

People's Participation in Development Projects in Rural Bangladesh: A Case Study of Alampur and Jagannathpur Union Parishad¹

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Abstract: After four decades of independence, the culture of people-centric developments in rural Bangladesh has not yet been institutionalized and ensuring people's participation in local development projects has largely remained elusive. One of the preconditions for nurturing people-centric developments is to ensure the participation of people into the project cycle. But ironically the concept has not been realized till to date. This study has aimed to review the gap between the theory and practices of people's participation in development projects - particularly at Union Parishad level, the lowest tier of local government bodies - in rural Bangladesh. For conducting the study, two Union Parishads - Alampur Union Parishad of Taraganj Upazila under Rangpur district and Jagannathpur Union Parishad of Comilla Sadar Upazila under Comilla district - have been purposively selected. One of the main purposes of this study is to ascertain the reasons behind the poor participation or non-participation of people in development projects, and the study has particularly tried to empirically measure the participation level at different stages of project cycle and to explore various factors influencing this participation. The paper has been concluded by recommending some measures that can ameliorate the participation scenario.

1. Introduction

People's participation is the sine qua non for development. Contemporary development scholars have been advocating the inclusion of people's participation in development projects as they believe the avowed objectives of any project cannot be fully achieved unless people meaningfully participate in it. Stone (1989) emphasized that people's participation in development projects may help to bring effective social changes. Besides, community participation in the design and management of a project greatly enhances the likelihood of project success due to improved goodness of fit and increased sustainability (Shrimpton, 1989).

People's participation in development projects has been gaining momentum as a new strategy for development since 1970s. In

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Bangladesh, local level development projects are generally implemented by Union Parishad (UP)³. Hence, the socio-economic development of local people largely depends on the proper functioning of this vital institution. In post-independent Bangladesh, almost all the development projects ever taken at grass-root level have been initiated and implemented under the supervision of popularly elected UPs. Ironically, the outcome of development projects is not significantly visible. Rural people still live in misery and deprivation; their basic human needs are not fulfilled. Their lifestyle is not improved as much as it was expected. The participatory practice has not yet been cultured properly. From this backdrop some questions may subsequently arise in the mind of a development practitioner-Does the existing decision making process of UP not promote people's participation in development process? What are the factors that affect the participatory process in UP level development projects? This paper is an attempt to address these empirical questions with an eye to its prime objective i.e. to explore the actors and factors shaping participation as well as causes for non-participation of local people in UP-led development projects. Furthermore, the article will provide some policy guidelines which will help development practitioners as well as the policymakers to identify the loopholes in the present system and thereby assist them to formulate proper policies in future.

2. Review of Existing Literatures

People's participation is the basic tool for achieving national goals of development. In order to implement governmental policies in right perspectives, the people -- the real clients of the governmental operations, are to be involved at all stages of development intervention. But because of bureaucratic preponderance and distrust by the successive governments to the people, people's participation in a large scale in local development process remained beyond the reach of the ordinary people (Ali et al (1983).

Aminuzzaman (2008) notes some invisible but serious factors which have a direct impact on the level and quality of accountability and popular participation of common people into the affairs of LG including: i) continued centralized control over the UP- maintained through the administration and the limited resources at its disposal; ii) the critical and

³ Union Parishad (UP) is the lowest platform of Local Government in Bangladesh for integrating local people into the development process.

often hidden role of the MPs and other political stakeholders in development planning and management and iii) lack of effective institutional mechanism which gives poor and marginalized to take part in development project planning and implementation.

Union Parishad (UP) is the lowest tier of the LGIs of Bangladesh which is evidently the most effective mechanism to integrate local people into the development wheel.² However, after nearly four decades of independence, the ground reality of Bangladesh is that the local power structure remains in the hands of local elites. On the other hand, UP representatives and local political leaders are often labelled as an 'exploitative class' who control the destiny of the rural people by remaining close to the citadel of power (Asaduzzaman, 2008).

Development projects in Bangladesh are being managed by the LGIs- particularly the Union Parishads. However, related literatures suggest that there is very little scope of participation for common people in the decision making, management and supervision of these UP-led development projects. Project information is also barely disseminated to them. An effective horizontal evaluation system has also not been institutionalized till today. In this backdrop, many questions have been raised by the development practitioners as to the existing decision making processes of Union Parishads - whether it promotes people's participation in development process or vice versa.

