

GOOD GOVERNANCE IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES LIKE

BANGLADESH:

GAP BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

Establishing good governance in developing countries is demanded by the International Donor Agencies as a prerequisite for aid assistance. To comply with this, the government of Bangladesh, like other governments of developing countries, is trying to develop participatory local government to support overall good governance. Research studies have asserted that, although rural people in Bangladesh are participating in development programs through their elected representatives, this participation has not been effective in ensuring good governance. Considering this background, literature relating to good governance through people's participation has been reviewed, and it is found that while the government of Bangladesh is pursuing democracy centrally, locally it is practising autocracy.

Keywords: Good Governance, People's Participation, Accountability, Local Government, Social Capital, Executive Agencies.

Ensuring good governance through people's participation in developing countries has been demanded by the International Aid Agencies and democratic donor countries as a prerequisite for aid assistance for a long time (Santiso 2001; 2003). This approach was instituted in 1989 after the World Bank first recognized the crisis in Sub-Saharan Africa as a crisis of governance and good public management as a precondition of the development assistance strategies for developing countries (Kaufmann, Kraay & Mastruzzi 2003). A study by the World Bank revealed that where there is participatory governance, an additional one per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in aid translates into a one per cent decline in poverty and a similar decline in infant mortality (WorldBank 1998). To comply with the demand of the donors, governments of the developing countries are trying to develop participatory local government to support overall good governance.

Like other developing countries the government of Bangladesh has also taken initiatives to achieve good governance through people's participation. A number of research studies have asserted that, although rural people are participating in development programs, this participation has not, however, been enough to ensure good governance. In fact, the meaning and mechanism of the notion of good governance through effective people's participation that has been imported from the developed democratic countries through international aid agencies remains somewhat unclear and ambiguous to

the government of Bangladesh. Nevertheless, both the donors and the government need a clear conception of the existing level of participation, determining the present quality of governance, thereby enabling the government to set a target for achieving good governance.

Considering this background, literature relating to good governance through people's participation has been reviewed to establish a relationship between people's participation and good governance. The dynamics of people's participation in Bangladesh's local government bodies is also reviewed to investigate the reality of this participation. This finding will help both the donors and governments of developing countries like Bangladesh to explore the present position of governance in their countries, and to identify possible ways for attaining good governance through effective and meaningful people's participation.

QUEST FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE

Attaching conditions during the disbursing of aid by the International Donor Agencies (IDA), particularly by the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), is a long time practice in relation to developing countries. At the beginning of 1980s, the IDA significantly tightened its policy lines by imposing the condition of public sector reforms as a core element of its aid strategy. To this end they started the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) across the developing countries to eradicate poverty through maximum outcomes from development assistance (Villanger & Jerve 2003). The main aim of the SAP was reforms, decentralization and deregulation of government policies and policy-making processes for maximising the usage of aid. However, after pursuing two decades of reforms, it has been recognised, even by the World Bank, that SAP neither alleviates poverty nor even assures sustainable growth in the least developed countries (Sobhan 2002). In the period of SAP (1980-88), East Asia sustained annual growth in per capita GDP of 7 percent while sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America respectively experienced a decline of 2.4 and 0.7 percent (Squire 1991). Following the failure of SAP, 'good governance' has become a popular word used by donors in development discourses as they have recognised good management is essential for good economic growth. From 1989, the international aid agencies and donor countries sought good governance through people's participation as an aid strategy. Mr. Kofi Annan, the then Secretary General of the United Nations, declared that 'good governance is vital for the protection of the rights of citizens and the advancement

of economic and social development' (Kim et al. 2005, p. 647). A research conducted by the World Bank has reported that a one standard deviation increase of people's participation in governance causes a 2½ fold increase in per capita income, a 4 fold decrease in infant mortality and a 15 to 25 percent increase in literacy (Kaufmann, Kraay & Lobaton 1999).

In Bangladesh, IDAs have been working for more than a decade to establish good governance in the country. The most important of their initiatives include the preparation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, achieving Millennium Development Goals, and participatory budgeting at the local levels. Through these initiatives the IDAs are trying to introduce more transparent and accountable government with greater people's participation in development programs.

Contextualising Good Governance

Different scholars and international agencies define the term 'good governance' in different ways. Some social scientists define it in a very simple way, as the level of goodness (Besancon 2003) or quality (Hye 2000) of government. It is also defined as 'good management', which underpins good performance, good stewardship of public money, good public engagement and, ultimately, good outcomes (Langlands 2004).

