned about participation in a local setting in two points: *first*, participation must have a practical and deliberative orientation, *second*, participation must be 'bottom up' giving entitlement to the people to find the tentative solution to their local problem (Mansuri and Rao, 2013)¹³. This entitlement or defining the role of the people empower them in the LGIs. This is what in other words termed as 'Empowered Deliberative Democracy' (Issac, 2004)¹⁴. Local participation is seen as a method to achieve a variety of goals, including sharpening poverty targeting, improving service delivery, expanding livelihood opportunities, and strengthening demand for good governance (Mansuri and Rao 2013)¹⁵.

Sections 4 – 7 of *UP Act, 2009* elaborate the formation, functions and responsibilities of *Ward sabha (WS)*, the council at the lowest unit of the LGIs. People of a locality are entitled to participate in development activities in all phases through this formal institution: from preparation stage to its completion. It is the microcosm of a parliament that makes peoples' voice heard directly and the inputs found from there are supposed to shape decisions at LGIs. But the *UPZ Act, 2009* and the subsequent amendments in 2011 and 2015 are incompatible with the spirit of local governance. To illustrate, according to section 42 of *UPZ Act, 2009*, MP of the constituency

¹¹ Zamil, A. (2012) *Annual Development Programme (ADP) Grants for Upazila Parishads: Role of Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) in the Planning and Implementation Process*. Dhaka: NSU.

¹² Chambers, Robert. *Rural Development: Putting the Last First*. London, Routledge, 2014.

¹³ See Mansuri and Rao, page 13

¹⁴ Issac, Thomas T Met et al. *Local Democracy and Development: People's Campaign for Decentralized Planning in Kerala*, 2004, Left Word

¹⁵ See Mansuri and Rao, Page 14

needs to be consulted prior to implementation of any development planning. So, to officials of the LGIs, the role of an MP in their constituency is superior and more binding than the local people given the insertion of a comprehensive clause in the law for local development planning.

Shuvra (2018) argues that certain factors such as absence of authority, lack of awareness, apathy of the villagers, lack of enthusiasm and absence of freedom on part of this body are responsible for this kind of malfunctioning of the institution. Experts on local governance decentralization maintains that party domination has become a barrier to the decentralization of local development. In India, West Bengal experimented how to make local governance at LGIs function better removing the social barriers such as caste and religion. Now it is a long seated political regime, and their influences in the polity has become so pervasive that these make the institutions fragile:

In West Bengal, three decades of Communist Party rule changed the political power structures in Bengali villages from a system based on caste and religion to one based on party membership and hierarchy. While village elites in West Bengal are now more broad-based and consensual, and village citizens more politically aware and socially mobilized (forming an engaged civil society), party domination has become the major barrier to further rooting of democracy (Mullen 2012).

The stories of LGIs in Bangladesh are close to the above one with nuances, though Bangladesh has often been credited with some advancements made in social sectors such as successful shifts from a male dominated political culture to women participation local governance, primary enrollment and guaranteeing universal health coverage¹⁶. From 2009 onwards, with end of more than two years long unrepresentative government, political power took over, the border line between party in power and local government continues to blurred: party men are now deeply anchored in the system, more entrenched than ever in traditional cultures of non-accountability. It is also identified that the local issues that are discussed in the meetings of the forum are selected and the tempo of discussion is very often customized after the wishes of the elites and the power brokers (Rao, 2013). This problematic civic space is likely to generate more unequal and exclusionary development policies and practices, with a significant risk of not only leaving the most vulnerable behind, but also of their dispossession and loss of fundamental rights and voice in relation to the development process (Hossain, 2019)¹⁷.

The question is: to what extent, is this discussion relevant to the policy makers? As SDGs are to be embedded in local perspective to improve the existing situation against each goal can be

¹⁶ Ahmed, Nizam. *Women in Governing Institutions in South Asia*. Palgrave MacMillan, 22 Aug. 2018.

¹⁷ Lewis, David, and Abul Hossain. *Revisiting the Local Power Structure in Bangladesh*. SIDA, 2017.

achieved for a local community, policy practitioners need to be aware of the nuances of local participation (Sachs 2020)¹⁸. To illustrate: Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development pledges to ‘leave no one behind’ and to ‘reach the furthest behind first’ are highly likely to be violated by closures of civic space.

The success story of Kerala has made the issue more contested. Critics note that an aware and mobilized local is a necessity for the effective functioning of local government (Mullen, 2012)¹⁹. Here lies the functionality of *WS*. In local governance, the problem of a locality can be voiced if people are aware of the provisions of the budget, their rights in the allocation to be made. This is the embeddedness of a project that fosters the inclusiveness or peoples’ participation in any kind of development activities of the community. Bangladesh is yet to enact a local governance policy – the absence of which undermines the balance of power between local government institutions and the government as well as the legislative body, renders instability of the local government system and distresses the quality services needed for local people.

2.5.3 Adoption of Local Initiatives and Its Promotion

Local initiative refers to those projects that emerge from the need of the local people. Sustainable development underlines not only on the point of originality of peoples’ demand from peoples’ voice but also put emphasis on local solution and its promotion. On the other hand, in classical model, top-down approach dictates development activities and local solution to a problem is overlooked. Though Bangladesh legislated an empowered-citizen centric model of democracy in 2009, the traditions of typical/classical ‘Representative-Techno-Bureaucratic’ version of democracy is alive and sometimes become dominant.

Practitioners identified few causes that are responsible for continuation of traditional culture in local governance: (1) a historical legacy inherited from long colonial rule; (2) social and economic crises in the post-colonial societies; (3) powerful political and bureaucratic vested interest; (4) absence of fulfilling the preconditions such as proper legislation and administrative framework, capacity building of the LGIs and change of civic culture²⁰ (Issac, 2004, Shuvra, 2018)). More important to note is that as people have limited experience to get access to accountability process, a people-oriented legislation results little (Ahmed, 2018)²¹. Shuvra (2018) argued extensively that

¹⁸ Sachs, Jeffrey D. *The age of Sustainable Development*, 2015, Columbia University Press.

¹⁹ Mullen, R.D. (2017) *Decentralization, Local Governance, and Social Wellbeing in India: Do Local Governments Matter?* London: Routledge.

²⁰ Issac, Thomas T M et al. *Local Democracy and Development: People’s Campaign for Decentralized Planning in Kerala*, 2004, Left Word

²¹ Ahmed, Nizam (edited). *Inclusive Growth in South Asia: Parliament, Judiciary and Civil Service*. 2018. Springer

the poor orientation and capacity, LGIs has got significant 'inputs' from people but the real problem lies at 'output' stage that officials are supposed to reflect in their decision making.

2.5.4 Five-year Plan (FYP) and Other Plans

In section 23, Annexure 2 of *UZP Act, 2009* and section 47, Annexure 2 of *UP Act, 2009*, the charter of duties shows adoption of five-year planning is the top priority of both LGIs. Inclusion of FYP, ADP and other time-bound plans are reproduced from a bunch of national ideas without much thinking. There was hardly any debate inside and outside the Parliament when the act was passed in 2009. Parliament passed a bill not because the MPs, and bureaucracy is committed to the ideas of decentralization but as part of fulfilling the conditions of the prescriptions from the development partners. This pseudo-decentralized governance of the political regime and lack of conviction to the philosophy of decentralization put the legal foundation of LGIs towards creating a tense relationship rather coordination between bureaucracy and local people.

Not only that, the prescription of bringing changes in the LGIs did not originate from domestic politics, as soon as the elected government took over, parliament voted for amendments in reference to the advisory role of local MP. Now, MP enjoys a superior advisory position in LGIs. No plan, no allocation, no activities can be carried out without their consent. Sometimes being present in the council session, sometimes through the bureaucratic channel, an MP communicates his/her instructions. This background contextualizes the reason for which FYP as an idea and practice at local level has received little attention of the officials and elected representatives (Ahmed, 2012)²².

Zamil (2012) found that officials are reluctant to adopt any planning for LGIs according to law assuming that it might invite troubles for them. In some cases, officials themselves maneuver non-administrative barriers such as not supplying the necessary documents for getting preparation for the meeting etc. that bar the elected representatives in participating in local councils. Surveying all situations, it can be concluded that planning is subject to discretion of the authority of LGIs.

2.6 Project Implementation at LGIs

In its lifecycle, a project faces critical challenges at implementation stage, related with financing and its supervision. Existing laws of LGIs provide the guidelines to implement the projects of local government. This section examines whether the guidelines of projects regarding LGIs

²² Ahmed, T. Decentralization and the Local State. 2012. Agamee Prokashani: Dhaka

financial capacity to mobilize local resources and their control over redistribution has embedded the notion of peoples' participation.

2.6.1 Financing the Project

In Bangladesh, LGIs usually mobilize resources from two sources:(a) Block grants received from the Ministry (b) Local resources. Both UP and UZP laws and instructions provide clear instruction of financing methods of the projects adopted locally.

