



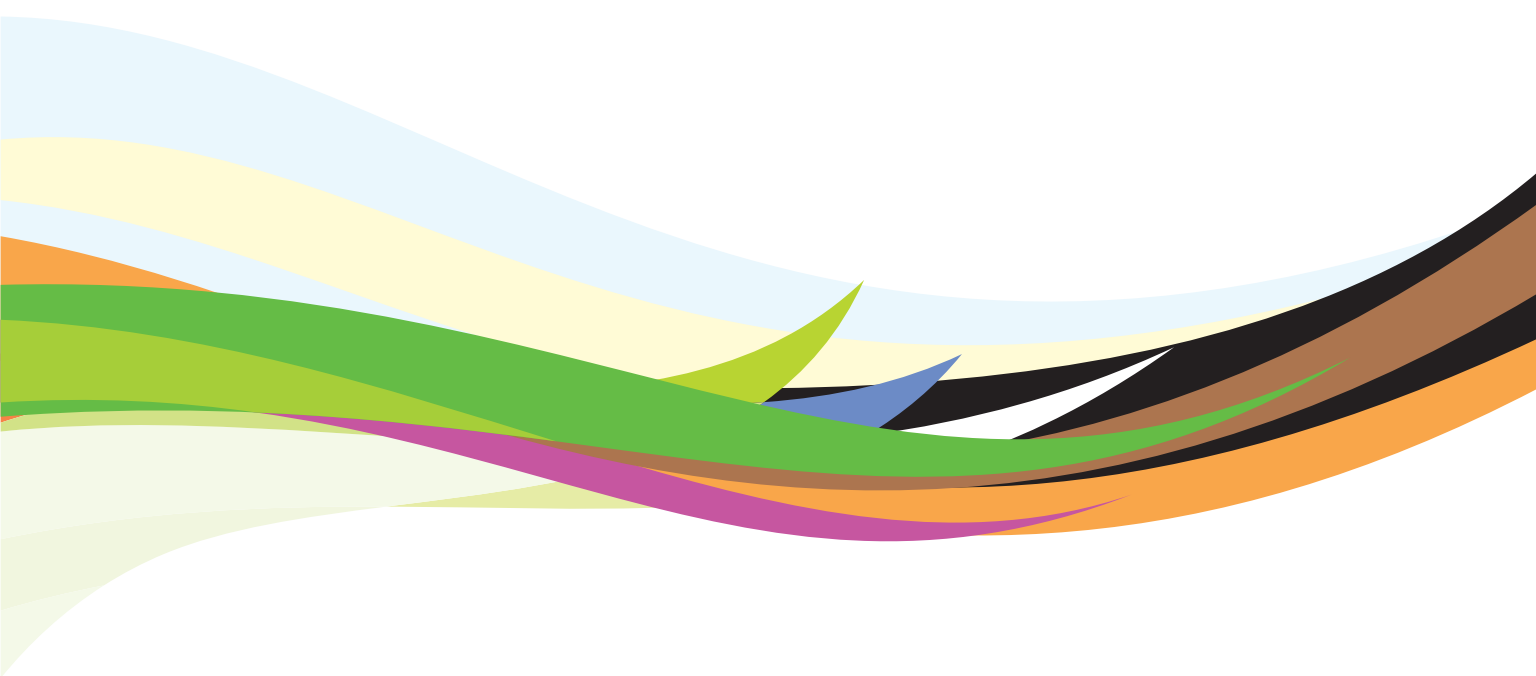
টেকসই উন্নয়নে স্থানীয় সরকার

**Effective Local Government System for
Localization & Achievement of SDGs
and Goals of the 8th Five Year Plan:
Policy, Local Resource Mobilization, Women,
Participation and Accountability Perspectives**

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A Study on

Effective Local Government System for Localization & Achievement of SDGs and Goals of the 8th Five Year Plan: Policy, Local Resource Mobilization, Women, Participation and Accountability Perspectives

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Focus of the Study and Approaches	04
1.1. Brief Background of the Study	05
1.2. Focus of the Study	05
1.3. Objectives of the Study	05
1.4. Rationale of the Study	06
1.5. Sample Study Area	06
1.6. Description of the Approaches and Methodology Used	06

CHAPTER 2

Local Government System in Bangladesh: Examining the Current Trends and Policy Gaps	07
2.1 Brief Analysis of the Local Government System	08
2.2 Pervasive Central Control and Contradictions in LG Legal Provisions	09
2.3 Lack of Clarity in Legal Provisions: An illustrative Overview	10

CHAPTER 3

Localization of SDG: Strategies, Progress and Challenges	13
3.1 Why Localize the SDG?	14
3.2 Localization of SDG in Bangladesh	14
3.2.1 Why Localize SDGs?	14
3.2.2 Strategies and Progress in the Localization of SDG in Bangladesh	17
3.3 Challenges in the Localization of SDG in Bangladesh	17
3.3.1. Economic Challenges: Lack of Finance and Trust Impeding the Localization of SDG	18
3.3.2. Behavioral Challenges: Tragedy of Commons Impeding the Localization of SDG	19
3.3.3. Political-Administrative Challenges: Discrepancy of Knowledge, Political Will, and Power Preventing the Localization of SDGs	20
3.3.4. Planning Challenges: The Fear of Uncertainty in SDG Localization	20
3.5.5. Gender-Related Challenges: The Devil is in the Details	21

CHAPTER 4

Local Government and the 8th Five Year Plan: Strategies and Challenges	22
4.1 Synthesizing the 8 FYP, SDG and Perspective Plan 2041	23
4.2. Findings: Strategies and Challenges	24
4.2.1. Lack of Knowledge and Dissemination of Knowledge: Leading to Information Gap and Development Laggards	25
4.2.2. Absence of Integrated Planning Mechanisms: Making Plans Impossible to Achieve	25

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 5

Local Resource Mobilization: Exploring the Current Status, Challenges and Way Forward	26
5.1 Current Status of Local Resource Mobilization in Bangladesh	27
5.1.1. Dominance of the National Government over Local Government Finance: Escalating Dependency	27
5.1.2. Poor and Backdated Mechanisms of Financial Management: Limiting the Mobilization of Own Sourced Resources	28
5.2. Challenges in Enhancing Local Resources Mobilization	29
5.2.1. Public Attitude and Lack of Initiatives	29
5.2.2. Limited Manpower	29
5.2.3. Role of Local Political Economy	30
5.3. What is the way forward?	30

CHAPTER 6

Assessing the Existing Mechanisms for Accountability	31
6.1 The Need for a Strong Accountability Mechanism in LGIs	32
6.2 Analyzing the Imbalance of Power in Local Government Tiers: A Political Economy Perspective	32
6.2.1. Lack of Clarity in the Distribution of Power: Setting Higher Ground for the Field Administration	33
6.2.2. Local Political Equation: Controlling the Power Dynamics at the Local Level	33
6.2.3. Control over Resource Distribution: Might Makes Right	34
6.2.4. Family Background and Network: Frequently Dictating the Decisions	34
6.3. Imbalance of Power at the LG Tiers	34
6.3.1. Imbalance of Power at the Zila Parishad	35
6.3.2. Imbalance of Power at the Upazila Parishad	35
6.3.3. Imbalance of Power at the Union Parishad	36
6.3.4. Imbalance of Power at the Paurashava	36
6.4. Findings from the Field: Comparing the Scenarios	37
6.4.1. Zila Parishad	37
6.4.2. Upazila Parishad	37
6.4.3. Union Parishad	38
6.4.4. Paurashava	38

CHAPTER 7

Participation in the Local Government: Citizen and Women Engagement Perspectives	40
7.1. Status of People's Participation in the LGIs	41
7.1.1. Citizen Participation in the Zila and Upazila Parishad	41
7.1.2. Citizen Participation in the Union Parishad	41
7.1.3. Citizen Participation in the Paurashava	42
7.2. Status and Challenges of Women in Participation in the LGIs	42

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 8

Policy Recommendations	44
8.1. Clarify functional assignments for LG Tiers	45
8.2. Enhance the revenue discretion and fiscal transfer from national government to LGs	45
8.3. Enhance the opportunities for citizen's participation and focus on accountability	45
8.4. Address manpower rationalisation aspect in UPs, UZPs ZPs and Paurashavas	45
8.5. Ensure more efficient and effective resource mobilization at the local level	46
8.6. Clarify the roles of different stakeholders to ensure balance of power	46
8.7. Make the LG office holders familiar with SDGs and the Goals of the 8FYP	46
8.8. Ensure regular monitoring to oversee the implementation of the existing legal provisions for	46

List of Tables

Table 0.1: Contradictions in Local Government Policy, Acts and Circulars	10
Table 0.2: Lack of clarity/ overlapping of responsibilities between LGs and Local Administration	11
Table 0.3: Overlapping of Responsibilities between different tiers of Local Government	12
Table 3.1: SDG Targets and the need for the Localization of the SDG	15
Table 4.1: Synthesizing the 8FYP, SDG and Perspective Plan 2041	24
Table 6.1: Mapped Scenarios of Power Relationship in Different LG Tiers	34
Table 6.2: Scenarios of Power Relationship in Different LG Tiers (Findings)	39

List of Figures

Figure 2.1: An overview of local government and local administration of Bangladesh	09
Figure 3.1: Familiarity of the Respondents with SDG	17
Figure 3.2: Familiarity of the Respondents with the Localization of SDG	18
Figure 3.3: Projects Taken to Localize SDG	18
Figure 3.4: Challenges in the Localization of SDG in Bangladesh	21
Figure 4.1: Intersection of Perspective Plan 2041, SDG and 8FYP	23
Figure 5.1: LGI Own Source Revenue as a Share of Total Government Revenues	27
Figure 5.2: Sources of LGI's Resource Mobilization	28
Figure 5.3: Existing Poor and Backdated Mechanisms of Financial Management in the LGs	29
Figure 6.1: Factors of Power Imbalance at the Local Government of Bangladesh	32
Figure 6.2: Interplay of Power among different Actors in the LGs	33



LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AACO	Assistant Accountant cum Computer Officer
ADP	Annual Development Plan
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
DC	Deputy Commissioner
DDLG	Deputy Director of Local Government
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
KII	Key Informant Interview
LG	Local Government
LGI	Local Government Institution
MP	Member of Parliament
PP 2041	Perspective Plan 2041
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SP	Superintendent of Police
TLCC	Town Level Coordination Committee
UNO	Upazila Nirbahi Officer
UZP	Union Parishad
WLCC	Ward Level Coordination Committee
ZP	Zila Parishad
8 FYP	8th Five Year Plan

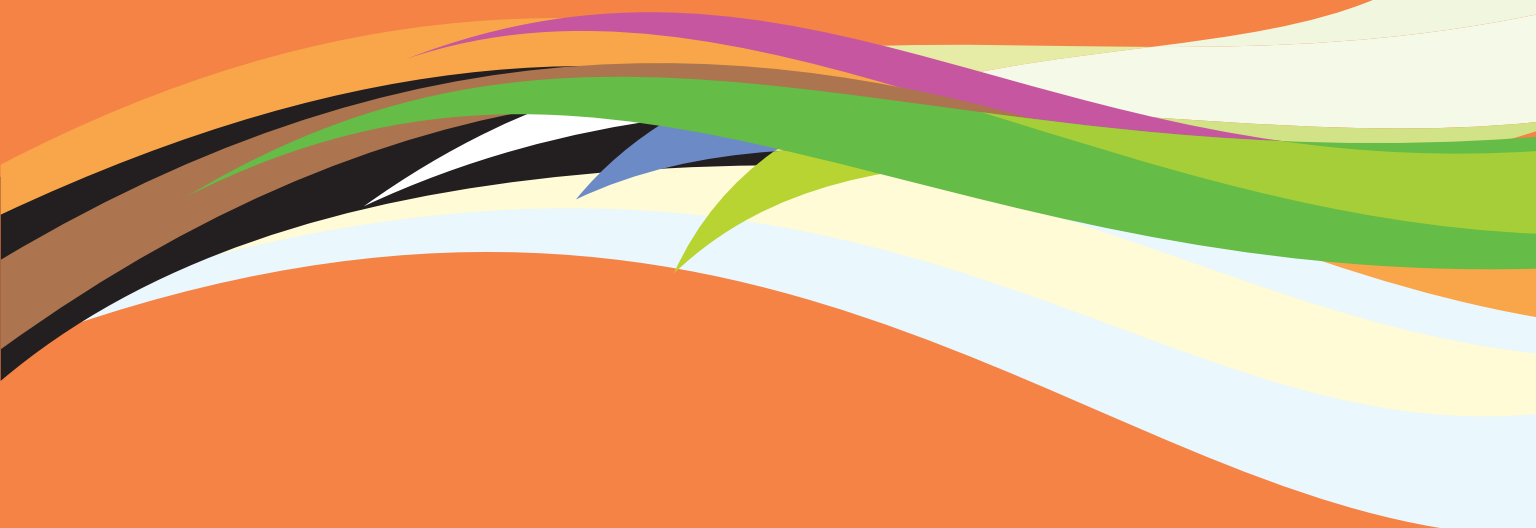


EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Bangladesh has many development targets and it is expected that bureaucracy and the political executives at different levels collaborate and work hand in hand in tandem in order to achieve the development milestones. But it has been observed that in Bangladesh, collaboration between bureaucrats and the political representatives at different levels have been problematic, and often conflicting. While the government officials act as the agent of central government administration at different LGs, the chairman/mayor/members, councilors are to play the role of the people's representatives. Elected representatives and the government officials have separate jurisdictional boundaries but more often than not, these jurisdictional boundaries overlap or deliberately crossed leading to chaos, conflicts and serious deterioration of personal relationships. These conflicts generally arise mainly due to the differences in their educational backgrounds, orientation, attitudes and more importantly, their differing preferences and interests. Based on the information collected from the field and also the consultation with the LG experts it can be said that such conflicting relationship often leads to the displacement of LGI's goals, stalemate in its normal functioning—ultimately making the LGs ineffective institution. In recent times, a serious imbalance of power can be observed at different levels: between national government and local government, between elected people's representatives of the local government institutions (elected chairs and members), between the elected people's representatives and the deputed officials of the national government's ministries/department due mainly to the lack of effective legislations or their weak enforcement and lack of clarity in the distribution of power among the different stakeholders of local government. The current study makes an attempt to identify the constraints and opportunities in the existing local government legislations and practices on the ground, it makes an assessment of the challenges on the front of localization and implementation of SDGs and the goals of the 8FYP of Bangladesh in achieving the development milestones. Besides, the study also examines the current status of local resource mobilization, people's participation, including the participation of women in the affairs of the local government institutions and the accountability system on the ground and its challenges. The offers some policy recommendations with a view to make the local government institutions strong and prepare them to achieve the development milestones set by the government of Bangladesh. The study is qualitative in nature and the findings are based on both primary and secondary data and information. The secondary data were collected from published reports, books, articles, newspaper reports. On the other hand, the primary data were collected through Key Informant interviews and FGDs conducted in sampled Zila Parishads, Upazila Parishads, Union Parishads and Paurashavas. The major findings suggest that there is a lack of clarity in the assignment of functional responsibilities among different tiers of local government, there is also a lack of clarity in the distribution of roles of different stakeholders of LGs leading to systematic imbalance of power, chaos and confusion among the stakeholders which are ultimately weakening the LGs as institutions. The study also finds that the both the upward and downward accountability mechanisms are weak and fragile in different tiers of local government. Currently, politicization is so widespread at the local government level which is contributing to the weakening of the accountability of the local government elected and deputed officials further. On the other hand, the local government enjoys limited revenue discretion and the elected representatives show little real interest in collecting taxes and also they have been failing in the management of the local tax system. And consequently, LGs dependence on central



government transfer is increasing. The study finds out that the local government office holders lack clear understanding and knowledge about the SDGs and goals of the 8FYP. The study argues that there should be a proper balance of power between the locally elected public representatives and the locally deputed government officials. Some recent incidences which took place in a number of local government institutions in Bangladesh have brought this crucial reality into the fore. There is no denying that striking such a balance is a challenge but it is important that the policy debate is broad-based and well-informed before reforms are made to the political organization of local government institutions in Bangladesh. Existing reality suggests that ensuring greater checks and balances at the local level by balancing between the power and authority of the elected representatives and deputed officials should be on the top of the reform agenda today along with aspect such ensuring accountability of all local government stakeholders and the more effective participation and representation of women and other disadvantaged groups. The study argues that without effective localization of SDGs, improving the upward and downward accountability system at the local level, enhanced local resource mobilization and ensuring the participation of local people in general and women in particular in the local development- the achievement of Bangladesh's development aspirations will get adversely affected. All these imbalances identified on the front of local governance need to be addressed with immediate effect if Bangladesh is to achieve the targets of SDGs by 2031, goals of 8FYP and also the Vision 2041. The major recommendations of the study include the following: clarifying the roles of different stakeholders to ensure balance of power, clarifying the functional assignments for all LG tiers, enhancing the revenue discretion and fiscal transfer from national government to LGs, ensuring more efficient and effective resource mobilization at the local level, addressing the manpower rationalisation aspect in UPs, UZPs ZPs and Paurashavas and also enhancing the opportunities for citizen's participation and establishing effective accountability mechanisms at the LGs, alongside, making the LG office holders familiar with SDGs and the goals of the 8FYP and ensuring the regular monitoring to oversee the implementation of the existing legal provisions for LGs.



Chapter 1

Introduction: Focus of the Study and Approaches

1.1. Brief Background of the Study

Elements of poor governance are more or less pervasive in all levels of Bangladesh, and poor people are the worst victims of it. The prevalence of poor governance in the public institutions in general and local government institutions in particular quite often excludes the poor and the marginalized from receiving their entitled services. As the poor often lack information about the services, and there is also absence of a concerted effort to work on their behalf to assess and improve the service delivery system. As a result of this, the poor and marginalized often face discrimination of different types, and they systemically remain excluded from public services, and also their voices remain unheard. Such exclusion puts a significant barrier to the economic emancipation of these poor people. Especially in a patriarchal society like Bangladesh, where poor, disadvantaged and women have less opportunity to engage in economic activities than men or those whose positions are relatively at the top in the economic ladder, the poor women bear the most burden of such exclusion and they are deprived of their entitled services provided by the state including social safety net supports.

