Challenges of Local Governance: A Study on New Upazila Administration in Bangladesh

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Abstract: *Bangladesh is one of the most governance deficit countries of the world. In this reality, Upazila system, as an intermediate tier local government unit, is reintroduced under the Upazila Parishad Act 2009. This Act is the source of the formation and function of the Upazila Parishad. However, to promote good local governance what types of tools the Act provides is momentous in this regard. This article argues that the existing Upazila Parishad Act is not governance friendly and itself creating hindrances on the way of ensuring good local governance in the Upazila administration. Analyzing various provisions of the Act in the light of the characteristics of good governance an attempt has been made in this article to identify its key areas of challenges on the way of ensuring good local governance in the Upazila Parishad. In addition, the article aims to provide practical solutions. It reveals some strategies to overcome the challenges of local governance at the Upazila system and also highlights the tools for fighting against these challenges.*

Introduction

Presently the issues of local governance have received stern attention from political scientists, development practitioners, researchers and policy makers and simultaneously these issues have occupied significant place in the discourse of development. Good local governance is an integral part of good governance. In Bangladesh, the question of good local governance is vital both in terms of institutionalizing democracy and people's welfare. The genesis of democratic local governance in Bangladesh lies in the spirit of our great liberation war of 1971, the spirit that has been enshrined in the constitution in this language, "Further pledging that it shall be a fundamental aim of the state to realize through the democratic process to a socialist society, free from exploitation- a society in which the rule of law, fundamental human rights and freedom, equality and justice- political, economic and social, will be secured for all citizens" (GoB, 2010). This constitutional commitment directly indicates a process or a mechanism by which 'equal opportunities for all' can be established and undoubtedly it is possible through a democratic local government with good local

governance. However, little attention is given to ensure good local governance in spite of having a big size local government in Bangladesh. The rapid increase of state functionaries' vis-à-vis the increasing challenges and complexities of governance make the democratic societies concentrated to ensuring good local governance. Such type of concentration indicates that the national government is not the only actor and the local authorities including influential land lords, associations of farmers, cooperatives, NGOs, research institutes, religious leaders, finance institutions and political parties have a big and significant role to play in the process of achieving good local governance. Comparative theorists have generally recognized three phases of democratization namely transition, consolidation and matured democracy. Bangladesh has successfully passed the transition phase with the beginning of the breakdown of an authoritarian regime and the establishment of a democratic regime in 1991 characterized by peaceful transformation of power and free-fair election. However, this successful transition into a democratic form of government fails to fulfill the hope and aspiration of the nation. The nation, in the second phase, 'consolidating democracy', is facing tremendous challenges of governance in its journey towards democratization and that achieving good local governance is one of them. In this phase the government emphasizes on the policy of decentralization to bring the administration and services to door of the local people. Following the decentralization policy, the government in 2009 introduced Upazila system (an intermediate tier local government consisting of one or two thanas) which can be a hub of peoples participation, leadership building as well as the testing laboratory of democracy in the country. Actually it can be used as a tool where the people can enjoy the opportunities of democracy. The theoretical approach of this article is to apply the decentralized decision making theory as well as the theories of local governance and in this regard the role of the local government having control over the small geographic area which is advanced by Oates (Oates, 1972, p. 55). His arguments are (i) local governments understand the concerns of local residents; (ii) local decision making is responsive to the people for whom the services are intended, thus encouraging fiscal responsibility and efficiency, especially if the financing of services is also decentralized. Stigler (Stigler, 1957, p. 213) also identifies two principles i.e. (i) the closer a representative government is to the people, the better it works (ii) the people should have the right to vote for the kind and amount of public services they want. These principles suggest that decision making should occur at the lowest level of government consistent with the goal of allocative efficiency. The ultimate goal of the constitution of Bangladesh is also the same. Article 59 of the Bangladesh constitution says, local government in every administrative unit of the republic shall be entrusted to bodies composed of persons elected in according with law. (2) (c) of the same article says, everybody shall perform, within the appropriate administrative unit, such function as shall be

prescribed by the act of parliament which may include functions relating to the preparation and implementation of plans relating to public services and economic development. In order to address this direction of the constitution the government of Bangladesh introduced Upazila system by enacting Upazila Parishad (Reintroduction of the repealed act and amendment) Act 2009. Under this Act the Upazila Parishad is established. After the establishment of this system it could not be a workable local government due to some institutional/uninstitutional arrangement of challenges which are working as a prime impediment to the process of good local governance. It has been a local government without good local governance which can be termed as the life of a fish without water. This article has revealed the core challenges the Upazila Parishad, under the Upazila Parishad Act 2009, is facing now in the light of the theories of governance, good governance as well as good local governance developed by World Bank, UNDP and other renowned scholars.

