

INSIGHTS OF GOVERNANCE IN SERVICE DELIVERY OF UNION PARISHAD (UP): ISSUES AND PRACTICES

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Abstract

Globally, local governments are established with the motive of local development through the participation of local people in their own developmental activities. Union Parishad, the oldest and lowest tier in the local government system in Bangladesh, has been functioning for more than a hundred years for the country's rural development. It is entitled to offer a wide range of services for the nation's Development at the rural level. But the development discourse essentially urges governance without which development is a far reached goal. This current study was an endeavour to find how the factors of governance are directly related to the service delivery of Union Parishads in Bangladesh by studying five Union Parishads of Cumilla districts. The study was conducted through a survey method using structured and unstructured questions to collect qualitative and quantitative data. In meeting the thrust of the study, three major indicators of local governance, namely transparency, participation and rule of law, were focused. Data have been analysed manually and presented through different tables, graphs and charts. Major findings showed that some important aspects of governance, such as openness of information, cooperation in service giving, training of officials, and so on, are suffering from inefficient treatments. By the findings, some considerably important recommendations have been made. It is noticed that some complex issues can not be removed overnight. However, there needs to be proper time and counselling for the officials and citizens to ensure local governance in the service delivery of Union Parishads of Bangladesh.

Keywords

Local governance, transparency, participation, rule of law, service delivery.

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1. Statement of the Issue

The development of a country urges equal shares of advancement in every part of the country. Globally, local governments are established with the motive of local development through the participation of local people in their developmental activities (Momen & Ferdous, 2023a). Local development directly leads to national development. Similarly, the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh ensures the establishment of local government in Article 59 (GoB, 1972). Union Parishad (UP) is the bottommost layer of local government. For rural citizens, it is the first step from their door to attain citizen service delivery from the state (Momen & Ferdous, 2023b). The authority's local government, or more significantly, the Union Parishad, is stressed in providing probable public facilities to the general citizens residing at the rural level

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mainly because of a lack of suitable administrative and monetary rights in addition to institutional ability (Khan, 2008). Thus, UP must play a pivotal role in rural development that strongly depends on the level of governance in their service delivery.

Governance encompasses a broader range of different issues. And is mainly explained from various perspectives (Karim & Rahman, 2011). The Oxford Dictionary provides three key meanings of governance that include: i) the state of being governed, good order; ii) the office functions or power of governing: authority or power to govern; iii) how something is governed or regulated; method of management, system of regulations (Rahman & Islam, 2000). Governance is a form of government and organisation based on accountability, transparency, participation, the rule of law and pluralism in its core characteristics.

Local government is considered an essential apparatus of the inclusive governance procedure of any state (Ferdous, 2024; 2020). Local government bodies accomplish various tasks in their legitimate dominions (Ferdous, 2021). The arenas and opportunities of these functions are yet inadequate. However, as local government institutions are nearer to society, these can confirm their comprehensive involvement in diverse accomplishments that comprise planning and executing development agendas and projects and supervising the service delivery (Hussain, 2013).

UP is an established, popular centre for service delivery with a popular image. But with time, it has lost its time-honored position due to poor governance (Hussain, 2017). There are 4571 UPs in Bangladesh (GoB, 2019). The Ordinance 1983 employed UP ten compulsory and thirty-eight optional functions (Siddiqui, 2005). UP is responsible for thirty-nine duties (GoB, 2009). Many studies have been conducted on local governance in Bangladesh (Momen & Ferdous, 2023a). Those studies mainly focused on governance patterns, theoretical aspects and practical implementation levels. Contemporarily UP Governance Project (UGP) was also implemented after the success of the Sirajganj Local Governance Development Fund Project (SLGDFFP) in Sirajganj in 2005-06 and the Local Government Support Project and Learning and Innovation Component (LGSP-LIC), implemented in 388 UPs of 41 Upzilas (GoB, 2016). But there are several new challenges to institutionalising good governance at the local level (Aminuzzaman, 2010). There is no specific study on governance in the service delivery of UP. This study will unlock another dimension of local governance.

2. Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study is to identify to what extent three significant indicators, namely transparency, participation and rule of law, are embodied in the service delivery of UP. The specific objectives are to

- i. Identify the knowledge level of the UP citizens about the service rendered by UP.
- ii. Measures the level of people's participation in UP decision-making.
- iii. Identify the UP officials' attitude in giving the chartered services.
- iv. Suggest appropriate policy advice in implementing governance in delivering their service.

3. Justification of the study

Many studies have been conducted on local governance in Bangladesh and some work has also been done on the governance issues of UP. However, governance in service delivery is not entirely focused on those studies. It is a crucial issue for advancing rural society through UP services. Thus, this study will remain of great importance in UP governance.

4. Literature Review

Uddin (2018) discovered the ways of grassroots participation at the local level, specifically the Union Parishad (UP) and assessed the empowerment of sidelined people through various ways. This paper considers the affiliation using a comprehensive expressive and logical tactic between participation and empowerment of grassroots society grounded on the appraisal of secondary fonts of evidence. Local government institutes, especially UP, have subsisted many instruments within which citizens join in decision-making procedures. Moreover, it is supposed that the involvement of society individuals in local government institutes is not merely a prospect for them. However, it is a tool of empowerment also. Thus, the procedure of empowerment is rooted in the idea of participation. The citizens at the local level have been partaking in UP in assorted activities, although the success of these involvements in relations of empowerment is still scanty.

Hossain et al. (2013) researched the local government's current organisational and working ability in a Toker Bazar Union in Bangladesh. Relevant data were gathered from randomly nominated 40 respondents of the research area by particular interview based on the questionnaire. Approximately three-fifths (57.5%) of the respondents keep the knowledge about command and ability of local government. Around fifty per cent of respondents supposed that there was a deficiency of shared involvement in decision-making that might confirm the control and influence of local government. The monetary crisis and the impact of the prevailing political party were seen as the key difficulties in executing advancement projects. Growing literacy and community consciousness can develop the degree of common participation along with appropriate strategy and approach for the anticipated facility at the local level.

Panday and Rabbani (2011) investigate the governance condition of the bottommost tier of local government in Bangladesh. Within the function of four good governance pointers- people's participation, leadership, equity, transparency, and accountability expectancy- the outcomes might enhance a new aspect of the existing understanding of local governance. The study results propose, grounded on empirical data from the study area, that the governance condition at the grassroots level is not favourable for forming good governance and resilient local-level democracy in the state. Notwithstanding the integration of diverse deliveries such as ward shave, citizen charter, open budget and right to information facilities in the recent Local Government Act (Union Parishad), 2009, the regime has failed to confirm involvement, good governance, accountability and transparency. Alongside this setting, the local government organisations' governance has been categorised by the local government's unwillingness to confirm improvement, deficiency of people's participation, lack of accountability and transparency and unsatisfactory dissemination of services.

Panday (2018) discussed the partnership between local government and NGOs in rural Bangladesh. The results propose that by working together with Union Parishads,

the “BRAC’s Strengthening Local Governance” effort has been effective in consolidating the governance of Union Parishads by shifting the outlooks of Union Parishad executives, building their capability and assembling individuals in society to become engaged in the procedure of Union Parishad’s service delivery. Consequently, the service delivery procedure has been rationalised, corruption has been abridged, and transparency and accountability have been amplified.

Sharmin et al. (2012) tried to recognise the local government difficulties in Bangladesh and deliver an inclusive explanation to consolidate the local government appropriately. Several difficulties rigorously controlled the regional government arrangement from practicality, for example, monetary control, power exercised by the central government, imperfect financial provisions, and political disruption. The analysis was directed based on secondary data sources. Besides, diverse researchers' interpretations were united accordingly so that an inclusive reform policy could be delivered appropriately.

5. Scope of the Study

This study considered some critical aspects of governance in UP service delivery. Its dimensions reflected citizens' knowledge about UP services, their participation in UP activities, and how UP articulates its services to citizens through governance. The scope of the study is depicted in Table 1.

