

Report
on
Divisional Workshop

**TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY :
PRECONDITION FOR STRENGTHENING
LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

*Held on April 12, 2004
at Khan Foundation, Democracy Auditorium,
Momenbagh, Dhaka 12117*

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1. Introduction

Union Parishad is the lowest level local government organ for the people in Bangladesh. Its origin can be traced back to some 150 years when the then British rule introduced the ‘Choukidari Parchayet’ in India. Thereafter it has gone through various changes and now stands as it is. Since its introduction it has been working as a link between the government and the people. It has also been playing good roles for the socio-economic development and civil administration of the locality. Its importance can never be exaggerated. So to meet the people’s needs, hopes and aspiration it has to be strengthened.

To this end a daylong divisional workshop was held with the UP chairmen, NGO representatives and experts on local government system on April 12, 2004 at the Democracy Auditorium, Momenbagh, Dhaka. Advocate Rokhsana Khondker, Executive Director of Khan Foundation, presided over the workshop. Dr. Abdul Moyeen Khan, Honorable Minister for Science and Information and Communication Technology, Government of Bangladesh, attended the workshop as chief guest, while Dr. Dalem Chandra Barman, Chairman, Peace and Conflict Department of Dhaka University, attended it as a special guest. Besides, a number of UP chairmen, UP members, journalists, NGO representatives, and others participated in the workshop

2. Welcome address

Advocate Rokhsana Khondoker, Executive Director of Khan Foundation (KF), welcomed the participants to the workshop on ‘Transparency and Accountability: Preconditions for strengthening the local government’. She told the audience that KF has been working for an era towards strengthening the local government. For this propose it has been able to involve the UP chairmen



Advocate Rokhsana Khondker, Executive Director, Khan Foundation and Chairperson, Shaishab Bangladesh delivering her Welcome Address

and members, lawyers, NGO representatives and civil society members through various workshops, seminars and forums. Besides KF has also been working for establishing rights of women and children, women's empowerment, reproductive health education for girls, poverty alleviation etc.

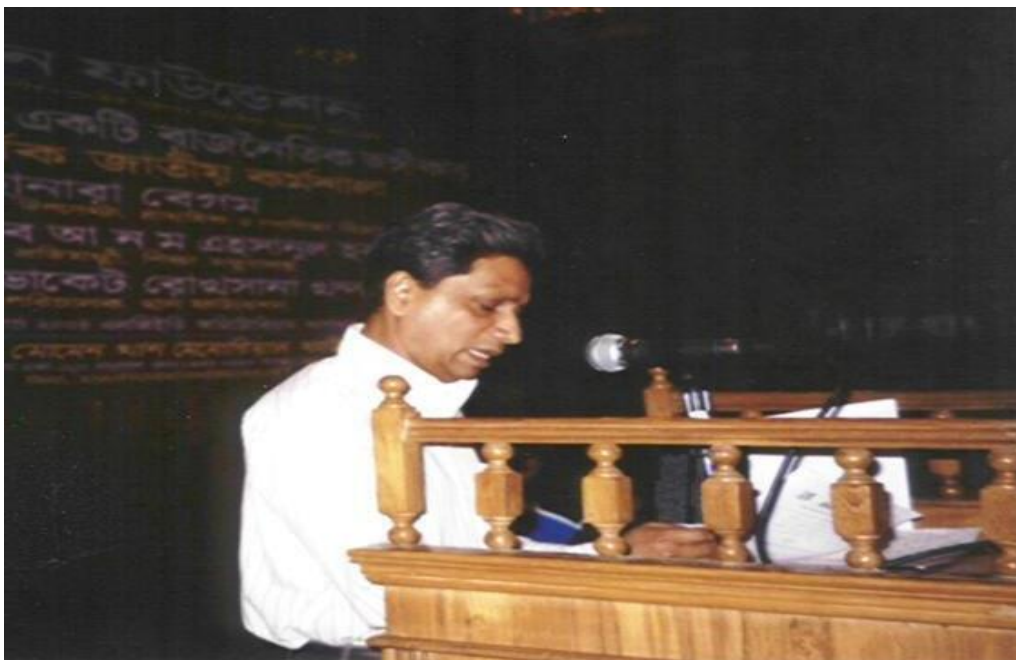
Advocate Khondker continued to inform the participants that KF undertook efforts for establishing democracy and good governance. To this end it has been arranging training for the UP functionaries, especially the women members, to boost up their knowledge, skill and attitude to it. Besides upazila forums have been formed with the women members. Networks have been formed with the NGOs and the women lawyers. Those networks have been working good for establishing democracy and good governance. Today's workshop, she said, is a continuum of all such efforts. She hoped that the workshop would reach its goal for which it has been organised. She thanked all before she concluded her welcome address.



