

Structural Puzzles in Upazila Administration of Bangladesh

Md. Mansur Hossen*

Abstract

This paper analyzes the factors affecting the structure of Upazila administration. Structure of an organization plays an important role to perform the responsibilities of its employees. The Upazila Chairman is the political head of Upazila administration and the UNO is the executive head of Upazila administration. They both interfere on each other because of ambiguous job responsibilities. In Upazila administration, there exists dual line of authority, dual accountability system of Upazila officers. The officers are accountable to Upazila Chairman and District officers at the same time. The MPs, as adviser, play crucial role in Upazila administration which is unexpected. Two elected representatives along with UNO and other civil servants make a hotchpotch in Upazila administration. In this paper, I have tried to give focus on these structural puzzles in Upazila administration. This paper argues that the structural puzzles at Upazila administration makes problems for its smooth functioning.

Keywords: Upazila administration, Upazila Chairman, Upazila structure, UNO, Upazila officers, MPs, Accountability, Authority.

Introduction

Decentralization is found in almost all countries irrespective of the form of government. Upazila administration¹ is an example of decentralization. Upazila system is the combination of both Upazila Parishad and Upazila administration. An officer having the rank of (Senior) Assistant Secretary serves as the Chief Executive Officer (UNO)² of the Upazila and is the key functionary of the Upazila administration. There are eighteen functional departments of the central government have field level representatives at Upazila headquarters³. The departmental officers are placed under the

* The author is Research Fellow, Centre for Administrative Research and Innovation (CARI), University of Dhaka, Bangladesh. Email: mansurhossen82@gmail.com

¹ Upazila administration is nothing but the rename of former Thana administration

² The Upazila Nirbahi Officer is the chief officer of the Upazila and he/she belongs to BCS (administration) cadre of Bangladesh Civil Service. An officer with the rank of senior assistant secretary from BCS (administration) cadre is posted as UNO.

³ These departments include Upazila health and family planning, Agriculture, Fisheries, Livestock, Engineering, Social services, Family planning, Project implementation, Women affairs, Cooperatives, Rural development, Public health and engineering, Food, Land, Statistics, Youth and development and Police station (thana).

administrative control of the Chairman⁴. However, they are also accountable to their respective district level officers as they worked as technical reporting officers. It means that the operational control is vested in the Chairman whereas technical control lies with their departmental officers at the district level. These representatives are supposed to work under the general supervision of the UNO at the Upazila level but they are not accountable to the UNO. The structure of Upazila administration has some problems to run the organization smoothly.

Problem Statement

All the departments within Upazila are the part of Upazila administration. These departments along with UNO are under the control of Upazila Parishad. The officers of Upazila administration are under the control of Upazila parishad, mainly under the control of Upazila Chairman and its District level officers. A system of dual authority⁵ with respect to the control over the officers exists. Officers who belong to the Upazila level are required to follow the instruction of respective departmental heads at the district though they act under the guidance of the UNO. The loyalty of the officers in charge of different departments to the UNO is lesser as compared with their loyalty to their respective departmental heads at the district level. Because UNO is neither their direct commanding authority nor is he empowered to write their Annual Performance Report. Rather, the authority to write their ACR⁶ is delegated to departmental heads at the district level. There exists an ambiguous job responsibility of Upazila Chairman and UNO that leads to conflict among them. Thus, there create a hotchpotch situation in Upazila administration.

Research Question

- a. What are the structural problems of Upazila Administration in Bangladesh?
- b. What are the consequences of these problems in development activities?

Scope of the Study

There are plethoras of aspect in Upazila system but this study is done on the structure of Upazila administration. The focus of this paper is structural problems of Upazila administration (Not Upazila Parishad).

Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study are:

- a. To identify the structural problems of Upazila administration.
- b. To expose the factors affecting the structure of Upazila administration.
- c. To identify the impact of structural problems on the performance of the Upazila officers.

⁴ Representative of upazila elected by the adult population of the upazila

⁵ Authority is right to give order and expect the order to be obeyed.

⁶ ACR- a structured Annual evaluation report for the government officers. It is given by their supervisors.

Methodology of the Study

The present study is based on secondary data like prospectus, books, and book chapters, journal articles, research reports, newspaper, activity reports and internet browsing etc. Beside source include different published materials like the publications of CPD , Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Local government, World Bank, Conference papers of some scholars, books and journals have also been studied.