Table 1. Scope of the study

Study Objective	Important Indicators	Measurement technique (Respondents were asked about-)	Important Variables
1. Evaluate Transparency in service delivery	1.1 Citizen’s Charter	Visibility of citizen’s charter in UP office area	Service rendered by UP and organogram
	1.2 Project Implementation	Availability of enough information regarding Union’s projects	Types, cost financing authority, time duration etc
	1.3 Financial grants from central government and self collected revenue	Utilization of financial assets	Why, how, when, where etc.
	1.4 Committee meeting	Decisions of the meetings	Objectives of decisions
	1.5 Social safety net programs	Information of the programs	Eligible citizen’s opinion
2. Extent of participation	2.1 project taking	Project taking techniques	Ward meeting
	2.2 Committee formation	Committee formation techniques	Circulation and public suggestions
	2.3 Budget making	Budget making procedure	Citizen’s opinion on budget
	2.4 village court	Village court operation	Satisfaction level service receiver
3. Respect to the rule of law	3.1 Officials commitment to their duty	Attendance to the office	
	3.2 Elected representative respect to the Union Parishad’s Act	Regularity of meetings	

6. Methodology of the Study

6.1. Study Location

The study Location was Five UPs of Sadar South Upazila of Comilla district in Bangladesh. These Five UPs were selected randomly from nineteen UPs of Sadar South Upazila.

6.2. Population

The population of the study is the citizens of Sadar South Upazila and the elected and government officials of the nineteen UPs.

6.3. Selection of Respondents

A total of 50, including citizens and UP officials, 10 from each UP, were the respondents of this study. A total of 4 respondents were taken from the elected officials of each UP, including the Chairman, the UP secretary, a Woman member (reserved) and a general member. Another 6 respondents were the citizens of respective UP and these 6 were taken in such a manner that represents all classes, i.e. teacher, student, farmer, housewife, small and medium entrepreneur. A woman member (reserved), a general member and other 6 respondents were selected randomly.

6.4. Methods of Data Collection

The study used a survey method to collect qualitative and quantitative data. The instrument used was a questionnaire, which included structured and unstructured questions. Data was also collected through direct interviews conducted by the researcher himself.

7. Data Analysis

The total number of respondents was 50, 10 from each UP, including citizens and Union Parishad officials. Four respondents were elected officials of each UP, including the Chairman, UP secretary, a woman member (reserved), and a general member. Six respondents were citizens of five selected UPs, including teachers, students, farmers, homemakers, small and medium entrepreneurs, and a woman member (reserved), a general member.

7.1. This has been compulsory for all Union Parishad of Bangladesh to display a citizen charter. Although 100% of Union Parishad prepared and displayed their Citizen Charter, citizens are less aware of this fact in detail. The first question was asked to UP officials and citizens about the citizen charter. About 95% of the respondents in the selected Unions replied they went to the Union Parishad to seek information on various services during the last year. Both groups answered the question where only 5% of them think the citizen charter is not informative, it should contain more information and they suggested the UP officials should be more service-oriented, which is the precondition for quality service delivery.