Sections 35 and 44 of the *UPZ Act, 2009* details nine sources of fund for the UZP. This includes the proceeds from the taxes, fees and other demands as determined by the UZP. The government can fix up the income from leasing out specified markets, water bodies and ferry ghat to contribute to the fund of UZP. The UZP itself is also authorized to impose taxes and fees on business organizations, industries, movie theatres, entertainment programs and different professions. Besides, UZP is authorized to utilize the income from its properties and the proceeds from its investment. However, the major sources of fund come from the government. The government sanctions block grants to the UZP (GOB, 2009).

According to the Guideline for the Utilization of Upazila Parishad Development Fund, UZP resource is categorized in two parts: Revenue Fund and Development Fund. Revenue Fund is to be raised from the house rents, proceeds from taxes and tolls, lease money received from renting market places, 2% of Land Development Tax¹⁸, 1% of Land Transfer Tax¹⁹, income from the properties of the UZP, personal donations, profit from investment and other funds coming from the government or otherwise. On the other hand, Development Fund includes revenue surplus - the excess amount received after defraying of revenue expenditures of the UZP. Moreover, block grants under ADP, local donation, funds received for development projects outside the purview of ADP and funds received from any organization for project implementation also come under the category of Development Fund (GOB, 2009).

In the same vein, according to section 53 and chapter 12 of the *Local Government (UP) Act, 2009* UP can levy taxes and source the resources. Resource mobilization of UP is more comprehensive than the UPZ, though the latter has drawn much attention of the central government in terms of receiving the grants and other financial assistances. It is mainly due to the presence of the executives who represent the Ministry. In addition to that, UPZ plays the role of coordination of resource distribution and supervision over UP and local MP regularly maintains communication through UPZ.

2.6.2 Redistribution of Resources

Chart 2.0 shows the sector wise distribution of UPZ resources according to the guideline of development activities (GoB 2010). It reveals that LGI is required to allocate most of its resources to social sector that categorizes three areas: Improvement of quality of education, Health and Social Welfare, Youth, Sports and Culture and other contingencies that match with local demands. It is obvious that UPZ instructions for resource distribution is quite compatible with SDGs.

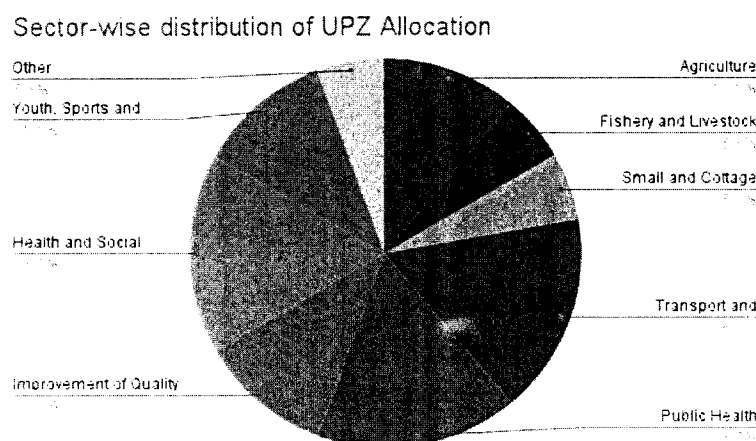


Chart 2.0: Sector-wise distribution of Allocation at UPZ

In case of UP, the guidelines of using resources for development is more comprehensive and guided as it the management of Ups are funded by a project named Local Governance Support Project (LGSP) – initially World Bank aided, later it has been funded by GoB. Yet, the implementation of project of LGIs are not beyond any debate.

The party politics of the constituency has critical role to play about the number, type of projects and the distribution of funds. UPZ Parishad (Council) is the visible actor. It is the competent body to take decisions about it through a consultative process. But the invisible actors from political sphere are more authoritative than the institution itself. Same is true about UP. This LGI enjoys independence to some degree as the block grant is transferred to their accounts directly under the project of LGSP. But UNO acts as the coordinator and plays a kind of supervisory role about utilization of the budget. Local MP and UPZ exert an indirect influence on decisions of UPs. All these result a vicious nexus between bureaucracy and politics.

Duplication and poor quality of projects are common problems about implementation of projects at LGIs. As distribution of resources is not based on deliberative and practical processes, officials who give technical support, they become tolerant of these issues. As a result of wastage of public money happens.

2.6.3 Coordination Between Elected Representatives and Bureaucrats

As the legislation suggests that LGIs in Bangladesh render multisectoral activities with scarce resources. The multi-sectoral development project management demand coordination among the

agencies responsible at operational and the policy level. In case of LGIs, local government advocates find that coordination among the actors of locality has been critical in Bangladesh due to bad institutional performance. It is required to reduce conflicts and confusions among the officers in different departments of the LGIs and elected representatives as this contributes to implement the policies/projects of the national and local government in efficient and effective way (Sarker 2011).

2.6.4 Policy Support of the Government

SDG has been theme based and time bound to achieve social and institutional targets. Literature show that localization of SDG is more context specific. These goals have been grounded on philosophy of enhancing welfare of the society (Aminuzzaman, 2017). Bangladesh has been committed to international community to enhance allocation at increasing rate for social sectors that covers education, universal health and social protection (WB). So, the urgency of policy support to standardize the social sectors in form of localization of SDG is expected than ever. From that perspective, GIU (2023) initiative to fix the +1 priority may be appreciated with its limitations to take the LGIs on board.

2.6.5 Gap between FYP and ADP: Planning Fallacy

The *Guidelines for Upazila Integrated Development Planning, 2020* underscores that UPZ development plans shall be aligned with all national plans. It set the following specific objectives:

- a. Provide the users with better understanding of the basic principles of development planning and a simple but comprehensive and integrated framework for development planning cycle
- b. UPZ's development plans shall be more result based and measurable for all stakeholders. They are also aligned with the goals of the national development plans such as the Perspective Plan 2010-2021 as well as the 8th Five-Year Plan 2021-2025.
- c. Introduce the users to overall concepts and principles of a Five-Year Plan (FYP) and an Annual Plan (AP) at the Upazila level and the key contents, steps and processes in formulating the development plans by effectively utilizing the development financial resources available at the Upazila level.
- d. Strengthening the institutional framework and accountability and transparency measures for sustainability.

This *Guidelines* and UP manual for carrying development activities complement each other as UP feeds inputs for UPZ development plans. Describing UPZ as multi-tier institution, the *Guidelines*

emphasize the importance of vertical and horizontal linkages and collaborations. The vertical linkages refer to the Upazila development plans being aligned not only with the district development plan and the overall national development's strategic directions and sectoral development goals and perspective plans, but also with the development initiatives of the Unions and the municipalities.

But the reality is that both UPs and UPZs for a long time do not have any FYP. They lack institutional capacity to formulate such plans. For capacity building there is no provision of allocations in their FY budget. All these together result in mere development plans in LGIs.

At operational level, people's participation in local government is categorically inserted as right to participate in the budget making (Open Budget Meeting) and the routine activities of the institutions using various tools of accountability (Citizen's charter, Grievance Redress System and Right to Information etc.). But regular participation through Ward sabha and other consultation meetings to formulate plans of development projects is not present in the LGIs.

2.7 Project Monitoring

In management of projects, monitoring is considered as vertical and top-down process. Government agencies are expected to report the results of their governance system. Good reporting having 'reliable, timely data on inputs, outputs, activities, outcomes and, often, societal level measures are essential for effective and efficient governance'²³.

But monitoring in local governance has different shades of meaning. As the *Guidelines 2020* characterizes it at least two senses: one, it is an 'ongoing process'. In deeper sense, it means that 'the lessons from monitoring are discussed periodically and used to inform actions and decisions' (GoB, 2020). and second, it is citizen centric. The citizens would spontaneously become responsible for monitoring the outcomes of the plans, evaluate the results and also assess its impact at the end. So, various kinds of monitoring for LGIs can be used as tool for 'learning, management and communication'²⁴ for next course of development planning. This continuous learning process begins with reporting the project.

2.7.1 Reporting on Project Implementation

²³ Tryens, Jeff. Government Public Performance Reporting - Is It Worth the Effort? www.adb.org, Asian Development Bank, 17 Aug. 2016, www.adb.org/publications/government-public-performance-reporting-it-worth-effort.

²⁴ Niemann, L., & Hoppe, T. (2017). Sustainability reporting by local governments: a magic tool? Lessons on use and usefulness from European pioneers. *Public Management Review*, 20(1), 201–223. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2017.1293149>

Report to authority does not necessarily aims at mere bureaucratic control. It feeds into next level of coordination for total development activities. In a traditional model of local governance often mere reporting can cause 'reporting fatigue,' leading to the discontinuation or mere reporting without bringing any qualitative change in the governance.