3. Methodology

Questionnaire survey, in-depth interview and case study methods were used to collect the primary data. Out of 130 respondents, 122 from Union level and 08 from Upazila level has been selected. Questionnaire survey was conducted at two union parishads of Bangladesh; i.e. Alampur Union Parishad of Taraganj Upazila under Rangpur district and Jagannathpur Union Parishad of Comilla Sadar Upazila under Comilla district from 100 community people and from 22 elected representatives i.e. UP chairman/member. Interviews of eight UZ level people's representatives and government officials including UZ Chairman, UNO, UZ Engineer and PIO were taken through unstructured questionnaire. Furthermore, four randomly selected development projects of the financial year 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 of the study area, two from each UP have been studied extensively. The committees of the said projects have been scrutinized. Informal discussion was also taken place with some members of the committees and some primary beneficiaries of those projects.

4. Evolution of Participatory Practices in Local Development Process of Bangladesh

Decentralization and people's participation at all levels of administration are two basic tools for achieving national goals of development. As policy model decentralization not only offers opportunities for the local people to interact with LGs and be integrated in the governance process but it has come to be regarded as a key to effective public administration and good governance as well as a facilitator to sustainable development. Throughout the world there has been a growing interest in decentralization and since 1970s decentralization efforts have been a common phenomenon in various parts of the world.

In Bangladesh, the idea of decentralization is not new. A large number of Committees and Commissions in the past right from the British rule through Pakistan period devoted some of their attention to involving common people into local development initiatives through decentralization program though these initiatives continued to be slow and obscure (Ali et al, 1983). However, to unearth the status of people's participation in local development process, a brief pen-picture of the decentralization effort ever taken in Bangladesh is discussed below.

4.1 British Period (1765-1947)

Bangladesh has repeatedly experimented with decentralization in the colonial, post-colonial and post-independence period. Every successive regime between 1882 and 2010 attempted to reform the LG structure. The first initiative of decentralization in the land dates back to the year 1882 when Ripon Resolution⁴ was enacted. By the end of nineteenth century LG system was introduced by the-then British rulers. Since then to strengthen the capacity of LGs and to create scopes and opportunities for the participation of community people in the management of local affairs, a considerable number of decentralization initiatives have been taken by different governments. But as the ultimate objective of colonial regimes was to consolidate the power, the decentralization efforts taken and implemented during the British rule had been piecemeal, narrow and restrictive in nature (Siddiquee: 1995: 150). Hardly any major changes

⁴ Ripon's Resolution, 1882 had opened up a panorama of leniency in its government policy by bestowing numerous powers on locals. To reduce bigger dissimilarity between different parts of the country, Ripon's government preferred the provincial government to implement the principle of financial decentralization with an eye to empowering the local bodies and municipalities, which ultimately surpasses as a milestone in the growth of a local self-government in Indian sub-continent.

occurred in the pattern of local people's participation in decision-making process. As a result, during the colonial period mass people's participation in development process had remained a distant reality.

4.2 Pakistan Period (1947-1970)

A decentralization policy for rural development under the banner of Basic Democracies system was introduced in 1959 by General Ayub Khan, which offered a four-tier government i.e. Union Council at Union level, Thana Council at Thana level, District Council at District level and Divisional Council at Divisional level reflecting a mix of deconcentration and devolution (Khan, 1997:8). During Pakistan period, union councils played important political role. As a result, participation had been limited to local political elites only.

4.3 Bangladesh Period (Since 1971)

Ironically, most decentralization initiatives in Bangladesh have been initiated by undemocratic governments. Though ostensibly the reforms aimed at strengthening LGIs, the hidden agenda was to consolidate political base at local level. As a result, participation had been limited to local elites only and the mass people remained outside the boundary of decision-making.

Decentralization contributes towards creating a politically motivated interest class and serves at a local level to protect the interest of the central political and military regimes. In countries like Pakistan and Bangladesh, where military rule was prolonged for decades, the military-bureaucratic oligarchies have adopted decentralization as a policy measure to satisfy the urban and rural notables with whom they have an interdependent relationship. The access of this privileged class into state resources and services is entrusted by the bureaucratic means. In return, the local elites work as the 'vote banks' in the process of 'legitimizing' and 'civilianizing' the dictatorial rule of the regimes (Rahman, 1995: 137).