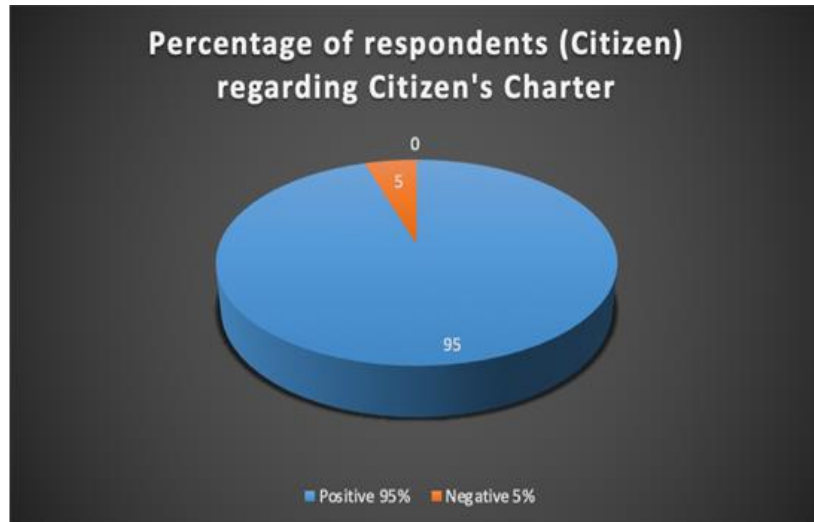


Figure 1. Percentage of respondents (Citizens) regarding Citizen’s Charter

7.2. Regarding the satisfaction information they received at the Union Parishad level, the satisfaction level was examined by asking them about the cordial service delivery of union employees, their ability to provide the specific service, the skill of the Union Parishad Chairman and so on. The satisfaction level of respondents was justified by establishing some easy categories of satisfied, dissatisfied and neutral. The collected data shows a large number of UP officials (80%) said they feel people’s satisfaction is high and 45% of local citizens in the study area expressed that they are delighted. In comparison, 15% of UP officials said they think people are unsatisfied because Union Parishad cannot serve them all the necessary services, especially the technological service delivery. About 30% of the local people expressed dissatisfaction with UP service delivery. Finally, 5% of the UP officials did not agree to talk about this matter and 25% of the service recipients said they could not define the satisfaction level because they never used the way of service taking.

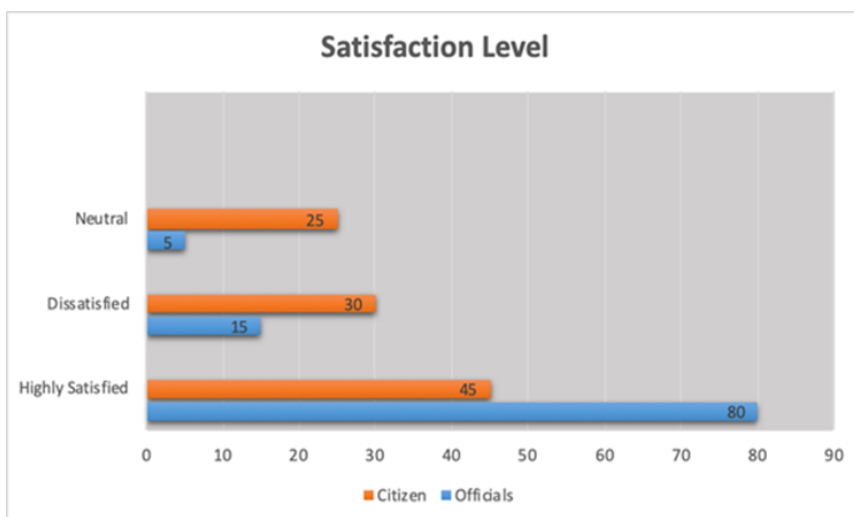


Figure 2. Satisfaction Level of Respondents

7.3. The Union Parishad (UP) Ordinance says all decisions will be taken and formulated with the consensus of the UP members, including the women members, and the development projects will be executed with the help of or with the participation of citizens. Out of 30 selected citizens from 5 UP, only 12 of them, approximately half (40%), informed that in the case of development project execution, they are unaware of which project will be executed. Surprisingly, 85% of the UP officials responded positively, and only 15% thought the development projects were confidential. In this case, the people's participation in the local government project execution remains in darkness.