Thus, poor governance broadly fades the impact of the government's poverty reduction initiatives away, which, in the long run, may impede Bangladesh's pace of development and slow down the achievement of important development milestones such as targets of 8th FYP and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). To be specific, SDG 1 (No Poverty), 2 (Zero Hunger), 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) and 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) are directly impacted by poor governance induced bad service delivery. Ultimately, goals such as 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and 10 (Reduced Inequality) also gets hampered.

Considering these realities, as an organized effort, WAVE Foundation and Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) has started a joint partnership to ensure and establish good governance for providing better services to poor, marginalized and vulnerable people. Under the domain titled 'Governance and Rights', WAVE Foundation has been implementing the 'Responsiveness of Public Services through Strengthening Participatory Governance Response' project supported by MJF and FCDO under the 'Strengthening Public Institutions theme of Excluded People's Rights in Bangladesh (EPR)' Programme from January 2019. In that line of action, this project intends to work on behalf of the poor people to make the Local Government Institutions (LGI) and Service Delivery Institutions (SDI) more accountable and responsive.

1.2. Focus of the Study

At the Local Government System of Bangladesh, the imbalance of power can be observed at different levels: between national government and local government, between elected people's representatives of the local government institutions (elected chairs and members), between the elected people's representatives and the deputed officials of the national government's ministries/department due mainly to the lack of effective legislations or their weak enforcement. Besides, it can be argued that without effective localization of SDGs, improving the upward and downward accountability system at the local level, enhanced local resource mobilization and ensuring the participation of local people in general and women in particular in the local development- the achievement of Bangladesh's development aspirations will get adversely affected. All these imbalances identified on the front of local governance need to be addressed with immediate effect if Bangladesh is to achieve the targets of SDGs by 2031, goals of 8FYP and also the Vision 2041. Therefore, the assignment aims to provide a way forward to make the local government system more effective by integrating the relevant SDGs and 8FYP targets through analyzing the local Government system from policy, local resource mobilization, accountability, and participation perspectives.

1.3. Objectives of the Study

- Identifying the constraints and opportunities in the existing local government legislations and practices on the ground
- Understanding the challenges of localization and implementation of SDGs and the goals of the 8FYP of Bangladesh in achieving the development milestones set-forth
- Examining the current status of local resource mobilization by LGIs and suggesting some way forward on this front
- Assessing the current status of people's participation, including the participation of women in the affairs of the local government institutions.

- Exploring the accountability system that is in place at the local level at the moment and providing recommendations as to how the system can be made effective by ameliorating the existing situation with a view to make the local government system effective in Bangladesh.

1.4. Rationale of the Study

With the joint effort of the government and many development partners, many attempts have been made over the years to strengthen the Local Government System in Bangladesh, but it is far from achieving its optimal goals. Problems such as unclear functional responsibilities of LGs, lack of opportunities for ensuring participation, weak upward and downward accountability, and poor own resource mobilization efforts are holding its progress back, which eventually might also restrict the country from attaining SDGs and 8FYP goals as expected. Therefore, the current study makes an attempt to analyze the present status of the Local Government System from multiple perspectives such as existing policy regime, the localization of SDGs, accountability, participation and resource mobilization and suggest a way forward which will pave the way for an effective local government system in Bangladesh.

1.5. Sample Study Area

In connection with this study 2 Zila Parishads, 2 Upazila Parishads and 2 Union Parishads will be visited. Data and information will be collected from different stakeholders of these institutions.

Name of the District/ Zila Parishads	Name of the Upazila	Name of Paurashava	Name of the Union Parishads
Magura Zila Parishad	Sreepur Upazila	Magura Paurashava	Shobdolpur UP
Tangail Zila Parishad	Tangail Sadar Upazila	Tangail Paurashava	Mogra UP

1.6. Description of Approaches and Methodology Used

The study will be based on secondary and primary data sources and follow a qualitative approach. Some basic quantitative data were also collected during the field visits for analysis. The secondary data were collected through an extensive review of relevant literature such as existing Acts, rules, regulations, policies, published reports and articles. And then, the findings from the primary data were triangulated with the secondary data. The triangulation process, i.e., the use of more than one approach to investigate an issue has enhanced the confidence in the final findings of the research. For collecting the primary information following techniques will be adopted:

1. Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)
2. Focus Group Discussion (FGDs)

The following individuals will be consulted during the field visit-

District/Zila Parishads	Upazila Parishads	Union Parishads	Paurashavas
Deputy Commissioner, Zila Parishad Chairmen, CEOs,	Upazila Chairmen, Vice Chair (male and female), UNOs, Upazila level officials of the nation building departments. Representatives of Upazila Parishad Chairman Association, Common citizens.	UP Chairmen, 2 male members of UP, 2 female members of UP, UP secretaries, AACOs, SAAO, SAI, Assistant Education Officer, Common citizens.	Mayors, male and female councillors, CEOs/Secretaries, Common citizens.

In addition to this, 8 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were organized involving community people at each tier of local government in which women participants were ensured and the FGDs were conducted involving people from all walks of life. Besides, a few LG experts were also consulted.



Chapter 2

Local Government System in Bangladesh: Examining the Current Trends and Policy Gaps

2.1 Brief Analysis of the Local Government System

Bangladesh is territorially deconcentrated into a four-tier field administration, with a unit at each of the following levels: division, district, upazila and union. The country is divided into six divisions, which, in turn, are subdivided into 64 districts (Zillas). Below the district level, at the countryside, there are 495 Upazilas, which are further subdivided into 4571 Unions and in urban areas, there are 12 city corporations (large cities) and 318 municipalities (smaller towns).

Administration at the divisional level essentially performs coordinating functions; while district administration historically has played the most vital role in ensuring central presence in the locality. Almost all government ministries and departments have their units at the district level. Under the guidance of different district level officers including the Deputy Commissioner (DC), officials at the Upazila level are charged with actually implementing government policies related to different sectors. The Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) acts as the head of Upazila administration and the general representative of the government at the Upazila level. A good number of government departments, for example, agriculture, education, health and family planning, social welfare, fisheries and livestock, public health etc. have offices at the Upazila level. At the union level, some important departments of the government have their field staff, which includes: education, health and family planning, agriculture, fisheries and livestock.

A separate devolved local government hierarchy also parallels the administrative hierarchy of the government. There exist local councils at each of the administrative levels except the division. At the top of the three-tier rural local government structure is the Zila Parishad (ZP) at the district level and at the bottom, the Union Parishad (UP) at the union level and the Upazila Parishad at the Upazila level—the middle tier.

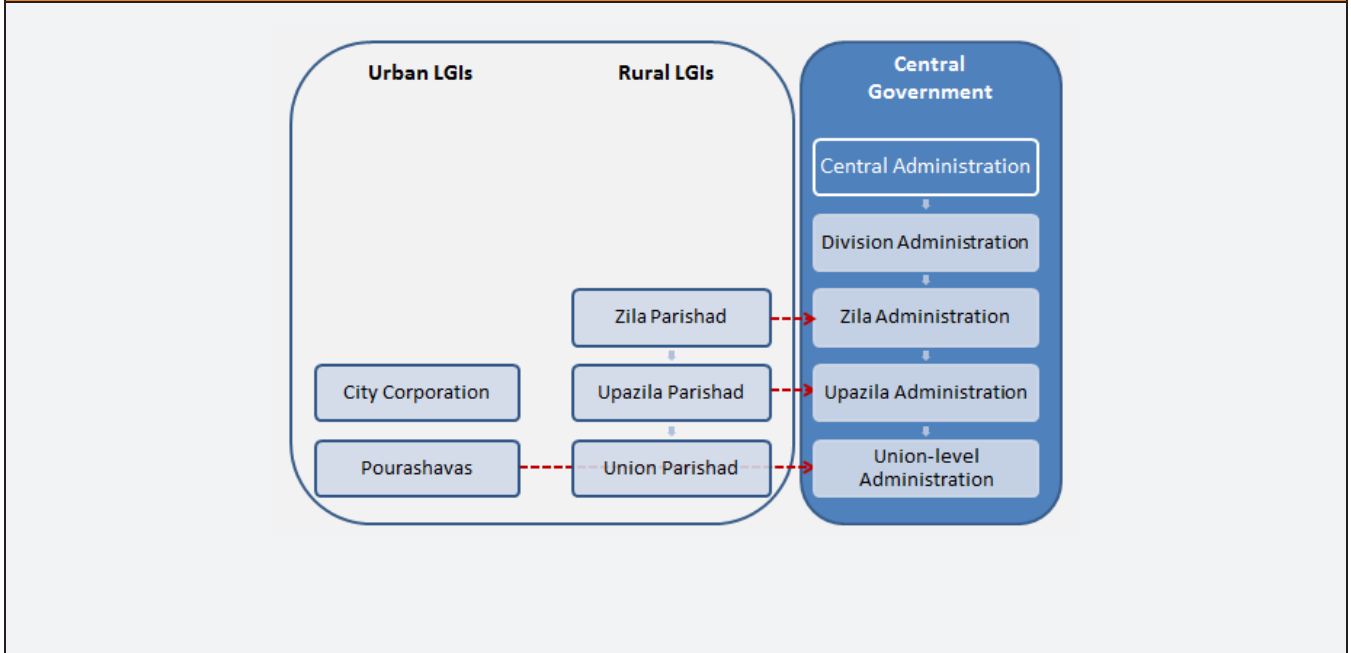
The total number of Zila Parishad is 64. A typical district or Zila covers an average area of 2406 sq.km populated by around 2 million population. Zila parishad is composed of a chairman and 21 representative members along with 5 women members in reserved seats. No direct election is held at the Zila Parishad level. The Chairman and the members are elected by the electoral college containing the elected representatives of all other local government institutions within the jurisdiction of Zila.

The middle tier, Upazila Parishad (UZP) at the upazila level, has greater importance than other councils. An Upazila contains about 302 sq kilometer area and a population of about 245 thousand (World Bank, 1996). The UZP is headed by a popularly elected chairman and composed of two vice chairmen, representative members (UP chairmen) and women members. Officials of different nation-building departments attend the meetings of UZP, but they are neither members of the Parishad, nor can they vote. Government activities at the Upazila level are divided into two categories: reserved and transferred. Responsibilities for transferred subjects have been assigned to the UZP; while the central government assumes responsibilities for reserved subjects.

The Union Parishad (UP) is the lowest unit of local government. Generally, a union with about 10–12 square miles area, encompassing 10–15 villages, is inhabited by about 15000 to 20000 people. A union is divided into 9 wards, with each ward electing a member on the basis of popular votes. The chairman, who heads the UP, is directly elected by the voters of the whole Union. In addition to a directly elected chairman and nine members, three women members are also elected, with each one representing three wards.

The prevailing local government system in Bangladesh is not very strong. The local government institutions are not self-governing institutions. They work principally as subservient bodies to central authorities-- which control their activities through circulars, directives and financial allocations. They have poor resource base, making them incapable of performing their mandatory and optional functions.

Figure 2.1: An overview of local government and local administration of Bangladesh



Source: Ahmed et al, Local government System in Bangladesh: A Comparative Perspectives and Practices, (Dhaka: Local Government Division: 2014).

The power and authority of elected representatives of local government institutions (LGIs) are minimal compared to field administrative units, besides, the elected representatives, in general, encounter difficulty in exerting whatever little authority they possess. LGIs elected officials have inadequate understanding of their tasks and responsibilities. Many of them lack adequate managerial skills, including basic skills of record keeping, collection and dissemination of information, policy and project formulation, participatory decision making and also rudimentary leadership skills. It has been observed that leaders of LGIs do not have basic resources such as office supplies, means of communication, transport, record keeping facilities, the necessary information. The limited number of staff and low level of their knowledge and skills make it difficult for the LGIs to act with efficiency and effectively. On the other hand, from the national government's end, the distribution of responsibilities of different office holders is not made clear. There is a lack of clarity and confusion in the distribution of roles, responsibility and authority among the different stakeholders of LGIs in general.

2.2 Pervasive Central Control and Contradictions in LG Legal Provisions

Over time, five types of Local Governments Institutions (LGIs) have been codified by law, including Zila Parishads, Upazila Parishad, Union Parishads, Pourashavas (municipalities) and City Corporations. These five types of LGIs function alongside local administration of the central government, also referred to as the "field administration". To a greater or lesser extent, each of the five types of LGIs serves as a hybrid institution that covers both roles implied in the Constitution: in part, they function like local self-government institutions (managing and implementing some of their own affairs within their jurisdiction), and in part, they function as elected bodies supervising the functioning of the central government's field administration within their jurisdiction.

In Bangladesh, relationship between the national government and the UP has been to an extent authoritative in nature in most cases in favour of the national government. Besides, various regulatory mechanisms, the national government primarily tends to exercise its control over LGIs through either MP or its field level functionaries such as the MPs, Director Local Government (DDLG) and the UNO--who heads the Upazila administration. LGI's functions are guided primarily by their respective Acts and regulated by a plethora of intricate and complicated administrative orders and circulars from ministries and different agencies--which very often either contradict with the original legal provisions mentioned in the Act of in the worst case scenario makes the original legal provision weak, irrelevant (Ahmed et al 2014). For instance, the major legal contradictions in the attempt at introducing a devolved local government system with a transfer of authority and responsibility for services to the UZP through the UZP Act 1998 lies in the UZP Act (amendment)

2009. Through the UZP Act 2009 central control was imposed over the UZP through allowing the Members of Parliament (MPs) to get involved in the decision making process of the UZP (Section 19 of the Rule 27). The 2009 Act has seriously undermined the spirit and essence of devolution expounded by the 1998 Act and its mother law-- the 1982 UZP Ordinance. In addition to the contradictions in local government Acts, it has been observed that contradictions are rampant between the local government policy and the sectoral policies (Osman et al 2014). Although the national plans of Bangladesh emphasize that the implementation of devolution is to take place in coordination with sector development strategies, particularly for social services. Osman et al (2014) observes that in reality, there is a sheer gap between the policy focus of these sectors. While local government policy emphasizes on devolution, sectoral policies systematically advocate for promoting deconcentration. Agenda wise, involvement of local government in service delivery is a remote issue in sectoral policies. Such contradiction in policy focus affects the effective transfer of services to the LGs. The table below provides an illustrative example of contradictions that exist in local government policy, Acts and Circulars.

Table 0.1: Contradictions in Local Government Policy, Acts and Circulars

ISSUES	ACT	CIRCULARS
Management of the officials and staff of Upazila Parishad	UZP Act 1998 states that the officials, staff and their functions of the ministries will be transferred to the UZP. All officials of transferred departments will be placed at the disposal of UZP.	Dated 4th May 2009: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upazila Chairman can propose measures for control, supervision, withdrawal, transfer, disciplinary action against an official to the concerned authority. • Chair will have the authority to take disciplinary action against any official or staff of the UZP other than the officials deputed by the government.
		Dated 6 January, 2013 Matters related to human resource management and control will be retained by departmental heads at the central level.

Source: Osman, Ferdous Arfina, Jamie Boex, Mokshedul Hamid, and Abdul Hannan Shaikh, An analysis of functional assignments in health and education in Bangladesh: the role of local governments and local administration, (Dhaka: UNDP: 2014)

2.3 Lack of Clarity in Legal Provisions: An illustrative Overview

Given the existing legal provisions, all tiers of field administration and all LGs are responsible for delivering services but it is to be noted that the legal provisions lack clarity about the division of functional responsibilities between these two entities. It is apparent that the UP Act 2009 has not mentioned specifically what role would UP play in delivering the services transferred to it which creates confusion among the functionaries about their roles and responsibilities in providing the delivery of local services. On the other hand, the sectoral policies being implemented by different ministries and departments of the national government quite often than not do have a lot gaps leading to serious confusions among the relevant stakeholders. For instance, the health policy 2011 remains vague about the nature of involvement of local government in service delivery (Osman 2014). Table 2 below presents the responsibilities of local administration and LGs for health services, which is indicative of local administration being the key player in service delivery while on the other hand, responsibilities for the LGs have been mentioned in such a broad manner that LGs might also be considered as the key service provider at the local level. Based on the recent Acts relevant to the local government tier, responsibilities of LGs have been mentioned while the Circulars of the concerned Directorates are the sources of the responsibilities assigned to the district and Upazila administration. Table 3 shows that responsibilities of LGs and district health administration overlap in supervision issues (shown in bold form) while in case of education, Zila Parishad's function overlaps with district health administration. On the other hand, at the Upazila level, the role of Upazila parishad with respect to health service is unclear and in fact overlaps with those of the Zila parishad. The existing functional assignment suggests that Upazila parishad will be responsible for "ensuring the provision of health and family planning services" it actually covers all aspects of service provision that have been pronounced in detail in case of the functions

of the head of Upazila health administration called the UHFPO. Such lack of clarity in legal provision causes confusion and finally results in non-functionality of Upazila Parishad as far as provision of health service delivery is concerned. Similarly, at the union level also, responsibilities for health and services have been kept vague while the functionaries of local administration actually manage the delivery of services (Osman, 2014).