In contrast, International Donor Agencies like the World Bank, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) use a normative approach to describe good governance, focusing on management factors to promote economic issues. These agencies have identified a number of basic components for good governance. Amongst these components four are common and universally recognised. These are: accountability, participation, predictability, and

transparency. **Accountability** refers to the imperative to make public officials answerable for government behaviour as well as responsive to the entity from which they derive their authority. The principle of **participation** derives from the recognition that people are at the heart of development.

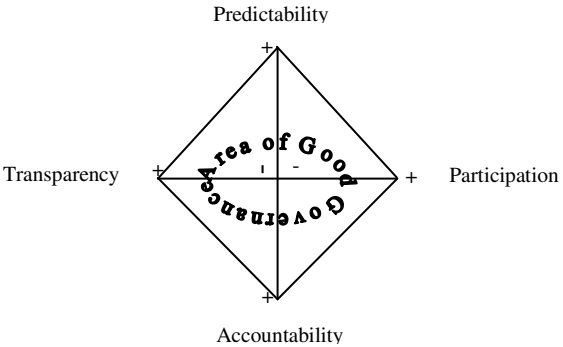


Figure-1: A diagram of good governance

People need to have access to the institutions that promote it. **Predictability** refers to (i) the existence of laws, regulations, and policies to regulate society and (ii) their fair and consistent application. **Transparency** refers to making information available to the general public and clarity about government rules, regulations and decisions (Gurung 2000). Indeed, participation, legitimacy, accountability and transparency are considered major factors in ensuring good governance (ODA 1993). These four elements of good governance are considered as 'Four Pillars, which are universally applicable regardless of the economic orientation, strategic priorities on policy choices of the government' (Rahman 2006, p. 54).

Contextualising People's Participation

Participation is, as the World Bank (1996) defines, a process through which people influence and share control over development initiatives. Though participation sometimes causes delays in the decision-making (Innes & Booher 2004) or increases cost (Olson 1965) or brings conflict (Burekul 2000), most critics describe it as essential to the sustainability of development programs (Carley 2006; Siroros 2002). Almost all social scientists have argued about the participation process as a social transformation mechanism, where the power of the implementing agency is transferred to the civil society. They further argued that people's participation is effective when people's empowerment reaches a position that enables cooperative and collective actions to be performed with the implementing agency, resulting in enhanced influence over decision-making, monitoring and evaluation processes (Brett 2003; Cooper, Bryer & Meek 2006).

Different social scientists have recommended different stages of people's participation process in local development programs. A metaphoric eight rung ladder of participation process has been developed by Arnstein (1971), which is: i) Manipulation, ii) Therapy, iii) Informing, iv) Consultation, v) Placation, vi) Partnership, vii) Delegated power and viii) Citizen control. In contrast, Wilcox (1994) and the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2 2003) proposed five stages of people's participation, which are: 1) Inform: one way communication, 2) Consult: two-way communication, 3) Involve: Deciding together, 4) Collaborate: Acting together, and 5) Empower: Supporting independent community interests. The stages 'involve' and 'collaboration' are symbiotic, together covering

people's participation as working jointly, so this study merges them, and identifies the four stages of participation as: 1) Inform, 2) Consult, 3) Involve and 4) Empower.

Relationship between People's Participation and Good Governance

The four major elements of good governance - such as accountability, transparency, people's participation and predictability –conceptually, tend to be mutually supportive, but people's participation is the central element amongst these (Rahman 2005). More clearly, a people-participatory government ensures more transparent, accountable and predictable governance for its people. Manowong and Ogunlana, for example, argue that the concept of good governance, 'has to be not just pro-people or people-centred; it has to be owned by people'(2006, p. 345). This argument thus recognizes that the level of good governance increases through people's heightened participation in development programs. JICA (1995) reported that good governance is the foundation of participatory development inasmuch as it provides the government roles needed to encourage participation and create the environment in which people can participate effectively. Effective people's participation enhances the transparency of the development works, the accountability of the implementing authority, and compliance with the local laws, which consequently establish good governance. The above discussion thus indicates people's participation and good governance are inseparable.

