

Monthly Update
Local Governance

**LG Cluster, UNDP,
Dhaka Bangladesh**

January, 2008

Greetings from LG Cluster Manager's Desk

It is very encouraging to find many articles promoting local governments published frequently in print media which was a very rare case not so long ago. Many scholars and civil society members are now expressing their confidence and trust on the local governments as the vehicle for local development. It is indeed very heartening to find that even the staunchest of the civil bureaucrats Dr. Akbar Ali Khan, Chairman of Regulatory Reform Commission (the Former Finance and Cabinet Secretary), who had his doubts about giving “unconditional direct block grants” to the LGIs not so long ago is now one of the first liners in supporting the LG cause.

In this month's issue we have compiled the news and articles on the important events, seminars, round table discussions which were held during last one month. The most path breaking event was the grand-conference 2008 of the local government members at the National Parade Square in Dhaka on 5 January where more than 10,000 elected members from the Union Parishads, Municipalities, and City Corporations attended. Dr. Showkat Ali, Chairman of the Committee for Accelerating and Strengthening Local Governments presented the report of the Committee to the audience. (The summary report is available at <http://www.undp.org.bd/cluster.php?d=4> under the heading Policy Papers). Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed, Chief Adviser of the Government inaugurated the conference and LGRD Adviser, Mr. Anwarul Iqbal presided the function. Special Guest, Mr. Manoj Basnyat, Country Director, UNDP, highlighted UNDP and UNCDF's role in promoting local governance in Bangladesh.

Another important event that took place was the first conference of the Non Resident Bangladeshis (NRBs). Among various other issues, a special seminar on local governance was also arranged. It was very heartening to find and listen to Mr. Safar Raz Hossain, the Secretary Local Government Division presenting the Sirajganj Local Governance Fund Project (SLGDFP) speaking highly about the success of SLGDFP.

Thanks and best wishes

Durafshan Chowdhury

Special Feature

[The Speech of the Country Director of UNDP, Mr. Manoj Basnyat at "Elected Representatives of Local Government Institutions Conference 2008" on 5 January, 2008](#)

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Speech of Mr. Manoj Basnyat, Country Director, UNDP
At the Conference of Elected Local Government Representatives
5 January 2008

Good Afternoon!

Hon'ble Chair of the working session of the conference of the Elected Representatives of the Local Government Institutions;

Respected Representatives of the local Government Institutions, Government Officials, my Colleagues from the development partner agencies, friends from the media and distinguished Ladies and Gentleman.

I feel extremely honored and privileged to have this opportunity to say a few words in this august occasion. First of all, I thank the Government for their initiatives to strengthen the local governments, a very crucial issue of the contemporary development world which was neglected for quite some time.

I also congratulate the Committee headed by Dr. A.M.M Showkat Ali and his Team for relentlessly working and submitting the report and recommendations within the stipulated time frame. I had a chance to go through the report and my opinion is that if the Government adopts the recommendations, it will work like a monumental pillar in strengthening the local governments in Bangladesh.

Although the history of local governments in this sub-continent goes back to nearly hundred and fifty years, but unfortunately, except for few sporadic years now and then, and some special areas in India, demonstrating good local governance, the experience is not one of the best demonstrated practices which could be presented to the world.

The initiatives, this Government has taken undoubtedly deserves commendation and now it is up to the local elected representatives to work hard and prove their ability and worth.

The recommendations of the Local Government committee, if adopted and practiced, could help alleviate poverty as envisaged in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction (NSAPR) the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) of Bangladesh.

Decentralisation and local governance are one of the core areas which is supported by UNDP globally. UNDP believes in the development of the people, their participation through practicing democratic norms in all decision making processes ensuring transparency and accountability. It also believes in the empowerment of poor and the vulnerable. And without devolution of power and authority to the locally elected bodies empowerment cannot be a reality.

