

## Governance Advocacy Forum: A Step for Decentralization and Strong Local Government

**Governance Advocacy Forum (GAF)** is a national level platform established in 2007 that consists of 36 national and international non-government organizations, networks, local government platforms, concerned institutions and civil society representatives. The forum aims to promote democratic decentralization and strong local government through policy advocacy and campaign in Bangladesh. WAVE Foundation, a non-government development organization coordinates the Forum.



Strong Local Government National Convention 2007

### Evolution of GAF

Since 1997, WAVE Foundation has been working with the Local Government Institutions (LGIs), in the areas of capacity development, facilitating active standing committees, monitoring public services through standing committees involving People's Alliances; participatory plans and budget for Union Parishad (UP), Pourashava and Upazila and development of 5 Years Strategic Plans for UP, Pourashava & Upazila, activating Village Court and Arbitration Council (at UP level), resource mobilization of LGIs, etc. From the extensive experiences of field level program implementation and logical sequence of its program learning WAVE facilitated the formation of Governance Coalition-GC, a network of NGOs and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) involved in promoting responsive governance and rights of poor and marginalized people through raising awareness, campaign, lobbying and advocacy at local and national level in 2004. Gradually GC consists of 41 members working in 16 districts of Bangladesh. While continuing to work on own priorities, the members of the Coalition move together to advance common vision and mission towards promoting responsive governance in Bangladesh.



At the end of 2006, WAVE Foundation and GC organized a country wide campaign program on 'Strong Local Government' and it continued till mid-2007. In June 2007, the past Caretaker Government formed a seven members committee titled "Sthaneoo Sarkar Protishthan Gotisheel O Shaktishalikaran Committee" (The Committee for Accelerating and Strengthening Local Government Institutions) to review the local government

acts at that time and recommend necessary amendments to guide an effective reformation of the entire local government system with a view to building efficient local government institutions. To complement and supplement the initiatives of the government, WAVE Foundation and GC invited organizations working on local government to jointly (a) identify and suggest required reform agenda based on grassroots reality; (b) analyze and finalize the recommendations for LG reform and (c) recommend strategies to ensure proper implementation of the reform. A total of 27 civil society organizations and institutions responded to the call for a broad based support towards promoting strong local government and decentralization in Bangladesh. These organizations decided to organize a National Convention with the slogan “Strong Local Government Must be Established for Good Governance” to finalize a set of recommendations developing through bottom-up discussions and assisting the Government in its local government institutional reform initiative. Accordingly, the national convention was held in July 2007 and finalized 40 points recommendations, submitted those to the committee and most of the recommendations were included in the committee report. Since then the 27 organizations were advancing their advocacy initiatives towards local government reforms together and in 2008, all the organizations unanimously decided to name the new platform as Governance Advocacy Forum (GAF). As part of continual engagement along with deepening its experience in promoting local government reform, at the end of 2009 the forum started ‘Democratic Decentralization & Local Self Government Campaign’ and has continually been undertaking different initiatives to take this issue forward.



## Goal

To establish democratic decentralization and strong local government in Bangladesh

## Objectives

- To facilitate democratic decentralization process through formulation and implementation of policy and relevant acts by the state
- To promote strong local government in line with the constitution
- To undertake campaign and advocacy on democratic decentralization and strong local government

## Areas of Interventions

- Local Government Acts and related Circulars
- Democratic Decentralization Policy and Process
- Local Government Financing and Budget
- Local Government Institutions’ own Planning and Resource Mobilization
- Role of Women in Local Government
- Capacity Building of Local Government Institutions
- Role of Local Government Institutions on Responsive Public Services and Local Governance
- Rapid Expansion of Urbanization and Its Impact in Local Government
- Transparency and Accountability of Local Government Institutions
- Responsiveness of Local Government related Public Institutions

## Management

WAVE Foundation coordinates and provides secretarial support to the Forum.

Chairperson	Dr. Qazi Kholiuzzaman Ahmad, Economist & Chairman, PKSF
Coordinator	Mohsin Ali, Executive Director, WAVE Foundation
Members	36 national and international non-government organizations, networks, local government platforms, concerned institutions and civil society representatives

All decisions are taken in plenary meeting of Governance Advocacy Forum.