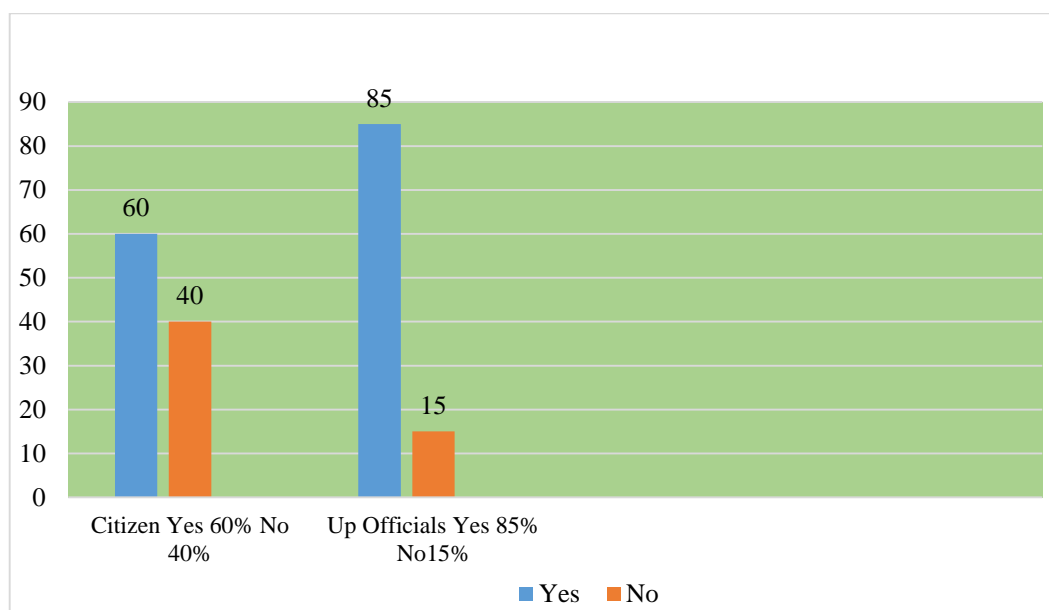


Figure 3. People's participation in development project execution

7.4. The Local Government Ordinance 1983 states that the standing committees have the authority to make decisions on development activities, and the final approval authority is the UP chairman. Every member will be the head of at least one standing committee, and at least one-fourth of the committees should be chaired by women members.

Table 2. Standing committees headed by women member

SL. No	Particulars	3 No. Galiara Union Parishad	7 No Bara Para Union Parishad
01	Number of the committees formed	13	10
02	Standing committees headed by women members	02	04

Selected 5 UPs of Comilla Sadar South Upazila followed the given provisions of the Ordinance but found that committees are inactive indeed. All of the members were unaware of their involvement in the standing committees; some of them asked the chairman about their participation in the standing committees when the researcher asked them. The UP members and chairman were asked about the women members' participation in the standing committees. All of them answered yes; unfortunately, the

women members were still confused. Instead, they also asked the chairman about their membership in the standing committees. Among 5 selected UPs, two UPS officials formulated 13 standing committees where female members chairperson only 2 4 respectively.

7.5. Representation of local marginalised groups in the standing committees was very low. Only 10% of our respondents mentioned that the representation of local teachers, law enforcement agencies person and border guards of Bangladesh’s person (the UP were near to Bangladesh-India border) were involved in the standing committees. The people they mentioned as marginalised are not precisely a marginalised group. On the other hand, 90% of them think there is no representation of any group in the standing committees, whether marginalised or different community groups.

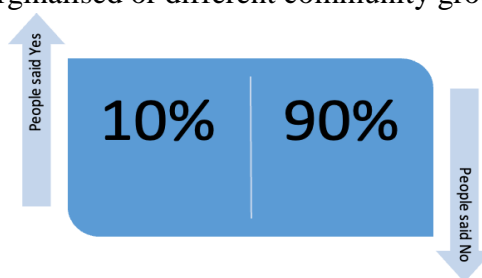


Figure 4. Representation of marginalised groups in standing committees

7.6. Whether the UP projects address the local poor women and disadvantaged communities. Our question was to the local citizens of the selected 5 UPs. The question gained a very positive answer. Out of 30 respondents, including teachers, farmers, homemakers, students, etc., 24 said yes and 80% of the respondents added there are several projects where the local poor women get benefits and different allowances from the projects. They mentioned some projects where poor women and disadvantaged groups received training. The remaining 6 respondents, which is 20% of the total respondents, think that the UP projects don’t fulfil the needs of poor women in their locality. They suggested that UP better formulate development projects to ensure women’s development.