In Bangladesh, 70 % of the people live in rural areas and as the elected representative of the rural people, UPs are the only institution who can voice the needs of the rural poor. If the capacity of the UPs is strengthened to provide services, it is more likely that the poor will benefit and the flow of services will be improved. Being nearest to the people, it will be difficult for the leaders of the UPs to ignore the demand and shall have to respond and provide services accordingly.

It is the responsibility of the central government to ensure conducive rules and regulation for the local government, so that they are able to take their own development decisions independently and implement the local development initiatives according to the needs of their constituents. It is worth that the central government and its Representatives, with their more important functions for making relevant policies and laws of the country.

Experiences from the developed countries show the strengths of local governments in their overall development. Some developing nations like India and South Africa confirms that an empowered local government is more likely to contribute towards a sustainable development than in the countries where local governments are weak and inefficient. .

The Government of Bangladesh has already proved its keenness to strengthen the role of local governments in promoting efficient and effective services at the local level. The Local Government Division of the M/O LGRD and Co-operatives has successfully implemented the Sirajganj Local Governance Development Fund Project (SLGDFP) which started in 2000 and UNDP and UNCDF feels proud to have been involved with the pilot initiatives. You may be happy to know that UNDP , UNCDF along with European Commission and Danida would be supporting the Government of Bangladesh in the World Bank assisted country wide Local Governance Support Project (LGSP). SLGDFP has not only set the ground for the country wide implementation of the government initiatives known as Local Governance Support Project (LGSP) but also was instrumental in helping the Government in taking a historical decision of providing direct block grants to the 4500 UPs of the country. For the first time in the history of the local governments in Bangladesh, the UPs enjoyed the taste of fiscal decentralization , which is a great step towards empowerment of local governments.

I thank the caretaker government for pursuing the issue for strengthening and empowering the local governments further and I am hopeful that the recommendations of the Committee would be promulgated as laws and regulations soon.

As a proven development partner in the area of local governance and decentralization, UNDP stands ready to support Government initiatives in this respect. I look forward to see a developed Bangladesh as a pioneer in promoting good local governance.

Thank you.

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Strong local government soon to serve the grassroots—Chief Advisor tells conference of local government representatives

Chief Adviser (CA) Fakhruddin Ahmed hoped the government will soon be able to build a strong, transparent and accountable local government on the basis of the recommendations made by a committee to effectively provide desired services for the grassroots people.

He mentioned some of the recommendations like preventing unwanted interference in local government institutions by members of parliament and formation of a permanent and neutral local government commission.

The CA made the remarks while inaugurating the "Elected Representatives of Local Government Institutions Conference 2008" organized on 5 January, 2008 by the Local Government Division of LGRD and cooperatives ministry at National Parade Square in the city.

The conference was organised to mainly disseminate the recommendations made by the committee for accelerating and strengthening the local government. A summary report of the committee was also delivered to the audience and participants.

Advisers to the present caretaker government, distinguished personalities and high civil and military officials were present at the function.

On June 3, 2007, the government constituted a seven-member committee on "Accelerating and Strengthening Local Government", headed by former Secretary AMM Swakat Ali, and the committee has already submitted a report with recommendations to the government.

Member secretary of the committee and Joint Secretary of the Local Government Division Mizanur Rahman presented the summary of the report at the function chaired by LGRD and Cooperatives Adviser M Anwarul Iqbal. Committee Chairman AMM Sawkat Ali also spoke on the occasion.

About 10,000 chairmen, ward commissioners and members of union parishads, municipalities and city corporations from across the country attended the conference.

The CA said apart from expediting local development, the government through effective decentralisation will be able to build a strong and partnership-oriented democratic system which will intensify the nation's struggle against poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition and corruption.

The head of the caretaker government informed that he has already directed the authorities concerned to review the recommendations of the committee and implement it quickly.

He told the elected local government representatives that they would help further advance the reform activities of the government by making valuable suggestions and recommendations on problems and prospects of the local government institutions through open discussion in the conference.

Referring to the government's anti-corruption drive to rid the society of the curse of corruption, the CA said enough successes have already been achieved from the drive and a good number of corruption suspects have been punished by courts.