Limitations of the Study

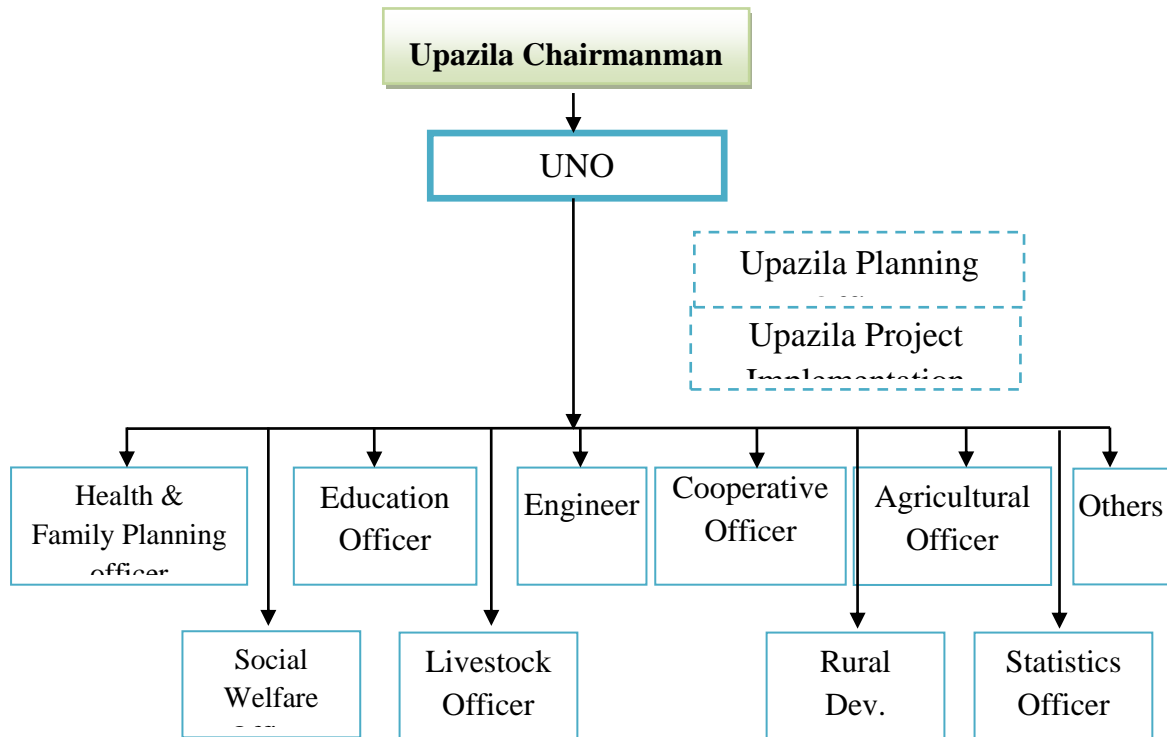
Since the study was required to be completed within a stipulated timeframe, due to time and resource constraints this study cannot be extrapolated to perfectly represent the total structure of Upazila system. I have limitations of time, knowledge, resource capability and so on. This study is based on only secondary data, but the scarcity of related academic materials and studies on the subject area in Bangladesh context is also major constraint. Our Local government ministry has no specific policy on Upazila administration but only Upazila Parishad. Most of the policies found in ministry's website are written in Bangla which was difficult to understand and translate.

Structure of Upazila administration

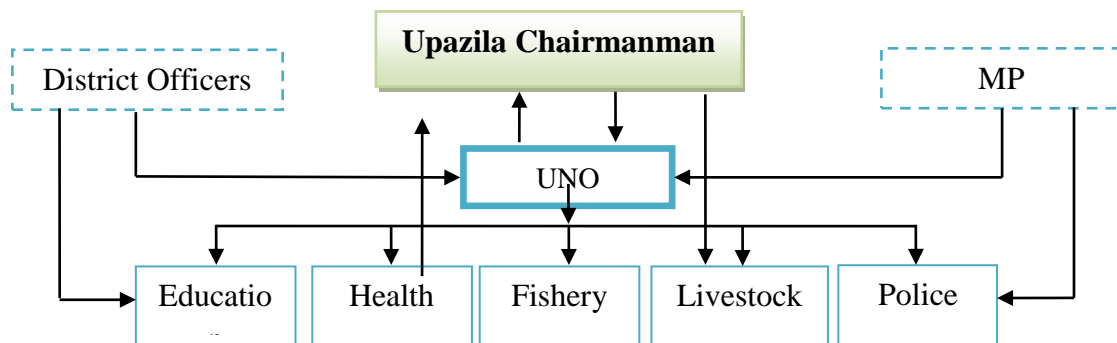
The ministry of LGED & Cooperative is the center of local government. There are two form of local government exist in Bangladesh i.e. urban local government and rural local government along with Special affairs Division of Hill district.



