

Basis of Institutional Capacity Building of Rural-Local Government in Bangladesh: A Brief Discussion

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Abstract

Local government of Bangladesh is an important aspect to make development at local level. It plays vital role in socio-economic development of the country. It is a process of political decentralization and ensures human rights, democracy, and accountability to society. The structured and well organized local government is the pre-condition to fill up the need of peoples demand and it is crying need to our developing society. The objectives and aspirations of local Government depends on how much it is being institutionalized in its practice. Different form of institution of W.Richard Scott (2001) like regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive of the organization are used to analyze the institution of local government of Bangladesh as a theoretical concept. This concept has been developed in analyzing data of the study. The sources of data are purely secondary. The possibilities and weakness of institutional capacity of local government in Bangladesh have been highlighted in the study.

Introduction

Bangladesh is a sovereign, unitary and independent country of the world and local Government is working as part of subordinate branch of government. Local government is a form of Government that discuss administrative, economic and welfare activities for ensuring overall development activities of a specific locality. It ensures the basic services of people relating to different development actions. It is also called decentralized form of Government that are responsible to ensure human rights, democracy and good governance. Local Government is important part of central government and it is recognized as a quasi-sovereign government. In the article... of constitution of Bangladesh ensures effective local government through participation in administration at all levels. The local government works, as an organization for servicing people and it is a vital dimension in development. The success of local

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government depends on how much it is institutionalized. In fact, the institution means to organize the people, mobilize resources, ensure participation of people, accountability and transparency, formulate plans, coordinate and implement development activities. The institution of local government also focuses on the recognition from people, community, and society. In the study of local government of Bangladesh the institutional capacity has been discussed through theoretical concept.

Data collection

The study has been developed through secondary sources of data. The data are collected from different books, journals, newspapers, and from Internet websites. Different scholars views regarding local Government have been discussed in the study.

Objectives of the study

The degree of institutional strength makes local government more effective and efficient. The local government of Bangladesh is insufficient in terms of political, administrative, and financial management. The local government is seriously dependent on central government as well as foreign donors. The nature of work, management procedure, and utilization of local resources are connected to institutionalization of local government in Bangladesh. The institutional capacity is to be strengthened when all sorts of supports are available in local level. In the study the following objectives are selected to explore the institutional capacity of local government in Bangladesh.

1. To know about democratic values in local government system such as election process and peoples participation.
2. The pre-condition of institutionalization of local government is autonomy and how it has been practiced at Rural- Local government in Bangladesh.
3. The institutional strength of local government is highly depending on management process. In the study different dimensions of management process in local government have been discussed to know about institutional capacity.
4. The social recognition is an important component of institutionalization process. It has been analyzed the recognition of local government from different professionals, civil society, rural elites as well as mass people.

Theoretical Analysis

The term institution is used in different senses. It is a long time process and a part of human being as well as organization. It is called custom or system of the society. The custom or system is to be institutionalized when it will be recognized by society. Different thinkers of social sciences used institution as different views. According to political scientists (Scott 2001:6), “institutions as frameworks of rules, procedures

and arrangement or prescriptions about which actions are required, prohibited or permitted". In the view of economics of organization, institutions as governance structures, social arrangements to minimize transaction cost. It is a set of principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures that shape the expectations of actors.

In the book of *Institutions and Organizations* by W. Richard Scott (2001:51-58) mentions three pillars of institutions such as regulative, normative, and cognitive-cultural and each pillar is considered as a vital ingredient of institutions. These elements are important factors of the organization to make them institutionalization. The regulative pillar is the process of rule-setting, monitoring, controlling, and sanctioning activities. It is highly formalized and always maintains rules and regulation of the organization. The regulative pillar of local government is rules, law, monitoring management, coordination, and different administrative procedures of local government in Bangladesh. It helps to run the organization in formal procedures. With this institution the control mechanism play an important role in the organization. The central-local relations, donors' assistance over local government and different control of administrative management are relevant to this institution. This kind of institution is legitimized by rules and regulations. The normative pillar of institution is norms and values of the organization. It is not the formal structure of the organization but it helps to fix up the goals and objectives. It indicates social obligation, commitment, and expectation. In normative pillar the system may be different but society/state must be approved. It needs official approval/recognized by the organization. The ideas of normative institution have been discussed to know about institutionalization of local government in Bangladesh. The third pillar of institution of Scott is cultural-cognitive. It is the shared conceptions that constitute the nature of social reality. It is socially constructed and culturally supported and approved by society. It creates specific meaning and must be approved by the society. The symbols, words, signs, gestures are used to make them meaningful. This concept of institution is also linked to local government of Bangladesh.

Background

The local Government of Bangladesh is a historical process and its present outcome is achieved from the British and Pakistan period through different changes and amendments. Bangladesh was born in 1971 by liberation and a composition of local government was essential to run the country. The first action on local government in Bangladesh was the president's order to dissolve all local bodies and appointed official administrators. The District council, and the Thana council were placed under control of Deputy Commissioner (DC) and Sub Divisional Officer (SDO) respectively (Faizullah 1987:16).