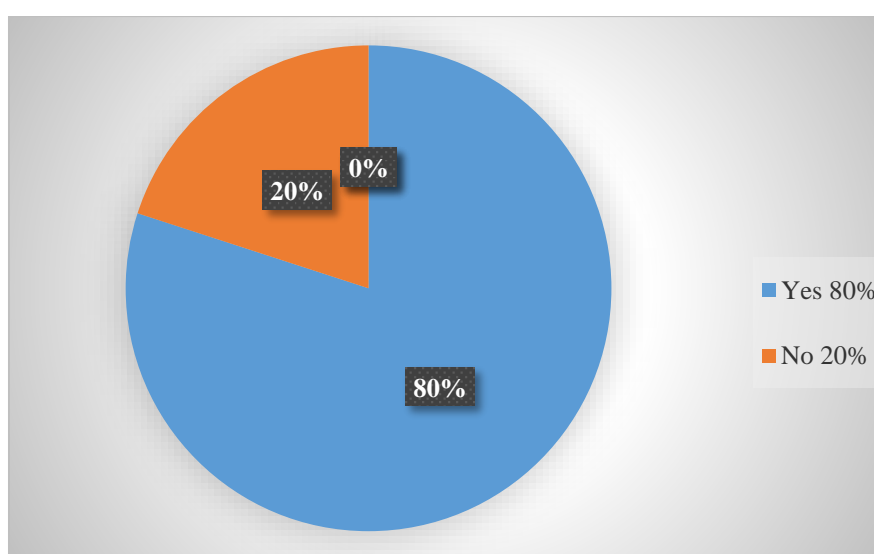


Figure 5. Poor women’s benefit in up projects

7.7. Financial support is a precondition for quality service delivery in Bangladesh's lowest tier of local government. We know about the financial support of UPs, but the reality is different. The support is not sufficient. UPs receive financial grants and support from internal and external sources to manage their functions. One internal source includes revenue granted from particular local sources like taxation; another is that UPs receive financial grants directly from the central government and Local Government Support Projects (LGSP).

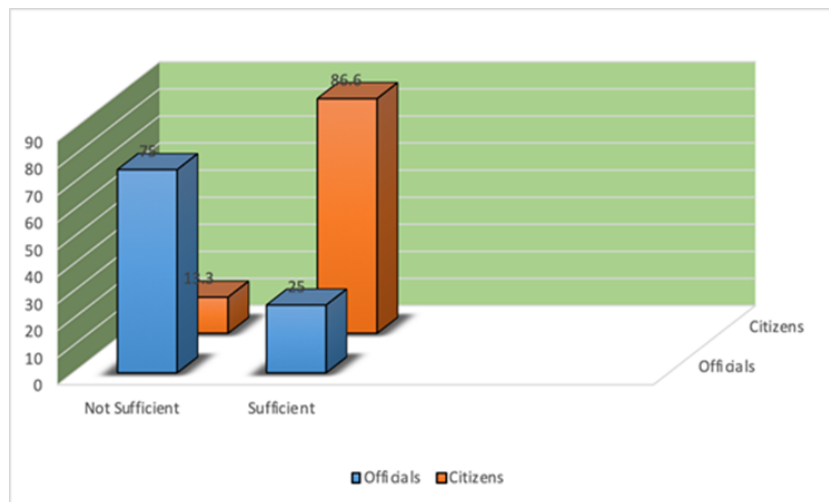


Figure 6. Is UP financial support sufficient or not?

The UP officials say these supports are insufficient and that more sources are needed. Seventy-five per cent of our respondents (elected UP officials) think the government's internal finance sources have failed to meet expenditures and the government should increase external sources. The rest, 25 per cent, are satisfied with their existing resources.