He hoped that local government and representatives of local government would play a stronger role in preventing corruption and building a social movement against the corruption across the country.

About general election by 2008, the CA said the Election Commission is working as per its announced roadmap to hold a free, fair and credible election and the government is extending all-out cooperation in implementing the roadmap.

In this regard, he mentioned completion of enrolling over 20 million voters with photographs by the Election Commission.

Appreciating the activities of the local government representatives in facing the two back-to-back floods and Cyclone Sidr, he said the government has successfully faced the aftermath of the cyclone with the help of all.

He said the relief operation was carried out fairly and hoped that rehabilitation programme would also be completed smoothly and properly.

The recommendations of the seven-member committee on "Accelerating and Strengthening Local Government" also include raising the number of wards in union councils to 15 from 9, fixing the number of directly elected members of district councils at between 20 and 35 on the number of upazilas in a particular district, raising the reserved seats for women members from the existing 30 percent to 40 percent for the next three elections on rotation basis, recognising the elected chairman at municipality level as "mayor" and the elected commissioners of municipalities and city corporations as "Councillors".

It also recommends that all local government institutions will bring out "Citizen Charter" and update it every year.

As per the recommendations, if a candidate is found guilty of criminal offence by court and imprisoned for at least six months and five years have not passed after his release, he will not be eligible to contest the election.

If any loan of a candidate taken from the council remains outstanding or if the candidate has any financial liability with the council and if he is a member of another local government institution or national parliament, if he was dismissed from service of a semi-government organization, autonomous body, cooperative society due to moral turpitude, corruption, misconduct so on and five years have not passed since his dismissal, he will be disqualified for contesting the election.

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Putting local government in place--Elections should be timed carefully

There can be no difference of opinion on the importance of an empowered, independent, transparent and accountable local government system that would strengthen the foundations of democracy and participatory development process in the country. Functional and neutral local government institutions, elected democratically, not only can address key issues like poverty, employment, environment, illiteracy and malnutrition, they also can help uproot corruption and lawlessness that stem from opportunistic politics. But there is no denying that democracy and rule of law failed to take a firm root in the country as these important institutions so long remained in the hands of corrupt political elements and their goons and a section of unscrupulous government officials. Thus, a thorough restructuring of the institutions has become a need of the hour, and this has been stressed by the chief adviser of the caretaker government Fakhruddin Ahmed in his speech while addressing the conference of the local government representatives in the city.

We believe the decision to prevent unwanted interference at the lowest tier of administration by members of parliament and create a permanent and neutral local government commission will go a long way to remove such unwanted interference and strengthen the foundation of the local level institutions. The past records show how MPs remained more interested in controlling the finance of various developmental works in their constituency than attending parliament sessions.

The important thing would be holding free and fair local government elections within the shortest possible time once the voter list has been prepared and put in effect reform recommendations of the expert committee. If time permits then holding the local government elections before the national elections would authenticate how far the voter list has become fault free, and allow time for the Election Commission (EC) to fine-tune it. The election would be a trial run for the EC and it would increase public confidence in the system that no doubt has lost much of its esteem in public eye. Should the local government elections be held earlier the chances of political interference would be minimum and there would be greater possibility of honest and clean candidates coming forward to contest.

If, however, preparation of the voter list drags on, and there is no leeway in holding of local government elections earlier, then it would be judicious to hold national,

local and mayoral elections simultaneously. That would save money of the exchequer and lessen the burden of logistics and manpower requirement on the EC. We feel careful planning well in advance can ensure the completion of the important tasks to the satisfaction of all concerned.

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'Form self-administered local government to institutionalise democracy'

LGRD Adviser Anwarul Iqbal speaks at a seminar titled 'The Democratic Local Government System of Bangladesh' at Hotel Sheraton in the city yesterday. The seminar was organised by scholarsbangladesh.com as part of the First Non-Resident Bangladeshi Conference 2007. Self-administered local government with financial solvency and accountability should be formed to institutionalise democracy in the country, said the speakers at a seminar yesterday. They said a strong local government system is a crying need to lessen dependency on the central government.