Conceptualizing Governance, Good Governance and Local Governance

Governance is a popular term where scholars are not in the same opinion to its definition. Actually governance is the management of the nation's affairs. Kaufmann et al. (2003) construct some governance indicators motivated by a broad definition of governance as the traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised. This includes (1) the process by which governments are selected, monitored and replaced; (2) the capacity of the government to effectively formulate and implement sound policies and (3) the respect of citizens and the state for the institutions that govern economic and social interactions among them. This classification of indicators into clusters corresponding to this definition of governance is not intended to be definitive. Rather, drawing on existing definitions of governance, we unbundled it reflecting our views of what constitutes a consistent and useful organization of the data that is concordant with prevailing notions of governance (Kaufmann et al., 2003). However, most scholars opine the same that the theory of governance raises conceptual and theoretical questions about the coordination and interaction of complex social system as well as the evolving role of the state. It also raises question about the traditional approaches to state-citizen, citizen-citizen and state-civil society relations. Actually these questions bring the concept of good governance in the literature of development. In general, good governance means a good management system that helps to achieve the goal of a democratic society. Good governance is, among other things, participatory, transparent and accountable. It is also effective and equitable and it promotes the rule of law. Good governance ensures that political, social and economic priorities which are

based on broad consensus in the society and that the voices of the poorest and the most vulnerable are heard in decision-making over the allocation of development resources. Governance has three legs: economic, political and administrative. Economic governance includes decision-making processes that affect a country's economic activities and its relationships with other economies. It clearly has major implications for equity, poverty and quality of life. Political governance is the process of decision-making to formulate policy. Administrative governance is the system of policy implementation. Encompassing all the three, good governance defines the processes and structures that guide political and socio-economic relationships (UNDP, 1997). Good governance entails sound public sector management (efficiency, effectiveness and economy), accountability, exchange and free flow of information (transparency) and a legal framework for development (justice, respect for human rights and liberties). In seeming agreement with the World Bank, the Overseas Development Administration (ODA, 1993) of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (now the Department for International Development), defines good governance by focusing on four major components namely legitimacy (government should have the consent of the governed); accountability (ensuring transparency, being answerable for actions and media freedom); competence (effective policymaking, implementation and service delivery) and respect for law and protection of human rights. Local Governance, therefore, includes the diverse objectives of vibrant living, working and environmentally preserved self governing communities. Good local governance is not just about providing a range of local services but also about preserving the life and liberty of residence, creating space for democratic participation and civic dialogue, supporting market led and environmentally sustainable local development and facilitating outcomes that enrich the quality of life of residence (Shah & Shah, 2006, p. 2). The Stockholm Global Forum (SGF) begun by looking briefly at the status of local governance around the world and then turned to focusing upon three principal themes which captured the critical essence of both first and second wave of local governance reform--creating an appropriate policy framework, the role of the local services delivery, and effectively managing the delivery of social services at all the local level (UN, 2000).

The Challenges

The increasing expectations for good governance, effective risk management and complex demands for legislative and regulatory compliance are presenting a growing challenge for every organization. In the contemporary nexus of globalization and as a government deficit country the local government's institutions of Bangladesh are also facing many challenges. In addition, the

Upazila Parishad Act 2009 itself has created some hindrances on the way of ensuring good local governance.

Figure 1: Characteristics of good governance
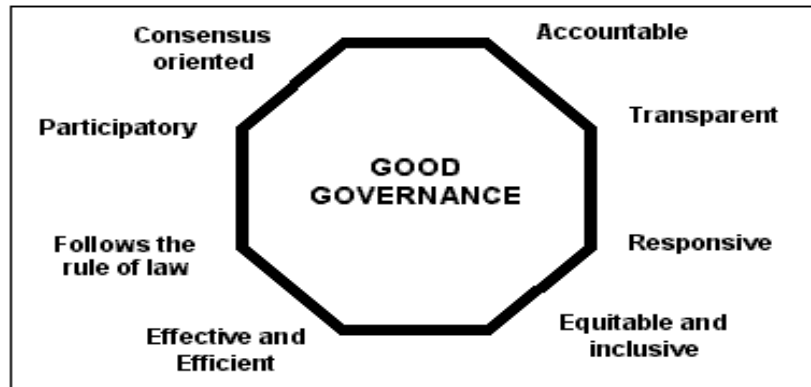
Source: UNESCAP (nd.)