Upazila Chairman is on the top of the hierarchy. Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) act under the control of Upazila Chairman. Officers of different departments belong under the UNO. Upazila planning officer and Upazila project implementation officer are the staff of UNOs' office.



Structural Puzzle in Upazila Administration



Data Analysis

We have seen that Upazila Chairman is on the top of the administrative hierarchy of Upazila administration. UNO act as a secretary of Upazila administration. They both have some duties but those are ambiguous. Organization structure theories suggest that there must be works specialization. Nevertheless, the structure of Upazila administration does not depict specific duties of Upazila Chairman and UNO. The main job of Upazila Chairman is policy formulation and UNO is policy implementation. Conflict between UNO and Upazila Chairman occurs regarding policy formulation and implementation process. Politicians want to be re-elected but bureaucrats instead want to perk up their professional prospects in the public or private sector. The imbalance that characterized conflicting relations between the Upazila Chairman and UNO are noticeable at the Upazila level administration of the Bangladesh. Sometimes UNO is found to play more dominant role than Upazila Chairman in the local administration in the policymaking and governance process. It is generally observed that UNO is better educated than Upazila Chairman. Therefore, The UNO is also

assumed to know more about the law, national policies outline, or determined by central government, local administrative capacity and possible solution for problems.

From the legal point of view it is more or less lucid that the present Upazila Parishad act (2009) is not perfect for apposite functioning of the Upazila administration.. There is no explicit guideline in the act for the proper functioning in the Upazila administration. The role of the Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO), Upazila Chairman, and MPs are very implicit in the present Upazila act. The MPs illegal interfere in the function of the Upazila administration hamper the regular flow of the Upazila function. Sometimes UNO and other government officials are in confusion to carry out the proposition of the Upazila Chairman and MPs. MPs directly or indirectly sway the functions of the Upazila administration by aligned with Upazila Nirbahi Officer.

The Upazila Chairman is the main executive of the administration. Every now and then, he does his functions according to his own craving and self interest. As an employee of the republic, Upazila Nirbahi Officer is bound to hear the guidance of the Chairman as well as he is liable to abide by the rules and regulation of the state. In the field of Upazila development programs, most of the tender of the development functions are given to the contractor who is in favor of Upazila Chairman. Beside this Upazila Chairman make politicized the social security programs such as (TR, KABIKHA, KABITA, VGD, and VGF)⁷, if Upazila Nirbahi Officer protest that then conflict arise.

Lack of harmonization among the officers occurs due to structural problems and it result in delay in project implementation; increases project cost and creates duplication of development projects. It also hampers the smooth execution of national government policies and programs. The lack of clear understanding of exactly who does what leads to poor synchronization (Sarkar, Parimal, 2011). The officers of these departments have to listen to instruction of the UNO in performing their activities. They are also accountable to their district level officers.

There has been a **dual line of accountability**⁸ and divided loyalty (Sarker, Parimal, 2011). It has been stated that these officers serve two masters. Problems arise when instructions are given by two authority levels for a similar function at the same time. In the given circumstance, it is difficult for the officers to decide whom to follow. This has created problem of management and confusion that leaves negative impact on the overall implementation of development programs at the Upazila. **For example**, The Upazila Agricultural Officer is responsible for coordinating for overall agricultural activities including distribution of inputs such as fertilizer, seed, irrigation equipments and improved agricultural implements. The Upazila agriculture Officer has little control over these activities (Ali, Shawkat:

⁷ These are the social safety net programs in Bangladesh.

⁸ The Line of accountability is an unbroken line of authority that extends from the top of the organization to the lowest echelon and clarifies who report to whom.

1986). In the field of agriculture Upazila Agriculture Officer (UAO) was the functional head and responsible for all activities regarding agriculture. But in practice, BADC⁹ was found loath to work under UAO because of absence of clear-cut instructions regarding their relations. It created many problems in relation to the supply of Agriculture -input. This kind of lack of instructions has led to a serious dispute between the UAO and his counterpart in the BADC over the distribution of inputs that has affected the carrying out their functions (Ahsan, A .H.M. Kamrul, 2010).