(From right) Mr. Sirajul Hossain, Assistant Director of NILG,, Dr. Abdul Moyeen Khan, Honorable Minister for Science and Information and Communication Technology, Government of Bangladesh Advocate Rokhsana Khondker, Executive Director, Khan Foundation and Chairperson, Shaishab Banglades and Dr. Dalem Chandra Barman, Chairman, Peace and Conflict Department, Dhaka University.

3. Presentation of key-note paper

The keynote paper captioned ‘Strengthening the local governance: Transparency and accountability’ was presented by Mr. Sirajul Hossain, Assistant Director of NILG, at the workshop. He examined the issue from various standpoints and held that transparency and accountability should be there for making the local government strengthened.



Mr. Sirajul Hossain, Assistant Director, National Institute of Local Government (NILG) present his paper

Towards this, he put forward the following recommendations:

- (a) People's participatory activities to be launched.
- (b) Coordination between elected representatives, local people and the appointed staff of UP is needed.
- (c) Clear demarcation of functions between the central government and the local government should be there.
- (d) Management capacity of UP functionaries to be enhanced through training etc.
- (e) Regular sitting with the local people on subject specific matters/issues.
- (f) Good governance to start in all spheres of social life.
- (g) A local government commission to be formed to assist and guide the local government organs.

4. Open discussion

After presentation of the paper of Mr. Sirajul Hossain, an open discussion ensued on it. A number of participants took part in the discussion. Bullet points of discussions are quoted below.

- * "People's participation to be ensued to establish good governance." – Mr. Selim Jahangir, Executive Director, GKS, Sirajgonj.
- * "Local government organs need information technology for advance." – Mr. Iqbal Bahar, Saberi, Executive Director, CRCDD, Chittagong.
- * "Union Parishad committees to be made effective." – Mr. ANM Fazlul Hadi Sabbir, Director, BFF, Faridpur.
- * "Land registration, management of village markets, and management of public water bodies to be placed under UP." – Mr. S. M. Shah Alam, Director, RDB, Dhaka.
- * "Intervention of MP in UP activities be stopped." – Mr. A Huq, Executive Director, BMDS, Faridpur.
- * "Women members of UP to be given more responsibilities." – Kazi Enayet Hossain, Executive Director, SCOPE, Barisal.
- * "Expenditures of candidates in UP elections to be monitored to keep those within limits." – Mr. Tarique Islam Polash, Executive Director, AID, Jhenaidah.

- * “Income and expenditure of UP should be regularly audited.” – Mr. Mahfuzul Huq Chowdhury, Chairman, Green Bangladesh, Chittagong.
- * “Chairmen of UP should be more sensitive while collecting taxes from public.” – Mr. A. Gaffar Bhuiyan, Chairma, Mahmudpur UP, Araihaazar, Narayangonj.
- * “Management weaknesses of UP to be removed to make it more transparent.” – Mr. Kazi Sakhwat Hossain, UNO, Bandar, Narayangonj.
- * “Project proposal prepared by LGED should be available in Bangla.” – Mr. M. Alauddin, UNO, Dohar, Dhaka.
- * “Accountability to be judged in terms of performing responsibilities, instead of talking problems always.” – Mr. Mustafizur Rahman, UNO, Satoria, Manikgonj.
- * “Woman members of UP to be more aware of their duties and responsibilities.” – Mr. Saidur Rahman, UNO, Kaligonj, Gazipur.