According to President Order no.22 of 1973 the Union Parishad of Local had been changed in the area of composition but the functions of Union parishad were same as before. A position of vice-chairman was created at Union level along with a chairman. In 1976, a new law called Local Government Ordinance-1976 had been introduced to reform rural local level governance in Bangladesh. A provision had been created for nominated members at Union and Upazila parishad and the post of vice-chairman was abolished. In Local Government amendment Ordinance - 1980 a village level local government named 'Gram Sarkar' has been set up with elected Chairman and members. The composition of Gram Sarkar was twenty-two members including women, peasants, and landless. The Gram Sarkar was given wide range of functions but without due resource back up or taxation power. But it did not continue longer period due to political reason and it had been abolished in 1982.

The Thana level local government had been changed after independence of Bangladesh. According to president order no.7 in 1972 the name of local government was Thana Development Committee(TDC).Later on, Local Government Ordinance no.22 in 1976 the name of local government was Thana Parishad. During this period the local government had done only the regulating functions such as law and order, revenue collection and judiciary. The development functions were absent and it was lack of people's participation. The Local Government Ordinance-1982 was remarkable evidence to make decentralization of local government in Bangladesh .The Upazila parishad had been formed and a chairman elected by people as well as some selected representatives including government officials got opportunity to work there. The Upazila Nirbhai Officer (UNO) was secretary of the parishad. The controlling as well as development functions of Upazila parishad help people to provide them maximum services.

According to president Order no.7 in 1972 and Local Government Ordinance 1976 the name of local government at district level was Zila Board and Zila Parishad respectively. The composition of Zila Parishad was elected, nominated (women members), and government officials. Chairman and vice-chairman were come from elected and nominated members. But no election was held during this period. The district commissioner and secretary of local government were responsible as a chairman and secretary of Zila parishad. The local government ordinance in 1988 the number of Zila parishad had been extended from 22to 64 and a chairman had been appointed for three years among 61 districts. The district commissioner was chairman and representative, nominated and government officials were member of this parishad. There was no voting right of government officials at meetings. It had compulsory and non-compulsory functions and collection of fund from nine sources.

In 1996, the empowering government constituted the local government commission and suggested four- tier local government

structure such as Gram Parishad(GP) at village level, Union Parishad(UP)at the union level, Upazila Parishad (UPZ) at Thana level and Zila Parishad (ZP) at district level. The main objective of LG was to make it democratic and powerful. The parliament passed the Local Government Act-1997 at village and union level. The Union Parishad had been empowered but Gram Parishad was inactive due to legal embargo. In November 1998, the parliament legislated the Upazila Act, 1998. A bill on Zila Parishad had been processed but was not finalized due to political culture of Bangladesh. The election of ZP and UZP were not held till now. In 2001, the government had been changed and only the Union parishad was continued till now. Later on, the government introduced Gram Sarkar at village level. The Union Parishad is composed of a chairman and nine members including women members and people directly elect them. But there was no election process of Gram Sarkar and it is basically formed by undemocratic process. The caretaker Government took over power and abolished it due to its ill purpose.

Analysis of Data

Institutionalization of local government depends on some factors relating to empowering of management system and other relevant issues. The rural local government of Bangladesh is traditional as well as functionally weak in its institutional capacity due to some lack of measurement from different period in Bangladesh.

1. Human Rights and Participation

The power of people is the important force to make strengthen the local government institution. People's unity is the strength and it makes them organized to the institution. The force of people to politician and bureaucrats strengthen local government bodies. With a view to strengthening the local government, the interference by bureaucrats and lawmakers should be stopped (The Daily Star 2007:2). People's awareness regarding legislature and local government bodies are significant factors to make the local government meaningful. People's participation at grassroots level is needed to institutionalize democracy as well as strengthen local government institution. The power of people is the tools to make the local government stronger and participative. Development becomes truly effective when local people participate in the planning process.

2. Accountability

The local government can be accountable to deliver service among mass people. The public service institutions play important role regarding this. The institutional capacity of rural-local government depends on effective accountability of public service organizations. Political commitment is needed to institutionalize local government in Bangladesh. The political

parties do not implement commitment after empowering in government. It is possible to make accountable of local government by enhancing managerial activities and responsibilities. It is necessary to provide more power to people representatives so that they can serve the people effectively.

3. Organizations and Management

Local government system needs to be changed so that public services including health, education, and agriculture can reach people through elected representatives. Legal framework must be formulated for strengthening the local government. The existing system must be changed and the elected representatives can take different initiative under strong monitoring management. There will be standing committees in the local government institutions to look after more important issues. The local government ombudsman needs to introduce at local level in order to ensure budgetary allocation and financial accountability. Strong local government commission can play important role in achieving the objectives of local bodies. The commission supervises; coordinate, and monitoring all activities of local government and take necessary actions and it must be highly powerful and free from politics. The functions of commission are to be fair and neutral, and legally it must be recognized by society.