To the contrary, in a practical deliberative democratic planning process, consultation with stakeholders' matter. Reaching stakeholders that can make a difference should be part of the planning process for every government performance report from day one. Therefore, a reporting framework to be effective and sustained over time in decentralized planning should be grounded in a strategic vision or plan including desired future performance levels of the organization. Keeping this consideration in account, the *Guidelines for Integrated Development Planning* is prepared. But this *Guidelines* does not take the UP tools into consideration rather suggest new process of preparing development plans. Before public disclosure of the report, agencies link their publicly reported indicators to either a government-wide or internal set of desired long-term results accompanied by a statement of how they intend to achieve those results. This performance-based reporting system must be trustworthy. To be taken seriously by stakeholders, a purely government report requires some form of validation. Another important aspect of trustworthiness is consistency. All these features, to a large extent, are reflected in the LGIs legislation of 2009 (GoB, 2009 and LGSP Manual, 2014). Tofail (2016)²⁵ shows that data management of LGIs is deeply flawed. Figures of WS do not match with the record keeping and other evidences that are supposed to preserve. It signifies that UP has become non-participatory and undemocratic in decision making and local people have limited access to basic services in the institutions.

2.7.2 Organizational Accountability

Organizational checks are embedded in the laws and related government instructions so that balance of power can be maintained among the different actors of LGIs. Advocates of organizational checks believe that oversight can ensure transparency and accountability of the local governance. Critics make an indictment of these checks for they are afraid of unnecessary control over LGIs that generally undermine the role of local people in governance. As a result, LGIs turn into an extended part of the centralized, process-oriented bureaucracy (Ahmed 2012). But this is scrappy and simple scrutiny of the oversight. Evidences found that bureaucratic engagement with much caution and prudence can improve the governance of LGIs (Zamil, 2012).

²⁵ Ahmed, T. et al, 'Social Accountability Mechanisms: A Study on the Union Parishads in Bangladesh', BIGD, March 2016, Dhaka

In spite of having much similarities and experience of implementing some of the goals of SDGs, we have to acknowledge the fact that it is not a home-grown idea. So, if government does not give any specific policy directives to LGIs, they will not act accordingly.

A system of checks and balance is a key ingredient of all democratic systems. At the local level this means that a balance must be struck between the power of the executive (e.g., the Upazila Chairman) and that of the local “legislature” (the Parishad members). At present, considerable executive authority is given the Chairmen, without a well-developed framework for Parishad oversight. There are various ways to strengthen the oversight powers of the Parishad, such as only indirectly electing Chairman, or increasing the scope of authority of standing committees in the Parishad, and its legislative authority as a whole.

2.7.3 Data management

Bangladesh lacks capacity in data management. Data deprivation has been identified one of the key challenges in localization of SDGs. GoB identified this incapacity in the early years of SDGs. Planning Commission has worked on the theme of data management at national level. But the question of data tracking at LGIs has remain unresolved. At local level, the most comprehensive data set on UPs is maintained through the Local Government Support Project 3 (LGSP3) under LGD (Ahmed, 2016).

Public performance reports should support a robust data analytics capability. A good performance report should include not only an explanation of data trends, but also provide analysis of causes and explore possible solutions to problematic trends. In the recent years, there is a changing pattern in the mechanism due to the increasing access to data analysis tools that emphasize a solid evidence based direct interaction with government counterparts. These tools are participatory public policy-making and budgeting, public expenditure tracking, citizen monitoring and evaluation of public service delivery. Social accountability thus complements and strengthens the conventional accountability mechanisms.

The quality, timeliness and scope of information on the performance of LGs need to be improved. Citizens themselves require this information, so that they can make judgements on the performance of their elected LGs. At present there are few requirements for regular public disclosure of important information, as the emphasis of GoB monitoring is on LGs reporting to the central government on progress with expenditures on specific programs. Restructuring the reporting system to support citizen oversight of LGs will actually strengthen GoB oversight of LGs. This requires the introduction of disclosure requirements (some of which LGs already use

informally), and reorienting the reporting system to focus on LGs outputs and outcomes, rather than the inputs provided by central government.

CHAPTER THREE

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

3.0 Conceptual Framework Explained

In this study, SDG localization is understood, as proposed by Oosterhof (2018) as the process of defining, implementing, and monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the local government level, particularly at the Upazila Parishad (UPZ) and Union Parishad (UP). Localization is meaningful only when projects undertaken by Local Government Institutions (LGIs) are explicitly aligned with SDG targets—through incorporation in local development plans, integration into project selection and budgeting, and establishment of systematic monitoring mechanisms. Therefore, project management practices of LGIs are used as the primary lens to assess whether SDG localization is genuinely taking place.

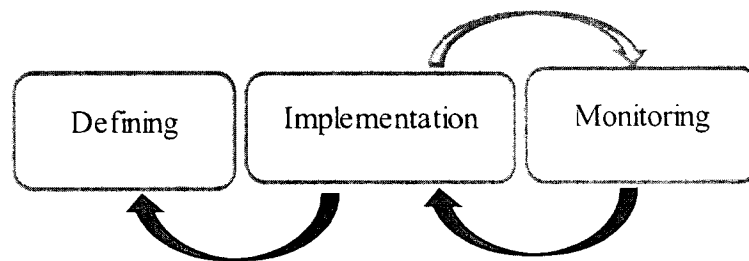


Figure 2.1: Localization Process of SDGs

Moreover, the idea of project management with a projection of social, economic and environmental outcomes to be achieved by the local community suggest that any project should be defined 'as a group of people, usually from various fields of expertise, collaborating temporarily with the aim of reaching a predetermined goal within a predetermined budget' (Grit 2011). These projects are set to determine and regulate the future social, economic and environmental prospects of a country. Hence, success and failure of localizing these goals can be measured through project management of LGIs. This study although aims at partial intervention with regard to overall localizing process, it generally looks at the entire localization operation unfolded by LGIs in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh has robust enactment on local government institutions. Even, at local level, preparation of a proper five-year development plans has a 'significant bearing on rejuvenating developmental activities at the grass-root level' including Union, Upazila and district (Zila) level (GoB 2021). Added to that, the theme of SDGs has added a broader scope of responsibilities for

the LGIs. At the backdrop of the current situation, the importance of developing a conceptual framework to understand the present discourse of development: project management and localization of SDGs in context of LGIs is critically felt.

In this study, the conceptual framework positions SDG localization as the dependent variable, operationalized as the extent to which local projects are selected, budgeted, implemented, and monitored with reference to SDG targets. The independent variables include:

- **Awareness of SDGs** among LGI officials and stakeholders
- **Stakeholder consultation** during project planning
- **Financing and policy support**, including government allocations, LGI revenue, and regulatory frameworks
- **Coordination** between bureaucrats and elected representatives

These factors influence SDG localization through key mediating processes, which are critical in linking inputs to outcomes:

- **Integrated planning** that aligns projects with local priorities and national SDG targets
- **Participatory governance**, ensuring citizen engagement and stakeholder involvement
- **Quality of project management practices**, including adherence to standards, efficiency, and transparency

The framework also accounts for moderating conditions that affect the strength and effectiveness of these processes:

- **Institutional capacity**, including human, technical, and financial resources
- **Political context**, encompassing local power dynamics, governance culture, and elected officials' priorities
- **National oversight**, reflecting the influence of central government directives, legal mandates, and monitoring mechanisms

Together, these elements explain why SDG localization in Bangladesh often remains partial or symbolic: SDGs are seldom fully embedded in local plans, project implementation is rarely tied to explicit SDG awareness, and monitoring mechanisms are frequently absent or weak. By mapping these dynamics, the framework provides a robust analytical tool to assess the preparedness of LGIs to localize SDGs effectively, highlighting the interplay between project management practices, stakeholder engagement, and contextual constraints.