5. Group work and recommendations

The workshop participants then embarked upon group works to discuss matters pertaining to transparency and accountability of UP activities and to come up with specific recommendations on it. They discussed the following questions in the process:

- (a) What is the influence of bureaucracy in strengthening the local government?
- (b) What is the role of people’s representatives in ensuring transparency and accountability?
- (c) How to ensure transparency and accountability in financial management of local government?
- (d) What should be the procedure for women members election to strengthen the local government?



A Part of the Participations

After a threadbare discussion on the above questions in the groups, the participants adopted the following as recommendations for ensuring transparency and accountability that is very much a precondition for strengthening local government.

- i. There is a talk about Prescribed Authority to look after the activities of the local government institutions. The powers of the Prescribed Authority need to be limited. In such situation an Auxiliary Institution, say the Local Government Commission, may be constituted.
- ii. People's participatory programs be adopted.
- iii. For coordination, transparency and accountability among the elected members, local people and local body staff, this system is very much useful.
- iv. Effective measures are very much needed for distribution of activities between the central government and the local government. The central government should have clear role in tax collections. The local government has limitation in this respect. But the local government can play major roles in service delivery and development activities.
- v. More attention needs to be given to make the local government management more efficient. Especially, steps need to be adopted for improvement of financial management and money transactions through bank and audit of accounts at regular

intervals. Besides transparency can be ascertained by proper keeping of records, regular meetings, committee formation etc.

- vi. Holding regular meeting with the local people on subject specific agenda.
- vii. Good governance needs immediate start-up in all walks of life to ensure a strengthened local government. Constitutional provisions needed for good governance of local government, subject to ratification by the people. People's linkage should be there for ensuring transparency and accountability in the democratic framework. The micro activities of the local government need to be evaluated and encouraged by the macro procedure.

6. Speech by Special Guest

Dr. Dalem Chandra Barman, Chairman, Peace and Conflict Department, Dhaka University, said in his speech of special guest that for strengthening UP, a manual to be prepared, and for that both the government and the opposition parties have to work together, so that with change of government local government does not suffer. There should be a match between the amount of tax collected and services rendered by the UP. He maintained that people's participation is a must in the process of transparency and accountability of UP activities. Political influence on UP functionaries should be stopped, he concluded.

7. Speech by chief guest

Dr. Abdul Moyeen Khan, Honorable Minister for Science and Information and Communication Technology, Government of Bangladesh, was the chief guest of the session. He said in his speech that recommendations of today's workshop should be well thought-off, not popular catchwords only. He assured the audience that Khan Foundation would write down in Bangla the service rules of the local government. He also suggested for a library in the UP complex. He thanked all participants of the workshop and concluded his speech.

8. Closing Session

Advocate Rokhsana Khondker, Executive Director of Khan Foundation, in her speech of chairperson said that much have been talked and heard, and much exercises have been carried out by the participants in the daylong workshop on transparency and accountability of UP. Good recommendations have come from the workshop delegates. She told the audience that time was up to abandon the election of women to reserved seats in the public bodies. The women now demand direct election to such bodies. She proposed that the

political parties should nominate women candidates to at least 35% seats of all public bodies. She thanked all the participants and declared the workshop closed.

9. Key learning

- a. People's participation is a must in the process of transparency and accountability of UP activities. Holding regular subject specific meeting with the people is a good way out for this purpose.
- b. A Local Government Commission to be constituted to act as watchdog over the Prescribed Authority.
- c. Women need direct election for active and authoritative participation in the public bodies.