On the basis of the people's participation stage, four models have been developed by researchers to describe qualities of governance. These are: 1) Managerial model –top down approach of implementation, marginal scope for people's participation; 2) Legislative model –decision making process initiated from the top to develop a common agenda through consulting the people; 3) Limited community participation model –engage community to open up the decision making process that finally generates harmony within the governing body and/ or within the community; and 4) Community empowerment model –bottom up approach that happens because of extensive community participation (Gibson, Lacy & Dougherty 2005). Reviewing these statements and models, an outline and diagram of models of governance can be drawn up, on the basis of people's participation. The four progressive stages of people's participation, namely: Inform stage, Consult stage, Involve stage and Empower stage, will be described along with the four models of governance, which are: Power model, Bureaucratic model, Political model and Empower model. These models have been developed on the

basis of the different stages of people’s participation in governing agencies, which can be shown along the following lines.

Power Model: This model evolves when people’s participation remains at the beginning stage, that is,

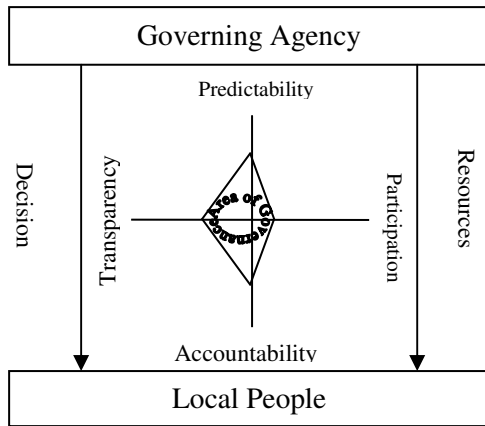


Figure-2: Diagram of Power Model

at the information level. In this situation, decisions and resources come from the top and projects are implemented mostly by the bureaucrats of the local agency, following rigidly prescribed processes, where people are treated as passive recipients. Authorities usually use local representatives or a display board or snail mail to inform people about the

program. The total process of the program is not transparent, accountable or predictable.

Bureaucratic Model: This model develops when the people’s participation level remains at the consultation stage. Governing agencies, in this model, consult with the people and use the resources of the people, but do not share with them the power to make decisions and/or policy. The participation is not enough to allow the people to know all about the resources, and that leaves scope for corruption in this model. A public meeting is usually conducted for consultation. People are treated as customers or clients by the authority as they do not share the whole process of development implementation. The process of the program, in this model, is less transparent and less predictable. This is despite the governing agency remaining accountable to the higher authority though not to the people.

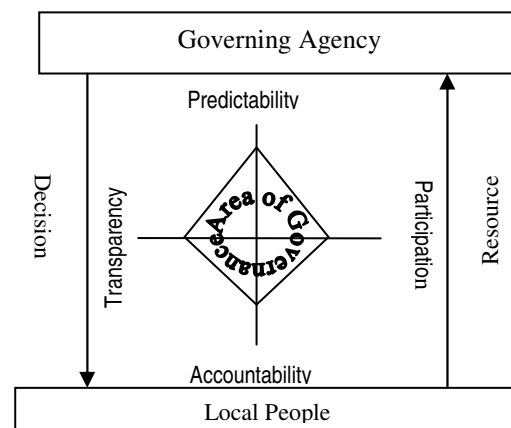


Figure-3: Diagram of Bureaucratic Model

Political Model: This model evolves when the participation level reaches the stage of involvement. In this model, the governing agency shares the knowledge, resources and authority with the local people in order to make decisions to implement the project. Moreover, in this model, people and agency jointly form a kind of coalition where both sides share histories, rituals, values and other common

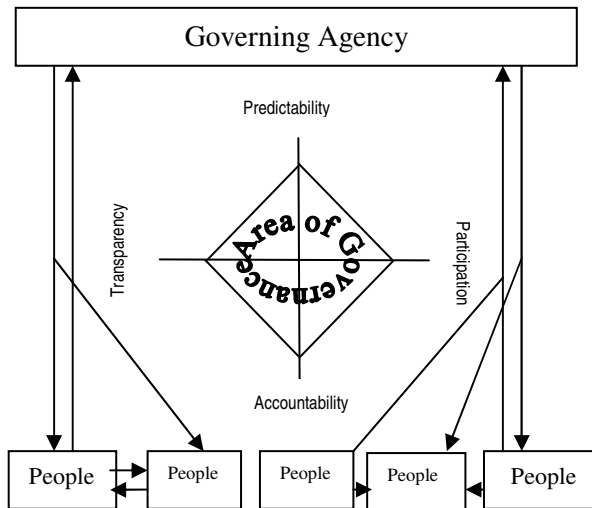


Figure-4: Diagram of Political Model

Predictability, transparency, and accountability are high in this model, as far as some people are concerned, but not for the community as a whole.