The seminar titled 'The Democratic Local Government System of Bangladesh' was held as part of the first conference of Non-Resident Bangladeshis organised by ScholarsBangladesh at Sheraton Hotel in the city. A book titled 'Gonotantrik Sthaniya Sarkarer Ruprekha' (Outline of Democratic Local Government) was launched on this occasion. In his book Abu Taleb, a researcher now living in New York, gave 25 outlines for proper democratisation of local government. He pointed out that the local government system should be divided into two parts.

The city corporations and municipalities will be urban local government while rural local government will be formed with the districts, upazilas and union parishads, he added.

He said power division in local government is also important for its proper functioning and local government should be separated from legislative body.

Speaking as special guest Secretary to LGRD and Cooperatives ministry Safar Raj Hossain talked about government's vision of local governance, government's initiatives to strengthen local government institutions, and implementation of viable recommendations of the Reform Committee.

He also spoke about women ward commissioners who actually don't get any chance to work and face discriminations. However, the City Corporation Act has been changed recently and in absence of the city mayors, a mayor panel has been formed where a position for woman has been made compulsory, said Adviser to LGRD and Cooperatives ministry Anwarul Iqbal.

Speaking as chief guest he said a unified act for the city corporations would be made for its implementation before the next city corporation elections. "We should also think of ways to strengthen local government financially," he added.

ME Chowdhury Shamim of Scholars' Publishers, Advocate Bashir Ahmed and Barrister Mahbub Uddin also spoke at the seminar.

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Honorariums of local government members to rise

The government is considering raising the monthly honorariums of elected representatives of local government bodies. The chief adviser, Fakhruddin Ahmed, while inaugurating the grand conference-2008 of the local government members at the National Parade Square in Dhaka, assured them of increasing their monthly honorariums in line with a recommendation made by the local government strengthening committee.

The local government and rural development adviser, Anwarul Iqbal, in his presidential remarks said the government was considering raising the monthly honorarium of a union parishad chairman from Tk 1,500 to Tk 3,000 and of a member from Tk 700 to Tk 1,500.

The LGRD secretary, Sheikh Khurshid Alam, and chairman of the committee on strengthening the local government bodies, AMM Shawkat Ali, also addressed the inaugural session of the conference, where a joint secretary of the ministry, Mizanur Rahman, read out the summary of the report of the committee on strengthening the local government institutions.

The Anti-Corruption Commission chairman, Hasan Mashhud Chowdhury, the chief of army staff, General Moeen U Ahmed, and former adviser to a caretaker government Akbar Ali Khan, among others, addressed the business session of the one-day conference of more than 10,000 members of union parishads, pourasabhas and city corporations of the country.

The chief adviser said, 'We will be able to build a strong, transparent and accountable local government structure at an early date based on recommendations that have been already submitted. This will ensure delivery of the desired services in a simplified manner at the grassroots.'

'Though our constitution provides clear guidelines on the local government system, the local bodies are yet to be developed accordingly,' he observed. He said the government was providing all necessary support to the Election Commission to materialise the election roadmap announced by it.

The government also had taken all-out measures to purge the society of the all-pervasive corruption, Fakhruddin said. 'Though the tenure of the caretaker government is limited, we have tried to play an effective role in dealing with important issues relating to our national life,' he told the gathering.

He mentioned his government's initiatives to ensure food security and control the price spiral of rice. 'Initiatives have been taken to import 10 lakh tonnes of food grains, of which contracts for importing four lakh tonnes have already been made while discussions are on to finalise the contracts for the remaining six lakh tonnes.'

In the business session, Moeen U Ahmed said the main challenge for the caretaker government was to control the soaring prices of essentials and keep the market stable till the next Boro harvest. 'I consider this price hike as a disaster. The responsibility of our government is to keep the prices under control till the next Boro harvest.'

He urged the local government representatives to motivate voters to judiciously use their votes to elect honest people in the next elections without selling their votes for money. Appreciating the Anti-Corruption Commission's anti-graft drive, he urged the commission to remain alert against the corrupt but make sure no innocent person was harassed.