10. Conclusion

The daylong workshop on 'Transparency and accountability' of local bodies was participated by a cross section of people who did much exercise and deliberations on theme, and came out with a number of meaningful propositions. If those are translated into action, then the local bodies would really emerge as people's bodies beyond any doubt.

Participation List

Sl No	Name	Designation	Address
1	Mr Mostafizur Rahman	UNO	Saturia, Manikgong
2	Ms Zahanara Begum	Professor	Department of Peace and Conflict, University of Dhaka
3	Mr Md Saidur Rahman	UNO	Kaligong, Gazipur
4	Mr Kazi Sakhat Hossain	UNO	Bandar, Narayangong
5	Mr A K Azad	Staff Reporter	Daily Safar, SantiNagar, Dhaka
6	Mr Fariduddin Ahmad	Amin	12/2 Tazmohal Road, Mohammadpur, Dhaka
7	Mr SR Shah Alam	Director	Rural Development, 23 rd Purana Palton Lane, Dhaka
8	Mr Afzal Hossain	Cameraman	BTV, Dhaka
9	Mr Helal uddin	Cameraman	BTV, Dhaka
10	Dr Tomina Sultana Dara	Medical Officer	GKS, Sirajgong
11	Dr Shahama Sham	Medical Officer	GKS, Sirajgong
12	Mr Aminul Haque Shanto	Staff Reporter	The Independent, Dhaka
13	Mr Amitosh Paul	Staff Reporter	The Manabzamin, Dhaka
14	Mr Md Golam Rosul	Sr. Staff Reporter	The Daily Desh Potrika, 30-31 Dilkusha, Motizeel Dhaka
15	Mr Md Serjuddala	Reporter	The Fasha 28/1 Motizeel Topkhana Road, Dhaka
16	Ms Mahmuda Khaton	Administrative Officer	Khan Foundation, Momenbagh, Dhaka
17	Mr Bishwajit Lodh	Accounts Officer	Khan Foundation, Momenbagh, Dhaka
18	Ms Nasrin Akhter	UP Member	Baira Union Parishad, Manikgong
19	Ms Hasna Begum	UP Member	Talebpur Union Parishad, Manikgong
20	Ms Rahima Begum	UP Member	Talebpur Union Parishad, Manikgong
21	Ms Momtaz Begum	UP Member	Talebpur Union Parishad, Manikgong
22	Ms Shahnaz Begum	UP Member	Singair Union Parishad, Manikgong
23	Ms Rowshon Ara	UP Member	Singair Union Parishad, Manikgong
24	Ms Mokta Siddique	UP Member	Singair Union Parishad, Manikgong
25	Ms Zinnat Islam Khnam	UP Member	Boldhara Union Parishad, Manikgong
26	Ms Roksana Hamid	UP Member	Boldhara Union Parishad, Manikgong
27	Ms Asma Begum	UP Member	Boldhara Union Parishad, Manikgong

Sl No	Name	Designation	Address
28	Ms Fulmala Akhter	UP Member	Jamsha Union Parishad, Manikgong
29	Ms Azifa Khtoon	UP Member	Jamsha Union Parishad, Manikgong
30	Ms Mariam	UP Member	Golakandail Union Parishad, Rupgong, Narayangong
31	Ms Noorzahan Begum	UP Member	Golakandail Union Parishad, Rupgong, Narayangong
32	Ms Rehana Akhter	UP Member	Golakandail Union Parishad, Rupgong, Narayangong
33	Ms Shazida Akhter	UP Member	Bholab Union Parishad, Rupgong, Narayangong
34	Ms Fazila Begum	UP Member	Bholab Union Parishad, Rupgong, Narayangong
35	Ms Monawara Begum	UP Member	Bholab Union Parishad, Rupgong, Narayangong
36	Ms Beauty Begum	UP Member	Boidarbazar Union Parishad, Sonargong, Narayangong
37	Ms Parvin Akhter	UP Member	Boidarbazar Union Parishad, Sonargong, Narayangong
38	Ms Anowara Begum	UP Member	Boidarbazar Union Parishad, Sonargong, Narayangong
39	Ms Zibane	UP Member	Barodi Union Parishad, Sonargong, Narayangong
40	Ms Jamila Khatoon	UP Member	Barodi Union Parishad, Sonargong, Narayangong