Table 0.2: Lack of clarity/ overlapping of responsibilities between LGIs and Local Administration

Tiers	Responsibilities of LGIs	Responsibilities of Local Administration
Zila Parishad (ZP)	<p>Health</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvement of health education, • Providing grants to the institutions facilitating medical care • Formation of mobile medical team • Formulation and implementation of programs for prevention of infectious diseases • Supervising the health workers • Establishment, maintenance and supervision of the health centres, maternal and child health centres • Training to Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs) 	<p>Responsibilities of District Civil Surgeon (Head of District Health Administration)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinating all health and family planning activities in the district –Ensuring proper functioning of all health institutions in the district and carrying out inspections periodically or as may be specified. <p>Supervising all health activities and programs in the district</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accounting officer in respect of health services officers in the district • To ensure procurement of supplies, maintenance of district reserve store and distribution of supplies to all peripheral health units. • Dealing with medico-legal cases in the district and to be responsible for the overall administration and enforcement of health legislation in the district. • To initiate disciplinary cases against all officers and staff working in the district.
Upazila Parishad (UZP)	<p>Upazila Parishad (UZP) Upazila Parishad Act 1998</p> <p>Health: Ensuring the provision of public health, nutrition and family planning services</p>	<p>Upazila Health and Family Planning Officer (UHFPO)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To work under the guidance of upazila parishad as coordinated by the UNO. • Supervising health and family planning activities at the upazila level and below. • Sanctioning authority for expenditure of funds for both health and family planning divisions and ensuring proper utilization of these funds. • Responsible for the management, administration and maintenance of Upazila health complex <p>Responsible for the implementation of family planning programs in the Upazila</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocation of duties among the health and family planning staff in the area • Managing training for the health and family planning staff in the upazila • Maintenance of necessary information and statistics in the Upazila health complex • Visiting the unions and villages regularly to get acquainted with the problems and achievement of the ongoing health programs • Regular inspection of the unions under the upazila • Responsible for procurement, distribution and proper utilization of stores. • To initiate ACRs of the officers and staff working in the upazila • Responsible for the supervision of enforcement of health legislation

Union Parishad (UP)	Union Parishad (UP Act 2009: 2nd Schedule) Health: Implementation of programs related to health and family planning (4); Arranging health centres for primary health care services.	Field level health workers provide both domiciliary and static health and family planning services.
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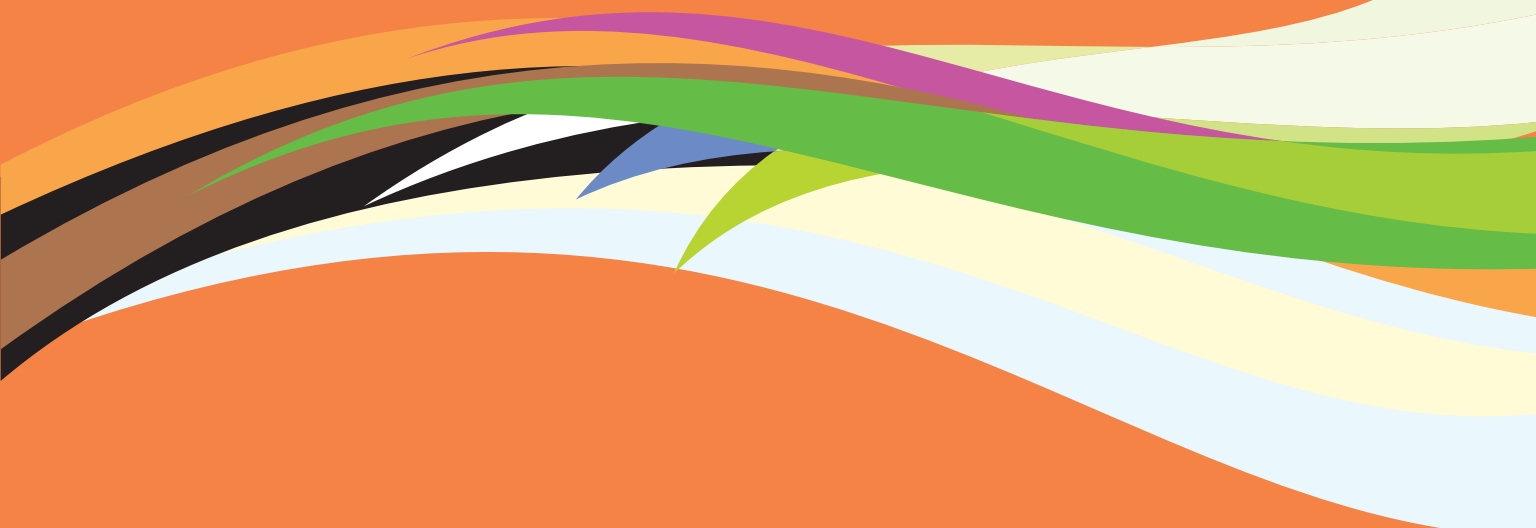
Source: Adapted from Osman, Ferdous Arfina, Jamie Boex, Mokshedul Hamid, and Abdul Hannan Shaikh, An analysis of functional assignments in health and education in Bangladesh: the role of local governments and local administration, (Dhaka: UNDP: 2014)

Table 0.3: Overlapping of Responsibilities between different tiers of Local Government

Tiers	Responsibilities of LGIs	Functional overlaps
Zila Parishad (ZP)	Health: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvement of health education, • Providing grants to the institutions facilitating medical care • Formation of mobile medical team • Formulation and implementation of programs for prevention of infectious diseases -Supervising the health workers • Establishment, maintenance and supervision of the health centres, maternal and child health centres • Training to Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs) 	Supervision of health workers and health centres by the ZP overlaps with the similar responsibility given to Upazila Parishad.
Upazila Parishad (UZP) (Upazila Parishad Act of 1998)	Health: Ensuring the provision of public health, nutrition and family planning services	It appears that UZPs are responsible for managing everything in order to “ensure health and family planning service provision” including the responsibilities assigned to the Zila Parishads.
Union Parishad (UP Act 2009: 2nd Schedule)	Health: Implementation of programmes related to health and family planning ; Arranging health centres for primary health care services.	Implementation of programmes related to health and family planning overlaps with those of UZPs which are assigned to them to ensure the provision of public health, nutrition and family planning services

The study finds that there are a lot policy ambiguities and gaps within the existing legal framework for LGIs. Although legally local government institutions (ZP, UZP and UP) have been made responsible for providing services at the local level, but in practice they remain far from playing any effective role in service delivery while the local administration virtually controls and manages the whole process.

Although there appears to be a genuine interest by the national political leadership in strengthening decentralized local governance, there is also a strong pull by certain central-level stakeholders (central line ministries and parliamentarians, in particular) to retain a dominant role for central government politicians and institutions over the public sector. As such, the local government system is caught in a tug of war between the desire to retain power and authority centrally on one hand, and the recognition that there is a need to localize the public sector (and if possible, to isolate the local-level services from central political tensions) in order to bring “quality services to the people’s doorsteps” in a stable and sustainable manner.



Chapter 3

Localization of SDG: Strategies, Progress and Challenges

3.1 Why Localize the SDG?

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) are often considered a “Master Plan” to achieve a sustainable and better future for all by 2030, but the success of the goals is entirely dependent on the policies taken by each country. The seventeen sustainable development goals, comprised of 169 targets, are set to ensure long-term inclusive development by emphasizing economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection. However, there is no legal binding to implement the SDG; instead, the countries are expected to take ownership of the goals and formulate tailored policies for a better future for the generations to come which, ultimately will contribute to the big picture of global development (United Nations, 2021). Thus, the concept of localizing the SDG comes in which subnational contexts are taken into consideration in setting goals and targets, implementing them, and monitoring and measuring their progress. To be specific, the localization of SDG paves the way for the formulation of a local development policy that works as a roadmap for the regional governments to fulfil the targets of the SDG (Local 2030, 2017). Consequently, the local government resides at the center of the achievement of the SDG.

Similarly, the People’s republic of Bangladesh government (GoB) has been working relentlessly since 2016 to achieve the SDG for a better future, and the Local Government Institutions (LGIs) in the different tiers remains at the heart of the localization process. This chapter aims to analyze the initiatives taken by the GoB to localize the SDG in Bangladesh. The chapter is divided into three parts; first, it discusses the importance of localizing the SDG in the context of Bangladesh. Second, it focuses on the strategies taken so far for the localization of the SDG in Bangladesh and tracks their progress using secondary literature and the data from the field visit. Later, the chapter sheds light on the challenges to the localization of the SDG in Bangladesh, which will further be contextualized in the later chapters of this report. From the analysis of data, this chapter found that despite significant effort taken at the center, the localization of the SDG in Bangladesh remains few and far between mainly due to economic, behavioral, political-administrative, uncertainty and gender-related challenges, and the imbalance of power among different stakeholders remains at the heart of these challenges.

3.2 Localization of SDG in Bangladesh

3.2.1 Why Localize SDGs?

The LGIs in Bangladesh remain at the center of the achievement of the SDG due to their decentralization-induced capacity to bottom-up implementation of public policies. Specifically, the importance of the localization of the SDG lies in the bottom-up implementation structure, which makes it more likely to result in policy success. In the public policy literature, policies are broadly implemented following either a top-down or a bottom-up approach depending on the perks and cons. The former approach works most efficiently when there remains strong control of the top-level decision-makers and the implementation process is straightforward. On the other hand, the latter approach carefully considers the context and adjusts the policy based on the interaction with the local institutional setting.

Similarly, in the context of Bangladesh, as LGIs are responsible for the implementation of central government policies and have the expertise to work closely with local people, they can tailor the implementation of the SDG according to their needs, which will smoothen the overall process of achieving the targets of the SDG in time. For instance, the need for different areas are different and unique – such as coastal areas are more prone to the impact of climate change and natural disasters, some areas have a severe shortage of drinking water due to arsenic pollution and salinity intrusion, some areas might have a seasonal need of employment and food, some areas have a below-average educational rate than the other areas. The bottom-up implementation of the SDG goals through localization allows the LGIs to consider the contexts and prioritize their needs. Also, their expertise makes it easy for them to map the resources available and allocate them wisely. As a result, localization of SDG through the LGIs is more likely to ensure inclusive development and, in the process, also strengthens the LGIs- leading to an ideal win-win situation. Table 1 illustrates the relevant goals and targets of the SDG that are essential to implement through localization. The targets have been shortlisted from the 40 priority indicators selected by the SDG Working Committee of the Prime Minister’s Office (SDG Tracker, 2020).

Table 0.1: SDG Targets and the need for the Localization of the SDG

Sustainable Development Goals	Targets Tailored for Bangladesh	Why Localize the SDG? Role of Local Government Institutions in Achieving Them
Goal 1: No Poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reducing the proportion of population living below extreme and national poverty line below 3% and 10%, respectively 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A significant chunk of the LGIs' activities involves alleviating poverty of the local people through an array of social safety net programs and projects. As they already have experience in managing such projects and programs and have existing data about local people due to working directly with them, these institutions will be the most efficient in allocating the limited resource and accelerating the process of achieving the targets of SDG 1.
Goal 2: Zero Hunger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reducing the prevalence of stunting among children under 5 years of age to 12% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The goal 2 is linked and somewhat similar to goal 1 (No Poverty). For example, allocation of allowance to lactating mothers can lead to completion of this goal. LGIs are already implementing such programs in their specific areas. Due to their previous experience in such programs and the nature of working closely with local people, LGIs will play the most important role in implementing this goal.
Goal 3: Good Health and Wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reducing neonatal mortality rate to 12 per 1,000 live births Reducing under 5 mortality rates to 25 per 1,000 live births Reducing the maternal mortality ratio to 70 per 10,000 live births 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This goal is linked with the goals 1 (No Poverty) and 2 (Zero Hunger). Therefore, its success depends largely on the completion of the above two goals, which are significantly based on the localization of the SDG. Moreover, the LGIs can implement projects to improve the status of existing healthcare services and facilities in their jurisdiction, which will lead to the fulfilment of the targets of goal 3.
Goal 4: Quality Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring 100% completion rate of primary education Ensuring 100% completion rate of junior secondary education Ensuring the proportion of schools by 100% in terms of electricity, internet, basic drinking water, single sex basic sanitation facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formal and non-formal education is a pivotal role to be played by the LGIs through different training programs and public educational institutions. The proper management of schools by the LGI line departments can further enhance the achievements in the public education sector and achieve the SDG 4 targets by 2030. Also, the LGIs through its line departments can take up infrastructural development plans and projects to ensure electricity, internet, basic drinking water, and single sex sanitation facilities through its line departments.

Goal 5: Gender Equality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reducing the proportion of women aged between 20 to 24 years who were married before age 15 to zero • Reducing the proportion of women aged between 20 to 24 years who were married before the age of 18 to 10% • Increasing the female labor force participation rate to 50% 	LGIs have played an important role in reducing the rate of child and early marriage, especially in rural areas of Bangladesh. Thus, achieving the targets under this goal will not be very difficult with the continued effort of LGIs. Moreover, to stop early marriages, it is necessary to educate women and make them self-sufficient through economic empowerment, which LGIs are doing through different training programs and schemes. By extending the scope of such programs, the targets of this goal can be achieved through the localization of the SDG.
Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring 100% population using safely managed drinking water services • Ensuring 100% population safely managed sanitation services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This goal overlaps with the goals 3 (Good health and Wellbeing) and 4 (Quality Education). Through different projects and infrastructure development that fall under the duty of LGIs, they can be successful in achieving this goal.
Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing annual growth rate of GDP to 10% • Reducing unemployment rate below 3% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This goal is an overarching goal that depends on the fulfilment of all the above-mentioned goals which can be achieved by the localization of the SDG by the LGIs of Bangladesh. Only a poverty and hunger-free, well educated, healthy and gender-equal country can aim for the achievement of such high growth and sustain it and it cannot even be conceptualized without the localization of the SDG.
Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reducing the ratio of income of the top 10% population and the bottom 10% population to 20 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This goal is connected to the goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). Although a country can achieve growth, keeping economic inequality at a very high level and it has been evident in many parts of the world. However, with the fulfilment of SDG at the local level can reduce inequality and sustain the growth.
Goal 13: Climate Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reducing the number of deaths, missing persons, and directly affected persons attributed to disasters to 1500 per 100,000 population 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local government institutions are the first ones to reach the local people during natural disasters. They distribute the relief and rehabilitate them. Thus, the LGIs would play the most crucial role in the achievement of this goal. Moreover, through different plans, programs, and projects, LGIs must play a leading role in mitigating the impacts of climate change with the lessons learned from their experience in managing disasters for a long time.
Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing the proportion of children under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority to 100% • Increasing the proportion of complaint Settlement against cognizance of cases by National Human Rights Commission to 60% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is one of the key duties of the local elected representatives of the LGIs to register birth and dispute resolution. Thus, the LGIs have the sole authority to achieve this goal. However, the LGIs need to be strengthened as well for the overall achievement of this goal.

Source: SDG Tracker (Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 2020)

3.2.2 Strategies and Progress in the Localization of SDG in Bangladesh

The GoB, since 2016, has taken many initiatives for the implementation and localization of the SDG. The government has taken up an action plan to implement the SDG, which has assigned functions to ministries and departments based on the prioritized targets and indicators (GED, 2012). Also, a web-based repository titled SDG Tracker has been developed to showcase the SDG priorities of the country and keep track of Bangladesh’s progress in achieving the SDG. Most importantly, SDG has been prioritized in the 7th and the very recent 8th Five Year Plan of Bangladesh, which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Moreover, to localize the SDG the General Economic Division of the planning commission have developed a framework. As per the framework, the first stage of localization is to formulate SDG focused Annual and Five-Year Local Plans considering the amount of money, human resources and required infrastructural development primarily at the Upazila level, and gradually in union, district and divisional levels for achieving the targets of the SDG in a coordinated manner. Furthermore, a committee on the implementation and coordination of SDG has also been constituted at the Upazila, District and Divisional levels under the direction of the cabinet division. The primary responsibility of the Committee is to adopt plans, monitor and implement them with special emphasis to the specific Upazila needs.

3.3 Challenges in the Localization of SDG in Bangladesh

Although Bangladesh’s government has taken significant measures to achieve the SDG, the sample of the study provided a different picture. The respondents were familiar with the term SDG or Sustainable Development Goals; however, they were largely unfamiliar with the localization of the SDG. Especially the elected local government representatives at the Union level had a very vague understanding of the SDG and its localization. The qualitative interview suggests that they became familiar with the term by reading newspapers (See Chart 1 and 2). Therefore, very little projects have been undertaken at the local level to localize the SDG (See Chart 3). However, it is essential to note that most of the activities done by the LGs align with SDG as mentioned in table 1 but there were hardly any informed and intentional, systematic planning on the top of their activities to localize the SDG in the sample LGs. Due to the alignment of their activities and duties, some projects specific to SDG have been taken in the sample LGs (See Chart 3). Therefore, the limitation of the local government system in Bangladesh as discussed in the previous chapter remains primarily the main challenge of SDG localization from our research as no notable planning was done in the sample LGs to localize the SDG. The findings from the field that hamper the localization and achievement of the SDG can be categorized into economic, behavioral, political-administrative, uncertainty and gender-related challenges.

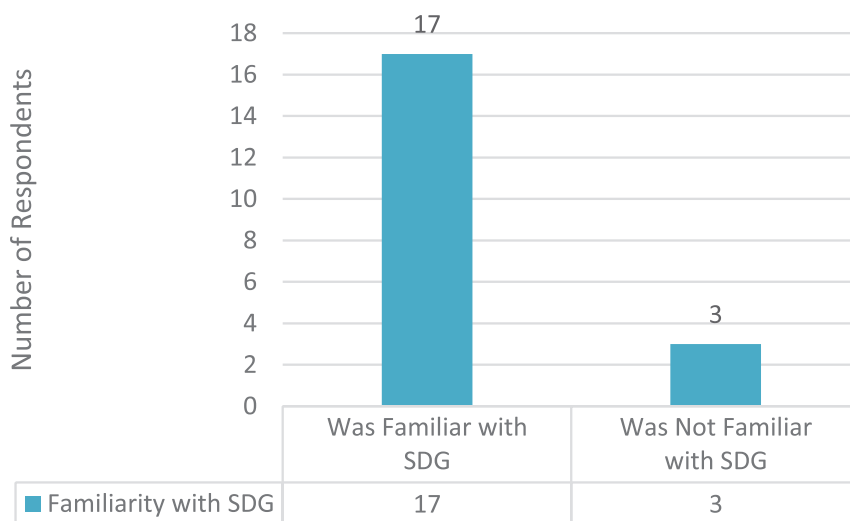


Figure 3.1: Familiarity of the Respondents with SDG

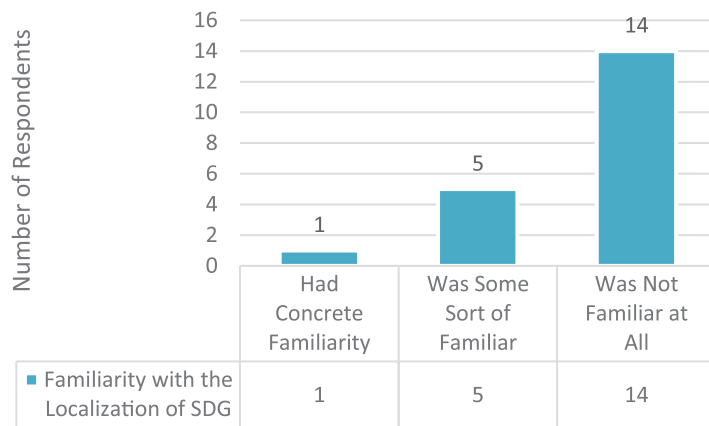


Figure 3.2: Familiarity of the Respondents with the Localization of SDG

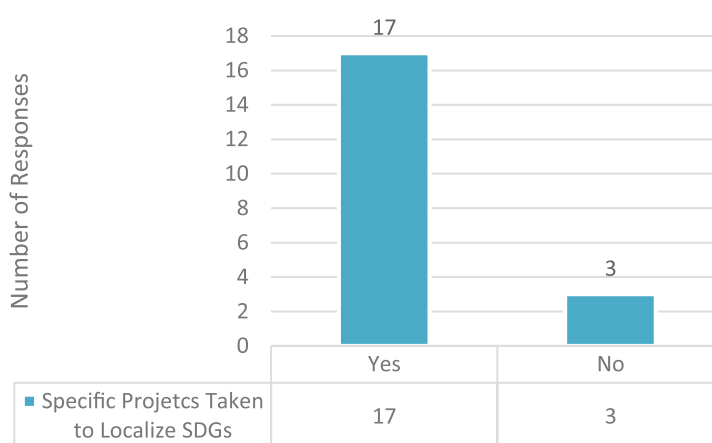


Figure 3.3: Projects Taken to Localize SDG

3.3.1. Economic Challenges: Lack of Finance and Trust Impeding the Localization of SDG

It is well evident from the previous chapter that the LGs suffer from severe financial constraints, which will later be discussed in detail in chapter 5. However, the findings of the research show that financial constraints in conjunction with people’s trust and the imbalance of power at the local level will play a significant role in SDG localization. A Union Parishad secretary mentioned that without changing the philosophy of their activity, SDG cannot be achieved. For example, as a public institution, LGs invest in public goods with their scarce resources, and it is impossible for them to invest in sustainable infrastructure. They tend to take many small projects than taking bigger and sustainable few projects. Moreover, these LGs follow a value-for-money approach with the intention to serve the maximum people with the utilization of minimum resources, thus the localization of SDG becomes problematic. The Union parishad Secretary said-

“We cannot build sustainable infrastructure as mentioned in SDG goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities). If I build a road with sustainability principle in mind, I cannot finish it within budget. And if I make a small yet sustainable road with my limited budget, it will not serve a lot of people and they will be raged thinking we have done it intentionally.”