The army chief said peace had been prevailing in the country for the past one year and if the people, particularly the elected representatives of local government bodies, wanted it would be more peaceful in the future.

Moeen said those who participated in the War of Independence and sacrificed their lives had dreamt of a developed Bangladesh. 'But how much success have we achieved in the last 36 years,' he questioned.

Former adviser Akbar Ali Khan said the national elections and the local government polls should be held at the same time. Seven local government representatives, who took part in the discussion, asked for immediate implementation of the recommendations of the local government strengthening committee through promulgation of fresh ordinances. They also demanded to raise their honorariums.

The mayor along with a ward commissioner from every city corporation and the chairman along with a member or ward commissioner from every union parishad or pourasabha were invited to attend the conference. However, all the 120 ward commissioners of Dhaka City Corporation, excepting its mayor, Sadek Hossain Khoka, were invited to take part in the programme. Female local government representatives constituted half of the gathering.

Asked why the DCC mayor had not been invited to the conference while all other mayors were in jail, Iqbal said on Thursday that everyone was invited to the event based on security clearance from the agencies concerned. This was the biggest such gathering during the tenure of the present government which to office a day after proclamation of the state of emergency on January 11 in the face of a volatile political situation. Earlier on November 13, the local government strengthening committee, formed on June 3, handed over a four-volume report to the chief adviser with the draft local government ordinances compiled in three volumes.

There are 309 pourasabhas, 4,498 union parishads and six city corporations in the country.

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Hold zila, UZ, parliamentary polls simultaneously --says Dr Akbar Ali Khan

Dr Akbar Ali Khan speaks at a roundtable at the Cirdap auditorium in the city yesterday. On his left is Prof Dr Jarina Rahman Khan and on his right are Mohsin Ali and Dr Quazi Kholiqzaman Ahmad.

Elections to zila and upazila parishads should be held simultaneously with the parliamentary elections, Chairman of Regulatory Reforms Committee Dr Akbar Ali Khan said yesterday.

"Questions would be raised and various problems would appear in the political process if zila and upazila parishad elections are held before the parliamentary elections," he added.

Dr Akbar, a former adviser to the caretaker government, made this observation at a roundtable titled 'Review of the recommendations of the committee to strengthen local government and responsibilities' at Cirdap auditorium in the city. Governance Coalition and 27 other organisations jointly organised the roundtable.

Opposing the Election Commission's (EC) proposal that political leaders holding party posts will have to resign before contesting the elections to any local government body, Dr Akbar said it is not possible for the members of local government bodies to sever ties with politics.

The local government is the first tier of democracy, he said, adding that it is not possible to build a stable democracy without strengthening the local government. He also said the government should give the people a clear idea of how the election to the local government bodies will be held. "Strengthening the local government is an ongoing process and we all have to carry it on," he added.

Dr Quazi Kholiqzaman Ahmad, president of Bangladesh Economic Association, said devolution of power to the local government, adequate funds for it and participation of all in the local government system are a must to strengthen the local government institutions. He also said a part of the national budget should be allocated for the local government.

Abdus Sukur, national project coordinator of Governance Coalition, presented a keynote paper at the roundtable moderated by Mohsin Ali, coordinator of the Governance Coalition.

Prof Dr Akter Hossain, Prof Dr Jarina Rahman Khan, Kartik Chandra Mandal, coordinator, governance, Manusher Jonno Foundation, and Numan Ahmed Khan also spoke.

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“Formation of Local Government Commission must for empowering local government

The Local Government bodies are weak because of their limited power. This organization is dominated and controlled by the bureaucrats of the Central Government. As a result, all the department of local government is facing various problems in their day to day works. If these organizations are fully empowered and the local government commission is framed, then and then, it would be getting enormous benefit.

Speakers on Monday, 29 October 2007 said this at the round table discussion meeting on Local Government Commission: An over view on Roles- Responsibilities and Mandate organized by 27 organizations along with Governance Coalition at CIRDAP Auditorium.