Democratic Model: This model emerges gradually as people’s participation attains the stage of empowerment. This model allows developing a partnership with people, delegating authority to make decisions and implementing programs with the sharing of local knowledge, resources and values. This

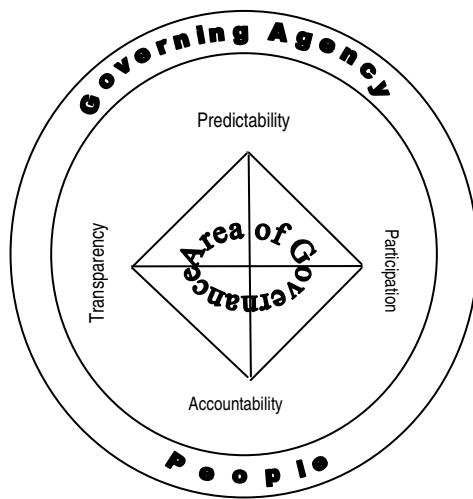


Figure-5: Diagram of Democratic Model

But, authorities need to be flexible and open to encourage the development of this model.

As today’s agencies in developed economies are following the consulting or involving stages of participation (Shand and Arnberg 1996), this means that they are following a bureaucratic or political model of governance. The democratic model in this milieu is difficult but not impossible to achieve if this trend can be sustained. The only important issue for the democratic governments and agencies is

interests, and establish a more cooperative network to develop any program. But, people can be engaged with the development programs fractionally, and that can lead to evolve conflicts. People are treated as partners, players or as contingent in this model, but the building of trust between the agency and the local people may remain weak because of the segmented network that has evolved.

model allows participatory planning and strategic decision making, which facilitate the development of a common vision, articulation of needs, effective, efficient and transparent management that facilitate a joint working environment. Transparency, accountability and predictability are fairly high in this model. Finally, this is the most rational model when people are considered as stewards or navigators.

that they should look after the practice of democracy in development implementation at rural level. But this is what is barely happening in most developing economies, because practically, 'a wide gulf exists between the expectations associated with democratic theory and the practice of democracy in community governance' (Gibson, Lacy and Dougherty 2005, p.1).

The above diagrams thus illustrate that good governance can be achieved through continuous endeavour to empower the people i.e. effective people's participation. Here, the word 'effective' refers to instances when people's participation makes a difference within the decision making processes or policy outcomes of government (Cole & Caputo 1984). 'Effective participation' is, as the World Bank (1996) defined, a process through which people influence and share control over development initiatives.

PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION CONTEXT IN BANGLADESH

The people's participation in local development works remains deeply rooted in the dynamics of the evolution of local government bodies in the region. The indigenous writings in this region, dating from approximately 1200 BC, mentioned some forms of village self-governance, which were termed 'village republics' by Sir Charles Metcalfe (Siddiqui 2005, p. 29). Though these institutions were autonomous and self sufficient in the mobilization of resources, there is not enough information on whether these village institutions acted like local government, and whether the common people had access to participation in the decision making process (Khanna 1977; Siddiqui 2005, p. 30).

In contrast, as Maity and Basham (1957) have mentioned, the first local government bodies were formed by the Gupta ruler (roughly AD 320-550) by forming a committee of leading local citizens (the Panchayet) and by appointing a land recorder and a revenue collector in village areas. Local people could discuss their affairs with the central employees during this time, hence these village Panchayets are regarded as 'if not democratic, at least established in some degree the principle of government by discussion'(Maity & Basham 1957, p. 98). This form of Panchayet existed for a long time (500-1525 AD) till the Mughals (1526-1761) appointed Kotwal (CEO) and Kazi (Judicial officer) in addition to the previous two land and revenue officials. Thus, the Mughal, by strengthening their law and order and revenue administration through centrally appointed employees, gradually weakened the local self-government system in the Bengal (Siddiqui 2005, p. 37).

During almost two hundred years of British rule (1761-1947) over the Bengal region, a number of experiments were conducted with the local government institutions and their activities with local communities. The first attempt to involve local people in a local government body was through the Village Choukidery Act in 1870. Through this act five selected local people who were nominated by the District Magistrate formed a Village Panchayet to appoint Choukider (village police) for the maintenance of local law and order.