Scholars of good governance generally argued that participation, accountability, transparency, responsiveness, rule of law, efficiency, consensus etc. are the pre requisite of good governance (see Figure 1). These are also essential for local governance including local service delivery policy, autonomy in local planning, local governance friendly central local relation etc. However, little attention is given in the existing Upazila Parishad Act 2009 to carry out the above elements of local governance. More explicitly the following analysis shows that the Act itself has created some challenges which are working as the prime impediment on the way of ensuring good local government at Upazila system. The challenges are as follows:

Intervention

It may also be argued that giving people the right to make decisions that affect them in their own areas has an important educative purpose. John Stuart Mill believed that the development of a responsible citizenry who become aware of the problems and limitations of governments comes from this involvement at local level. What is more, politicians who have gained experience at local level, dealing with small-scale problems, can 'learn the ropes' even making mistakes which would affect only a relatively small number of people, before graduating to national level policy making (Axford et al., 2002, p. 299). A local authority deals only with local problems must be dealt only with by persons who are affected by them. The merits of these arrangements are that such decentralization of function generates local initiatives and facilities, the efficient and economical managements of local affairs' (Rao, 1980, p. 10). From the beginning of the local

government system in Bangladesh central local relationship is authoritative in nature. Due to the colonial legacy, unmitigated power conflict of the politicians, uninstitutionalized competition for power and military authoritarian rule the local government bodies were not established as a result and welfare oriented, participatory, gender sensitive, transparent and corruption free institutions in the British and the Pakistan period (Sowdagar, 2010, p. 18). Bangladesh hereditarily got such authoritarian culture. The existing Upazilla Parishad Act is also the result of that authoritarian culture. While the section 42(1) of the Upazila Parishad Act empowers the Parishad for independent local micro planning and sub section 3 empowers the Member of the Parliament (MP) of the respective area to intervene in the local planning which ultimately results less autonomy in planning and implementation of development activities of the Upazila Parishad. According to the Act, the Parishad, in its each development planning and implementation, must accept the advice of the MP before sending a copy of planning to the government. This section is conflicting to the spirit of the Act as well as the constitution and will work as a prime hurdle on the way of ensuring autonomy of the Parishad. Section 63(2) of the Act says, the government, if necessary, can formulate principles in order to fulfill the objective of the Act regarding the powers and functions of the Upazila Parishad (UZP) Chairmen and Vice Chairmen; principles regarding the implementation of activities of the Parishad; preservation, conduction, investment and control of the Parishad's fund and the matters regarding the building of construction, development planning and implementation etc. In fact, the existing arrangement implies a policy formulation-implementation dichotomy. Interestingly, such a dichotomy has a corresponding relationship to the structural arrangement of the system, resulting in the conflicting relationship between generalists and specialists. There is also confusion about the nature of decisions. It is difficult to draw a demarcation line between the policy decisions and the operational decisions. This confusion complicates the disposal of cases. This, along with centralized tendency in administration, causes delay in decision making. Jurisdictional infringement, buck passing, distortion of priorities, employee disorientation and misallocation of resources are many of the factors responsible for such a state of affairs" (Huda and Rahman, 1989). Such provisions of the act are actually the instruments of intervention in the local affairs and that interventional instruments will not bring any fruitful result for good local governance in the Upazila Parishad.

Corruption

Corruption is a key national challenge for Bangladesh. It leads to abuse of power for personal benefits and increases all forms of social injustice and undermines the rule of law. Corruption affects all individuals, specially the poor. In most South Asian countries including Bangladesh, corruption has become an enduring