Former adviser of the caretaker government Dr. Akbar Ali Khan was the chief guest while Mohsin Ali, Coordinator of Governance Coalition presided over the round table and delivered welcome speech. Dr. Salauddin Aminuzzaman, Professor, Public Administration Department of Dhaka University presented the key note paper and moderated the discussion meeting.

Renowned Economist Dr. Atiur Rahman, Senior advisor of DANIDA Hans Hoffmeyers, Joint Editor of Protham Alo Mr. Abdul Kaium, local Government specialist Dr. Tofael Ahmed, Dr. Akhter Hossain, Dr. Zarina Rahman Khan, Public Administration Department of Dhaka University were present as special guests.

Dr. Akbar Ali Khan said reforms in various sections of the society are occurring in present days. This is the high time to form local government Commission. The Commission will take all decisions regarding local government. Later on it will be expanded on the basis of division of labour, wealth and power. He also said if the commission is formed there will be no problem for the local government bodies in discharging all sorts of functions.

Mohsin Ali, Coordinator of Governance Coalition opined that decentralization of power is necessary for establishing good governance in the Country. The only way of decentralization of power is to make local government organizations stronger.

Dr. Salauddin Aminuzzaman said in his key note paper that the local Government Commission should be an independent and constitutionally recognized institution which should fix up its own factions, financial allocations, audit and management. Dr Atiur Rahman said ministries during previous government failed to flourish local government. As a result huge number of people living in villages could not see the light of development. Hans Hoffmeyer said, the local government bodies should be strengthened themselves. He said that as Democracy can not be forced. So local governments should be given the opportunity to develop on its own ability and capability.

About 140 representatives from different sectors – civil society, public representatives, academicians, stake holders, NGOs, Development partners and both electronics and print media reporters were present at the meeting.

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Government's Special Project to develop the best 1060 Union Parishads of the country

The Government of Bangladesh has taken a new project in hand to develop its best 1050 Union Parishads. It s a five years long project and its budget had been determined primarily for 47 crores. The Local Government Ministry selected these 1060 Union Parishads for the project assessing performance and capability of all 4500 UPs of the country.

It has been informed that the block grants can be used for development of the local community, ensuring and institutionalizing transparency and accountability of the UPs, strengthening the capacity and ability of the UPs to deliver better services to local citizens. However these funds can not be used for paying salaries, loans or any kind of allowances.

This program will be executed under the project Local Government Support Project- Learning and Innovation Component (LGSP-LIC). LGSP-LIC will be executed national under the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives (MLGRD&C). The World Bank, UNDP, UNCDF, EC, SDC, and Danida will provide assistance for this project.

For the first time in the history of Bangladesh such a project is undertaken to develop the Union Parishads. Over time, more and more and eventually all the UPs will be included within the project.



Joint Secretary Dr. Kamal Abdul of Local Government Ministry informed the reporter of Prothom-Alo that it was a remarkable step to strengthen the UPs. There was not any scope to take any step to undertake such projects before due to budget constrains. He firmly believes such project will play an important role to develop the entire local government system.

Under LGSP-LIC, in the first year (2007-08) every UP will be provided with 4,70,000 taka through a bank account. More funds will be provided examining the progress of the development activities and performance of the UPs.

Local Government Ministry has informed that the UP chairmen with undertake infrastructure building activity such as building mud roads, culverts, water supply, sanitation etc and their maintenance only if these are consulted with the local community first. Moreover, these block grants can be used to finance a wide range of activities and service delivery priorities such as installation of community-managed tube wells, construction/rehabilitation of schools and health centers, purchase of educational materials and school furniture, construction of common property irrigation facilities, community tree planting activities etc. Nonetheless all such activities can only be undertaken through participatory consultation. The needs and priorities of the area will be identified through a transparent and participatory planning and budgeting process, at open meetings at ward and union levels. All the necessary information concerning the project activities will be placed for display at the notice boards placed at public areas.

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