KHAN FOUNDATION

In Special Consultative Status with the Economic & Social Council of the United Nations

**Divisional Workshop
on
“TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY:
PRECONDITION FOR STRENGTHENING LOCAL GOVERNMENT”**

10am to 4 pm 12 April 2004
at Democracy Auditorium, Momenbagh Dhaka 1217

PROGRAMME

- 10:00 am – 10:30am : Registration
- 10:30am-10:45am : Welcome Address
Advocate Rokhsana Khondker
Executive Director, Khan Foundation
- 10:45am – 11:15am : Keynote Presentation
- 11:15 am- 11:45 am : Address by Special Guests
Dr Dalem Chander Barman
Chairman, Peace and Conflict Department
University of Dhaka

Ms Nasima Begum
Sr. Asst. Secretary
Local Government Department
People Republic of Bangladesh
- 11:45am – 12:30pm : Open Discussion
- 12:30am-01:00 pm : Group Work
- 01:00pm-02:00 pm : Working Lunch
- 02:00pm- 03:30 pm : Group Work Presentation and Recommendation
- 03:30pm-04:00 pm : Closing

LOCAL GOVERNMENT INITIATIVE, FUNDED BY USAID AND IMPLEMENTED BY ARD INC.

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KHAN FOUNDATION

In Special Consultative Status with the Economic & Social Council of the United Nations

Keynote on

Transparency and Accountability : Precondition for Strengthening Local Governance

12 April 2004

Democracy Auditorium, Momenbagh Dhaka 1217

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Recent History of Local Government in Bangladesh

Since 1971 there have been three lot of attempts by successive government to strengthen local government in Bangladesh and deliver services more effectively. The first experiment began in 1972 and ended in 1975. Bangladesh was 61 Districts. Each District was to be headed by a governor. The purpose was to bring about political control over District administration. However this did not have much impact because of the fall of Government, shortly after the system was announced.

During the second experiment, which began in 1976, local government was to consist of Zila, Thana and Union Parishads for the rural areas and Pourashavas for the urban areas. The local government system was to be based on the concepts of Gram (village) Sarkar and Swarnivar (Self-reliance), to strengthen local government, provide more autonomy, and help mobilize people at the village level for development works. Gram Sarkars were to be organized around increasing food production, expanding mass literacy, promoting population control/ family planning activities and maintaining law and order. However the system of elections to the local bodies was never implemented, so local government was dominated by the bureaucracy. In 1982 a change in the form of the Government did not allow this system of local government to be fully implemented.

A third experiment began in 1982. This upgraded the 464 Upazila of Bangladesh into Upazilas, or sub-district units. The Upazilas were to become the centre of all development activities, policy planning and implementation. Each Upazila had an elected-cum-nominated council, with a separate staff led by an Upazila chief executive officer (Thana Nirbahi Officer) functioning as its secretariat. This plan for strengthening local government brought together, for the first time, two conflicting elements-popular participation and merit-based administrative units implementing development plans. Local Government units were also maintained at the Union level, albeit with reduced powers. Pourashavas in the urban areas also maintained.

In the fourth attempt, a high powered 'Local Government Structure Review Committee' was established to reserved the strengthen process of local government. Between 1992 and 1996 , the Government of Bangladesh focused on establish democratic system with providing responsibilities, power to the local government representatives. In the fifth attempt between 1996-2001 some structural changes have been took place Reorganize women participant in the local governance. Some new law (zila and Upazila village level) has been passed which are still in the dark room-Initiative has been taken in revenue raising and in local development. The Union Parishad has had the longest and most continuous existence of the various tiers of local government-although its name has occasionally changed and its power, authority and responsibilities have been or augmented by successive governments.