Soon after independence government explicitly committed itself to decentralization and made efforts towards this end. The new Constitution of Bangladesh had provisions for representative bodies at all level of LG. In 1973, the President's Order 22 was promulgated under which some reforms in the LG had been taken: 1) a three-tier LG namely Union Parishad (Council), Thana Development Committee and Zila Parishad

were introduced; 2) District Governorship was introduced; 3) UP election was held in 1973. Although to ensure grass root democracy, the UP election was held but the government did not hold election to the other LG tiers nor did it take any measures to devolve authority to any of them. So it is evident that during this period more attention was vested to national than local issues.

A more significant change in the LG system was brought about in 1976 through the Local Government Ordinance, 1976. This Ordinance provided for a UP for union, a Thana Parishad for thana and a Zila Parishad for district. However, no election was held in any tier except UP. In 1980, as a result of the said Ordinance, Swanirvar Gram Sarker was introduced for the first time at village level in Bangladesh providing for an equality of representation to various functional interests like farmers, landless laborers, freedom fighters, women and youths. Many argues that implicit objective of the reform package of decentralization was to gain political support at grass root level for the military regime in its process of civilianization.

The most revolutionary step in the history of LG in Bangladesh has been marked in 1982 through the introduction of UZ system by promulgating Local Government (Upazila Parishad and Upazila Administration Reorganization) Ordinance 1982 in the name of "bringing the administration nearer to the people and improving local people's access and promoting their participation in decision-making process." Under the Ordinance, some reforms in the LG had been taken: 1) decentralization of administration through the abolition of former sub-divisions and upgraded the Thanas into Upazilas; 2) UZ was established having more functions and responsibilities and huge funds were allocated to it directly; 3) UZ was made the focal point for rural development; 4) the Gram Sarker was abolished.

The major change that occurred was that for the first time all development functions were given to the locally elected council and the councils were supported by devolution of financial powers to enable it to plan and implement projects of local importance through popular participation (Siddiquee, 1995). But Khan (2009) finds that the declared objectives of decentralization during Ershad regime - promoting participatory development and ensuring people's access - have not been achieved rather it has been used as a device to establish 'privileged access' of a powerful few into state resources. Moreover, the UZ system was also thought to have decentralized corruption at local level (Khan, 1987:407).

The momentum of UZ system did not last long. The democratic government under the leadership of Begum Khaleda Zia abolished the nine years old UZ system in 1991 and reinstate the bureaucracy dominated thana administration where the chairmen of UP were given the chairmanship by rotation and TNO was made secretary to it. But the abolition of UZ system limited the opportunity and re-established the position of administrative apparatus at local level. Since then no significant changes have taken place in the structure of LG. Though several Commissions were formed, their recommendations for 'major changes' in the structure, composition, functions and finances of rural LG bodies have not been implemented. The Non-party Caretaker Government, after coming to power in 2007, chose to re-establish UZ system. The UZ election has been conducted in January 2009.

The Awami League government after coming into power in 2008 has enacted the Upazila Parishad (Reintroduction of the Repealed Act and Amendment) Act, 2009 detailing the functions and duties of UZ. The law has created widespread controversy among the civil society members and caused discontentment amongst the elected representatives of UZ. The role of MP as stipulated in law has been termed by many as a bottleneck for participatory local governance. In fact, the UZ system is now struggling for tripartite power shedding among local MP-UZ Chairman-UNO or control crisis i.e. who controls whom. It is a fact that after a long interval, constant experimentation and ups and downs, the UZ system is restored in the local governance system in Bangladesh with new hopes and aspirations and government is trying to readjust the roles and responsibilities of the actors relating to UZ resolving the existing power shedding and control crisis.

5. People's Participation in Development Process: Framework for Analysis

Community people's participation in the development process is the fundamental issue that the study endeavours to address in this paper. Therefore, a clear understanding of some concepts like- 'participation', 'development' and 'development project' is of vital importance for realizing the spirit of this article.