A major attempt to ensure people's participation in local government bodies was initiated through the Bengal Local Self-Government Act of 1885. This Act provided a three-tier system of local bodies including an elected Union Committee for each Union (cluster of villages) at the remote level. This Act initiated the election as a mode of choosing one's representative at the local level, though these representatives were subject to approval by the District Magistrate.

The Bengal Village Self-Government Act of 1919 was another major step in this area. A two tier system replaced the three tier local government system that existed, retaining the District Board and establishing a Union Board at the Union level. This system continued until India and Pakistan gained independence in 1947 (Sarker 2006).

Though these Acts were called Self-government, these bodies were not, nevertheless, self governed. They were controlled by the central government. Even the elected members were subject to the approval of the central government. So these governing bodies did not allow any scope for the engagement of the local people; rather, people were treated as the customer. Through these processes the government created an elite class at the local level e.g. president and vice president of the Union Board, and used them to collect taxes, and realigned them towards government ruling policies (Siddiqui 2005). The real purpose behind the introduction of local bodies was, perhaps, seeking supports from the natives at the local level while denying their participation at the central level (Morshed 1989).

During the Pakistan period (1947-1970), the Basic Democracy Order-1959 promulgated four tiers of local government system all over the country. In rural areas they formed the Union Council and the Thana (sub-district) Council. All Member of Union Councils and 50 percent of the members of the Thana Councils were people's representatives who were elected by the local people. But the

controlling authority of these councils was in the hands of bureaucrats as the elected local representatives could be removed from their position by the local government officials because of any misconduct in the discharge of their duties. So, rather than serving the people, these people’s representatives served the government officials (Sarker 2006).

The constitution for newly independent Bangladesh, in 1971, kept provisions for promulgated representative bodies at all levels of local government. In compliance with this constitutional provision, different governments introduced different types of local government bodies (see the Figure-6). These reforms started with the President’s order number 7 of 1972. Through this order the name of Union Councils and Thana councils changed, but no significant change in the people’s participation process happened.