However, the citizens of the 5 UPs think negatively. Out of 30 respondents, 26 added that the existing resources are enough to run the function, which is 86.6% of our respondents who are service recipients of UPs. A very high percentage of citizens think the existing resources are enough for UPs. The rest, 13.3%, believe the existing resources are insufficient to provide services.

7.8. Almost all respondents said that the UP service providers are skilled and well-trained. The persons engaged in preparing development plans are qualified in their profession and experienced. Our total respondents were 50; 45 people, 90%, think the UP officials were well-behaved and cooperative in providing better services. Additionally, they found them dedicated to the profession and also service oriented. Very low, only 5 respondents think they are not well trained. They found the UP officials worst ever. Their experience in that case was unprofessional. They suggested that UP officials be sent to the sector for upper-level administrative training.

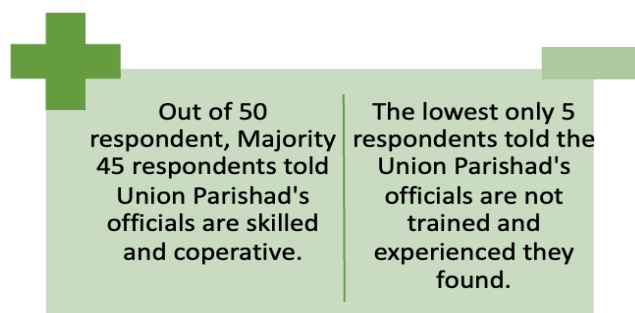


Figure 7. People’s opinion about the skills of UP officials

7.9. The Union Parishad is Bangladesh's oldest functioning local government institution. The Local Government Ordinance authorises the local people’s opinion in the budget-making of UPs. The UPs are used to avoid the rules from very early, but the old scenario has now changed. In the case of the UP budget, the present system is more aware of the importance of the citizen’s participation. This present survey found the exception. The UP members and local citizens informed that the UPs are now taking their opinions in formulating and reviewing the budget.

The citizens were asked about the people’s participation in budget preparation. The positive responses were huge. 73% of the respondents said yes. The UPs arrange budget sessions, and everybody can give their opinion regarding the budget review. 10% of respondents responded negatively that they don’t get the opportunity to give their opinion in the budget making. The remaining 17% of them are unaware of the system.

Table 3. People's Opinion on budget making

People’s response	Yes	No	Not aware
Percentage	73%	10%	17%

7.10. Union Parishad Legislation stats: all the Union Parishad have to prepare their Annual and Five-Year Development Plan. A survey finds a Five-Year Plan (FYP) in 5 selected UPs, but local citizens and UP members are unaware of the plan, especially the women members. They were asked whether the Five-Year Plan contained the development scheme or not. 36.6% of local people responded they don’t know anything about the Five-Year Plan and the remaining 23.3% of the respondents said yes, there is a Five Year Plan, but they don’t know what it is.

Only four people from our interview partially explained the Five-Year Plan of Union Parishad, which is 13.3%.

7.11. The fiscal allocation of each Union Parishad is defined in the Local Government (Union Parishad) Ordinance 1983, which was recently replaced by the Local Government (Union Parishad) Act 2009. Taxation includes holding tax, business license and non-motorized vehicle fees, tax on institutions, cinemas, fairs, signboards, marriage registration fees, etc.

According to the UP chairman, these sectors are non-productive to some extent. Most of the time, people don’t pay the tax, which affects the long-term service-provider ability of UPs.