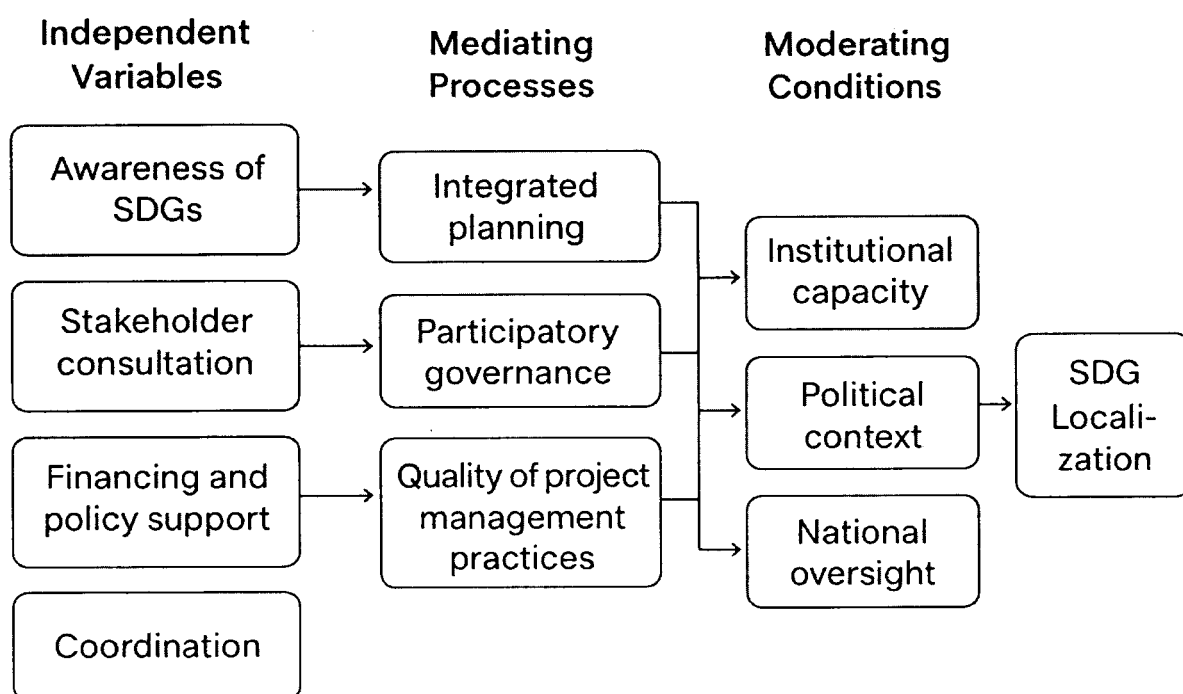


Figure-2.2: A Conceptual Framework for SDGs Localization based on Figure 2.1

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

4.0 Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed overview of the tools, procedures, respondent interactions, and methods employed in conducting this study. Given the exploratory nature of the research, a mixed-method approach combining qualitative and quantitative elements was adopted, following a rigorous scientific methodology to address the research objectives. Accordingly, the chapter presents a comprehensive discussion of the study's population and area, sample size, sampling process, data collection tools and procedures, research methods, and the analytical techniques applied throughout the study.

4.1 Research Approaches

This study employed a mixed-method approach to achieve its objectives, with particular emphasis on qualitative methods, complemented by quantitative tools due to the exploratory nature of the research. The main aim was to assess the capacity and awareness of Local Government Institutions (LGIs) regarding project planning and design for SDGs in the local context, necessitating the use of both qualitative and quantitative approaches for a comprehensive understanding.

Primary data formed the core of the research, supported by a critical review of relevant literature from both public and private sources as secondary data. Qualitative data were collected through face-to-face unstructured interviews, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with elected representatives and officials responsible for planning and implementing SDG-related projects, and discussions with representatives from relevant ministries, divisions, and departments to examine current practices and impacts. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were also conducted with civil society members, elected local representatives, and other stakeholders at the union and upazila levels. Additionally, a structured questionnaire was administered to selected local residents, who are potential beneficiaries of LGI projects and plans, to gather quantitative insights.

4.2 Area of the Study

The study was conducted in 4 districts covering 7 Upazilas and 11 Union Parishads across 3 divisions in Bangladesh. These units were selected purposively due to their diversity in socio-economic contexts and project experiences.

4.3 Sampling Techniques

A purposive sampling method was used for both qualitative and quantitative data. Participants were selected based on their direct involvement in planning and implementing development projects by the local government institutions. A simple random sampling was also employed for collecting data from stakeholders and key informants.

4.4 Sample Size

Since the study applied mixed methodologies, the sample size was determined based on the necessity of this research aims and objectives. Therefore, for conducting this research, the purposive and simple random sample techniques were used for selecting the sample. However, the following table can be seen to get the whole view about the sample size and data collection procedure from the concern respondents:

Table-3.1: Category and Sample size

Category	Numbers
Elected Representatives (UP & UZP)	16
Government Officials (LGIs)	27
Civil Society Members	20
National/Policy-level Officials	05
Total	n= 68

4.5 Data Collection Methods

- **Qualitative:**

- **Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)** with elected representatives (UP & UZP), Upazila Nirbahi Officers (UNOs), and other government officials (LGIs).
- **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)** with civil society members and stakeholders.
- **Observation** of planning sessions (Ward Meeting) at Union level and Coordination Committee meetings at Upazila level (where applicable).
- **Document Analysis** of five-year plans of UPs, project documents, and SDG integration guidelines.

- **Quantitative:**

- A structured questionnaire administered to 68 respondents assessing awareness, practices, and institutional capacities regarding SDG localization.

4.6 Data Analysis:

- **Qualitative Data:** Thematic analysis was conducted manually.
- **Quantitative Data:** Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages) were analyzed using MS Excel. Results were presented in tables and graphs for clarity.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

5.0 Introduction

We conducted interviews with 51 participants representing different categories, including government officials, politicians, local elites engaged in field-level implementation of the SDGs, and policy makers at the ministry level. To maintain confidentiality, each interviewee was assigned a pseudonym (P1, P2, ... P51). The interviews included both closed- and open-ended questions. We categorized them into three A (P1...P29) as government officials; B – local people (P30...P47) and C – the policy makers (P48...P51). The collected data was analyzed using a conceptual framework. Here, the chapter is organized in the following four sections:

Section A: Socio-demographic Features

Section B: Planning and preparation of Projects

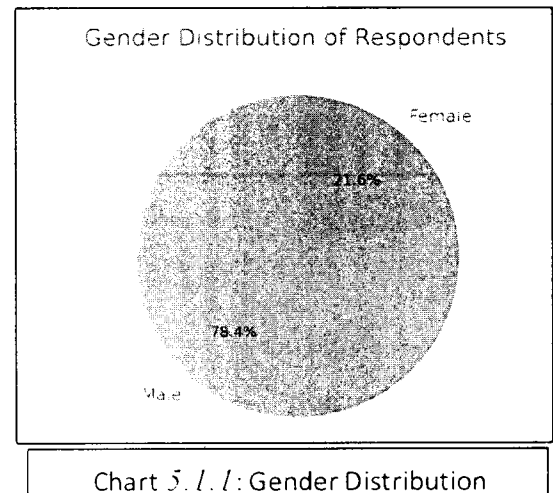
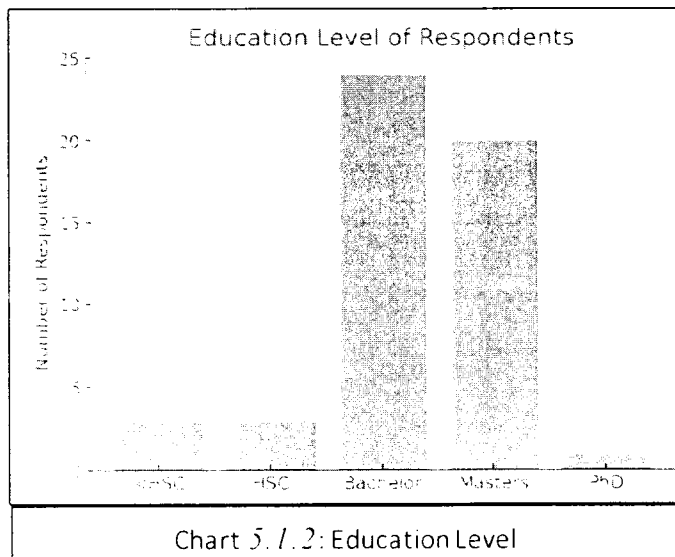
Section C: Implementation

Section D: Monitoring

The key findings of the study are presented below:

5.1 Socio-demographic Features

Charts 5.1.1, 5.1.2, 5.1.3 and 5.1.4 present key information about certain demographic features of the respondents: gender, age, education, and designations. Here, more than two-third (78.4%) of total respondents were male, and they had bachelor or higher level of education. Of them, 47.1% had bachelor degree and 39.2% had master's degree. More than half of the respondents (52.9%) were civil service officials and 31.4% were elected representatives of



local government bodies. A majority of the respondents (45.1%) were senior citizens. Overall, the demographic composition suggests a strong emphasis on educated, male, and senior civil servants and elected representatives. While this provides