The UNO has to face problems in harmonizing inter-departmental relationship at the Upazila level because of **design problem** concerning the structure of the Upazila. The officers working in the Upazila are not directly accountable to the UNO. Rather they are directly supervised and controlled by the heads of their departments at the district level. In case of violation of any instruction, the UNO has not been given adequate authority to coerce other officers of different departments to implement decisions. UNO can only persuade them to get things done at the Upazila level but it depends on their will either to cooperate with him or to avoid him.

There is lack of **division of functions** among departments. In the case of the Upazila, the departments involved in inter-departmental activities are not aware which department is responsible for what activity, when it should be executed, and how the execution must be carried out(Sarkar, Parimal, 2011) . Existing rules and regulations are not suited for the present context where specialization of functions has gained attention largely.

In terms of the rank and status of the officers, they are supposed to be privileged equally. In the case of the Upazila, there is discrimination between the generalist and the specialist officers in terms of privileges they get. For example, the UNO, who is a generalist officer, holds a higher rank and is more privileged compared with other specialist officers. Under these circumstances, there has been discontent among the generalist and specialist officers. In reality, The UNO has effectively become the first among the equals (Ahsan, A.H.M, 2010). There has been very low level of trust among the officers in the Upazila administration. There are also attitudinal problems (**SOFTWARE PROBLEM**) such as reluctance of the government officials to work under Upazila Parishad and resistance among the specialists services to the leadership of the UNO (Ali, Shawkat, 1986). This situation adversely affects the planning and implementation of various development programs at the Upazila level (Ahmad, 1991).

Findings

From the above discussion, we see that the structure of Upazila administration is a puzzle. It does not make any distinct charter of duties of Upazilla Chairman and UNO. As a result, they both interfere in each other jobs. There exists an acute mental conflict between the Upazila Chairman and UNO about the ownership of Upazila. The officers at Upazila have to

⁹ Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation

maintain dual commanding and accountability authority. At the same time, the officers are accountable to their district level officials and Upazila Chairman. The ideology of political leaders and bureaucrats are not same. As a result, the officers at Upazila fall in dilemma that which commanding authority he /she should abide by. If he ignores the order of Upazila Chairman he may be transferred to a remote area. On the other hand, if he ignore the order from departmental head at district level he may get poor marks in APR which will hamper his career prospect. We also see that the UNO plays the dominating role in policy formulation and implementation. As UNO is a policy expert, he also controls the activities of other departments. There exist generalist and specialist conflict among the officers at Upazila level. As the UNO is not the direct commanding authority over other officials and they are not accountable to UNO, they do not care about UNO. There is no formal communication line among the departments at Upazila. The officers of a department have to communicate with other department through UNO that is time consuming. The manuals of Upazila do not clarify the charter of duties of officers at Upazila. A large number of ambiguities are seen in the charter of duties. The charter of duties provided multiple authorities over a specific function. It makes confusion that actually who will do the job.

Recommendation

I would like to give some suggestions regarding the structure of upazilla administration. Such as-

- a. Authentication of lines of responsibility
- b. A system of single authority
- c. Service-oriented attitude of the officers irrespective of cadres
- d. A clear charter of duties of UNOs, Upazila Chairman as well as officers should formulate at Upazila level.
- e. MPs should be removed from the structure of Upazila parishad.
- f. Single accountability authority should be introduced.
- g. Minimizing conflicts among generalists and specialists.
- h. Officers at Upazila should be accountable to UNO as well.
- i. There should be a check and balance relation between Upazila Chairman and UNO.

Conclusion

Upazila administration is the rename of former Thana administration. Though it is said that Upazila is a form of local government but it is still dependent on central government. The structure of Upazila administration is ambiguous, as the UNO and Upazila Chairman do not know about his /her specific duty. The statuses of Upazila officers' are not equal and that is why there exists mental conflict among the UNO and Upazila officers. The accountability mechanism of Upazila administration is not clear. The officers are accountable to Upazila Chairman and at the same time, they are accountable to their district level officers. The advisory role of MPs has great impact on the performance of the bureaucrats at Upazila level. MPs

and Upazila Chairman use the officers ignoring the structure of Upazila administration to serve their political interest. However, the design of the Upazila was intended to make Upazila level bureaucrats accountable to popular leadership placing them under the administrative control of the elected Chairman. Instead of creating a better working environment, it created edgy relation between the elected representatives and the officials in Upazila administration.

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