5.1 Concept of Participation

Participation is an indispensable ingredient of development and development administration in all countries and occupies an institutional basis in the total process of developmental change. It is the way to

improve on traditional ways of making decisions, setting agendas, and devising policy (Rowe and Frewer, 2004:513). But participation is not easy to achieve. People's participation is a broad and comprehensive societal happening that cannot take place in isolation. Participation is the by-product of a democratic, civic and political cultural process. People's participation in development programs is not only affected by the environment in which participatory practices take place but also conditioned by the institutional framework, socio-economic as well as political backgrounds of the participants (Cohen and Uphoff, 1980, Cornwall, 2002 and Gupte, 2004).

In this instance, participation refers to active or meaningful involvement of local people in UP-led development projects in Bangladesh. To be more precise, only those activities or involvements on the part of local people, which have influenced the decision-making at planning and implementation stage of development projects, have been considered as participation in this study.

5.2 Development: What It Means

The concept of development is used in different disciplines. In the parlance of development economics 'development' means 'improvement in a country's economic and social conditions'. More specifically, it refers to improvements in ways of managing an area's natural and human resources in order to create wealth and improve people's lives. Development, in this study, is closely linked with this notion and is concerned with the improved quality of life at the grass-root level that can be achieved through proper implementation of development projects.

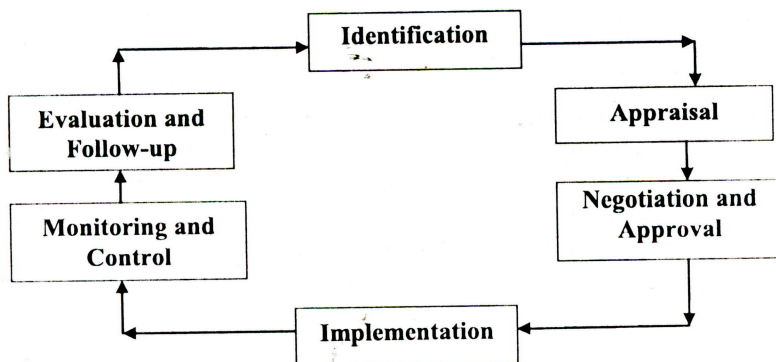
5.3 Concept of Project and Project Cycle

'Project' is a plan-hypothesis with a starting and finishing time, a cost and geographical location for achievement or accomplishment of specific objectives. The Project Management Institute has defined project as a temporary endeavour undertaken to create a unique product or service (Project Management Institute, 2004:5). Projects, in this study, refer to the development projects undertaken and implemented through LGIs at UP level. A development project, in content and coverage, is flourished through several stages which are known as project cycle.

The cycle that projects goes through from their initial conceptualization to implementation and evaluation is called the project cycle. A development project sets out to meet a perceived need by a sequence of

activities, which includes identification, preparation, appraisal, implementation and evaluation. The stages and components of project cycle and their logical sequences can be formulated with the following diagram:

Figure 1: Project Cycle: The Six Phases



In this study, the level of participation of community people only in the identification and implementation stages of projects has been examined.

5.4 Factors Conditioning Participation

In Cohen and Uphoff's (1980) comprehensive participatory model, three basic and fundamental dimensions of participation: what kind of participation takes place, who participates and how the process of participation takes place has been got importance (cited in Ahmed, 1987: 16). For ensuring social inclusion in policy cycle, Cohen and Uphoff's includes the criteria like sex, family status, education, social division and income level of the participants whose involvement must be in project identification, implementation, benefits and evaluation stage. Furthermore, social, economic, cultural and political factors usually creates bottleneck for people's participation in policy/project cycle. In the case of Bangladesh, all the factors including institutional framework that Cohen and Uphoff mentioned in their comprehensive model regarding people's participation are more or less influencing in the context of people's accesses in local level development projects. Hence in this paper, in order to examine the factors that affect the effective participation of local people in UP level development projects of Bangladesh, a framework of participation has been developed based on Cohen and Uphoff's basic framework. In this newly framed model, it is assumed that multifarious institutional and regulatory (structure and rules and

regulations), socio-economic (gender, educational status and income level) and politico-cultural (number of political interferences and unwillingness in participation) factors inhibit participation of community people in UP-led development projects.