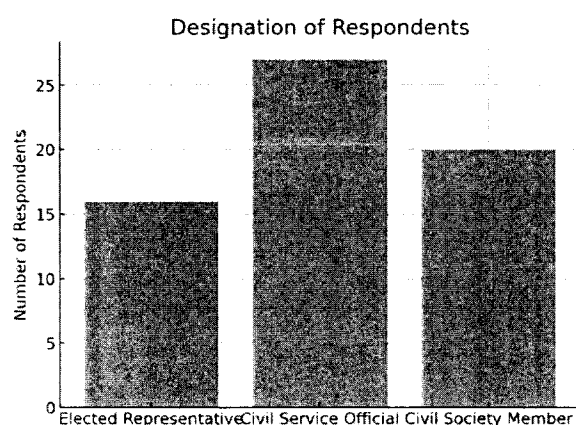


Chart 5.1.3: Designation/Profession

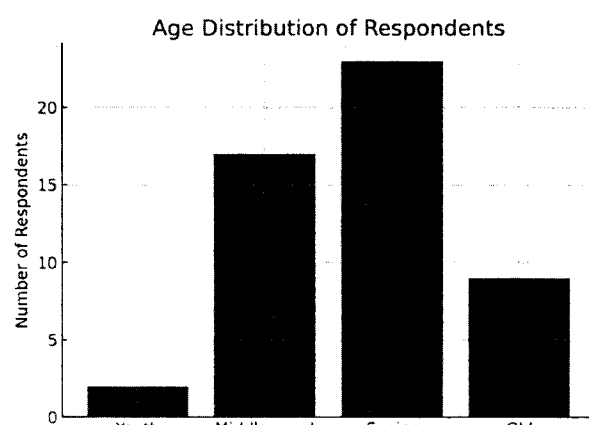


Chart 5.1.4: Age

credibility in terms of expertise and experience, it also highlights potential gaps in inclusivity, particularly regarding youth, women, and grassroots civil society members. These limitations are acknowledged in interpreting the findings with notes and observations so that these may not influence the generalizability and representativeness of the study.

5.2 Planning and preparation of projects

We have defined awareness in both general and advanced levels. General awareness means that the target population are aware of the SDG localization at simplest terms and advanced level defines the level of engagement at deeper level. At deeper stage, people are aware of the interconnection between project adoption and SDG localization.

5.2.1 Awareness about SDGs

Table 5.2 shows that almost all the respondents (98.0%) were aware of the SDGs. Interestingly, a large portion of the respondents (31.4%) did not know the number of goals in the SDGs. However, 66.7% respondents informed that they know how many goals are there in SDGs. A vast majority of the respondents (90.2%) were aware of the importance of localization of SDGs.

Table 5.2 Awareness of SDGs by gender

Aspects	Response	Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
Awareness of SDGs	Yes	39 (76.5%)	11 (21.6%)	50 (98.0%)
	No	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
	Not sure	1 (2.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (2.0%)
Awareness of all 17 SDGs	Yes	24 (47.1%)	10 (19.6%)	34 (66.7%)
	No	1 (2.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (2.0%)
	Not sure	15 (29.4%)	1 (2.0%)	16 (31.4%)

Awareness of SDG Localization Process	Yes	35 (68.6%)	11 (21.6%)	46 (90.2%)
	No	1 (2.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (2.0%)
	Not sure	4 (7.8%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (7.8%)
Source of SDG Knowledge	Training, Workshop, Seminar	33 (64.7%)	8 (15.7%)	41 (80.4%)
	Print and Electronic Media	5 (9.8%)	3 (5.9%)	8 (15.7%)
	Conversation	2 (3.9%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (3.9%)
Stakeholder Awareness of SDGs and Localization	Yes	6 (11.8%)	1 (2.0%)	7 (13.7%)
	No	28 (54.9%)	9 (17.6%)	37 (72.5%)
	Not sure	6 (11.8%)	1 (2.0%)	7 (13.7%)

Table 2 also indicates that mass media play a significant role in communicating information about the SDGs and raising awareness of its localization as 15.7% respondents are informed from mass media. But trainings and workshop are still dominant modes that through which local people become conscious of SDGs and its localization. One of the politicians (P2) said, ‘Government officials on few occasions, invite them for training... even the Union levels politicians are not included.’ Awareness of women is very low. One of the UNOs (P1) said, ‘women participants are reluctant to receive training if the training is arranged in UZP or district head-quarters. Women are much interested in their communities, like Uthan Boithak (Home yard meeting). But due to resource constraints it has become very hard to organize such meeting’.

5.2.2 Key Findings:

From above discussion, the following are the important findings:

1. Strong awareness among officials and representatives reflects success of institutional training programs.
2. Limited detailed knowledge (e.g., exact number of goals) indicates need for deeper capacity-building.
3. Stakeholder awareness is low, showing a gap between top-level actors and grassroots communities.
4. Youth, women, and grassroots voices need to include in all tiers of SDG related project implementation

5.2.3 Awareness of SDGs by Education

From *Table 5.3*, it is evident that people with bachelor degree tend to be more aware compared to other groups, while trainings and workshops are the main modes of SDG information. Almost half (47.1%) of the respondents who had bachelor degree informed that they were aware of the SDGs, meanwhile the case for respondents with master's degree was 39.2%.

People with higher level of education tend to know more about the number of goals in the SDGs compared to the people with lower level of education. For example, 35.3% respondents who had master's degree informed that they knew about the number of goals in the SDGs, the percentage for respondents with bachelor degree was 25.5%.

Interestingly, people with bachelor degree tend to be more aware of the localization of the SDGs compared to the people with master's degree. Data shows that 41.2% respondents who had bachelor degree informed that they were aware of localization of the SDGs.

Table 5.3 Awareness of SDGs by Education

Aspect	Response	<HSC	HSC	Bachelor	Masters	PhD	Total
Awareness of SDGs	Yes	3 (5.9%)	2 (3.9%)	24 (47.1%)	20 (39.2%)	1 (2.0%)	50 (98.0%)
	No	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
	Not sure	0 (0.0%)	1 (2.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (2.0%)
Awareness of all 17 SDGs	Yes	0 (0.0%)	2 (3.9%)	13 (25.5%)	18 (35.3%)	1 (2.0%)	34 (66.7%)
	No	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (2.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (2.0%)
	Not sure	3 (5.9%)	1 (2.0%)	10 (19.6%)	2 (3.9%)	0 (0.0%)	16 (31.4%)
Awareness of SDG Localization Process	Yes	3 (5.9%)	3 (5.9%)	21 (41.2%)	18 (35.3%)	1 (2.0%)	46 (90.2%)
	No	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (2.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (2.0%)
	Not sure	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (3.9%)	2 (3.9%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (7.8%)
Source of SDG Knowledge	Training, Workshop, Seminar	2 (3.9%)	3 (5.9%)	18 (35.3%)	18 (35.3%)	0 (0.0%)	41 (80.4%)
	Print and Electronic Media	1 (2.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (7.8%)	2 (3.9%)	1 (2.0%)	8 (15.7%)
	Conversation	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (3.9%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (3.9%)
Stakeholder Awareness of	Yes	0 (0.0%)	1 (2.0%)	3 (5.9%)	3 (5.9%)	0 (0.0%)	7 (13.7%)

SDGs and Localization	No	3 (5.9%)	1 (2.0%)	16 (31.4%)	16 (31.4%)	1 (2.0%)	37 (72.5%)
	Not sure	0 (0.0%)	1 (2.0%)	5 (9.8%)	1 (2.0%)	0 (0.0%)	7 (13.7%)

5.2.4 Awareness of SDGs by Designation and Medium of dissemination

Table 5.4 indicates that civil society members such as school teachers, journalists, politicians and clerics tend to be less aware of the SDGs compared to elected representatives and civil service officials. Moreover, about two third of the respondents think that the stakeholders of their constituency are not aware of the SDGs, which is a big challenge for localization of the goals. Data shows that officials (52.9%) are more aware of the SDGs than those of the elected representatives (29.4%). One of the policy makers (P48) confessed, *‘Initially, as there was no specific guideline, the local administrators was not serious about the increased participation of the local people...sometimes it happens to be mechanical rather than spontaneous and creative inclusion of the local people...’*

Of the respondents who know the number of the goals of the SGGs, 49.0% were civil service officials and 11.8% were elected representatives. So, it is evident that the elected representatives who are supposed to lead the localization process are less aware of the number of SGD's compared to the civil services officials. On the other hand, trainings and workshops the main source of information about localization of the SDGs for the both elected representatives (27.5%) and the civil service officials (41.2%).