pattern of public life that pose a threat to democracy and development. Corruption is so much systemic in Bangladesh and, more alarmingly, its wings have spread to such an extent in recent years in the absence of effective drive to counter its menace that no pundit is needed to explain its huge costs. Being one of the most corrupt countries in the world, Bangladesh with its severe governance problems can only ignore the needs for combating effectively the menace of corruption at its own peril (TIB, 2000). The negative implications of corruption are conspicuous: it inhibits the operation of market forces, creates bottlenecks in administrative process, prevents justice and fairness, dampens the spirit of public service and impedes sustainable development (Rahman, 2003, p. 14). The UZP's economy is fragile. The fragile economy leads to increased level of poverty and then corruption. According to many studies and annual reports, the local government department has been identified as top corrupt sector in Bangladesh for the last couple of years. In Bangladesh, corruption at local level, to some extent, is different from national level. In local level poverty is a known factor that encourages corruption and in the Upazila administration the types of corruption are embezzlement of funds provided by the government, nepotism and politicization in distributing goods and services, contractor-engineer-Upazila Chairman nexus in construction works etc. Local infrastructure development, especially construction of roads, bridges, culverts and re-excavation of ponds, canals etc. are major works usually undertaken by the Upazila Parisad. In the first case, where the representatives in collusion with officials and other agents make private gains mainly through accepting commissions and bribes while carrying out development works. Besides, one of the justifications of corruption is that commissions and payments are accepted to recover election expenditure (Vijayalaksmi, 2006, p.12). Admittedly, there are other motives for profiteering, as the received pay offs exceed election expenses. These are the key factors of the local level corruption. The existing Act has been failed to involve the local people in the local development works. There is a relation between this local development works and local politics. The less involvement of citizens in local affairs creates the scope for corruption in Upazila Parishad's function. The previous experience of local government's corruption in Bangladesh is not well enough. Unfortunately, most of the Union Parishad could not establish their honesty and integrity in the disbursement of the allocation received from the central government (The Daily Star, 5 Jan 2005)**.** Most of the Upazila Chairmen are the leaders of the political parties and they have direct linkage with the central political leaders. So, there is a big possibility of getting favor from the central political leaders in their corrupt activities. Therefore, involving the local people in all the planning and implementation mechanism and all the other day to day activities of the Upazila Parishad can make it a successful one.

Accountability and Transparency

Transparency and accountability are the important determinants of good local governance which is always underemphasized in the local government system in Bangladesh. Transparency is the foundation of accountability which means doing functions according to the rule as well as openness and clarity of action; and accountability is giving account of the action to the legitimate authority. These are the fundamental demands of democracy as well as participatory government. Transparency and accountability allows people to see what their authorities are doing, how decisions are taken, where their money goes and what it delivers. Four actors are typically relevant in local accountability systems: local residents, local governments, producers of local government services, and higher levels of government (including central government) (Schroeder, 2004). These relations depend on the historical, social, and political constitution of the powers of each actor, which may be based on ideology, wealth, heredity, election, appointment, or other means (Agrawal & Ribot, 1999, p. 476). To ensure good local governance in the Upazila Parishad political accountability is one of the determinants. Political accountability can also be improved by having elected local officials, oversee local executives, increasing awareness about policy performance of local governments, or involving citizens directly in decision making beyond elections. Strengthening the political dimension of local accountability requires some safeguards in local electoral systems and local council oversight. On the demand side, political accountability measures allow for citizen-initiated legislation (petitions), referendums or recalls of elected public officials. They include procedures for public petitions to adopt, amend or repeal, an act, law or executive order. They also empower citizens to demand public hearings on policy decisions and action and to appeal to citizen ombudsman offices in local governments (Serdar, et al. 2008, p. 115). In the whole local government system in Bangladesh the accountability mechanisms are poor and traditional. The recent Upazila Parishad Act has provided very weak and limited accountability mechanism. An indistinct accountability mechanism mentioned in the section 40 and 52 of the Upazilla Parishad Act 2009 is only limited to auditing and investigation by an authority of the government. However, accountability does not mean only auditing and investigation. Accountability involves many things including people's participation, public hearings, easy access to information, role of the stakeholders and participation of the opposition political leaders in the whole mechanism. The mechanism provided by the Act is poor and traditional. In fact, it is more a mechanism of intervention and less of accountability. A real mechanism of accountability can be made involving the local people in this auditing and investigation as well as the whole accountability mechanism. It should be "political accountability"-a process whereby citizens hold elected officials to account for their behavior and performance (Aucoin &

Heintzman, 2000, p.45). Actually demands from residents are the key external driver for accountability. Therefore, residents of the Upazila should be encouraged to use the increasing amount of information provided by their Upazila Parishad along with that on the parishad's performance from central government to hold their local authorities to account more effectively. Upazila Parishad should increasingly takes the views of residents and stakeholders into account through numerous consultation and participation exercises. Almost all scholars of local government arguing the same that the accountability mechanism of the local government institution should be equipped with the involvement of local peoples including local political leaders of all political parties, civil society members, land lords, farmers, journalists, teachers, businessman etc. More explicitly, committee system can be introduced in the Upazila level in its accountability mechanism like the parliamentary committee system where local political leaders can be included as chairman and member of the committee.