The current structure includes Union Parishads for the Rural areas, Pourashavas for smaller urban areas, and corporations for the large metropolitan areas. As required by the twelfth Constitutional Amendment, each of these bodies is headed by elected representatives. The Union Parishad have elected representatives that give them a democratic framework, they have thirteen standing committees that give them a parliamentary configuration, and they have their own sources of revenue that give them

a semblance of independence and autonomy. Pourashavas and Corporations have similar structures.

Those the law exist but there are no elected bodies at the Upazila and district levels. However, supportive and complementary structures considered to strengthen local government system include a District Parishad and a Development Committee at the Upazila level to link Unions and the Districts, as well as villages and Upazilas. These committees will be primarily geared at coordination, administrative efficiency, and smooth interaction between elected representatives, national and local bureaucracies, and non-governmental organizations. New law 'Gram Sarker' Has been introduced for the representative of village level. Without budgeting provision this institution will net as an associate body of the Union Parishad.

Transparency, Accountability System of Local Government

The current processes through which local government operate is not conducive to the development of responsive, accountable and transparent local government system. The central and other level of bureaucracies act as "prescribed authorities": local government accountability and responsibility is therefore focuses upwards toward the bureaucracies and the administrative system rather than to the people. The current distribution of power between the central government and all other sub-national or local government is overwhelmingly skewed in favour of the central government. Even within local governments, power is skewed towards the Chairman rather than the legislative body. The individual member's accountability and responsibility is focused towards the Chairman rather than people. This highly centralized power structure environment makes transparency to difficult to achieve.

With a clear distribution functions between the central government and local government and within local government among its various units, further specification is required for the processes by which these functions will be performed. More and more , the responsibility and accountability of local government unites will be monitored legally and by voters through political means rather than by the national bureaucracy, which is responsible for monitoring/supervising, planning and implementation of programmes and fund allotted by them.

Democratic Institution-Building

For local government to flourish, responsibility for issues relevant to people's lives need to be mandated to communities, and most effectively to community-based local governments whose operations are transparent and accountable to community members. Numerous legal provisions (e.g., Section 30 and 30 (2) of UPO) provide veto powers to prescribed authorities like the Ministry of Local Government, over the deliberations and actions of local government . These veto powers limit representative democracy at the local level. An example of the nature of the relationship between the prescribed authority and/or administrative machinery is finding that in many cases the Union Parishad Chairman will not make any decision without the prior approval of the UPazila Nirbahi Officer. Even within the local government system, the centralization of powers in the hands of the Chairman of the local body further limits democratic decision-making. The Chairman is elected with his/her own mandate and is not required to consult the locally elected council to carry out his/her mandate. However, participation, involvement and enthusiasm of council members are little encouraged when the Parishad, in many cases, rubber stamps decisions made by the Chairman.

Lack of awareness of the role responsibilities of elected officials and permanent officials within a democratic system are also limiting the growth of democratic institutions. Consequently, accountability and responsibility issues are misdirected. Elected representative, instead of feeling responsive and accountable of the community and citizens, direct their accountability to permanent officials of the central government and district administration. Only during elections do the issues of responsibility and accountability revert back to the citizens.

Participation and representative ness

Although the legal framework provides for participation and representative ness, the current local government system does encourage these values. The system of elected (reserve seat) women members facilitates representation, but at the same time, limits the ability of the women members to be effective in decision-making. Elected from reserve seat is associated with higher / critical status and provides for “representatives” in larger constituency without any impact.

While local governments are mandated to work through committees sub-committees in which all groups in society, especially the most deprived, are to be represented, the reality is that, on the average, only or two committees work in each jurisdiction, namely those responsible for resource distribution authority and consequent power and prestige. However, these committees are seldom representative of all social elements in the community.