4. Decentralization

A democratic decentralized pattern of local government is required to strengthen local government institution in which consists of structure, reform, and functions of local government in Bangladesh. Decentralization is the latest tools of development administration and by strengthening local government institution it is possible to reduce poverty from the country. All power should be delegated to local government. The proper administrative and political decentralization are needed to ensure for providing the rights of people at grass roots level. The local government is to be considered as unit of service for people and supported by mass people. The rules and regulation of local government should be people oriented and mass people can easily participate in development process. As part of decentralization process the role of local government in the society will do as a changing agent. The principles of decentralization help to make rural–local government effective and people oriented. It is important to reintroduce Upazila parishad democratically to strengthen local government and presently it is needed consensus among political parties, civil society, and professionals.

5. Personnel Management

The personnel of local government are important supportive force to ensure efficiency and effectiveness as well as it plays positive role in institutional capacity building. The strength of institutional capacity depends on personnel management of the organization. In the

organization of local government presently the union parishad is effective and the personnel of this organization are recruited by district administration. A secretary and a few supportive officials are working at union parishad. The set up of personnel management of local government are not well organized and institutionalized because there is no specific provision regarding personnel management. The recruitment rules are not specified and there is no clear guidance regarding promotion, transfer, training etc. The status of secretary and other personnel is not considered as like as other personnel of public service. The staff of local government must be trained up and have to be capable to work with people. There have some training institutions to train up local government officials but it is not sufficient and has some lack of technical support.

6. Women Empowerment

The effective participation of women in politics at local government makes it meaningful and effectiveness. Women are important human resource to make economic development for the country because half of our populations are women. It is recognized in society as well as state that the participation of women in local government is significant. That is why government has taken initiative to participate three women members at union level. It is a process of women empowerment in local government but practically women are not able to participate in decision-making. The social recognition of women is not institutionalized in our country. The values of society in Bangladesh are not standard and perception of male towards women is considered as negatively. The social meaning towards women empowerment is not highly acceptable from all levels. The women participation in local government is not democratic and it is also true that women are not aware of from themselves. The lack of education is important obstacle in empowering women by which impacts on institutionalization of local government in Bangladesh.

7. Participating Organizations

NGOs and donor agencies are supportive organization to strengthen local government institution. It is possible to enhance capacity of people by taking different initiatives through NGOs activities to local government in Bangladesh. The donor's are providing technical as well as financial support to institutional capacity building but it is difficult to provide full support by them. Some NGOs and voluntary organizations are involved in making local government effective to empowering rural people. The initiatives of participating organization help to institutionalize local government. But the major actors of government organization are not fully supported to institutionalize local government in Bangladesh.

8. Local- central relations

The relation between the central and local governments lacks coordination and it is completely top-down(The daily Star 2007:2).In the constitution of Bangladesh the guidelines regarding local government is stronger but practically the institutions of local government is weak because lack of better relation with central government. The central government is always used paternalistic attitude towards local government. The exercises of power sharing between central and local government make it institutionally stronger.

The strong monetary management and free from influence of lawmakers and central government the local government of Bangladesh can be effective.

9. Autonomy

The administrative and financial autonomy of local bodies are the pre-condition in strengthening local government institutions. Administratively, local government is highly depends on central government. Finance is an important source and called it heart of administration. It works as a pre-requisite to make autonomy of rural-local government. In fact, Union Parishad in Bangladesh is highly dependent on its grants to central government for its development expenditure (Wahhab 2002:137). The budgetary allocation of local government is insufficient and the management of resource mobilization is inefficient. The resources are important source to make local government self-reliant and institutionalized. The regulating functions are to be self administered by local representatives and the demands of people are to be considered by local government. There have some potential resources at local level and it needs to mobilize properly for institutional development.

10. Bureaucracy

The bureaucracy is an important part in local government and it plays a vital role to make local government effective. The bureaucrats are working with peoples representative in local government but they are not accountable to people. It is constitutional obligation that government officials are to be accountable to the authorities by whom they are employed (The Daily Star 2007:2). Strengthen of local government depends on the willingness of bureaucrats but the present bureaucratic culture is not favor of to strengthen local government institution. The bureaucracy is a more powerful actor in local government in compare to people representative that does not make fruitful result in development. Local government is not free from influence of bureaucratic culture of Bangladesh and traditional norms in administration. The excessive domination of bureaucracy over local government hampers institutionalization of local government in Bangladesh.

Conclusion

Local Government is the important tier in socio-economic development and it ensures good governance in the country. The degree of institutional capacity make local government strengthens and it helps to ensure peoples aspiration and demand. The local government of Bangladesh is lack of well-organized and institutional capacity that reflects in local development at different sectors. The institutional capacity makes local government more powerful and functional. In the developing society of Bangladesh the highly organized institutional form of local government is necessary to make local development. The participatory and decentralized form of local government should be introduced at different level to get meaningful outcome. Necessary actions of management, rules and procedure are needed to strengthen institutionalized form of local government in Bangladesh.

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