Figure 2 shows that accountability has both long and short rout. In the short rout there is direct linkage between the citizens and the service providers. Here client's power can be established at the local level. However, in the long rout of accountability it does not show any direct linkage between the citizen and the service providers. Therefore, citizens and service provider linkage can only be established through the short rout of accountability mechanism at the Upazila system.

Figure 2: An accountability framework showing key relationships across major stakeholders and service provisions
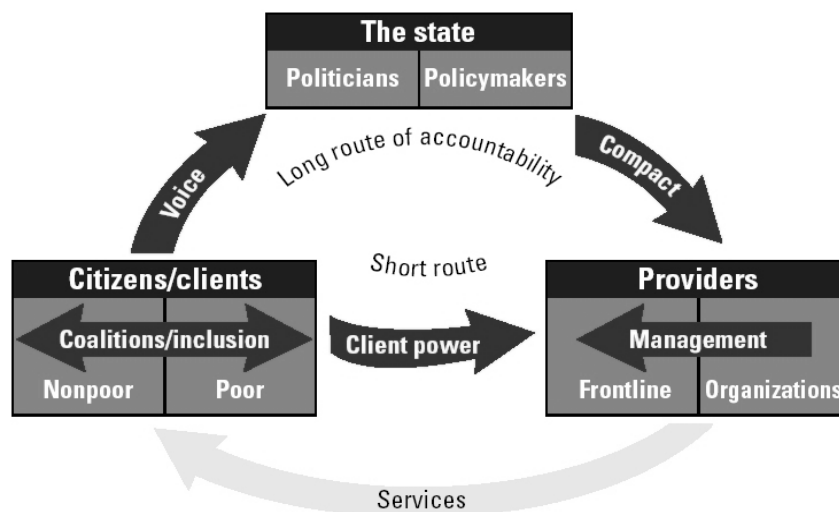
Source: World Bank, 2003.

Conflict among MP, UNO and Upazila Chairman

Only with proper understanding, coordination and appreciation by both the elected representative and the government officials at the upazila level can develop the Upazila Parishad a vibrant institutions of local self government and perpetuate good local governance. Some sections of the existing Upazila Parishad Act provide an institutional arrangement of conflict between the Upazila Chairman and the Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO). The Act further complicates the situation which says Upazila Chaiman is the Chief Executive and the UNO is the Principal Executive Officer of the parishad. The difference between the two is still unclear. Now the UNOs claim that they are the representative of the central government on the other hand the Upazila Chairmen claim that as an elected representative they are the supreme decision makers of the Upazila. Actually a proper coordination depends on understanding among government officials, Upazila Chairmen and the people. Some part of this understanding comes from law, some from quality of leadership and cultural practice. Presently all these practices are absent. Moreover, the Upazila Parishad Act has been made in a manner that allows the people outside of the parishad to intervene in its activities and that section 25 of the Act disempowers the Upazila Parishad giving lawmakers the opportunity to intervene.

Finance and Budget

This is the reality that many of the world's local governments are severely lacking in adequate resources. The local bodies are overwhelmingly dependent on grants and subversions from the national government for their income. The Upazila Parishad is not out of this inadequacy. The tax base of the parishad is not sufficiently enlarged. Section 33 of the Act provides nine sources of fund for the parishad however all are ineffective in the context of our local political economy and culture except the governmental grants. Apart from this, the potential sources of fund can be tax, fees, tolls, rates that can formulate parishad's fund. Nevertheless, the central government enjoys most of the items of taxation which brings substantial revenue. Though there are number of items on which local bodies may levy taxes; in practice they can earn revenues from only a few. So the tax base of local governments is both narrow and shallow (Siddiqui, 2005, p. 226). In the above reality, dependency on government's grants means intervention in local affairs. Consequently participatory and independent budgeting is not possible in the present state of the political economy of the Upazila Parishad. Therefore, local people's opinion for the solution and identification of the local problems will not be reflected in the parishad's functioning.