Devolution, Delegation and Reallocation

The central government monopolises virtually all taxes. Without independent resources, local government cannot take responsibility for any activities for develop autonomy. Currently, local government are used for variety of purposes. In some instances they are used to increase participants, in other cases they serve as focal points for mobilization. In other instances, they are used to implement national development programme objectives, local government units can be responsible for activities that take place within their jurisdiction to meet community needs. The decision allocating responsibility to levels of government needs to be taken openly, transparently and in relation to criteria of capacity, Where communities are able to finance and staff their local government, as well as plan for development needs, they can assume greater responsibilities, thereby leading to greater eventual autonomy.

Local government units are often responsible for tasks that they cannot fund, but are denied responsibility for some tasks that are of essential interest to the community. With a rational allocation of responsibilities, tax sources and professional personnel, local government can evolve into strong, viable instruments for their community’s social and economic development.

While devolution of power, delegation of tasks and reallocation of resources are important, it is equally important to note that development of the local government system in Bangladesh is evolutionary, with a continuing role for central and local administration albeit a very different role. Organizational and training efforts are needed to strengthen local government’s operational and managerial practices. Ensuring the transparency of their operations will require refocusing accountability to the citizenry, the regular dissemination of programme activities and information

appropriate financial management and auditing, and proper record-keeping. These will be the key functions of the central administrative units. Providing opportunities to local government officials for professional development and training will be another. In essence, central administrative units will redirect themselves from being controlling authorities which limit growth and autonomy to a supportive and facilitative role in management development and training for local government staff.

Conclusion

More specifically, these limiting factors lead to the following conclusions :

1. Since the role of prescribed authority is detrimental to the development of democratic institution-building at the Local level, the role of prescribed authority must be minimized in areas which limit representative democracy and be supportive in areas of general management and service delivery. It is also necessary to explore the benefits of transferring supervision and prescribed authority for local government from a local government ministry to a local government commission which has greater affinity with local government units but avoids the rigidity of a national ministry. The role of central government officials in local government needs to change from one of direction and supervision to a supportive and facilitative one. At the same time, without central agencies and field official management and supervisory knowledge and skills, most local governments will not be able to survive.
2. Participation in decision-making at the local level has to be organized, managed and supervised at the initial stages before participation can become effective. Ensuring diversity and representativeness are keys to participation and current practices impede and obstruct participation, although some scattered examples of effective participation are taking place. Building on these examples through highlighting them should be a key strategic initiative.
3. Establishing a triangular relationship between local representatives, permanent staff and citizens is imperative to institutionalization of democratic practices at the local level. For elected officials, professional development and training in the role and responsibilities (accountability and transparency) of public officials have to be coupled with professional –ism (management knowledge and skills among the permanent staff. Cooperative agreements are vital between local government on the one side individuals and groups in society on the other for consultative decision-making and ensuring appropriate delivery of services.
4. Distribution of work between central government and local government has to be based on capacity and ability, especially in the area of resource mobilization. Central government can serve as a more appropriate level for collection of revenue while local government can serve as a more appropriate level for collection of revenue while local government because of its proximity to the people can serve as a more appropriate level for delivery of services. Organizational levels between the central and local level have to be re-examined for their appropriateness in the development process.

5. While overall managerial capacity has to be enhanced, the area of financial management needs special attention. Proper record-keeping, processing of all financial transactions through the banking system, supervision and management of programme activities and financial audit must be vigorously pursued.
6. Transparency and accountability can only develop through integration of the local government system with the citizenry, regular dissemination of programme activities and information, appropriate financial management and auditing, and realignment of responsibility of representatives for prescribed authority to citizens. Until these changes are effectively carried out, expectations of transparency and accountability will remain elusive and only on paper.
7. Strengthening of local government in Bangladesh cannot take place unless a serious effort is made to develop a multitude of mechanisms of rationalization which will allow the smooth functioning of governance including to a generally accepted constitutional position of local government at the macro-level, regularization of the election process at the mid-level and integration of local government with society at the macro-level.