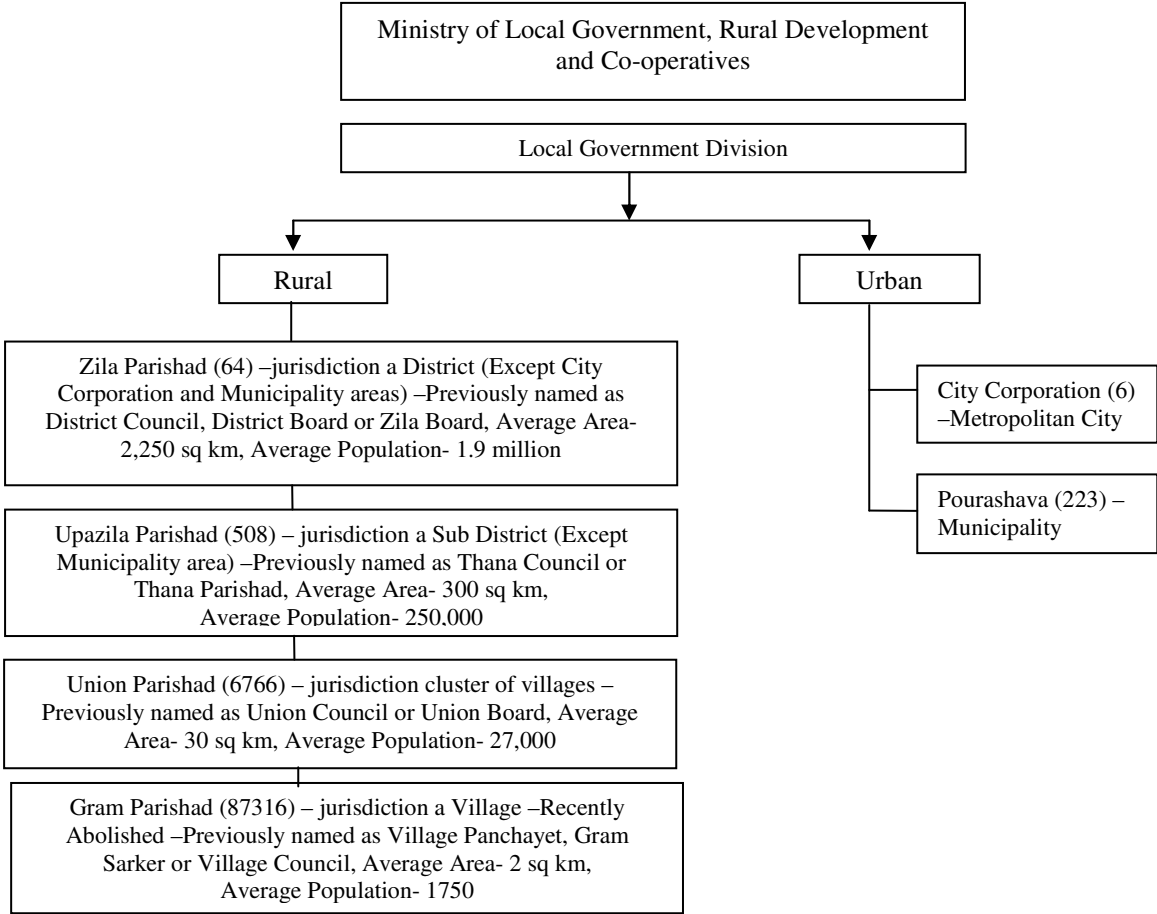


Figure-6: Structure of Local Government Bodies in Bangladesh (BBS 2007; Commonwealth Local Government Forum 2007).

With the change of the government in 1976, the then military ruler changed the local government system notably by promulgating the Local Government Ordinance of 1976. This Ordinance introduced

three tiers of local government bodies: namely the Zila Parishad at District level, the Thana Parishad at Thana level, and the Union Parishad at Union level. One chairman and nine members were to be elected by the local people for the Union Parishad. Two nominated women and two peasant members who were also to be included in the committee were selected by the bureaucrats of the central government. However, the elected chairmen were still accountable to the local bureaucrat, as the dismissal power of the Chairman for any misconduct was under the control of the government. Moreover, local bureaucrats were always appointed as Chairman of the Thana Parishad. So these people's representatives truly represented the government instead of representing local people.

In 1982, another military ruler reined over the government and changed the local government system through another Ordinance. The Local Government (Thana Parishad and Thana Administration Reorganization) Ordinance, 1982 was a milestone in the local government system in the country. Through this Ordinance, Thanas were upgraded to Upazilas and the Thana Parishad to Upazila Parishad. The most important change was that the Chairman of the Upazila Parishad was an elected person and local officials were transferred to the Parishad, and acted as non-voting (without voting rights) members of the Parishad. All development programs at Upazila level were also transferred to the Parishad. Though the Upazila system was constituted as a true democratic local government body, most social researchers considered it as a mechanism for decentralizing corruption and they concluded that it failed to involve local people in development programs (Sarker 2006, p. 1294; Siddiqui 2005, p. 95).

A democratically elected government in 1991 restructured the local government bodies again. The Upazila Parishads were abolished by promulgating the Local Government (Upazila Parishad and Upazila Administration Reorganization) Ordinance. In 1992, the Local Government Structure Review Commission recommended two tiers of local government body, namely Union Parishad and Zila Parishad (Siddiqui 2005, p. 100). The Thana Development Coordination Committee (TDCC) replaced the Upazila Parishad, where UP chairmen of the Upazila jurisdiction held the Chairmanship by rotation. Moreover, the local Parliament Member was appointed as the Adviser of the TDCC, which unexpectedly degraded the authority of local people's representatives. Thus local government bodies again came under the control of the legislative/ central government. Sarker mentioned that 'TTDC had

little decision making power, virtually no popular participation, and represented central-local relations back to bureaucratic control' (Sarker 2006, p. 1295).

In 1997, with the change of another democratically elected government, a Local Government Commission recommended establishing a four-tier local government institution at the village, Union, Upazila and Zila levels without mentioning any changes in people's participation. In 2001, a review committee of the Local Government System also recommended a four-tier local government system, which consequently introduced the Gram Sarker Act-2003. Through this Act a non-elected body was introduced at village level to organise participatory planning and support the activities of the central government. However, on the basis of the recommendation (placed on 13 November 2007) of the committee on 'Accelerating and Strengthening Local Government Institutions', the government abolished Gram Sarker at village level and went back to three tier local government bodies, each at District, Upazila and Union level. These committees mainly focused on the organizational structure, source of revenue earning, autonomy of local government, empowerment of women, setting criteria for candidate for election, etc. These committees also suggested forming an independent Local Government Commission to remove the local government bodies from the vicious grip of the central government.