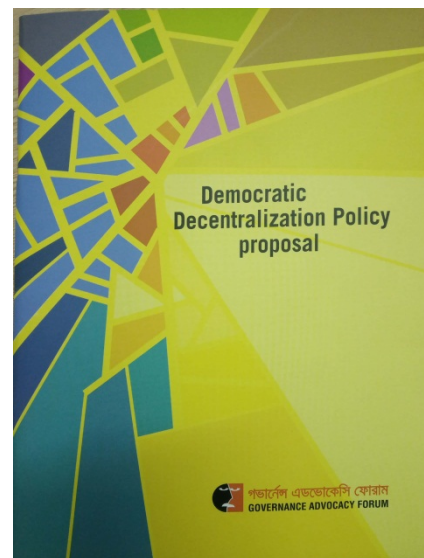
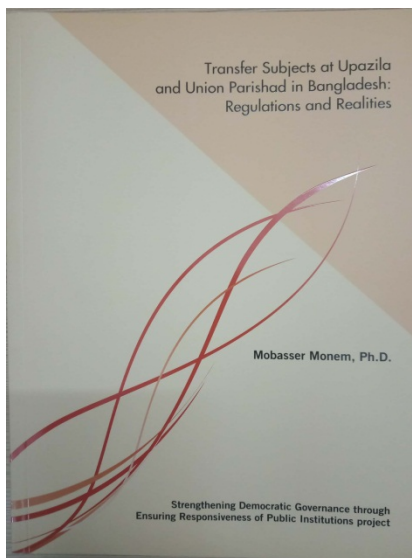
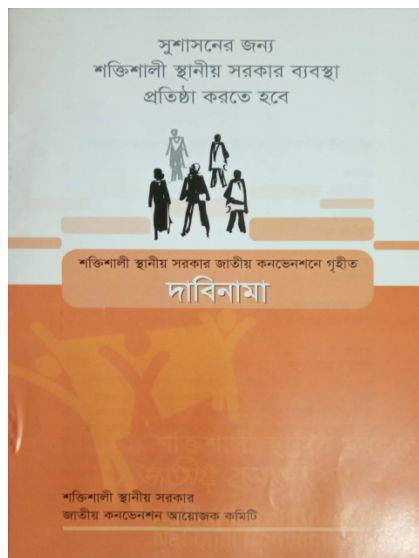
## Initiatives- Undertaken

- Submission of 40 recommendations from 'Strong Local Government National Convention 2007' to 'The Committee for Accelerating and Strengthening Local Government Institutions' formed by the government
- Development of concept paper and draft proposal on formation of a 'Local Government Commission' and submission of this proposal to the government in 2007
- Advocacy and campaign on incorporating 'Democratic Decentralization and Local Self Government Issues' in the electoral manifestos of different political parties following 9th Parliament Election in 2008
- Review of Local Government Acts on 2009 i.e. Union Parishad, Upazila Parishad, Municipality and City Corporation and initiation of campaign on findings and recommendations based on review
- Campaign on findings and recommendations from review on different Local Government Acts in 2009
- Review and analysis on allocation for local government institutions in national budget and submit recommendations regularly
- GAF for the first time in Bangladesh started working on 'Formulation of Democratic Decentralization Policy' in 2010
- Organize a 'Democratic Decentralization National Convention 2010' and a proposal of 'Democratic Decentralization Policy' was raised
- GAF revised the 'Democratic Decentralization Policy' proposal in 2012
- Countrywide Campaign on formulation of 'Democratic Decentralization Policy by the Government' in 2013
- Conduct a research on 'Transfer Subjects' of Upazila Parishad and Union Parishad in 2014
- Countrywide Campaign on 'Democratic Decentralization and Effective Local Government' in 2016
- Successful mobilization of public opinion from different segments to raise the issues on Democratic Decentralization Policy and Local Self-Government system



## Achievements

- Most of the recommendations from ‘Strong Local Government National Convention 2007’ were incorporated in the Local Government Acts in 2009 i.e. Union Parishad, Upazila Parishad, Municipality and City Corporation
- Local Government Commission was formed in 2008
- The ‘Gram Sarkar Act’ was abolished in 2008
- Activities of Union Parishad Standing Committees are defined in 2008
- Demands of Democratic Decentralization and Local Self Government were agreed by major political parties and finally they incorporated those issues in their electoral manifestoes in 2008
- Upazila Parishad started again its journey in 2009 after near about two decades of discontinuation which was one of the significant demands of GAF
- One integrated ‘City Corporation Act’ has been formulated in 2009
- Jurisdictions of Village Court (of Union Parishad) are expanded from BDT 5000 to BDT 25000 in 2006 which was further expanded to BDT 75000 in 2013
- A memo has been circulated for transferring the relevant officials under Upazila Parishad and to transfer their salary and other benefits to the Upazila Parishad fund 2015
- A set of recommendations have been submitted to the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General on the role of Audit and Relevant Institutions in establishing Effective Local Government through a policy research in 2016
- A good number of policy makers have expressed solidarity with the demands of GAF relating Democratic Decentralization and Local Self Government issues and have been contributing to uplift the execution of these issues time to time
- GAF developed a ‘Democratic Decentralization Policy’ proposal for the first time in Bangladesh and submitted to Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development & Co-operatives of GoB



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