On the other hand, a lot of money from the already scarce financial resource of the LGs gets wasted on transaction cost. Thus, taking up sustainable infrastructural projects becomes very much unachievable. A CEO from one of the sample Zila Parishad said-

“There is a noticeable difference between private 1 lac taka and public 1 lac taka. A significant transaction cost is associated with the public 1 lac taka and thus even if we allocate 1 lac taka for a specific project, the output will not be as good as a solid 1 lac taka project would have been.”

Such principle of the LGs in taking up projects and their subpar quality might have resulted in a lack of trust among the local people regarding the LGs' capacity in contributing to inclusive local development. Thus, people lack trust in sustainable projects with the fear of being left out. Consequently, the localization of SDG in Bangladesh is less likely to receive bottom-up acceptance, which is expected to pose a severe challenge.

Roughly 70% of the respondents who participated in the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were not satisfied with the quality of the work done by the LGs and considered them to be somewhat corrupt and inadequate for achieving the goals of SDG. It was further validated by a District Commissioner who mentioned that imbalance of power among different actors in the various tiers of local government is responsible for such lack of trust. He noted that there remains serious imbalance of power among the Member of Parliament (who works as an advisor), elected local government representatives, as well as the officials from the field administration in Upazila and Zila level and thus scarce resources cannot be distributed evenly as each of them try to establish their dominance through them, which ultimately fuel the distrust. Although the MP possesses the greater power, the race of dominance cause a bickering between the local government representative and the field administration official and the less powerful tend to lean towards the MP. Consequently, the financial distribution and the allocation of resources get hampered to a great extent even if the MP and the Chairmen belong to the same political party. He further mentioned that people have only accepted the Paurashava, City Corporation and the Union parishad since there remains a lesser imbalance of power and they can allocate their resources more freely. Therefore, financial constraint and transaction cost further impacted by the imbalance of power in the LGs result in distrust among local people which pose a great threat to the localization of SDG.

3.3.2. Behavioral Challenges: Tragedy of Commons Impeding the Localization of SDG

Even if LGs invest in projects and programs related to the SDG, lack of maintenance and the public's attitude can hamper it to a great extent. According to a Zila Parishad chairman, people do not value what they are given easily and thus become careless in using them, threatening the likelihood of achieving different goals. Case 1 from the Magura Zila Parishad presents a case similar to this.

Case 3.1: Localization of the SDG and the Tragedy of Commons

SDG can be difficult to localize in public service delivery due to the nonchalant attitude. For instance, Magura district has a shortage of pure drinking water due the presence of excessive Iron and Arsenic in the groundwater, which requires excessive filtering before drinking. According to the Chairman of Magura Zila Parishad, there was no access to pure drinking water in the Magura public hospitals, so the attendants of the patients had to travel a long way to obtain drinking water for the patients. Thus, he installed eight high-quality water purifiers of Taka 60,000 each in eight hospitals. He gave the hospital management the duty to replace its filter cartridge every month, which only cost Taka 120. However, only after six months, he noticed that seven of the eight purifiers were not working because the filter cartridges got jammed by Iron in the water as they have not been replaced in a timely manner. The initiative of the Chairman was directly aligned with the Goal 6 of the SDG (Clean Water and Sanitation for All), which could significantly reduce the burden of the patients and their attendees at the public hospitals that could also serve the SDG Goal 3 (Good Health and Wellbeing), but the attitude of the public hospital management in their maintenance led to a tragedy of commons.

To be specific, the non-rival and non-excludable nature of the public goods may pose a significant challenge to the localization and achievement of the SDG. The LGs deal with public goods and services available for all members of society despite they pay tax for the service or not. Therefore, people become irresponsible in using those services, leading to the tragedy of the commons when that public good gets damaged due to overconsumption. Similarly, even if the SDG are localized to the optimum level without tailoring the existing behavior of the local people, it is unlikely to sustain.

3.3.3. Political-Administrative Challenges: Discrepancy of Knowledge, Political Will, and Power Preventing the Localization of SDGs

There was a severe discrepancy about the knowledge regarding the localization of the SDG among elected local government representatives and government officials in field administration that can complicate the achievement of the SDG. Our data show that the depth of knowledge about SDG and its localization was constant among the field administration officials in all tiers. However, the level of knowledge gradually reduced as we went to the lower tiers of the local government. For example, chairmen, vice chairmen, members (male and female) had no idea about the SDG and its localization. The reason for the divergence in the understanding about the localization of the SDG relies in the difference of power and interest of the elected and administrative representatives. For instance, the elected representatives have the responsibility to work for the people, and thus, he takes up small scale projects so that he reach most people through the scarce resources of the LGI, distribute the social safety net money among his supporters and maintain a strong network within the local politics. So, he follows the routine work within his supporters to get reelected and worry less about the new concepts like the localization of the SDG. Our data show that one of the Upazila Vice Chairman (male) received training on SDG localization from the central government but have forgotten due to lack of practice.

On the other hand, the officials from the field administration keep a constant connection with the center and keep updated. However, it is not the job of the filed administration officials to plan and implement the localization of SDG unless the central government orders them; their role is to provide the elected local government representative with secretarial help. Therefore, if the elected local representative is not aware of and keen to localize the SDG, it is impossible to plan and implement the goals involving all the line ministries and fulfil the targets by 2030.

Moreover, due to the clash between politics and administration due to the imbalance of power discussed earlier, the field administration officials do not force the elected representatives to take up an initiative like the localization of SDG. A significant finding (presented in case 2) from the field shows that religion fuels the imbalance of power at the local level between politics and administration that works as a challenge to localize the SDG. A UNO said in her interview,

'If the UNO is too strict and bound the Chairman by too many rules and regulations, it becomes impossible for him/her to be in the same station for a significant period to properly perform the duties.'

Case 3.2: The Discrepancy of SDG Knowledge and Role of Religion

One of the Union Parishad Chairmen from the sample was too old to understand the new concepts such as SDG and he never heard about it. However, the secretary of the same union had clear idea but as per his job duty, he is not there to localize the SDG rather his duty is to assist the Chairman. Although it has been well evident that field administration officials often dictate the local government representatives, we discovered noteworthy findings from this union. Here, religion played a major role in the spectrum of power relations that exist among politics and administration that impact the overall performance of the LGIs. The secretary of the Union Parishad mentioned that the Chairman depends a lot on me since he is too old and does not understand a lot of technical things, but he (UP Secretary) does not try to suggest him to do anything out of the box. To quote him, *"I am a Hindu, and I try escaping trouble by not doing anything different."*

However, elected representatives do not only dictate the field administrative officials, but the balance of power can also be the other way around. The following quote by a Chairman signifies the bickering among the Chairman and UNO and how it works as a major barrier to localizing the SDG.

"The UNOs treat us terribly, we have been elected for the five years to serve the people of this area, but they (UNO) are to be on the administrative cadre service for forty years throughout the country. So we are not the same, our responsibilities are not the same."

3.3.4. Planning Challenges: The Fear of Uncertainty in SDG Localization

The long-term planning and implementation of different targets of the SDG posed a fear of uncertainty to the LGIs, which is likely to work as a major challenge for the SDG. Although there remains severe divergence of

power between the political and administrative officials, both the parties agreed on the issue of uncertainty. For example, an Upazila chairman stated that he is here to serve the people for five years, which is a slice of the long timeline to achieve the SDG's targets. They had limited skill to make such plans that can truly add up to the achievement of SDG in Bangladesh. A Chief Executive Officer from the Upazila Parishad gave a similar opinion, but he also reflected on the power dimension in the local level as an uncertainty. He said-

"It is very difficult to make plans as emergencies can appear anytime, for example a natural disaster or coronavirus. Then I have to cut short my plan and tackle the emergencies with my limited resources, so what is the need of such plan? And if I have a plan the relation of the Chairman with the local MP can deteriorate anytime which will ultimately fail the plan."

From the observation of the field, it can easily be noticed that the global stagnation caused by the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic for the last two years has created a fear of uncertainty; in some cases, it has erased the previous success in many sectors, which is currently discouraging the LGs and its line ministries to take up plans that align with the SDG. An education officer echoed the same concern during an interview. He mentioned that they have installed water filters and constructed toilets in schools, installed smart TV in the classrooms, and maintained a feedback loop among students, parents, teachers, and the schools' managing committee that perfectly aligns with SDG 4 (Quality Education). However, the closure of schools for one and a half years has significantly increased the dropout rate, and the standard of both teachers and students has fallen dramatically, which will be a significant challenge to overcome in the coming days.

3.5.5. Gender-Related Challenges: The Devil is in the Details

Observation from the field suggests that the status of women at the local level is not up to the desired level, and they are often barred from taking part in the decision-making level (which will be discussed further in Chapter 5) and there remains serious imbalance of power among the male and women members of the LGs. These issues will work as a significant challenge in the achievement of Goal 5 (Gender Equality) that will have a domino effect on poverty reduction (goal 1), good health and well-being (goal 3), decent work and economic growth (goal 8) and will ultimately hamper the overall reduction of inequality (goal 10) following a causal link that exists among them. However, for an important goal like this, the targets (See table 1) have not been chosen wisely, which does not allow women to take more authority in the local decision-making domain.

A Upazila Vice Chairman (Female) mentioned that her Chairman is a 'misogynist' and does not hear from women unless they come with their husband. Also, a women participant in the FDG mentioned that as per her experience, it is challenging for a woman to reach the Paurashava mayor unless she has any network to reach the mayor for a specific service. In such circumstances, the integrity of the LGs also get diminished, and it directly impacts the achievement of goal 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions). Therefore, unless the targets are not catered more carefully in the context of Bangladesh, the inequality in gender relations will pose a major challenge towards the achievement of SDG.

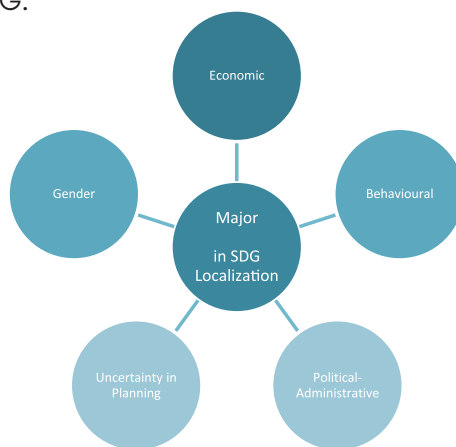
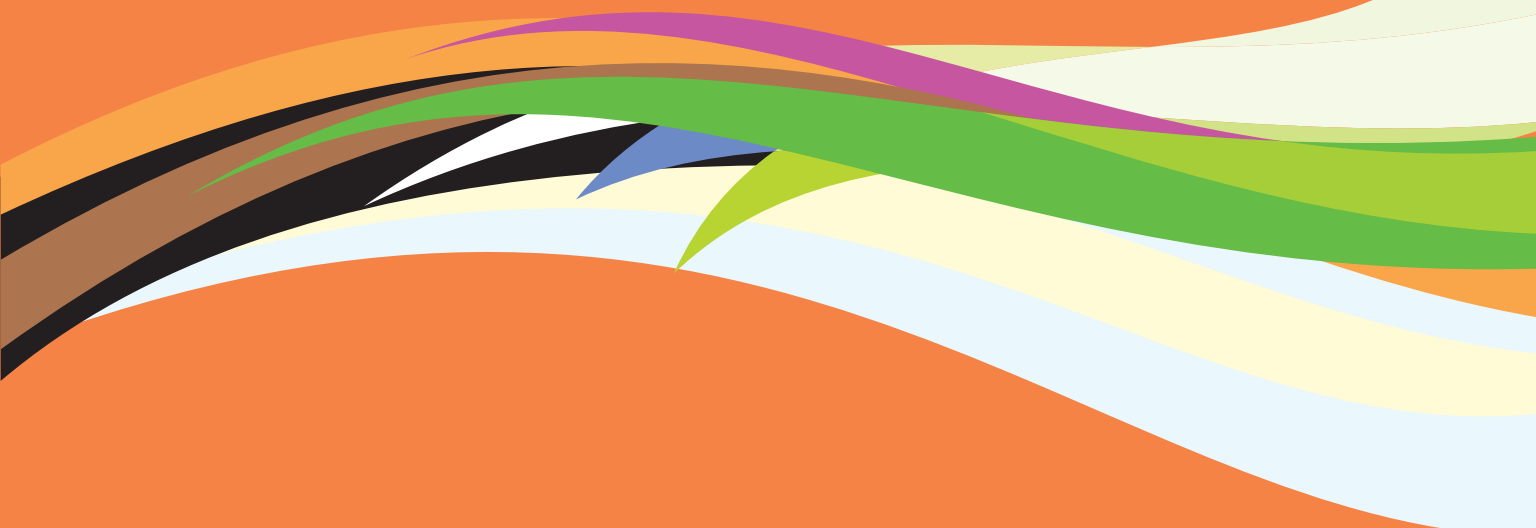


Figure 3.4: Challenges in the Localization of SDG in Bangladesh

This chapter focuses on the localization of SDG in the context of Bangladesh and reflects on the progress of Bangladesh localizing the SDG. The findings from the field reveal that the imbalance of power among different actors in the local government system of Bangladesh remains at the center of the economic, behavioural, political-administrative, planning, and gender-related challenges that need to be addressed for the timely implementation of the SDG from the bottom up through localization and the active and collectively synchronized effort of the LGs in all local government levels of Bangladesh.



Chapter 4

Local Government and the 8th Five Year Plan: Strategies and Challenges

The 8th Five Year Plan is a means to achieve the development objectives of Bangladesh within the timeframe of July 2020 to June 2025, and so it intersects with other grand plans of development such as the SDG and the perspective plan 2041 of Bangladesh. As mentioned in the previous chapter, since localization and bottom-up implementation of policies is highly correlated with policy success, similar to the SDG, the role of the LGs cannot be ignored in this regard. In fact, they play the role of a critical player in achieving 8 FYP. Therefore, considering the present condition of the LGs as discussed in chapter 2, they need to be strengthened, and their capacity needs to be enhanced to timely achieve the 8FYP, which will eventually feed into the achievement of sustainable goals by 2030 and perspective plan goals by 2041.

Therefore, analyzing both the primary and secondary data, this chapter aims to understand the status of the plan's implementation through strategies taken locally and what challenges lie ahead in their implementation so that recommendations can be tailored accordingly. The chapter found that there has not been any significant progress in implementing the 8 FYP in the sample LGs, even there were no strategies at all, and the respondents were mostly unaware of the plan. It further argues that such hindrance was due to inadequate mechanism to disseminate knowledge and the absence of integrated planning that currently work as the most significant challenge in the achievement of 8FYP. The chapter is divided into parts; the first one synthesizes the 8 FYP objectives and SDG goals relevant to local government in Bangladesh and situates them within the big picture of the Perspective Plan 2041 (PP 2041). And later, the chapter light upon the strategies taken and challenges of attaining the objectives of 8 FYP.

4.1 Synthesizing the 8 FYP, SDG and Perspective Plan 2041

The goals and objectives of the 8FYP, SDG and PP 2041 intersect at the same point in terms of public administration and economic development (Figure 4.2). For instance, chapter 1 of part 2 of the 8 FYP focuses on strengthening public administration, public institutions, and governance and considers local government and governance a key area. Specifically, it prioritizes strengthening and enhancing the LGs capacity for better service delivery (GED, 2020, p. 184). Moreover, the plan integrates economic growth, employment generation and poverty reduction, enhancing participation and inclusiveness, empowering citizens, and developing critical infrastructures (GED, p. li) as core development approaches.