The above study thus shows that from the beginning the local government bodies in Bangladesh experienced significant changes in their structure and in functions, but no significant change in terms of involving people. While these changes were regarded as the instrumental change of local government bodies, in no way did they bring any normative/intrinsic change in their function. Particularly, after the independence in 1971, with the change of government, just like in 1976, in 1982, in 1991, and in 2001, there were changes in local government structures. These changes, however, never facilitated the local community to make their own decisions and engage themselves in their own programs. Moreover, because of government mechanisms, people's representatives also never worked for the people. Rather the central government, retaining a great measure of controlling the people's representatives, took on the function of local government and kept the local people apart from this for their own interests (Subramaniam 1990). The only remarkable development of local governance was Upazila Parishad during 1986-1991, but in the absence of mechanisms and laws of compulsory

people's participation, these institutions and their elected heads and members were considered as corrupted and anti-people minded. Even the ongoing review committee supported by IDAs, while it intends to make a Local Government body accountable to the local people or bottom tier, is championing (because of misconception) these local government bodies becoming accountable to the Commission or top tier.

Quality of governance in rural Bangladesh

From the above review it is clear that the rural people of Bangladesh remain in the information stage: that is, the country has been practicing the Power Model of governance at local level for a long time. This finding is consistent with the observation of many international development agencies and researchers that there is little scope for the people to be effectively engaged in the affairs of local government in Bangladesh (WorldBank 1996). The UNDP (UNDP 2002) pointed out that public participation in development activities is far from being an efficient tool of governance in Bangladesh. Nonetheless, the currently introduced participatory- budgeting program by the World Bank has also been controversial. Where approximately eighty percent of the populace at village level are illiterate, how much they understand about the budgetary calculation and how they establish their voice for making decisions is a great question. All these efforts by the donors or government can be considered as just an information process to the people at rural level.

The IDAs envisage that practicing democracy at central level would naturally lead to the gradual emergence of democratic institutions all over the country, but there is no sign of democratic local governance in Bangladesh despite the fact that centrally it has been practicing democracy for a long time. In fact, local communities in most of the developing democratic countries participate in electing their representatives through a democratic election that is the sole and final practice of democracy at local level. This situation can be compared with the governance status of some other developing countries all around the world. A paper reviewing the literature shows that some of the local government bodies in countries like Bolivia, India and Nigeria are informing local people in perpetuation of good governance. In contrast, some of the local government bodies in places like in Indonesia, Uganda, Thailand and Kenya are consulting with local people to obtain good governance (Waheduzzaman 2008).

However as former Chief Economist of the World Bank and Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz has suggested, ‘participation does not refer simply to voting ... [but] requires that individuals have a voice in the decisions that affect them (Pruitt & Thomas 2007, p. 13). By itself, the information or consulting approach to engaging the local people is not enough to establish their voice, especially where people are mostly illiterate and less aware about their rights as citizen. Entirely transparent, accountable and predictable governance, that is, good governance, can only be achieved through more involvement and empowerment of the local people, particularly where people are more illiterate and blurred about their citizenship rights. The figures (figures 2-5) that are developed through the literature review can be used as a tool to identify the present position of governance at the present stage of participation, which will provide a clear indication about the next step in achieving good governance.

CONCLUSION

Developed countries and donor agencies are playing a central role as advocates of good governance. In order to receive aid assistance, developing countries are required to comply with donor requirements with respect to good governance. To comply with this, different developing democratic countries are trying to establish good governance through people’s participation, but still, after almost two decades of effort, developing countries remain at the early stage of the participation process, that is, not truly involving local people with local government functions. In Bangladesh, since 1885, local people have been participating in the local government bodies through their representatives. But these representatives, because of structural and functional mechanisms, except during election periods, do not involve people with the local government’s functions. Most of the times elected leaders and local bureaucrats only inform local people about local development programs. Even the donor agencies are practicing and nurturing the information process at the expense of engaging the people in rural Bangladesh. While representative-participation and hearing people is effective for western society – where people are educated and highly aware about their citizen rights – this is not suitable for a poor socio-economic society like Bangladesh. This study reveals that Bangladesh local government, as it remains at the information stage in terms of people’s participation, is thus, practicing the Power Model of governance instead of the Democratic Model of governance. While Bangladesh and other democratic developing countries are practicing democracy centrally, at the local level they are

practising a kind of autocratic government. This is undoubtedly a paradox. Empowering the local people is the only way to ensure effective participation for good governance and to end the paradox.

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