Need Based Participatory Planning and Decision Making

The single greatest virtue of local governance is its closeness to the people who are being governed. 'From the standpoint of normative theory, the relationship between participation and freedom is correlated and clear. 'Individual should be free to participate in government and politics the way they want and as much as they want. And they should be free not to participate as well. Ideally all barriers to participation should be abolished (Janda, et al. 1992). The nature of participation, both conventional and unconventional, varies state to state. The rural Bangladesh is fully agro based. Consequently, participatory decision making in rural areas means involving the rural farmers in their local decision making, planning and implementation process. However, we have a bitter experience that local political leaders and economic elites hinder this process. Being weak in finance and political influence, the rural farmers are not interested and encouraged enough to participate in the local decision making and planning. Besides, the UZP Chairmen, as political leaders, will not be interested in involving the supporters of other political ideology in its functioning. In practice, in an agro based society agro based micro planning is the only suitable way of involving rural local farmers, the large part of our society, in local planning and decision making process. But such type of planning is fully absent in the Upazila Parishad functions. Apart from this, there is a policy formulation and policy implementation dichotomy provided by the existing Upazila Parishad Act. Section 63(2) of the Act says; the government, if necessary, can formulate principle in order to fulfill the objectives of the Act regarding the implementation of activities of the parishad. In addition, section 22 of the Act empowers the parishad for independent local planning on the other hand sub section 3 of the same section empowers the MPs to intervene in the local planning that restricts the independent planning of the parishad. This is ultra virus to the spirit of the Act and also the constitution. In this reality participatory decision making and planning is a far cry.

Linking Local Institutions/Peoples with Global Opportunities

Globalization and local governance both are the reality of the modern world. Globalization is a fact of life. It can be a frightening fact of life, but it also can be managed. Globalization appears to pose new and significant opportunities to democracy, governance and development that definitely impacts on local governance. Flows of capitals, information and technology over the world, increased cooperation among the nations, sharing of ideas and development strategies, the challenges including the continued development of regional, international and global flows of resources and networks of interaction, increasing interconnectedness of political communities across social, cultural, environmental and economic lines and more specific issues that include pollution and

environmental threats, use and distribution of natural resources, and regulation of global networks of finance, trade and commerce which pose specific problems for democracy (Axford et al., 2004, p. 186). I think proper addressing of these challenges can translate these into opportunities. In the actuality of global-local nexus, excluding local governments in general and the Upazila Parishad in particular from these global opportunities means turn back to the world wide wave of development. Because global local interaction is the key word of governance and development as Robertson (1995) rightly identified as *glocalization-* 'a process of increasing the connectivity and interdependence of the world's markets and businesses with increased mobility of goods, services, labor, technology and capital throughout the world (Gracia, 2010). Glocalization, for its part, refers to the balancing of global and local with worldwide network of cities which aims at strengthening economic, social, and cultural sectors through peace building and development projects. In the course of adjusting to conditions brought about by globalization, localities can also accommodate opportunities to capacitate themselves and strengthen local quality of life. This approach referred to as "glocalization" denotes a merging of global opportunities and local interests, aiming to create a more socio-economically balanced world, which calls for the accommodation of global perspectives to local conditions, as well as for a more pronounced role of local actors addressing global challenges (Gracia, 2010). Globalization posses challenges and local government can capacitate themselves by merging global opportunities with local interests. Glocalization then takes place when local actors have a more pronounced role in addressing global challenges. So, it is the significant question and also a challenge to the existing Upazila Parishad that how it will avail these opportunities and face these challenges from this interconnected world as well as what type of capacity it has now. Negotiations, joint agreements, exchanges of knowledge, experiences, technical know-how and ideas with the donors, aid agencies, international NGOs and development partners are vital in this regard. Presently a linkage and interaction between external and local actors at the interface of global and local development processes is required to identify the changing opportunities for and constraints to beneficial institutional change for inclusive, sustainable development and poverty reduction. The Upazila Parishad with its present capacity, skill and resources, is unable to make any linkage with the global development actors. Section 30 of the existing Act, concerning the agreement power of the Upazila Parishad is obscure and does not provide any provision regarding agreement with the foreign development partners, aid agencies, international NGOs etc. More explicitly, it totally fails to provide any direction to avail the opportunities of globalization.