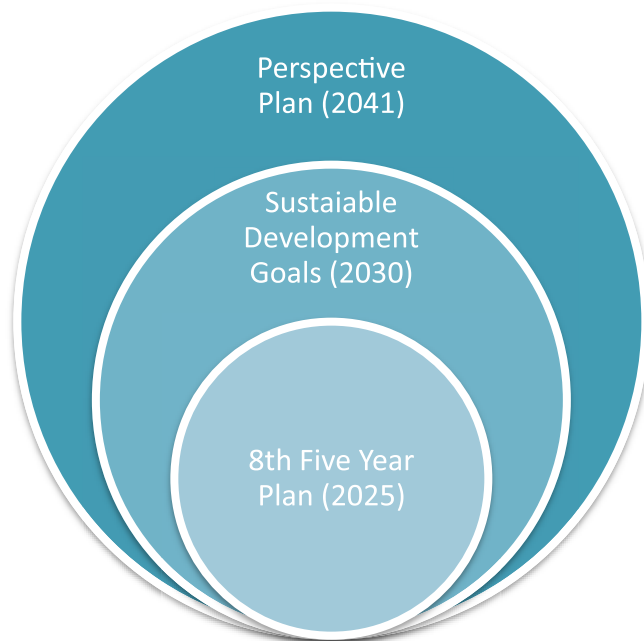


Figure 4.1: Intersection of Perspective Plan 2041, SDG and 8FYP (Source: Author)

On the other hand, the PP 2041 aims to achieve UMIC (Upper Middle-Income Country) Status by 2031 with the elimination of extreme poverty and achieve HIC (High Income Country) Status by 2041 with poverty approaching extinction. (GED,2020, P. i). Moreover, the plan considers decentralization as a key institutional pillar and aim to introduce structural changes to correct the centralized and unitary nature of the government, investing in the strengthening of institutions of decentralization, and developing a legal framework for providing a clear guideline for the local government to function (GED, 2020, p. 20). Nevertheless, most importantly, the targets of the PP 2041 will be attained through four instalments of FYPs, so every FYP is a means to reach the policy by the end of 2031 and 2041 (GED, 2020, p. xlii).

Furthermore, as the 8 FYP and PP 2041 align on strengthening institutions, eradicating poverty, ensuring participation and enhancing capacity, the align with the SDG goals 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 12 and 16. In simpler terms, the achievements of these goals and plans will eradicate poverty, ensure participation and employment, reduce inequality, strengthen institutions and ensure better delivery of public services, eventually leading to sustainable economic growth. Table 4.1 synthesizes the common grounds of 8FYP, SDG and PP 2041. Therefore, the 8FYP situates in the core and achieving its objectives can help achieve the SDG, which can further facilitate the process of attaining the PP 2041 (Figure 4.2).

Table 4.1: Synthesizing the 8FYP, SDG and Perspective Plan 2041

8th Five Year Plan	Sustainable Development Goals	Perspective Plan 2041
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening the capacity of the LGs for improved service delivery • Accelerating economic growth, employment generation and poverty reduction • Enhancing participation and inclusiveness and empowering every citizen to benefit from the development process fully • Ensuring sustainable use of natural resources • Development and improvement of critical infrastructures such as water supply, drainage, sanitation, and waste management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goal 1 (No Poverty) • Goal 2 (Zero Hunger) • Goal 3 (Good Health and Wellbeing) • Goal 5 (Gender Equality) • Goal 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) • Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) • Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities) • Goal 12 (Climate Action) • Goal 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieving Upper Middle-Income Country status by 2031 with the elimination of extreme poverty and achieving High Income Country status by 2041 with poverty approaching extinction. • Introduce structural changes to correct the unitary and centralized nature of the government and administration in Dhaka, where all the major decisions are taken • Investing for strengthening the institutions of decentralization • Developing a legal framework for providing a clear guideline for the local government machinery about its function, jurisdiction, taxation, finance, budget account, electoral process, and central-local and local-local relationship

Source: GED, 2020; GED, 2020; SDG Tracker, 2020.

4.2. Findings: Strategies and Challenges

The findings from the KIIs and FGDs from the research sample show that the respondents were mostly unaware of the 8FYP, so no significant strategies were not employed, keeping the objectives of it in mind. We have found that the ignorance among the local people about the 8 FYP is due to their alienation from the national government and lack of solid knowledge dissemination and integrated planning mechanism. The following sections further unpack the issues.

4.2.1. Lack of Knowledge and Dissemination of Knowledge: Leading to Information Gap and Development Laggards

Similar to the SDG and its localization, there was a significant difference among the knowledge about 8 FYP and PP 2041 elected public representatives and the filed administration officials. None of the elected local representatives demonstrated at least a fundamental understanding of 8 FYP or the PP 2041. Specifically, they had a better understanding of the SDG than the 8 FYP. Moreover, similar to the SDG, they had somewhat familiarity with the previous instalment of the FYP, i.e., the 7th FYP. Such a gap in the updated information demonstrates their significant discrepancy in knowledge from the national government. However, the field administration officials were also not very clear about the development goals of the 8 FYP and the PP 2041; they only roughly had the idea about reaching the High-Income Country status by 2041.

Such disparity of knowledge can be attributed to the absence of knowledge distribution mechanisms at the local level that poses a severe threat to achieving such development milestones. The plans are made in the center, but there is no swift mechanism to disseminate them locally, especially among the elected public representatives in the quickest possible time. They usually receive training on such contemporary issues very late and often at a time that those trainings generate significantly less or no value. Moreover, neither the existing training mechanisms are evaluated, nor the impact of the training monitored. Consequently, the public representatives do not feel motivated to localize them and integrate them into their function. For instance, one of the Upazila Vice Chairman mentioned that he received training on the SDGs but have forgotten what he has learned due to not implementing them in the activities of the Upazila. Therefore, if a quick and efficient knowledge dissemination system is not developed, the new knowledge would arrive late at the local level and implementation of them would be jeopardized, which will delay the achievement of 8 FYP and the PP 2041, especially in the remote LGs that are located far away from the national government.

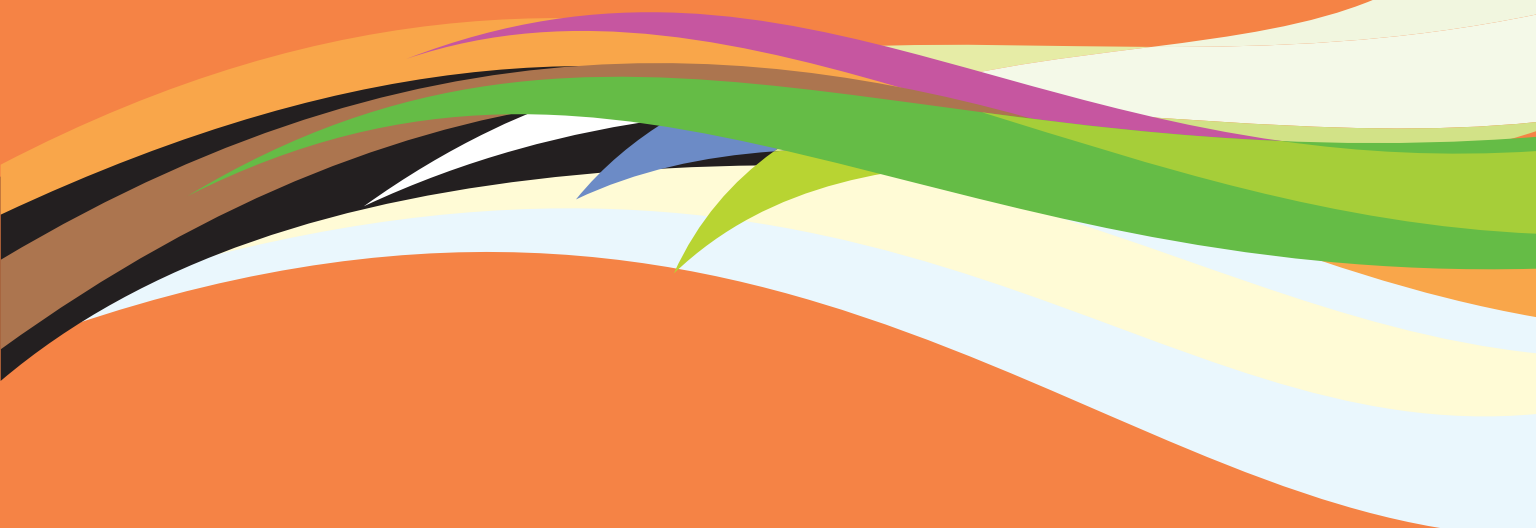
4.2.2. Absence of Integrated Planning Mechanisms: Making Plans Impossible to Achieve

Apart from disseminating knowledge, the absence of solid integrated planning that considers and resolves the tensions across policy areas makes plans and goals almost impossible to achieve. For instance, Bangladesh requires horizontal, vertical as well as spatial integrated planning at the national and local levels to achieve the targets of 8FYP; however, currently, only horizontal integration is evident in the national government that is not enough to reach the development targets. Horizontal integration refers to integration across different departments within the same level of the government. On the other hand, vertical integration integrates different levels of government and coordinate among them, and spatial integration considers the local factors and their interrelation into planning (Holden, 2012). So, in terms of Bangladesh, only horizontal integration is seen in development planning like 8FYP or localization of SDG and there is hardly any set-out rule on how the vertical integration among different tiers of local government would take place for policy success. One of the respondents, a secretary of the Upazila Parishad, said regarding the absence of vertical planning-

"We are Zila Parishad only in name. We do not know what is happening in the Upazila or in the Union Parishad? Are we supposed to be an overseeing authority or an implementing authority, or should we be abolished? - this need to be fixed first."

Therefore, there is no vertical integration which makes the activities of the LGs in achieving the objectives of development plans like 8FYP very much ambiguous. However, as the LGs are closely connected and sometimes overlapping in the jurisdiction, there is no alternative to vertically integrated planning. Even the PP 2041 acknowledge this issue (See table 4.1) and aim for providing a clear guideline for the local government to function, but there have not been any noticeable progress in this regard. Also, as different areas have different developmental needs and endemic issues, considering spatial integrated planning in the local government of Bangladesh will also facilitate the localization of SDG and achieve the prioritized SDG targets in Bangladesh.

In conclusion, from the analysis of national policy documents like 8 FYP and PP 2041 in this chapter, it is evident that the planning at the top is extremely well thought out, but due to the absence of effective knowledge dissemination infrastructure and integrated vertical and spatial integrated planning, the 8FYP is likely to face a challenge, which will eventually impact the SDG and the PP 2041.



Chapter 5

**Local Resource Mobilization: Exploring the Current Status,
Challenges and Way Forward**

Local resource mobilization in the LGIs of Bangladesh, like other developing countries, remain in a very fragile state, but such a state must be overcome to hit development milestones such as 8 FYP, SDG, and graduate to the status of an Upper-Middle Income and ultimately a High-Income Country according to the Perspective Plan 2041. In the present context of local government finance, the LGIs have significantly less capacity to mobilize their resources and rely primarily on the national government for funding, which is also inadequate (Ahmed, 2020). Therefore, the LGIs suffer from a lack of financial resources that prevent them from being more efficient as a service delivery agency and lead to poor services that ultimately result in the improper implementation of government policies at the local level. Consequently, the LGIs fail to contribute to the country's overall economic growth, which ultimately bridle Bangladesh's road to development.

However, the present status of resource mobilization can be attributed to many factors and these pose significant challenges to overcome unless the LGIs cannot be strengthened as laid out in the national development plan and LGI Acts. Therefore, this chapter aims to investigate into the issue further. Drawing on both the primary information from the field and secondary literature on Local Government finance, the chapter identifies the pathologies of local resource mobilization in Bangladesh and makes an attempt to identify the challenges lying ahead on this front. The chapter argues that the growing dependence on central government finance contributes to unclear, poor, and backdated mechanisms and practices of financial management at the different tiers of local government. Moreover, the lack of initiatives by LGIs, the public attitude towards paying tax due to poor services, limited and unskilled human resources, lack of tax efforts and the local political economy pose a significant challenges to local resource mobilization. The chapter recommends strategies to overcome the existing shortcomings.

The chapter is divided into three sections- the first section discusses the current status of local resource mobilization and its pathologies. The second section focuses on the challenges to enhance the capacity to improve the present fragile nature of the local resource mobilization to keep up with the development aspirations of the country. And lastly, the third section sketches out some ways forward for better local resource mobilization in Bangladesh.

5.1 Current Status of Local Resource Mobilization in Bangladesh

The miserable condition of the LGIs in terms of local resource mobilization can be easily identified from the discrepancy of its present and expected contribution to the country's GDP. A recent report by Ahmed (2020), LGIs contributed only 0.15% per cent of Bangladesh's GDP, but the 8 FYP aims at boosting the local government revenue to the amount of 1 per cent of the GDP. Therefore, the gap between expectation and reality is apparent, and it speaks for the current fragile nature of local resource mobilization in Bangladesh. Such status are associated with factors: the dominance of the national government over LG finance and poor financial management on the part of the LGIs. The following section further explores these phenomena.

5.1.1. Dominance of the National Government over Local Government Finance: Escalating Dependency

The LGIs in Bangladesh have increased their dependence on the national government over the years for financial resources instead of improving their capacities to mobilize their resources, making them weaker and making decentralization questionable. Data from World Bank (2019) in Figure 5.1 demonstrates the decline and stagnation of LGIs' own source revenue as a share of total government revenue. If such a trend continues, it will further weaken the institution and make the development goals unattainable.

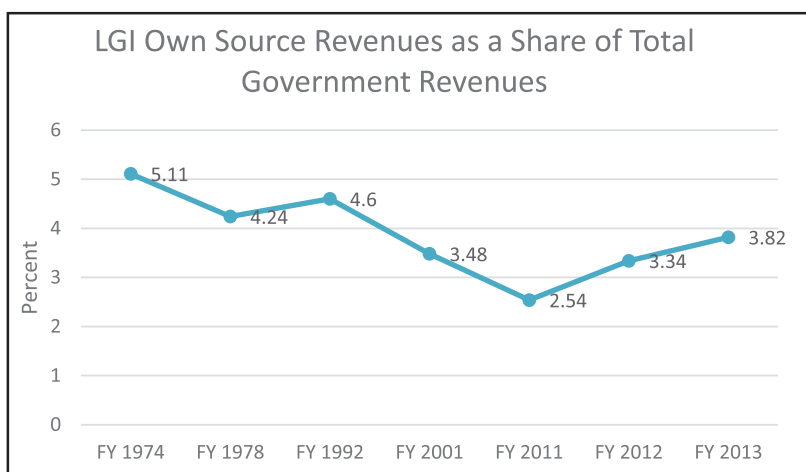


Figure 5.1: LGI Own Source Revenue as a Share of Total Government Revenues (Source: World Bank, 2019 in Ahmed, 2020)

It is to be noted that the national government is liable to some extent for this downhill state of own resource mobilization by the LGs. The primary reason is that the powerful source of revenue is controlled at the central level. The major sources of LGI's revenues include central government provided ADP block grant, intergovernmental fiscal transfer, special grants and mobilization of revenues from own sources as legally indicated dictated by the national government. However, the national government does follow an outdated formula and mechanism to transfer the resources to the LGs. Furthermore, the own source revenue usually comes from a few sources of tax, lease money, and fees (Figure 5.2 provides breakdown of LGI's resource mobilization sources). Nevertheless, these sources of income are inadequate and usually fail to generate enough revenues to deliver on their mandated functions on the one hand and decrease LGI's dependency on the national government in terms of finance. For instance, a key informant, the CEO of a Zila Parishad said that their income sources are diminishing gradually. He mentioned that the Zila Parishad used to collect tolls from several sources, which helped to mobilize their resources, but as time went by, those infrastructures were made toll free, and they eventually lost the revenue that came from those sources. Therefore, as development advances in Bangladesh, these traditional sources to mobilize resources are likely to go out of their hands, which will eventually weaken the financial base of the LGs and endanger decentralization by keeping the financial dependency curve upward.

5.1.2. Poor and Backdated Mechanisms of Financial Management: Limiting the Mobilization of Own Sourced Resources

Although the remaining sources of the LGs are inadequate and do not generate enough revenues, the poor and backdated mechanisms of financial management practices pose further challenge in this regard. Based on the information collected from the field several challenges have been identified regarding poor financial management in LGs--which are presented in Figure 5.3 below. For instance, lack of discretion of LGs to determine tax sources, old tax rates, irregular valuation or properties, weak tax effort and weak system of tax collection, unwillingness of the citizens to pay tax, improper or irregular assessment of taxes, poor tax management. At present, there is hardly any mechanism in place to make the tax assessment on a regular basis, the tax collection mechanisms remain backdated and very poorly governed. Additionally, due to the age-old tax rate due to the absence of proper tax management, the LGs fail to extract resources even from the inadequate sources which are their jurisdictions.