Table 5.4 Awareness of SDGs by Designation

Aspect	Response	Elected representative	Govt. Employees	Civil society member	Total
Awareness of SDGs	Yes	15 (29.4%)	27 (52.9%)	8 (15.7%)	50 (98.0%)
	No	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
	Not sure	1 (2.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (2.0%)
Awareness of all 17 SDGs	Yes	6 (11.8%)	25 (49.0%)	3 (5.9%)	34 (66.7%)
	No	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (2.0%)	1 (2.0%)
	Not sure	10 (19.6%)	2 (3.9%)	4 (7.8%)	16 (31.4%)
Awareness of SDG Localization Process	Yes	14 (27.5%)	27 (52.9%)	5 (9.8%)	46 (90.2%)
	No	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (2.0%)	1 (2.0%)
	Not sure	2 (3.9%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (3.9%)	4 (7.8%)
Source of SDG Knowledge	Training Works hop. Seminars	14 (27.5%)	21 (41.2%)	6 (11.8%)	41(80.4%)

Stakeholder Awareness of SDGs and Localization	Media	2 (3.9%)	5 (9.8%)	1 (2.0%)	8 (15.7%)
	Conversations	0 (0.0%)	1 (2.0%)	1 (2.0%)	2 (3.9%)
	Yes	3 (5.9%)	4 (7.8%)	0 (0.0%)	7 (13.7%)
	No	8 (15.7%)	22 (43.1%)	7 (13.7%)	37 (72.5%)
	Not sure	5 (9.8%)	1 (2.0%)	1 (2.0%)	7 (13.7%)

5.2.5 Promoting Local Initiatives

Table 5.5 presents the extent to which local initiatives for SDG localization have been undertaken and promoted. The findings indicate that a substantial proportion of respondents reported taking initiatives towards SDG localization (94.1%) and implementing projects aligned with the SDGs (94.1%). In contrast, fewer respondents considered SDGs during the planning and project selection stage (74.5%) or actively promoted activities supporting SDG implementation (86.3%).

Qualitative insights further highlight challenges in community engagement. One local resident (P34) described the project selection process at the Union Parishad (UP) level:

“Local projects are always selected by the local leaders. They customize the projects on their own terms.”

This suggests that, in practice, community voice is often overlooked, limiting the responsiveness of projects to the actual needs of local populations.

Table 5.5 Adoption of local initiatives and its promotion

Initiatives Undertaken for SDG Localization	Yes	48 (94.1)
	No	1 (2.0)
	Not sure	2 (3.9)
Integration of SDGs in Planning and Project Selection	Yes	38 (74.5)
	No	1 (2.0)
	Not sure	12 (23.5)
Alignment of Implemented Projects with SDGs	Yes	48 (94.1)
	No	0 (0)
	Not sure	3 (5.9)
Alignment of Implemented Projects with SDGs	Yes	44 (86.3)
	No	1 (2.0)
	Not sure	6 (11.8)

These results indicate that while local initiatives and project alignment with SDGs are high, institutional mechanisms for integrating SDGs into planning and promoting implementation activities remain relatively weaker.

5.2.6 Consultation with stakeholders

Table 5.6 examines the extent to which SDGs are discussed in monthly meetings and incorporated into council resolutions over the past 12 months. The data reveal that discussions about SDGs in monthly coordination meetings of UP/UPZ are moderate, with 70.6% of respondents indicating that SDGs are discussed, while 29.4% report no discussion. However, the inclusion of SDGs in council resolutions is markedly low, with only 29.4% of respondents noting their mention, compared to 70.6% who reported no inclusion.

Table 5.6 Consultation with stakeholders

SDGs are discussed in the monthly coordination meeting of UPZ/UP	Yes	36 (70.6)
	No	15 (29.4)
	Not sure	0 (0)
Mention of SDGs found in the resolution of Council's last 12 monthly meeting/project selection meeting	Yes	15 (29.4)
	No	36 (70.6)
	Not sure	0 (0)

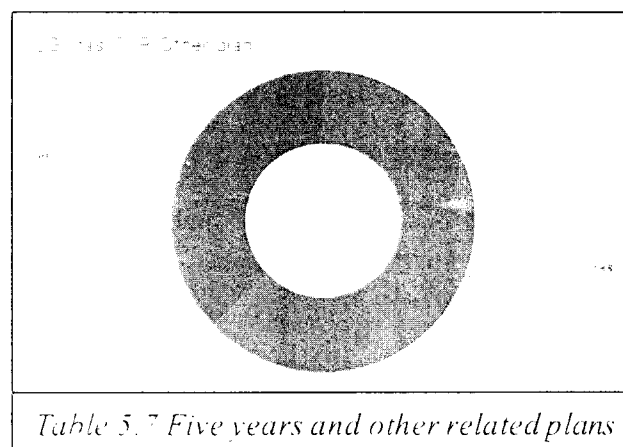
These findings highlight a weakness in the institutionalization of SDG localization. Over one-fourth of respondents (29.4%) reported that SDGs are not discussed in monthly meetings, and approximately two-thirds (70.6%) indicated that SDGs are not recorded in council resolutions. This suggests limited formal integration of SDGs into routine decision-making processes. One government official (P5) noted:

"They did not include SDG issues in the monthly meeting resolution due to lack of any instructions of the ministry."

Overall, the evidence points to a gap between the adoption of local initiatives and formal institutionalization of SDG-related practices.

5.2.7 Five Year Plan (FYP) and other plans

Chart 5.7 illustrates that a majority of the Local Government Institutions (LGIs) (62.7%) reported having a five-year development plan, while 37.3% indicated that they do not have such a plan. This suggests that most LGIs allocate resources for structured planning, although a significant proportion still lack formal long-term plans.



Qualitative insights highlight limitations in the planning process. One interviewee (P32) explained:

“While preparing five-year plan, they had little participation...once they were communicated to attend a workshop. But they did not give any inputs directly to the UPZ authority.”

This indicates that community involvement in the formulation of FYPs is minimal, limiting the responsiveness of plans to local needs. Government officials also noted procedural and capacity challenges. One official (P10) stated:

“We had to submit the planning book as per demand of ministry...The guidelines were circulated just immediately before the preparation. The training was not adequate and in fact, there was no previous practices to minimize the errors of FYP at local level”.

Overall, while most LGIs have a five-year development plan, the process is often constrained by limited stakeholder participation, insufficient guidance, and inadequate training, which may affect the quality and effectiveness of local planning.

5.2.8 Summary of Planning and Preparation Process of Projects

The table presents an analysis of factors influencing the localization of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the local level in Bangladesh, focusing on socio-demographic characteristics, awareness, planning practices, and administrative processes.

Table 5.8: Planning & Preparation Process at LGIs

Theme	Instances	Comments/Remarks
Socio-demographic features	Limited detailed knowledge (e.g., exact number of goals) indicates need for deeper capacity-building. Stakeholder awareness is low, showing a gap between top-level actors and grassroots communities.	<i>Government officials on few occasions, invite them for training... even the Union levels politicians are not included</i>
Awareness of SDGs by designation and medium of dissemination	Connection with UPZ administration has made people more aware of SDGs. Ministry has no specific guidelines for incorporating people in the planning process of SDG localization.	<i>Initially, as there was no specific guideline, the local administrators was not serious about the increased participation of the local people...sometimes it happens to be mechanical rather than spontaneous and creative inclusion of the local people</i>

Adoption of local initiatives and its promotions	Projects are selected top-down basis. Local politicians often fix up the projects	<i>Local projects are always selected by the local leaders. They customize the projects on their own terms."</i>
Including SDGs in monthly resolution of the UPZ	Lack of coordination and training of the officials of LGIs in SDG localization	<i>They did not include SDG issues in the monthly meeting resolution due to lack of any instructions of the ministry</i>
Five-year plan and other plans	Lack of adequate training Absence of previous planning at local level and supervision so that errors can be minimized.	<i>While preparing five-year plan, they had little participation...once they were communicated to attend a workshop. But they did not give any inputs directly to the UPZ authority</i>

Overall, the table 5.8 highlights systemic challenges in SDG localization, including gaps in knowledge, training, community involvement, and coordination, which collectively hinder effective planning and implementation at the local government level.

5.3 Implementation of Projects

Table 5.9 highlights key challenges in the implementation of SDG-related projects at the local level, particularly in terms of financing, coordination, and policy support.

Financing Constraints: Lack of resources emerges as a major barrier to SDG localization. A majority of respondents (62.7%) agreed, and 33.3% strongly agreed, that insufficient financial and material resources hinder the effective implementation of SDGs at the local level. Only a small fraction (3.9%) remained neutral, while no respondents disagreed. This indicates that resource limitations remain a critical constraint for local governments in operationalizing SDG-related initiatives.

Coordination Challenges: Table 5.9 also reveals communication and coordination gaps between government officials and elected representatives. About one-third of respondents (33.3%) agreed, and 11.8% strongly agreed, that these gaps impede the localization of SDGs. Nearly 29.4% remained neutral, while 21.6% disagreed, highlighting that coordination issues are perceived differently across stakeholders.

Policy-Level Gaps: Beyond local coordination, communication gaps between national ministries and local governments also hinder SDG localization. Almost half of the respondents (47.0%) agreed, and 15.7% strongly agreed, that such gaps exist at the policy level. A further 27.5% remained neutral, suggesting that the absence of clear directives and guidance from higher levels

of government creates uncertainty and affects the alignment of local projects with national SDG priorities.