Service Delivery to the Poor

Decentralization has been considered as effective in public service delivery, a better means for the implementation of programmes related to poverty reduction and is more responsive to local people's needs. A well functioning local government that delivers public services consistent with citizen's performance is crucial for good local governance. The most important duty of local government is to ensure that all the citizens particularly the vulnerable have access to basic services. It is the responsibility of the government to ensure that such services are gradually received by all within the limits of available resources and the local governments are the best institution to deliver those services. Public service delivery arrangements in Bangladesh are highly centralized and strongly controlled by a large administrative system which has no direct accountability to local political representatives and which monopolizes development expenditure at the local level. Moreover, the quality and coverage of the resulting service provision is generally poor. Teachers and doctors are frequently absent from work. Corruption is widespread. Upazila health clinics are unsanitary and medicines are often not available as they are sold privately by clinic staffs (UNCDF, 2004). The poor people of Bangladesh comprise the largest percentage of countries population and they cannot afford to pay the full prize for essential public services due to their lowly material position. In recognition of this fact the government should make provision for the basic services link to an indigent policy which targets the poorest of the poor. As a source of power and function of the Upazila Parishad, the Upazila Parishad Act 2009 provides no specific guideline for public service delivery. The rural poor farmers are the main stakeholder of the Upazila and the prime actors of the rural agro based economy. The Act also does not provide any guideline for the rural farmers. Specially, how and what services they get from the Upazila Parishad is not clear in the Act. The use of modern technology as well as modern concept of service delivery like public-private partnership is totally absent in its functioning. Apart from this, in the existing political culture of Bangladesh, equal distribution and neutral governance are the increasing challenges. At this juncture, the nature of party politics and how far the central local relation is affected by the strong party ideology and ideological differences are significant. Because politics here is divided into two ideologies and in relation to its conflicting nature the distribution of services is one sided to a great extent and that the supporters of the party in power get the lions share at the local level.

Right to Information

Right to information means peoples have the right to know what and how their representatives are doing functions. In this perspective the mechanisms of access

to information is the key factor, which bring the ruled closer to the rulers. This closeness is the fundamental prerequisite of good local governance. Definitely the rapid development of information technology brings the new solution of this old problem. Particularly in terms of increased opportunities for interactivity between political actors and the public have excited and alarmed many commentators, policy makers, politicians and activists. They consider this development as digital democracy and digital governance. The use of information technology i.e. internet, email are the easiest way or mechanism of democratic participation and access to information. The Upazila Parishad Act does not provide any opportunity for such easy access to information for the people. The old fashioned notice board is the only source of delivering information to the people that does not reflect the expectation of the people's right to information. Disclosure of income and assets is a sensitive subject in many places, but it is an important issue of concern. Disclosure requirements permit the establishment of information concerning the changes in wealth of individuals while they hold public office either as elected representative of as municipal officials (Transperancy International, 2004). Due to the absence of the use of Information Communication Technology (ICT) in information discloser mechanism, the people have little opportunity to know the income and changes in the wealth of their Upazila Chairmen and the government officials at the Upazila Parishad. Actually in the 2nd generation governance access to information is not only the right of the people but also a service. Therefore, this is the responsibility of the authority concerned that how they will provide these services to the people. Information sharing can also be happen among the Upazilas so that the peoples of the one Upazila can be informed about the successful performance of the other. In this regard UNDP (2002) observed that innovations and best practices on good local governance should be documented and shared with other local governments and stakeholders for application (or replication) in their respective governance affairs. It should also be disseminated to other development partners to build on in their approaches and programmes. As the concept of good governance is dynamic and constantly evolving, it is critical that new approaches or innovations be continually developed. Cities and regencies, which have demonstrated the ability to successfully apply good governance practices in several or selected areas of competences, would serve as models of lessons learned to be emulated by other local governments. Information sharing and training among peers, champions of governance reform in their cities/regencies would be one of the characteristics of the movements.

Local Capacity Building

Upazila Parishad is the outcome of government's decentralization policies. With decentralization, much of the responsibilities for service delivery are transferred to the Upazila Parishad. While several Upazilas are able to maintain the quality of

services devolved to them, it is unable to improve beyond its present capacity and has limited success in getting the communities involved in addressing local problems. It becomes imperative, therefore, that local capacity in planning, investment programming, micro-finance, monitoring and evaluation and other areas where capacity is needed in the efficient and effective running of local government. Likewise, capacity for reporting, the use of local resources, foreign loans and grant assistance should be enhanced not only for local governments but more importantly for national government ministries and offices. Emphasis should be placed on the operationalization of good governance principles in the affairs of government and the provision of additional assistance to poor local governments in order to improve their credit worthiness and allow them access to additional financial resources (UNDP, 2002).