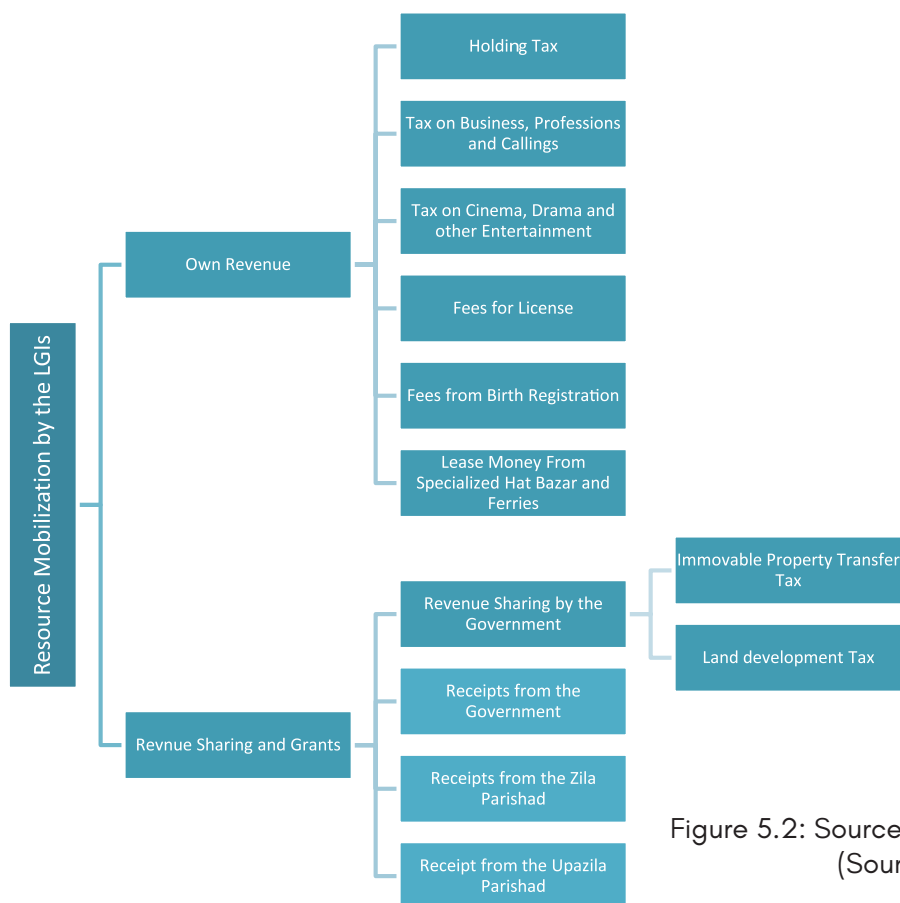


Figure 5.2: Sources of LGI's Resource Mobilization (Source: Ahmed, 2020)

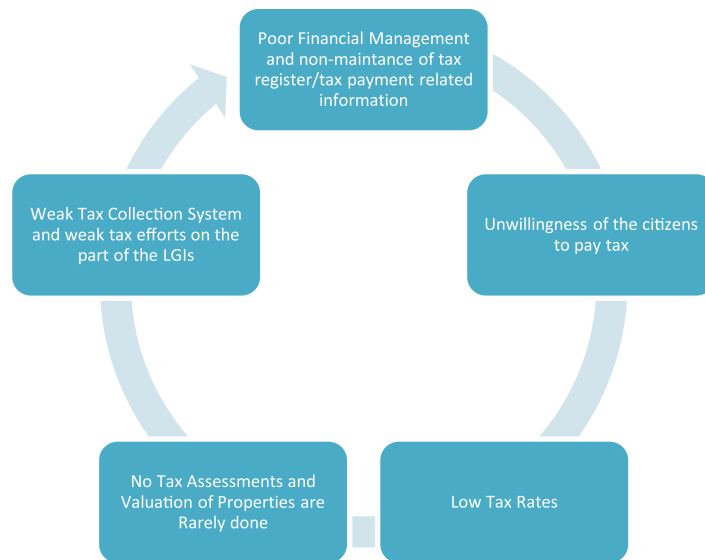


Figure 5.3: Existing Poor and Backdated Mechanisms of Financial Management in the LGs (Source: Author)

5.2. Challenges in Enhancing Local Resources Mobilization

Overcoming the existing pathologies in the LGs can be challenging and it might take long term initiative and effort to enhance local resource mobilization capacity that would involve a number of actors. From the KIIs and FDGs conducted for this research, we have identified willingness of the local residents to pay tax, inadequate initiatives by the LGs for political reasons, limited manpower and local political-economic relations posing significant challenges in generating local resource mobilization. The following section further unpacks these issues.

5.2.1. Public Attitude and Lack of Initiatives

Willingness of the citizens to pay tax and the willingness of the elected public officials to collect taxes are two important variables putting barriers to mobilization of local resources by the LGs. From the FDGs conducted at the different local government levels, it was found out that the citizens were largely dissatisfied with the services provided by the LGs, and so they had developed an attitude to justify not paying tax for the poor services they receive from the LGs. Also, they mentioned that the introduction of ICT in the LGs has complicated the process and needs more paperwork than before to receive a specific service. Moreover, they noted that the people in charge of providing these services are not qualified enough and make mistakes while performing their jobs, which further adds up to the time required to obtain a service, and the officials working at the LGs tend to put the blame on the service recipients for the mistakes they have made. Therefore, it was evident from the FDGs that people had a collective attitude towards not paying taxes. Citizens also mentioned that they largely remain unaware of what is being done with the tax that LGs collect as “nothing is done in a transparent manner”. On the other hand, elected representatives do not make their best efforts to collect taxes considering its political consequence or backlash. Besides, as the local elected representatives receive funding from the government for their LGs each financial year irrespective of effectively or judiciously they are utilizing these funds, they do not feel the need to force the public to pay taxes. Rather, they prefer to “maintain the existing status quo” for the “fear of losing popularity”. This attitude was evident during the interview with a Paurashava Mayor, he said-

“We are financially very weak since people are not willing to pay taxes. They have a mindset that I have voted you in to be the Mayor; why should we pay you our hard-earned money now? We, being the people’s representative, cannot force them to pay taxes. Forcing is the job of the civil servants, not ours”

5.2.2. Limited Manpower

Skilled and efficient manpower is essential for ensuring proper financial management in any LGI and the absence of a skilled workforce in most of the LGs poses a severe challenge to enhance own source resource mobilization. The absence of skilled and adequate manpower restricts the LGs from making tax assessment

on a regular basis and keeping a proper record of the total revenue generated and also their revenue bases. One of the Zila Parishad Chairmen expressed serious frustration regarding the lack of skilled manpower in the Parishad, which prevented him from tracking his properties' report and mobilizing own-source revenue from them. He further mentioned that due to lack of manpower, either local political elite were unlawfully possessing Zila Parishad's property, or it was difficult for him to recover the lands that had already been grabbed. The significance of the lack of manpower in the inability to mobilize own source revenue was evident in the following quote by a Zila Parishad Chairman-

"We do not need 20 people in the Parishad; only 5-6 people are enough. But we need people who are efficient and can get the job done for us"

5.2.3. Role of Local Political Economy

The local political economy is shaped mainly by the attitudes of the local elected representatives and their integrity. A journalist in the FGD shared a crucial insight in this regard. He mentioned that the local government representatives are primarily businessmen and they try to evade tax for the businesses they own while being in power, and so he loses the authority over people to force them or take initiatives to motivate them from paying taxes. Therefore, on top of the carefree attitude, the tendency of local elected representatives to evade tax using political power poses a severe threat to the overall finance of the LGIs.

5.3. What is the way forward?

Devising a way forward to overcome the shortcomings of local resources mobilization to achieve development goals within the specific time frame is hard and requires a lot of effort and political will. And significant improvement would be elusive if a substantial shift in the mindset of the people and the politicians cannot be ensured with immediate effect. However, certain recommendations can be made to pave the way to improve local resource mobilization by LGI and strengthen them.

Firstly, a revised and new formula must be devised to transfer funds from the national government to the local government. In this regard, performance indicators must be mainstreamed in providing ADP fund.

Second, an effective monitoring mechanism needs to be in place in this regard.

Third, the sources of resource mobilization for LGIs must be reviewed and updated.

Fourth, after a thorough review more sources to be assigned to the LGIs to generate revenues and some discretion may also be given to LGIs to generate local revenues from.

Fifth, skilled manpower needs to be provided to LGIs for tax collection. The officials of the LGIs need to be given proper training to motivate them to collect taxes from the local sources, on tax collection including tax management system.

Sixth, skilled manpower needs to be provided to LGIs for tax collection. The tax assessment can be done by outsourcing the task to the local youth.

Lastly, the tax rate must be based on the current market price and the location of the LGIs.

However, such a recommendation is problematic as it is likely to skyrocket the tax and create dissatisfaction among the public. Local elected representatives will also likely to oppose it. Therefore, before taking such actions, the service delivery needs to be top-notch so that public perception changes and their willingness to pay tax increases subsequently. In addition, the taxation system needs to be further simplified so that the bulk of paperwork or digital literacy does not restrict people from paying the tax.

However, it might take some time due to the nature of the local political economy. The existing imbalance of power in the local government system and lack of accountability and transparency may also be a serious challenge towards achieving excellence in service delivery. Thus, without qualitative changes in the local government system and a mental revolution to change the mindset of the people, the issue of enhancing own source revenue might be at risk and consequently threaten the development goals. Nevertheless, such excellence in service delivery can be achieved, and people's mindset can also be achieved if government takes gradual and appropriate steps on this front. It is important that the LGIs follow a carrot and stick approach in this regard whereby the highest local taxpayers in the LGI will be recognized and rewarded, and on the other hand, the local tax defaulters will also be identified, and some punitive measure will be taken against them for demonstration purposes.



Chapter 6

Assessing the Existing Mechanisms for Accountability

6.1 The Need for a Strong Accountability Mechanism in LGIs

Accountability is essential for any organization to run effectively, but a dysfunctional mechanism can also lead an organization to chaos and indiscipline eventually contributing to its goal displacement. As mentioned in the second chapter of this report, the upward and downward accountability mechanisms do not seem to function as appropriately as expected in different tiers of local government, which heavily impacts on the overall effectiveness of the LGIs as institutions. In fact, this dysfunctional or fragile nature accountability will ultimately adversely affect the achievement of the SDG and 8 FYP by the local government institutions. Therefore, without establishing a robust accountability mechanism in the local government system in Bangladesh, achievements of SDG and 8 FYP and the Vision 2041 will remain a fry cry.

The field data collected in connection with this study also testifies to the absence of a proper accountability mechanism in LGIs. The majority of the LGI's key informants were very unclear about their chain of accountability, and they mentioned multiple sources of accountability, but considering their position, they were not accountable to those sources as per their relevant laws. On the other hand, the participants in the FGDs mentioned that there was hardly any effective mechanism for them to hold elected local representatives accountable that significantly delimited their right to receive services from the LGIs. This chapter aims to analyze and answer the reasons for the present status of accountability mechanism at the four sample local government tiers, which are under the purview of this research. This chapter argues that the lack of accountability at local government depends largely on the local political economy, at the center of which resides the imbalance of power among different actors of local politics and administration, and this imbalance is to a great deal attributed to clarity in the distribution of power, local political equation, control over resource distribution and socio-cultural factors.

This chapter firstly reflects on the overall political economy at the local government of Bangladesh and constructs some scenarios of imbalance of power at the LGIs and then analyses this project's findings against the constructed scenarios. And later concludes the chapter by demonstrating how this existing imbalance of power is likely to impact on the achievement of the SDGs, goals of 8FYP, and the overall effectiveness of the LGIs.

6.2 Analyzing the Imbalance of Power in Local Government Tiers: A Political Economy Perspective

In the simplest terms, power is one individual's capacity over another to make them do what they would not have otherwise done. Therefore, in other words, the imbalance of power among two or more individuals or entities provides the more powerful one with authority over the less powerful to coerce. Moreover, the source of this authority can be legal rational (authority grounded in the law) or traditional (authority grounded in the prevailing order of the society) or a combination of both. There is no denying that when the power of different actors is not clearly specified by the legal framework and instead the power is determined by the extra-legal factors, it might then lead to difficulty in the proper functioning of any organization.

In the context of the local government system in Bangladesh, it has been observed that the balance of power among different actors often get dictated by various political-economic factors that lead to certain actors exercising their traditional authority over others, leading to a broken system of accountability and ineffective LGIs. We argue that lack of clarity in the distribution of power, local political equation, control of resource distribution and family and social background and other associated factors are responsible for the existing imbalance of power in the local government system in Bangladesh. The following section briefly reflects on these factors.

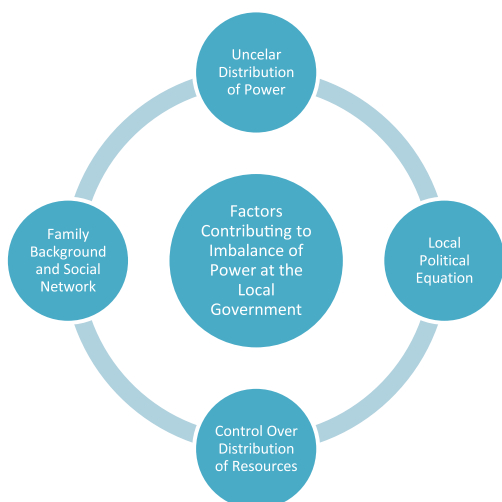


Figure 6.1: Factors of Power Imbalance at the Local Government of Bangladesh (Source: Author)

6.2.1. Lack of Clarity in the Distribution of Power: Setting Higher Ground for the Field Administration

The ambiguity in local government laws and policies often helps the field administration officials to have the upper hand over the local elected representatives in the local power game. To be precise, the control and scope of power and the mechanism to ensure accountability are not very clearly specified in the relevant laws and policies, which is difficult for most elected local representatives to understand themselves. Moreover, the elected representatives are quite apathetic towards the relevant laws. One reason for such attitude can often be their depth of academic knowledge to understand the law. Also, they often do not feel the need to update themselves to the new changes in the laws and policies, which makes them unaware of their roles in general and accountability mechanisms in particular. Instead, they follow a routine approach of an elected local government representative. However, field administration officials are very much up-to-date with the relevant laws and policies due to their relatively higher educational background than the elected representatives, close attachment with the national government, their training and indoctrination. Moreover, due to the incapacity of the local elected representatives to understand the laws, they depend on the field administration official's assistance in understanding them. As a result, the field administration officials often utilize the advantage of their technical knowledge against the elected local representatives to gain an upper hand in the power game, which also enables them to restrain from being accountable to the elected representative.

6.2.2. Local Political Equation: Controlling the Power Dynamics at the Local Level

The local political equation dictates the power relationship among different local government actors, which gives an individual/entity the authority to rule over others. The major actors in the local political equation are the MP, local elected representatives, field administration officials, and local political elite (the leaders of the local unit of the ruling political party) and a complex web of relation remain among them (Figure 2 attempts to demonstrate the complexity of the power relation). Among the actors, MP and the local political elite play the most important role (if they both hail from the same ruling political party) and both the elected representatives as well as the field administration officials try to dominate each other by making coalition with them. Therefore, the power of the local elected representatives and the field administration officials are dictated by their coalition, which shatters the accountability mechanism in the LGs as they remain accountable for enhancing their status and not for their service delivery roles.

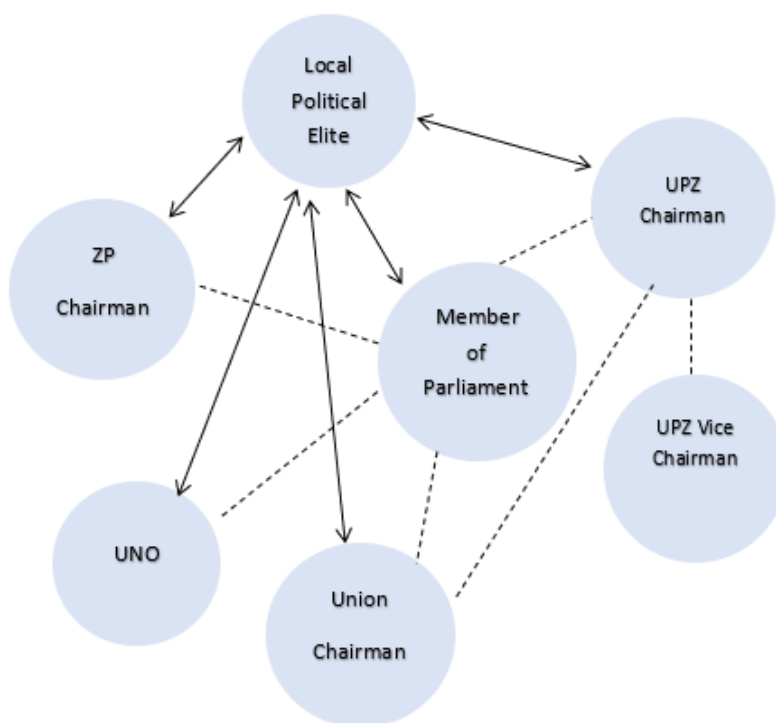


Figure 6.2: Interplay of Power among different Actors in the LGs, here solid lines denote influencing relationships, and dotted lines denote fluctuating relationships in different contexts (Source: Author)

6.2.3. Control over Resource Distribution: Might Makes Right

The local power equation establishes control over resources that further exacerbates the imbalance of power and the accountability mechanisms. As the MP and the local political elite play a significant role in the local power dynamics, they often influence the distribution of resources along with their coalition and prioritization of the projects based on their personal gain and political relations. As a result, they establish the control over the local resources, which eventually establish their indirect control over the LGs that jeopardize the legal and existing accountability mechanism.

6.2.4. Family Background and Network: Frequently Dictating the Decisions

Apart from the local political equation and control over local resource distribution, family background and social relations play a significant role in gaining power. For instance, local elected representatives, local field administration officials or a local resident can belong to a politically influential family or remain in close social relationships with influential political leader/bureaucrat(s) or can be very rich, and such a criterion can remarkably enhance their power and enhance their likelihood of influencing decisions at the LGs. Consequently, the emergence of such traditional authority in the LGI threatens the accountability mechanism and, ultimately, the efficiency of the LGs.

6.3. Imbalance of Power at the LG Tiers

Based on the sources of power and their consequent relationships, there can be several scenarios of power imbalance at different tiers of local government with different consequences. The following section briefly analyzes the scenarios which further unpack the imbalance of power at the LGs of Bangladesh (See Table 6.1).

Table 6.1: Mapped Scenarios of Power Relationship in Different LG Tiers

LG Tier	Relationship Among Relevant Actors	Consequences
1. Zila Parishad	Relationship among MP, Zila Parishad Chairman, CEO, and Local Political Elite	<p>Scenario 1.1: MP dominating the Zila Parishad Chairman</p> <p>Scenario 1.2: CEO non-cooperating with the Zila Parishad Chairman</p>
2. Upazila Parishad	Relationship among MP, Upazila Chairman, UNO, Vice Chairman, Members, Local Political Elite	<p>Scenario 2.1: Chairman dictating the UNO with help from MP and Local Elite</p> <p>Scenario 2.2: UNO dictating the Chairman with help from MP and Local political elite</p> <p>Scenario 2.3: Chairman dictating the Vice Chairmen</p> <p>Scenario 2.4: Members dictating the Chairman</p>
3. Union Parishad	Relationship among Union Chairman, Secretary, Members, Local Political Elite	<p>Scenario 3.1: Chairman dictating the members</p> <p>Scenario 3.2: Members dictating the Chairman</p> <p>Scenario 3.3: Local political elites influencing the Chairman</p>
4. Paurashava	Relationship among Mayor, Secretary/CEO, Councils, and Local MP	<p>Scenario 4.1: Lesser imbalance of power</p> <p>Scenario 4.2: MP and local elite influencing the Mayor</p>

Source: Author

6.3.1. Imbalance of Power at the Zila Parishad

The prominent actors in the Zila Parishad are the MP (who plays an advisory role to the Parishad), the Zila Parishad Chairman and the CEO. Although the Zila Parishad Chairmen have the status of a state minister, from the KII conducted with the two Zila Parishad Chairman for this study it was confirmed that the MP dominates them in distributing resources and projects despite their good or bad relation (Scenario 1.1). And the law enables the MP to exercise such power. For example, if the Chairman sends a project for approval to the ministry without consulting the MP, the MP holds the power to withhold it through a “DO letter” if it is conflicting with his interest.