Table 5.9 Financing, coordination and policy gap for SDG localization

Aspects	Description	Response	Count
<i>Financing</i>	Lack of enough resources for implementation of SDGs at local level	Strongly Agree	17 (33.3)
		Agree	32 (62.8)
		Neutral	2 (3.9)
		Disagree	0 (0.0)
		Strongly Disagree	0 (0.0)
<i>Coordination gap</i>	Communication gap between government officials and elected representatives that hampers localization	Strongly Agree	6 (11.8)
		Agree	17 (33.3)
		Neutral	15 (29.4)
		Disagree	11 (21.6)
		Strongly Disagree	2 (3.9)
<i>Policy Gap</i>	Communication gap between National Government and local government in localizing SDGs	Strongly Agree	8 (15.7)
		Agree	24 (47.0)
		Neutral	14 (27.5)
		Disagree	5 (9.8)
		Strongly Disagree	0 (0)

These findings collectively suggest that while local governments may be committed to SDG implementation, financial constraints, coordination challenges, and policy-level communication gaps substantially limit their effectiveness. Addressing these barriers is essential to strengthen the localization process and ensure alignment between national priorities and local actions.

5.4 Monitoring Practices

Effective monitoring is critical for ensuring the successful implementation of SDG-related projects at the local level. Table 5.10 reveals that 66.7% of respondents received instructions from the ministry to plan and implement projects aligned with the SDGs, whereas 23.5% reported not receiving any guidance, and 9.8% were uncertain. Despite the provision of ministerial instructions, a majority of respondents (62.7%) indicated that they are not required to report to any higher authority regarding SDG implementation.

Monitoring SDG projects involves a broad range of activities, including the allocation of financial and human resources, and the production and management of substantial amounts of data. The findings suggest that data availability remains a challenge: 47.1% of respondents confirmed that their organizations maintain data related to localized SDG targets, 21.6% reported no such data, and 31.4% were unsure about its availability.

Table 5.10 Monitoring of projects at LGIs

<i>Aspects</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Response</i>	<i>Count</i>
<i>Organizational Checks</i>	Got instructions from ministry to plan and implement SDG-aligned projects	Yes	34 (66.7)
		No	12 (23.5)
		Not sure	5 (9.8)
	Institutions promote activities supporting SDG implementation	Yes	44 (86.3)
		No	1 (2.0)
		Not sure	6 (11.8)
<i>Reporting</i>	Report to higher authority on SDG implementation	Yes	19 (37.3)
		No	32 (62.7)
		Not sure	0 (0)
<i>Data management</i>	Availability of data on localized SDG targets	Yes	24 (47.1)
		No	11 (21.6)
		Not sure	16 (31.4)

These findings highlight that while ministerial instructions are relatively well received, the absence of systematic reporting and gaps in data management hinder the effective monitoring of SDG initiatives at the local level. Strengthening reporting mechanisms and data systems is essential to enhance accountability and support evidence-based decision-making.

5.5 Key Challenges and Gaps Identified

Table 5.11 summarizes the principal challenges encountered in SDG localization at the local government level. A large majority of respondents (84.3%) reported that their organizations lack proper guidelines for SDG localization, while 86.3% identified insufficient resources as a key constraint in implementing SDG targets.

Encouragingly, all respondents (100%) emphasized the need for additional training on SDG localization, reflecting a consensus on the importance of capacity-building to overcome these challenges.

Table 5.11 Challenges to implement SDGs at local level

<i>Aspect</i>	<i>Response</i>	<i>Count</i>
<i>Organization lacks proper guidelines regarding SDGs localization</i>	Yes	43 (84.3)
	No	8 (15.7)
	Not sure	0 (0)
<i>Lack of resources to implement SDGs targets</i>	Yes	44 (86.3)
	No	4 (7.8)
	Not sure	3 (5.9)
<i>Require more training on SDGs localization</i>	Yes	51 (100.0)
	No	0 (0)
	Not sure	0 (0)

These findings underscore that, while local governments demonstrate commitment to SDG implementation, significant institutional and capacity gaps persist. The lack of guidelines, limited resources, and inadequate training are key barriers that need to be addressed to strengthen the effectiveness of SDG localization at the local level.

5.6 Priorities of LGIs aligned with SDGs

Chart 5.12 presents the project priorities of Local Government Institutions (LGIs) in Bangladesh in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The findings indicate that LGIs tend to concentrate their initiatives around a limited set of goals while neglecting others. Among the 66 documented initiatives, the highest share (19.7%) is directed towards Goal 5 (Gender Equality), followed by Goal 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure) with 15.15 percent, and Goals 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and 4 (Quality Education), each accounting for 13.64 percent.

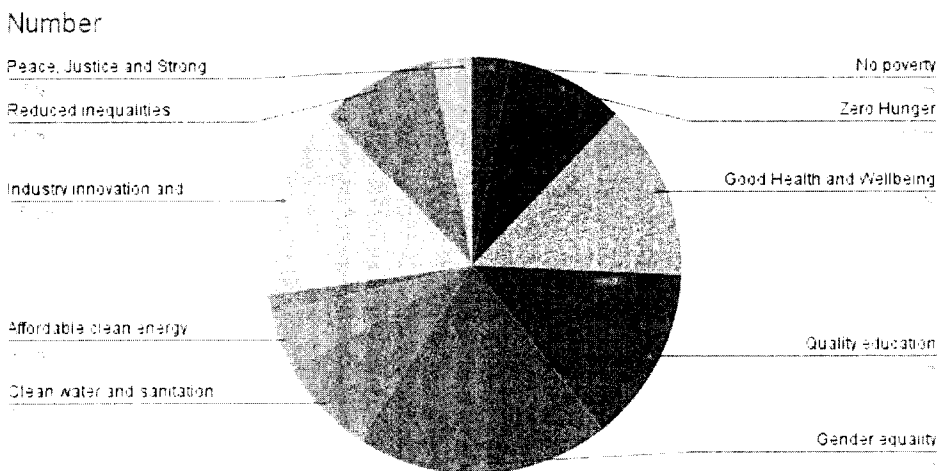


Chart 5.12: Priorities of Certain SDGs over others by LGIs

Moderate attention is also given to Goals 2 (Zero Hunger), 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), and 10 (Reduced Inequalities). In contrast, a significant number of goals—namely

Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), Goal 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), Goal 14 (Life Below Water), Goal 15 (Life on Land), and Goal 17 (Partnerships for the Goals)—received no initiatives at all. This uneven distribution of priorities suggests that while LGIs are making commendable contributions in areas such as gender equality, health, education, and infrastructure, critical dimensions of sustainability, environmental protection, and global partnership remain largely overlooked. Such selective prioritization reflects both the resource constraints and contextual realities of LGIs in Bangladesh, but it also underscores the need for more balanced and integrated approaches to localizing the SDGs.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.0 Introduction

This chapter synthesizes the study's key findings, interprets their significance for SDG localization at the Union and Upazila levels, draws overall conclusions, and presents actionable recommendations. Drawing on data from fieldwork, surveys, and stakeholder consultations, the findings suggest that while LGIs demonstrate awareness and partial engagement, their institutional capacity remains weak.

The chapter is structured as follows: a concise summary of the principal findings, thematic discussion on major bottlenecks and opportunities (planning, implementation, monitoring, participation and institutional capacity), an overall conclusion, and a set of prioritized recommendations with suggested actions and indicators for monitoring.

6.1 Summary of key findings

The research—based on mixed methods (KIIs, FGDs, document review and a 68-respondent survey)—produced the following main findings:

1. **High basic awareness among officials but weak grassroots understanding.** Nearly all officials and representatives reported awareness of SDGs; however, awareness among wider stakeholders (especially women and youth) is low and detailed knowledge (e.g., number of SDG goals) is limited. Trainings/workshops are the main source of knowledge.
2. **Partial institutionalization of SDG thinking into planning.** While many LGIs undertake development projects and some report alignment with SDGs, formal integration into routine planning and council resolutions is limited (only a minority of monthly council resolutions mention SDGs).
3. **Skewed project priorities.** Of the local initiatives mapped, the largest shares align with Gender (Goal 5), Industry/Infrastructure, Health and Education; several SDGs remain neglected (notably Sustainable Cities, Responsible Production & Consumption, Life Below Water, Life on Land, and Partnerships).
4. **Resource and coordination constraints.** A majority of respondents cite lack of adequate resources and weak coordination between bureaucrats and elected representatives. Communication gaps also exist between national ministries and LGIs.

5. **Weak monitoring and data systems.** Nearly half of LGIs report no reliable data for localized SDG targets; reporting to higher authorities on SDG progress is the exception rather than the rule.
6. **Strong demand for capacity-building.** All respondents expressed the need for further training on SDG localization.