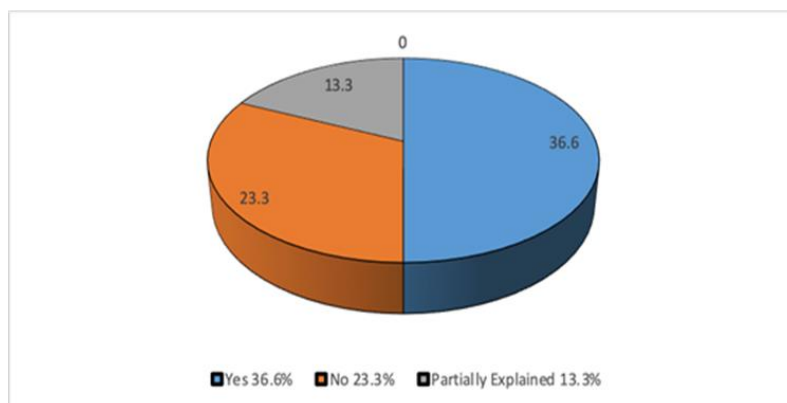


Figure 8. People's Participation in Five Year Plan

Our question was whether UPs' source of revenue in the form of taxation, fees, service charges, etc., could be increased. And why? The respondents from UP officials, including the chairman, secretary and members, both male and female, explained tax as the source of Union Parishad's finances failed to run its service because it is too low to provide quality service to the mass people. During the survey, all the officials and citizens went through a focus group discussion. Out of 50 respondents, 90% of them think their source of revenue in the form of taxation, fees, service charges, etc., could be increased. Otherwise, UPs are unable to run the functions. Only 10% of the respondents said it's enough; the central government should increase the grants, too.

The question was *whether UPs' revenue sources, such as taxation, fees, service charges, etc., could be increased. And why?*

Table 4. Response regarding UP taxes, fees and service charge

Percentage of respondents Agree 90%	Percentage of respondents Disagree 10%
<p>Causes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. People refuse to pay the holding taxes. b. Majority of the populations are in the group of low income. c. People think all of the services are free of cost from government. d. People use vehicles without license. e. Up officials cannot force the people for tax. f. Peoples of locality are unemployed. 	<p>Causes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. These groups of respondents think government should run its own institution by giving grants. b. Taxes is burden for low income people c. The existed taxes are enough for UP.

8. Recommendations

8.1. Service delivery

Union Parishad is the bridge between the government and the citizens. Nowadays, people often visit the Union Parishad for birth certificates, death certificates, bills, money transactions, etc. Those services are written in the citizen charter, but the service providers are not skilled enough and should be more dedicated to their jobs. The masses don't know what services they could seek from the Union Parishad, and most service recipients are poorly educated.

8.2. Committees formation

Standing committees represent the union's claims and necessities and help maintain development activities at the local level. However, a survey found that the committees are inactive, which is alarming. Therefore, the Parishads should form more effective committees with women members.

8.3. Priority should be given to the budget-making

Union Parishad should make the budget in the presence of concerned standing committees and the local public. This will be a group discussion and an open budget meeting will be organised in the locality.

8.4. Training and capacity strengthening of officials

Bangladesh's government has already shown interest in strengthening local government institutions. Training and workshops for selected officials could make them service-oriented. It can develop the local government's capacity and accountability to rural citizens with increased transparency.

8.5. Emphasising areas

There is a provision for maintaining public places, open spaces, gardens, playgrounds and lighting public ways and streets. Unfortunately, Union Parishads are far from meeting these duties. Hence, their governing system should be more cooperative in this regard.

8.6. Openness of information

Union Parishads seem unwilling to disseminate information. As a result, the community, including the marginalised sections, cannot secure their rights in the decision-making process and the receipt of services. Here, governance should open information to citizens for holistic development.

9. Conclusion

The local government of Bangladesh has only one function - "to serve people". To achieve this goal, local government and central administration have to work jointly with cooperation and remain accountable to the people. On the other hand, the local people must need to know what is Union Parishad? What does it perform? Who can benefit from it? Only then can good governance in the service delivery system. Union Parishad, the oldest and lowest tier in the local government system in Bangladesh, has been functioning for more than a hundred years for the country's rural development. Finally, considering all the above-mentioned limitations and gaps, the findings have recommended some interventions, mainly openness of information, cooperation in service giving, training of officials and so on, to remove the drawbacks. It is noticed that some complex issues cannot be removed overnight. However, there needs to be proper time and counselling for the officials and citizens.

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