Women Representation

One of the significant goals set out by the Fourth World Conference on Women 1995 in Beijing was adequate representation of women in all decision-making bodies. Article 9 of the Constitution of Bangladesh promotes the special representation of women in all tiers local government. Actually in any representative body there should be a 'logical balance' of men and women to voice the concerns of the society *en masse.* Good governance means being participatory, accountable, predictable and transparent which reasonably calls for a gender balance in political decision-making. It is believed that women's insights and values of governance can enhance and enrich the overall decision-making process. It is also generally observed that women at the local level are more sensitive to community issues (Shamim, I. & Kumari, R., 2002, pp.8-9). Section 6 of the present Upazila Parishad Act 2009 provides the opportunities for women representation in the Upazila Parishad. It says the Upazila Parishad consists of a Chairman and two Vice Chairmen and one of the Vice Chairman would be a woman. This is great but the problems lie in the functions of the woman Vice Chairman. The powers and functions of the woman Vice Chairman are not clearly mentioned in the Act. Consequently the women Vice Chairmen and the other women members of the Upazila Parishad do not know what their functions are and how they have to work. This situation will work as a key hurdle to the spirit of woman empowerment. Besides, it will be very difficult for them to represent for women as well as work for woman development at the Upazila level.

Concluding Remarks

Governance is always challenging for all societies. Challenges of local governance exist in various forms and it is not easy to measure the full extent of challenges in the Upazila Parishad. The wide spread prevalence of these

challenges have tremendous implications on institutionalizing democracy, establishing strong people's participation at the local level, ensuring autonomy and development planning and activities of the Upazila Parishad and most of the challenges of local governance arise from the institutional arrangement more explicitly from the Upazila Parishad Act 2009. Actually the parameters of good local governance are manifested in the article 59 of the constitution of Bangladesh which says, local government in every administrative unit of the republic shall be entrusted to bodies, composed of the persons elected in accordance with law. However, the Act has been passed in a manner so that Upazila Parishad could not work as a vibrant, participatory and welfare oriented local body. In addition, it has created numerous challenges and impediments in the process of materializing the provision of the constitution. To realize the genuine development, the Upazila Parishad is the suitable institutional vehicle for planning and implementation of the development plans pertaining to economic development and social justice. As a local government unit the Upazila Parishad is potential taking due account into its infrastructure and resources but the real problem lies in the Act. The Act should be immediately amended and the process of decentralization required to be accelerated to the Upazila level. The central governments intervention into the local planning more particularly the MP's intervention should be stopped and the powers and functions of the Upazila Chairman, Vice Chairman and the woman Vice Chairman must be precise and clear. The Act should be more dynamic so that it can adjust itself with global flows of resources, development strategies, technology, thinking and standard. The Upazila Parishad needs to think globally and work locally. A precise rules and regulation should be made to ensure an effective coordination between the government officials particularly the Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) and the Upazila Chairman. Use of modern information technology is vital for right to information as well as delivering services to the local people. In this regard the concerned section of the Act must be directed precisely. People's participation has to be accelerated because participatory forums have not been effectively used by the citizens at the Upazila level and they do not function as measures of accountability and transparency. There is still a considerable gap in what citizens know about Upazila Parishad funds and resources and what perhaps they should do. But the local people always look to its elected and appointed leadership to create and sustain a prosperous world class local economy, infrastructure, environment etc. Corruption, lack of transparency in decision making, limited opportunities for participation and social discrimination are still challenges in all societies. For the purpose of transparent, efficient, democratic, constitutional governance socially just need specialists and managers who have not only an awareness of the problem, but also the skills necessary to overcome these challenges. Corruption is the reality of all societies. It can be reduced so that it cannot create any hindrances in the development

process of the Upazila Parishad. Effective mechanisms of accountability and transparency and participatory decision making are the suitable tool of reducing corruption at the local level. In addition to this institutional mechanism; corruption can be reduced at the Upazila level through some uninstitutional attempts also. Especially, all tycoons or political leaders living in Upazila have their known identity in the villages of the Upazila where they are closely known with their roots and backgrounds. In case, any body is found to be suddenly rich or behaving in an upstart manner, it is the local authority specially the Chairman and the Vice Chairman of the Upazila Parishad who can detect the reasons and sources of accumulation of unaccounted wealth. They can easily identify the corruption, the presence of any terrorist or criminal or drug trafficker living in their locality and can take appropriate action.

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