6.2 Discussion of Findings

6.2.1 Awareness, Inclusion and Participatory Practice

The gap between formal awareness (among officials) and meaningful grassroots understanding is consequential. SDG localization requires active community input — Ward Sabhas (Ward meetings), open budget meetings and similar forums — but evidence shows these practices are under-resourced and irregular. The gender and youth gap in awareness and participation weakens the “leave no one behind” pledge and risks reinforcing elite capture in project selection and priority-setting. The reliance on occasional top-down training means SDG concepts have not yet become embedded in everyday local governance processes. Unless participation is widened (gender- & youth-sensitive outreach; community-friendly formats), projects risk being supply-driven and misaligned with vulnerable groups’ needs.

6.2.2 Planning and Alignment with National Priorities

Local projects achieve better outcomes when aligned with national priorities. Evidence from the past two decades suggests that local development outcomes are stronger when LGI initiatives are aligned with national development priorities. The study shows that although the constitutional and policy frameworks encourage alignment, operationalizing such linkage remains weak. Where project funding and oversight (for example LGSP-supported activities) provide clearer linkage and monitoring, LGIs demonstrate better participation and project quality. Yet, in practice, LGIs often rely heavily on national plans while underutilizing local expertise, leading to weak ownership of projects. Malfunctioning of War Sabhas further exacerbates this problem.

Policy coherence and practical tools that translate national SDG targets into local project templates will help LGIs design interventions that are locally relevant and nationally consistent. Comparisons with India are instructive: constitutional amendments established Gram Sabhas as inclusive village assemblies, enabling local governments to integrate centrally sponsored schemes with locally determined needs. Bangladesh’s LGIs could benefit from similar reforms, including

institutionalized platforms for community consultation and stronger coordination mechanisms across government bodies.

6.2.3 Financing and Implementation Capacity

Resource scarcity is most frequently reported as the main barrier. LGIs rely almost entirely on block grants from national ministries, leaving them with little discretion to undertake context-specific projects. This dependence fosters a top-down approach, undermining local ownership. Yet, there are opportunities to expand local resource mobilization. Traditional practices such as *Wakaf* (among Muslims) and *Dana* (among Hindus) could be leveraged to support community initiatives, for example by donating land for rural health clinics. Similarly, collaboration between LGIs and the National Board of Revenue (NBR) could help identify local tax bases, with a share of revenues earmarked for LGIs. Such initiatives would not only diversify funding sources but also strengthen the financial autonomy of local governments. Strengthened fiscal autonomy, clearer roles for actors, and mechanisms to manage political influence without diluting accountability are required for effective project implementation.

Human resource deficit at LGIs also poses a significant barrier. Many Union Parishads operate with only one secretary, while Upazila Parishads also lack sufficient skilled staff. Rising workloads from national and local crises further stretch existing capacity. Without additional and better-trained staff, it is unrealistic to expect LGIs to deliver effectively on SDG localization. Ministries must therefore consider long-term strategies to recruit, retain, and build the capacity of LGI personnel.

6.2.4 Monitoring, Data and Accountability

The weak state of data management and reporting undermines planning, learning and accountability. Without routinely collected local indicators and a standardized reporting framework, national monitoring cannot accurately capture local progress; LGIs cannot systematically learn from past interventions. Many LGIs lack even basic administrative data, which undermines evidence-based planning and accountability. Although examples from LGED and LGSP demonstrate that systematic record-keeping is possible when incentivized, mainstream LGI operations remain weak in this regard. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of open government and data-driven decision-making, as local administrations were able to coordinate effectively using digital platforms. Moving forward, LGIs must prioritize coherent and transparent data disclosure, ensuring that citizens as well as higher authorities can track progress

consistently. A pragmatic, standardized local SDG monitoring framework and centralized repository (with user-friendly dashboards) will be central to evidence-based SDG localization.

6.2.5 Initiative Gaps in Key Sectors

The near absence of projects for several environmental SDGs and for partnerships suggests a narrow focus on welfare and infrastructure at the expense of ecological sustainability and multi-stakeholder collaboration. Given increasing climate risks, these gaps are strategically important and should be corrected.

6.3 Conclusion

The study concludes that LGIs in Bangladesh have made initial progress toward SDG localization but remain far from institutionally prepared to realize the full agenda. Gaps in citizen participation, misalignment between local and national priorities, staffing shortages, financial dependence, and weak monitoring systems collectively limit effectiveness.

To address these challenges, LGIs require:

- Stronger democratic practices at the grassroots to ensure inclusive participation;
- Practical mechanisms to align local initiatives with national SDG priorities;
- Expanded staffing and systematic capacity-building;
- Diversified and innovative resource mobilization; and
- A comprehensive overhaul of data management and monitoring practices.

Without these reforms, the ambition to “leave no one behind” will remain aspirational rather than actionable. Strengthening LGIs is therefore not only a matter of administrative necessity but also a prerequisite for achieving Bangladesh’s SDG commitments by 2030.

6.4 Recommendations

The study reveals several critical insights that inform the recommendations for strengthening the localization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Bangladesh.

First, the demographic profile of respondents shows that senior citizens dominate community engagement in SDG-related activities, while youth participation remains limited. Although a few promising practices, particularly at the Upazila Parishad (UZP) level, address youth employment through ICT-related projects, these remain isolated and lack scale. Increasing opportunities for youth engagement is therefore essential for sustaining SDG localization.

Second, while most respondents demonstrate basic awareness of the SDGs, they also believe that ordinary citizens remain poorly informed. This perception highlights a persistent gap between officials—both elected representatives and bureaucrats—who possess greater awareness, and the broader community, which lacks access to information. Such disparities threaten accountability in project planning and implementation. Gender disparities in awareness are particularly striking: 68.6% of males reported awareness compared to only 21.6% of females. This finding indicates that LGI innovations in disseminating information about SDGs remain inadequate, particularly in ensuring inclusivity and adherence to the “leave no one behind” principle. Although training programs on SDGs exist, they are not effectively tailored to community needs.

Third, educational attainment is positively correlated with SDG awareness, as respondents with bachelor’s degrees are more informed than others. However, the study also finds that civil society actors such as teachers, journalists, politicians, and religious leaders are less aware of SDGs than government officials and elected representatives. This suggests that awareness is shaped not only by education but also by power structures and proximity to decision-making centers. The influence of officials in shaping the localization process underscores the urgent need to expand SDG awareness among civil society stakeholders, who play a vital role in community mobilization.

Fourth, gaps in institutional arrangements constrain SDG implementation. Although the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) has taken some initiatives, such as appointing an SDG Coordinator under the Prime Minister’s Office, reforms remain limited and outcomes poorly measured. In contrast, India’s restructuring of its Planning Commission into NITI Aayog, a dedicated nodal institution for SDG implementation, demonstrates a more institutionalized approach. The comparative weakness of Bangladesh’s structural reforms reflects insufficient bureaucratic reorientation and monitoring mechanisms.

Fifth, disruptions at the local level further undermine SDG localization. In-depth interviews reveal that limited financing, political interference, and rigid ministerial control are major obstacles. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these challenges by curtailing budgets for training and workshops, undermining awareness and capacity-building efforts at both national and local levels.

Sixth, consultation with stakeholders remains inconsistent. Although SDGs are reportedly discussed in monthly UZP meetings, evidence shows that inclusion of SDGs in council resolutions over the past year has been minimal. This discrepancy suggests a lack of commitment by both elected representatives and officials to institutionalize democratic practices in project planning. Without stronger participatory mechanisms, localization will remain superficial.

Finally, three interrelated challenges—financing, coordination, and policy support—emerge as central barriers. Inadequate resources constrain project implementation; coordination gaps between elected representatives and bureaucrats weaken effectiveness; and limited policy support hampers the resolution of challenges encountered during localization. Furthermore, while LGIs generally receive instructions from higher authorities, compliance in terms of reporting and data management is weak. Deficiencies in organizational competence in data collection, analysis, and dissemination further limit evidence-based decision-making.

Overall, LGIs continue to prioritize infrastructure projects—such as culverts, roads, and sanitation facilities—while social and gender-focused initiatives receive comparatively less attention. Although some national-level women’s development programs (e.g., Vulnerable Group Development and cash transfers for female students) are implemented locally, challenges such as duplication of social safety net programs remain largely unaddressed by LGIs.

In light of these findings, the study recommends:

1. Expanding youth-focused projects beyond ICT to diverse employment-generating sectors.
2. Increasing allocations for awareness-raising and ensuring that trainings are tailored to community needs, with emphasis on female participation.
3. Building the capacity of civil society actors to strengthen community-level SDG ownership.
4. Institutionalizing structural reforms similar to India’s NITI Aayog model, with robust monitoring and accountability frameworks.
5. Enhancing local financing mechanisms while minimizing political interference and bureaucratic rigidity.
6. Strengthening participatory planning processes by ensuring that SDGs are systematically integrated into council resolutions and ward shava deliberations.
7. Improving data management capacity to ensure reliable reporting, monitoring, and evaluation of SDG-related projects.

These measures are vital for transforming LGIs from passive implementers of centrally driven projects into proactive institutions capable of meaningfully localizing the SDGs.

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