On the other hand, if the relationship between the CEO and the Chairman is good, the functioning of the Zila Parishad becomes smoother. However, if their relationship is bad, the CEO can exert power over the Chairman by his network (Scenario 1.2). For example, the CEO can delay sending project proposals to the ministry for approval and his network of administrative cadre officials at the ministry can further linger the process of getting approval which hampers the functioning of the Zila Parishad. Also, the Zila Parishad Chairman, being a politically elected individual needs to keep the request of the local political elites as well as his Parishad members, but such actions are influenced more by a patron–client relationship than any other factor.

6.3.2. Imbalance of Power at the Upazila Parishad

The MP, who acts as an adviser to the Parishad, the Upazila Chairman, Vice Chairman, Members, UNO, and the local political elites all contribute to the power game, and the power dynamics may appear very complex with the interactions and power relations among all these actors. For instance, if the Chairman belongs to the same political party and the same bloc as the MP and the local elite (Scenario 2.1), they make a coalition, and often in the presence of such a coalition, balance of power naturally shifts in favour of the MP and the UNO has to carry on his duties amid such a situation of severe power imbalance and quite often than not UNO faces pressure while discharging their duties. Nevertheless, the MP and local political elites tend influence the allocation of resources and prioritization and granting of development projects despite the good relationship and does not leave it all to the Parishad.

In another scenario, if the Chairman belongs to a different political party or a different bloc of the same political party (Scenario 2.2), the UNO tends to lean toward them and makes coalition that causes an imbalance of power between the UNO the Chairman. Moreover, in the present administrative context of Bangladesh, the UNOs often remain a sympathizer to the ruling political party which further boost their power in the local scene and as he also tend to establish political control, the tension gets intensified. In other words, the political background gives the UNO traditional authority on the top of his legal rational authority. Thus, in such a scenario, the UNO does not remain accountable to the Chairman anymore, which can cause serious conflict among them and consequently, the functioning of the Parishad gets hampered. The Case study 6.1 from a prominent daily of Bangladesh provides a glimpse into the complex political relationships in the Upazila Parishad.

Furthermore, within the same scenario (Scenario 2.2), even if the political equation and coalition building is eliminated, there always remain a ‘tug of war’ of power between the UNO and the Chairman, which is evident in the recent High Court decision. To be specific, the Upazila Parishad Chairman Association (BUPA) filed a writ with the High Court challenging the section 33 of the Upazila Parishad (1998) Act that enables the UNO with the role of providing the Parishad with secretarial assistance only. They filed this case to reclaim their power since, according to them, different gazette notifications have diluted their power and made the UNO supreme authority of the Upazila over the years. Moreover, the high court verdict on the September 14 of 2021 also directed the government to instruct the UNOs to provide assistance and necessary advice to the Upazila Parishad Chairmen throughout the country in exercising their executive power (The Daily Star, September 14, 2021). However, as per the KII with the Upazila Chairman for this study, the situation have not been any better even after the High Court’s decision.

Case Study 6.1: Upazila Chairman Assaulted by MP

In the Gurudashpur Upazila of Natore, the Upazila chairman was physically assaulted by the Member of Parliament for not pledging allegiance to him (MP), although they both belonged to the same party, the ruling Bangladesh Awami League. According to a news published in the Daily Prothom Alo on the 6th of February, 2021, the MP, his son and brother in law might have influenced the incident of beating, as the Upazila Chairman did not support the Chairman candidate in the Municipality election who belonged to the MP's bloc. Instead, he supported the rebel candidate from the same party (Bangladesh Awami League). According to the report, as the rebel candidate whom the Upazila Chairman supported won, the MP influenced this incident as a demonstration of his power and domination over the local government structure. Furthermore, the local unit of the Awami League (local political elite) took the side of the Upazila Chairman and not the MP.

(Source: Prothom Alo; February 6, 2021)

Moreover, as the vice chairmen's role has not been clearly specified in the law and they do not have any signatory power and so, the Chairman and the UNO usually tend to dominate them. However, if the vice-chairman belongs to a different political party or different political bloc of the same political party as the Chairman, the power gap becomes so high that the opinions of the vice-chairmen are hardly considered (Scenario 2.3).

In another scenario, Union Parishad Chairmen who act as the voting member of Upazila Parishad can establish dominance over the Chairman due to the power of network. If the relation between the Upazila and Union Chairman are not good, the union Chairmen can create a syndicate and non-cooperate with the Upazila Chairman. For example, they can intentionally delay the process of approval of the schemes or even take the decision in their favour at their will making the Upazila Parishad irrelevant in this process. Moreover, although it has been mentioned that the MP plays the role of most powerful actor, there remains a latent clash among them for establishing dominance and the MP exploits this imbalance of power among Upazila Chairman and Union Chairmen to establish further dominance over the Upazila Chairman (Scenario 2.4). Furthermore, in a similar manner, the members of the Parishad can also prioritize and approve their projects in the Parishad due to their close connection with the Upazila Chairman.

6.3.3. Imbalance of Power at the Union Parishad

The Union Parishad Chairman, Secretary, members, and local political elite participate in the power game at the Union Parishad. The Chairman possesses more power than the members and dominates over the members (Scenario 3.1) and may take favourable projects and sometimes be influenced by the local political elite who works as a support base for the Chairman (Scenario 3.2). On the other hand, a member can have an influential social network or wealth that can enhance the overall existing power of all the members. Such a phenomenon may lead to a conflict among the Chairman and the members if the Chairman becomes too dominating (Scenario 3.3).

6.3.4. Imbalance of Power at the Paurashava

The key actors in the Paurashava are the Mayor, the Secretary, and the councilors. Here, the imbalance of power remains very minimal between the Chairman and the Secretary, as he does not belong to a cadre service. Neither does he possess a strong network or expertise. Also, there remains balance of power among the Mayor and the Members. Therefore, the power balance of power remains comparatively stable in the Paurashava (Scenario 4.1). However, the MP, not being in any official role, often influences the Mayor in some decisions regarding taking and granting projects, as he remains at the top of the power chain. It is not possible to become a Paurashava Chairman without the support of the MP (Scenario 4.2). Also, being from the same political party, the Mayor often needs to consider the request of the local elite, but it is more based on a quid-pro-quo relationship or relationship of mutual dependence.

Furthermore, due to the unclear and sometimes overlapping jurisdictions of the different tiers of the local government and over-complicated power equations in the local level, some incident out of these mapped scenarios can possibly occur that involve different LGIs and an array of actors. The case 6.2 presents such a unique but possible scenario of imbalance of power in the local government of Bangladesh.

Case Study 6.2: A Mayhem of Politics and Administration in Barisal

The Barisal City Corporation Mayor, who holds the status of a state minister belonged to a different bloc of the same party than the MP. And had a distance between him and the field administration, his family influence gave him an upper hand in the local power game. On the other hand, MP of the constituency where the City Corporation belonged, were a full minister and hailed from another bloc who had a better relationship with the field administration. So, belonging two different blocs caused a tension of power and dominance between them. The problem arose when people from the City Corporation and the Mayor's bloc entered the Upazila Complex without permission at night and started to tear down the banners and festoons with the MPs name on that. They were hanged to commemorate the national mourning day on the 15th of August. However, when the UNO came to know about it, he requested them to leave the complex at night and told them to do the 'clean up' the next morning. However, the issue was not resolved and more people from the City Corporation Mayor's bloc started to rush to the complex. As a result, the UNO ordered the Ansar men appointed for his security to open fire and consequently, a significant number of Mayor's men were wounded. And later, police came and charged baton to the mob. As a result of the incident, the UNO and the police filed 2 cases against 94 people and the Mayor was the prime accused for the violence. The Bangladesh Civil Service Association also published a statement severely condemning the event and the cabinet secretary also denounced it. However, the statement was later taken down. On the other hand, different units of the party criticized the incident since, according to them, such clash did not require open fire.

(Source: Prothom Alo, 19 August 2021; Dhaka Tribune, August 20, 2021; The Business Standard, November 5, 2021)

6.4. Findings from the Field: Comparing the Scenarios

6.4.1. Zila Parishad

Both Scenarios 1.1 and 1.2 were evident in the Zila Parishads from the sample. In both the Zila Parishads MP played a dominating role and greatly influenced the Parishad's working. Despite having the status of a state minister, there apparently existed a significant power gap, and both the Chairmen seemed frustrated with the excessive intervention of the MP in the Parishad affairs. One of the Chairman mentioned that Zila Parishad Chairman would be very much hated in the local politics if they attempt to challenge the status quo of the MP. To quote one of the respondents,

"They have honoured us with a seat; thus, we sit here; we have no power or whatsoever against the Member of the Parliament."

On the other hand, one of the Zila Parishad Chairmen mentioned that his previous CEO was so evil that it was next to impossible for him to do business as usual. Also, he said that he had to keep the request of his members, local political elites from Zila Awami League, DC, and SP into consideration from time to time, which does not allow them to function freely. A Zila Parishad Chairman indicating his incapacity said-

"They have tied our hands and feet together and then threw us in the river to swim."

6.4.2. Upazila Parishad

In the sample Upazila Parishads, Scenario 2.1 and 2.3 were evident. In both the Upazilas, the Chairman and the MP belonged to the same bloc of the same political party, so they had a better relationship. However, their coalition, in one of the Upazila Parishads, put the UNO in a critical situation. The UNO mentioned that the Chairman and the MP direct her, and if she challenges the status quo, it will be very difficult for her to be in the same station for a significant period. On the other hand, in another Upazila, the Chairman was a businessman and remained mostly in Dhaka. So the financial status of the Chairman further elevated the status of Chairman and gave the UNO an impetus to keep good relation with the Chairman. On the other hand, since the Chairman remained mostly in Dhaka, he did not intervene in the work of the UNO and the UNO also formed a good relationship with the MP and the local political elite, so the power imbalance in the Upazila was not very flagrant.

In both the Upazila Parishads, despite hailing from the same political party, the vice chairman was vulnerable due to the lack of their signatory power. One of the vice-chairman labelled them as “Nidhiram Sarder” (A Bengali Idiom translated as soldiers without weapons) who have to depend on the mercy of the Chairman and UNO. Also, in one of the Upazilas, a woman vice-chairman belonging to a different party was further suppressed due to her political background. Case 6.2 further reflects on her issue.

Case Study 6.3: Power Imbalance Intersected with Gender Dimensions

The vice chairman (woman) of one of the sample Upazila had a serious dispute with the Chairman due to hailing from different political parties, which was further intensified by the power imbalance in the Upazila. The female Chairman supported BNP (although she was suspended from her party as she took part in the election while her party boycotted the election) and her divergent political ideology resulted in a bitter relationship with the Chairman and the male vice chairman hailing from the ruling Awami League. The UNO was also not very fond of her due to her political background, and the Chairman and the UNO made a very good nexus, and thus she was often sidelined in the affairs of the Upazila.

As per her interview, the UNO and Chairman indulged in severe corruption in buying sports equipment for the Upazila, and when she asked for two footballs for the local sporting clubs, she was rejected, saying, “What is the need for footballs for women? Ask for Saree or bangles, we will give you that.” The Vice-Chairman then started to speak in the monthly meeting about their previously alleged corruption in buying the sports equipment, and both the UNO and the Chairman rejected her claim as fake and forced her to apologize for her behaviour. The woman Chairman took the matter to the DC, and the DC later asked the UNO to show cause about the incident, which further intensified the bitterness among them. As a result, her husband was beaten by the Chairmen’s men, and the project implemented officer (PIO), who was a woman, was also involved in it. To quote her, *“I am in a very vulnerable position due to my political identity and the power imbalance, and when a woman (referring to the PIO) becomes enemy to another woman- the whole thing becomes a nightmare!”*

6.4.3. Union Parishad

The imbalance of power in the sample Union Parishads of this study was significantly low and somewhat absent. No conflict among the Chairman and members and secretary were observed. However, one of the members in the Union Parishad mentioned the influence of local elites and the Chairman in prioritizing potential projects and sending them to the Upazila Parishad in some instances, which refers to scenarios 3,1 and 3.3.

6.4.4. Paurashava

Both scenario 4.1 and 4.2 was evident in the sample Paurashavas. No abnormal imbalance of power was observed, and the secretaries played their official roles. However, the MP played a significant influencing role in the functioning of the Paurashava, and one of the Mayors avowedly admitted it. He said-

“We belong to the same party and same block, and I am here for his blessing; why should not I listen to what he tells me to do?”

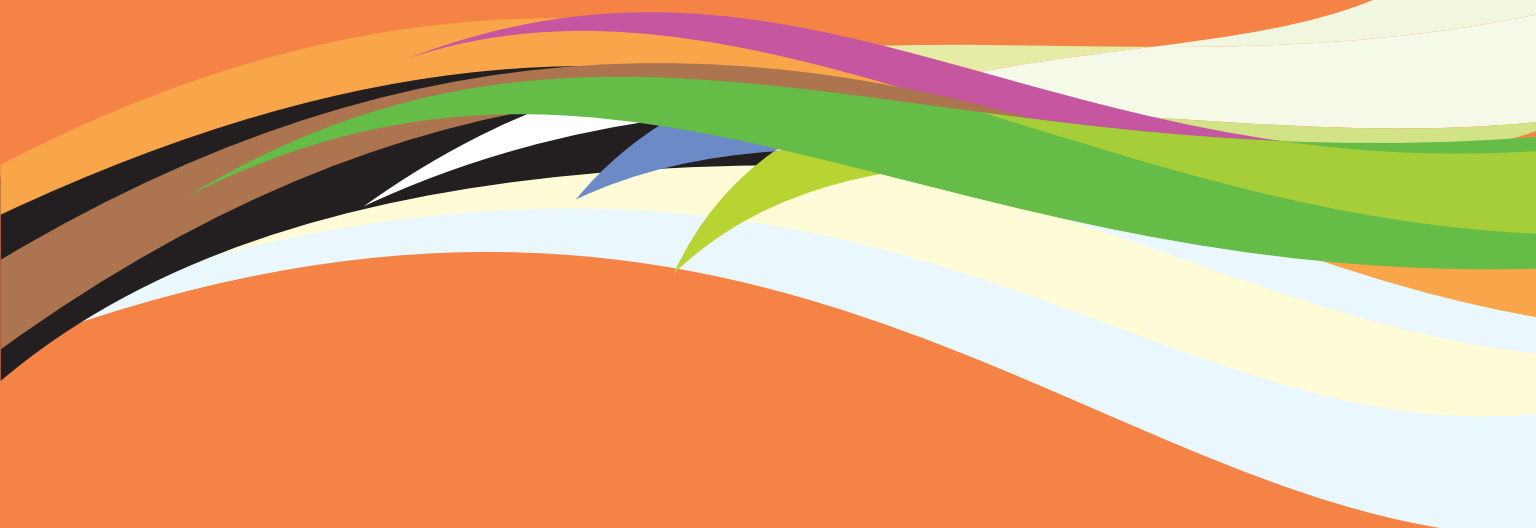
Table 6.2 sums the findings from the sample local government tiers of the study based on the scenario constructed in Table 6.1.

Table 6.2: Scenarios of Power Relationship in Different LG Tiers (Findings)

LG Tier	Relationship Among Relevant Actors	Consequences	Research Findings
1. Zila Parishad	Relationship among MP, Upazila Chairman, CEO, and Local Political Elite	Scenario 1.1: MP dominating the Zila Parishad Chairman	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
		Scenario 1.2: CEO non-cooperating with the Zila Parishad Chairman	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2. Upazila Parishad	Relationship among MP, Upazila Chairman, UNO, Vice Chairman, Members, Local Political Elite	Scenario 2.1: Chairman dictating the UNO with help from MP and Local Elite	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
		Scenario 2.2: UNO dictating the Chairman with help from MP and Local political elite	
		Scenario 2.3: Chairman dictating the Vice Chairmen	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
		Scenario 2.4: Members dictating the Chairman	
3. Union Parishad	Relationship among Union Chairman, Secretary, Members, Local Political Elite	Scenario 3.1: Chairman dictating the members	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
		Scenario 3.2: Members dictating the Chairman	
		Scenario 3.3: Local political elites influencing the Chairman	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
4. Paurashava	Relationship among Mayor, Secretary/ CEO, Councils, and Local MP	Scenario 4.1: Lesser imbalance of power	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
		Scenario 4.2: MP and local elite influencing the Mayor	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Source: Author

From the above discussion, it is apparent that the accountability mechanism in the local government is based on the local political-economic power relations and not based on some solid formal mechanisms; therefore, the efficiency of the LGs differs from place to place. And in most cases, the absence of a solid mechanism for ensuring accountability weakens the LGs and deviate them from their goal, which poses a significant threat for localizing SDG and reaching the SDG targets, 8 FYP, and the overall goal vision 2041. The concluding chapter will provide recommendations to strengthen the accountability mechanism and the LGs so that the development goals can be attained with less difficulty.



Chapter 7

Participation in the Local Government: Citizen and Women Engagement Perspectives

Despite gender, religion or economic status, effective local governments provide one of the most important avenues for people, i.e., the opportunity to participate in the development of their communities and influence the decision-making processes that directly impact their lives. Since LGs work very closely with the people, ensuring participation in the LGs works as a bottom-up feedback loop in the national policy-making process. Thus, in recognition of such importance of participation in the functioning of LGs, several acts have been revised within 2009–10 to establish a strong, participatory and democratic local government. In addition, a Right to Information (RTI) Act was enacted in 2009 to empower the citizens to ensure transparency and accountability of the public sector. Likewise, the 8FYP also plans to enhance participation and inclusiveness and empower every citizen to fully benefit from the development process. Therefore, development cannot be inclusive if participation is not ensured from a bottom-up perspective.

Moreover, in a country like Bangladesh, where variables like gender, education, social class, or religion play a vital role in shaping people's mindset and roles in society, ensuring participation is more challenging even though there are legal mandates. And women become the worst sufferer of these issues. However, since half of the Bangladeshi population is women, it is impossible to conceptualize the achievement of development targets like 8FYP, SDG and PP 2041 without women participation. Consequently, this chapter aims to understand the state of overall participation in the LGs to identify the shortcoming so that they can be eradicated for enhancing the effectiveness of the local government in Bangladesh. The chapter finds that the level of participation remains at a relatively higher level at the Union Parishad and Paurashava and the participation of women in the LGs is mostly ornamental due to patriarchy and inadequate knowledge. The chapter is divided into two major parts; the first part examines the existing mechanisms of participation at the LGs and triangulates them with the field's data. And the next section reflects the unsatisfactory status of women participation in the LGs.

7.1. Status of People's Participation in the LGs

The status of people's participation in different tiers of local government in Bangladesh is not equally satisfactory and, the level of participation varies from one LGI to another within the same tier. Moreover, the absence of legal provisions or the lack of enforcement of whatever legal provisions exist hold back people's participation in some cases. The following section reflects on the status of participation in the four sample tiers of Local Government in this research.

7.1.1. Citizen Participation in the Zila and Upazila Parishad

Both the Zila and the Upazila share a somewhat similar character in ensuring citizen participation. In the case of Zila Parishad, there is currently no legal mechanism to ensure citizen participation. On the other hand, according to rule 7 of the Upazila Parishad Budget (Preparation and Approval) Rules 2010, there are provisions for ensuring citizen participation in the approval of the Upazila Parishad budget. The rule sets out some standards, such as uploading the draft budget on the Upazila Parishad website and discussing it with critical stakeholders, but they are not clearly and systematically specified. However, these provisions in reality exist only in theory and seldom being followed, which was also experienced in the two Upazila of the sample. However, all the Zila Parishad had social media (only facebook) pages or profile to ensure participation, but those pages' efficacy was questionable as the majority of the local people had a minimal idea about them. Roughly seventy percent of the respondents who took part in the FGD did not have a Facebook account, and so they were cut off from the only participatory mechanism that exists at the Zila and Upazila level.

7.1.2. Citizen Participation in the Union Parishad

The Union Parishad has the most satisfactory mechanism of all the LGs, but as per evidence from the field, their role in ensuring participation can be called into question. Ward Shava and Open Budget meetings are two of the mechanisms of participation that exist in the Union Parishad. As per the law, ward shavas are to be held twice a year with the presence of 5 per cent voters of the ward that is supposed to ensure bottom-up planning. On the other hand, open budget meetings are legally required to be conducted once a fiscal year. However, from the FGDs, it was found that the LGs were not very interested in holding these meetings and similarly, people were apathetic in attending them. The respondents from the FGD mentioned that there is very little opportunity for them to voice their opinion as the meetings are usually dominated by the elected representatives and political elite. They further noted that only people who are invited go to these meetings, and only the people close to the elected representatives and ruling elites are invited in these meetings. Interestingly, among 15 people, that participated in the FGD at the Union level, only three of the participants (one male and two female) informed that they went to these meetings, and as per their introduction at the beginning of the FGD, they mentioned that they were in some way associated with the politics of the local wing of the ruling party.

7.1.3. Citizen Participation in the Paurashava

The Paurashavas do not have any legal mechanism to ensure citizen participation, but as evidence suggests, the nature of ensuing participation was better than the Zila and Upazila Parishads. Paurashavas usually has two committees to ensure accountability: TLCC (Town Level Coordination Committee) And WLCC (Ward Level Coordination Committee), comprising actors from different levels. A TLCC comprises a maximum of 50 members and is headed by the mayor and represented by all councillors and representatives of local stakeholders. It is mandatory that one-third of TLCC members are women, while the poor in the community must be represented by at least seven members, including two women. On the other hand, A WLCC is a forum where community members can raise issues regarding local development and social concerns. A WLCC meets every three months and is composed of 10 members. However, due to the absence of the legal bindings, these meetings are not held regularly, and a similar picture was seen in the sample Paurashavas. Furthermore, the formulation of such committees automatically results in an alienation from the common people as being in the committee creates a tension of power between the common people and the committee members, and so the voice of the common people is likely to be remained unheard.

7.2. Status and Challenges of Women in Participation in the LGIs

The overall the status of women is not near satisfactory in the LGIs both in terms of an insider and an outsiders perspective mainly due to legal limitations. From an insider's perspective, the Upazila Vice Chairman are the most neglected within the Parishad. Since they do not have any signatory power, they cannot participate in the decision making; and although there remains a tension between the UNO and Chairman, they keep the women vice chairmen in the dark due to her lack of power. For instance, all except one female elected local government representative agreed that their opinion is taken into consideration while making decisions. Still, they failed to provide any specific evidence of the reflection of their opinion in the LGI's decisions.

Moreover, the legal mechanisms were not being followed in the sample LGIs. For instance, as per the law, 3 and 30 percent of the ADP should be utilized by women and for women but no evidence of such allocation of resources was not seen in the sample LGIs. On the other hand, as per the law, as the women members in all the LGIs are given the charge of more area than their male counterparts, they get over burdened with activities and, consequently, fail to fulfill their duties. Such systematic incapability also diminishes public support of them over the years.

From an outsider's perspective, the local women had minimal opportunity to participate in the decision-making process and data from the field shows that Women Development Forums was inactive in the sample LGIs. Also, the women did not participate in the LGI affairs due to their poor service delivery experience. For example, the women participants in the FDG agreed that the possibility of receiving service for an individual decrease if she is a woman and poor. So they cannot even conceptualize that their voices will be heard in the affairs of the LGI. Consequently, they feel no need to participate in the affairs of the local government through Ward Shava. The following case extracted from one of the FGDs depicts the vulnerability of women in the LGIs.

Case: Services for Women: Intersection of Power, Poverty and Gender

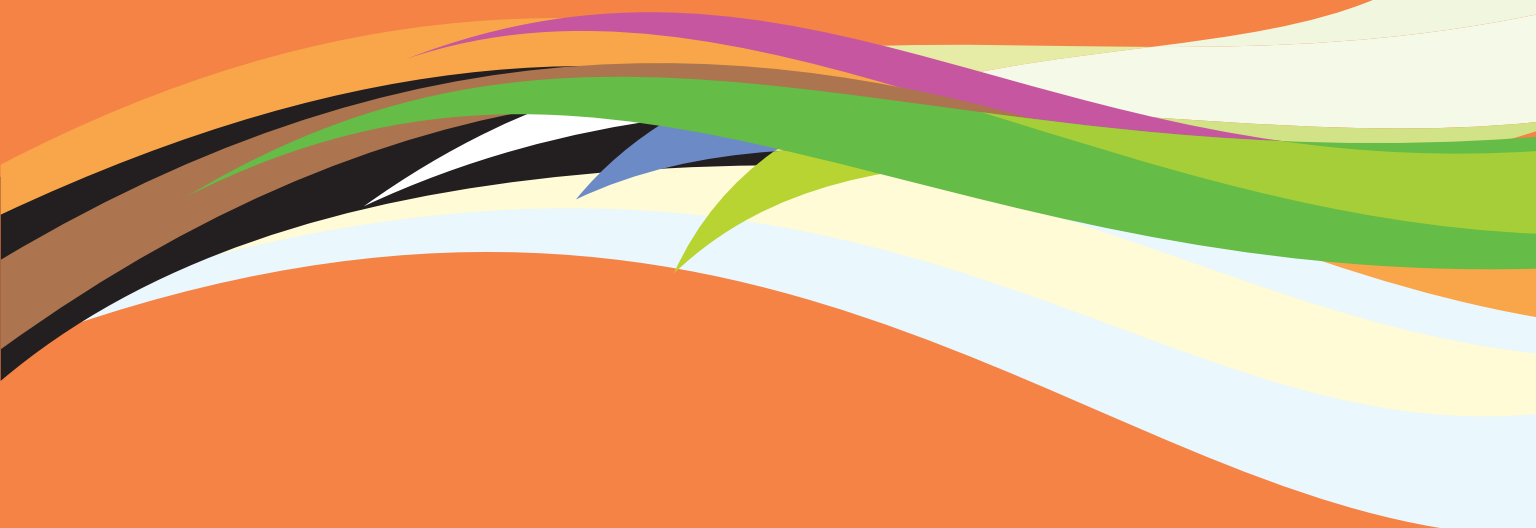
A participant in one of the FGDs shared this story of her neighbour. She said it is very difficult to receive ones entitled service if the person does not have any network at the LGIs. And the possibility of receiving the service becomes more troublesome if the service recipient is a woman without a network. One of her neighbours had to walk from one door to another at the Paurashava for 15 days for the money of social safety net for pregnant mothers and had to climb the steep stairs of the Paurashava multiple times every day during pregnancy. Moreover, as she was uneducated, filling up different forms and producing too much paperwork added an extra burden on her.

Apart from the legal limitations, the main reason for such non-participation and submissive mindset of both the women members and local women can be attributed to the dominance of patriarchy and lack of education.

Firstly, patriarchy is so deeply rooted in Bangladesh, especially in rural areas that women do not feel the necessity to raise their voices. Also, similarly, the men do not feel the necessity to consider their opinion. And this attitude also reflects in the LGIs. One of the male local elected representatives even mentioned that they ensure women participation just because it is mentioned in the law. Therefore, women's participation cannot be properly ensured unless this mindset is changed. Moreover, women also conform to these patriarchal standards due to their economic backwardness compared to their male counterparts and improvement of their financial status will also be a catalyst to enhance their participation and economic empowerment can also facilitate the process of changing the mindsets.

Secondly, despite the inadequate avenue of participation, local women usually do not have the education and skill to properly present their needs, so their voices remain unheard. Such a lack of skill was also evident among the elected local representatives. For instance, one of the female local government representatives was so nervous that during the interview that she could barely talk, although a very congenial environment was set, and the male members of that LGI were interviewed before her in the same setting. Therefore, quality education for women is necessary for women that align with SDG goal 4 and lead to changing women's mindset and economic development that works as a positive force towards minimizing patriarchy. Consequently, SDG goals 5 (Gender Equality), 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and 10 (Reduced Inequalities) get ensured in the process.

In Conclusion, the participation at the local government of Bangladesh remains at below satisfactory level and significant changes in the laws should be made that is also suggested in the 8FYP and PP 2041. However, the imbalance of power in the LGIs and the absence of proper accountability mechanisms put a big question mark towards ensuring accountability even after amendments in the laws. Moreover, ensuring women participation also seems to be a lengthy process as its roots, such as patriarchy, educational and economic backwardness, cannot be ensured in a very short time, which significantly threatens the achievement of the development targets set forth for 2041.



Chapter 8

Policy Recommendations

Despite some progress in the LG sector, Local government institutions (LGIs) in Bangladesh have been burdened with many issues and challenges to improve local public services delivery and ensure good governance at the local level as explained in different chapters of this report. Based on the analysis in different chapters following policy recommendations can be made:

8.1. Clarify functional assignments for LG Tiers

The legal assignment of functions and expenditure responsibilities to LG Tiers remains unclear due to a fragmented legal framework, and there is a considerable gap between legally assigned functions and their actual capacity to perform their functions. The “finance follows functions” rule of decentralisation is not followed through and there are a lot of unfunded mandates given to all LG tiers. For each tier of local government, there is a separate legal framework. Some of the provisions of these legal frameworks are overlapping and assignment of functions is not clear. For instance, the function of leasing water bodies is given to Upazila and municipalities by law. Although there is an official demarcation of boundaries between Upazila and municipalities, they often share very close territorial jurisdictions. In fact, municipalities are located within a boundary of Upazila, and at times unclear boundaries confuse these local government entities.

LGIs cannot perform their mandated service delivery functions due to a shortage of resources—both finance and manpower. For instance, Union Parishads are assigned 39 mandatory functions but their capacity to generate own source revenue is generally weak due mainly to shortage of manpower and on the other hand, UP’s tax effort in general appears to be poor due to “popular local political considerations” of the elected representatives. In addition, UPs assign only one secretary who takes care of all the administrative functions. Recently, a new position called “Assistant Accountant cum Computer Operator (AACO)” has been created and given to all UPs. Despite this, UPs manpower position is not adequate by any standard considering their local service delivery mandates.

8.2. Enhance the revenue discretion and fiscal transfer from national government to LGIs

LGIs are given limited revenue discretion under the current LGI framework. LGIs can only collect revenues from the sources indicated by the national government under the law. They do not have the authority to look for alternative tax bases. Even within the limited discretion, LGIs currently have limited capacity to effectively collect the revenues from the sources assigned to them. In addition, LGIs receive limited funds compared to their actual needs under the current inter-governmental fiscal transfer system. Inadequate funding is indeed a major constraint on the ability of LGIs to deliver effectively on their mandated functions.

8.3. Enhance the opportunities for citizen’s participation and focus on accountability

A major challenge in the current local government system is limited opportunities for meaningful participation of local citizens and weak upward and downward accountability. There is a wide consensus today that a more devolved and effective local government system is crucial for making development agenda more pro-poor, widening citizen’s participation in decision making, and ensuring that resources are directed to where they are most needed, thereby increasing allocative efficiency.

8.4. Address manpower rationalisation aspect in UPs, UZPs ZPs and Paurashavas

The shortage of manpower in LG Tiers seriously constrains their activities. This disadvantage is particularly prevalent more in rural LG Tiers than in urban LG Tiers. The staffing level of Union Parishad (UP), which essentially consists of a single UP secretary and the recently provided AACO, greatly constrains the ability of the UP to deliver services. At the Upazila level, UZPs need additional manpower to undertake service delivery functions that are assigned by the UZP Act. Adding manpower for ZP, UZPs will certainly make a difference for enhancing the level of service delivery. Increasing core staff appointed by ZP and UZPs will also support the Parishad (Council) in performing the ZP’s and UZP’s executive functions, and assist in the monitoring and reporting on services delivered in the ZPs and UZPs by branch offices of the national government agencies. In contrast, the issue of manpower in municipalities is different from that in Unions and Upazilas. For smaller municipalities (B- and C-ranked), the existing manpower requirement shown in the municipality organograms may be exaggerated in comparison to actual needs of those municipalities. As municipalities are largely funded from their own revenues, excessive spending on administrative staff may cause a problem because this would result in allocating fewer resources for municipal services and would reduce the value for money that municipal taxpayers receive. Municipalities’ manpower position and organograms should therefore be reviewed and properly rationalized.

8.5. Ensure more efficient and effective resource mobilization at the local level

In recent years, government has undertaken initiatives for both the rural and urban tiers of LGs with a view to motivate them mobilizing their own source revenues by linking their tax efforts with some performance measures. These measures have helped raising LG's revenues. The major revenue sources for LGs include property tax and other non-tax revenues that were not assessed or collected earlier based on any systematic and rigorous valuation methods. While greater economic development will permit the use of formal value-based taxation systems in the future, there are many other conditions that need to be fulfilled for an effective local tax system. Those conditions may include autonomy of LG's in selecting local tax sources and bases, accurate household statistics, commitment and willingness of local representatives to collect taxes, and transparency in the local tax system. Enhancing capacity to mobilise local resources will require addressing all constraining factors that may derive from existing social, economic, political, and administrative and legal factors. In this connection, training efforts must be undertaken for LGI functionaries. Those training programmes should include both technical aspects of tax assessment and administration and also awareness-raising activities among local tax payers in order to stimulate their willingness to pay taxes.

8.6. Clarify the roles of different stakeholders to ensure balance of power

There is a clear lack of clarity in the distribution of roles. The existing conflict between the UNO and Upazila Chairman derives first from the lack of clarification of role of the UNO. In the previous UZP, the UNO used to serve as the secretary of the Upazila Chairman. Thus the Upazila Chairman, when elected, had a perception that they would be able to play an upper hand role over the UNO, who would play the subordinate role. It was mostly expected that the bureaucracy would work under the elected representatives in a democratic form of local governance. However, after taking the oath of the office, the Upazila Chairmen realized that their prediction was not right. Instead, the UNO tries to influence the decision making process. In fact, Article, 33 of the UZP Act 2009 states that 'the UNO will act as the secretary of the Parishad'. However, the problem emanates from the fact that the term 'Secretary' has not been well-defined. The UNOs explain that the UNO office will provide all sorts of secretarial services required by the UZP. However, she/he is not obliged to play the role of the Secretary as was played by the UNOs during the previous UZP system. On the other hand, UZCs want the UNO to play the subordinate role of typical Secretary of the UZP. It is important to understand that there should be a proper balance of power between the locally elected public representatives and the locally deputed government officials. Some recent incidences which took place in a number of local government institutions in Bangladesh have brought this crucial reality into the fore. There is no denying that striking such a balance is a challenge but it is important that the policy debate is broad-based and well-informed before reforms are made to the political organization of local government institutions in Bangladesh. Existing reality suggests that ensuring greater checks and balances at the local level by balancing between the power and authority of the elected representatives and deputed officials should be on the top of the reform agenda today along with aspect such ensuring accountability of all local government stakeholders and the more effective representation of women and other disadvantaged groups.

8.7. Make the LG office holders familiar with SDGs and the Goals of the 8FYP

It was found out during the field visits that the public representatives and the government officials deputed at the local government institutions do not have adequate knowledge and understanding about the SDGs and the goals of the thrust sectors mentioned in the 8FYP. Particularly, the elected representatives were found to be lagging behind in terms of their knowledge about these goals. Given the above, it is important for the government to organize as many training programmes/workshops as possible for the LG stakeholders particularly the elected representatives in order to orient them towards SDGs and goals of the 8FYP. The local elected representatives need to have the motivation to make the local level plans in line with the SDGs and 8FYP and also undertake schemes and projects which would help them achieve our development milestones. The progress being made by the LGs in reaching the development targets need to be monitored on a regular basis if Bangladesh is to achieve the targets of SDGs and goals of 8FYP.

8.8. Ensure regular monitoring to oversee the implementation of the existing legal provisions for LGs

Government needs to make that it develops a well-functioning mechanism to monitor the implementation status of the current legal provisions suggested for different tiers of local government. This should be a continuous process whereby government would make an assessment of the progress made on this front on a regular basis and also try to identify the bottlenecks in implementing the politically or administratively sensitive provisions of the law and also adopt effective strategies to implement those to ensure efficient functioning of LGs and also bring expected order in LGs so that these institutions can meaningfully contribute to the achievement of the development goals of the country.



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