6. A Brief Overview and Socio-Economic Profile of the Studied-Union Parishads

Jagannathpur Union Parishad is located at Comilla Sadar Upazila under Comilla district and is considered as a model UP at Comilla District. Because of high literacy rate, people of this UP are culturally aware, financially well-off and relatively conscious about local development initiatives. Alampur Union Parishad of Taraganj Upazila, Rangpur district, on the other hand, has different socio-economic pattern. Most inhabitants of this union are directly or indirectly dependent on agriculture for their livelihoods. The main features of these union parishads are given in the following table:

Table 1 Profiles of the Studied-Union Parishads

	Alampur Union Parishad	Jagannathpur Union Parishad
Establishment Year	1960	1964
Area	22 Square Km.	8.25 Square Km.
Population	21,019	45,015
*Male	10,960	22,515
*Female	10,059	22,500
Educational Institutions	10	21
*College	-	1
*High School	2	4
*Govt. Primary School	2	5
*Non-govt. Primary School	3	5
*Dakil Madrasha (religious school)	2	4
*Community School	1	2
Literacy Rate	40%	70%
*Male	41.54%	60.12%
*Female	34.76%	56.22%
Communication Facilities		
*Kutcha Road (Km.)	60 Km.	20 Km.
*Brick Built (BB) Road (Km)	6 Km.	19 Km.
NGOs working in the area	6	9
Main Occupation	Agriculture (90%), Small-scale Business	Industrial work, Small-scale Business, Overseas worker, Service

Source: Author's compilation of the information collected from Alampur and Jagannathpur Union Parishad complex

6.1 Socio-Economic Profile of the Respondents

Hundred cross section of community people (male 70 percent and female 30 percent) was interviewed during survey. To examine the correlation between socio-economic status of the respondents and their participation in development projects, relevant information on age, gender, occupation, educational level and income level of the respondents have been collected. 61 percent respondents are aged between twenty-one and forty years. 43 percent respondents are either illiterate or have only attended primary school. 46 percent respondents are poor with less than four thousand taka as their monthly income. In addition, two UP chairmen and twenty UP members were also interviewed. Most of them were from well-to-do families and socially as well as politically powerful in their respective areas.

7. Participation of Local People in Development Projects: Empirical Findings

Development programs of the government are usually implemented at the grass root level through development projects. In rural Bangladesh, development projects are planned and subsequently implemented by UPs keeping an eye to national guideline. The very aim is to connect the community people into different phases of development projects. With a view to addressing the factors influence on and affect the participatory process in UP-led development projects, the survey was conducted in Alampur UP and Jagannathpur UP. The collected data has been analyzed keeping an eye to the objective of this study. On the basis of empirical data, the major findings have been drawn which is presented chronologically.

Participation in Development Project Planning and Implementation

Projects are usually undertaken for the improvement of livelihood of local people. Local people's needs and demands, therefore, are assumed to be reflected in the selection of development projects. Their involvement in project planning is a prerequisite for its sustainability. However, during survey 93 percent respondents reported that they never participated in the planning phase of any UP-led development projects. Hence, the participation of grassroots people in project planning is only 7 percent whereas at implementation level this percentage is 24.

Factors Influencing the Participatory Process in UP-led Development Projects

There was a general assumption that several factors like institutional, legal, economic, social, political and cultural factors play a role in influencing on the participatory process in UP-led development projects. To verify the assumption, questions were asked to the respondents which later on has been produced the following information.

Institutional and Regulatory Framework and Participation

Development projects are planned, prepared and implemented for the development of local people. As the administrative system and institutional management of Bangladesh from time immemorial are hierarchical and rule bound, strong institutional mechanism and development focused regulatory framework is utmost necessary to connect the local people into development process. To be involved into development activities, the local people as beneficiary have every possible right to know about the ins and outs of development projects. But with a very few exceptions, the elected representatives were found mostly reluctant to disclose development project related information to common people.

Perception about existing Structure of Union Parishad

Many development practitioners opine that the institutional arrangements of LGIs hardly encourage popular participation in the decision-making process. Though run by people's representatives, the institutions are still hierarchical in nature and thus the UPs seem to disregard the voices of community people. The existing UP administrative system would not let the local people know about the details of development projects. In this study, 60 percent respondents opined that the present structure of UP hardly promotes grass root people's participation in development process. To address the issue, some respondents suggested for creation of the post of PIO, engineering section and a Union Development Officer (UDO) at UP level. Some emphasized on UP-NGO collaboration for motivating and encouraging community people to be involved in local development initiatives.

Perception about the existing Rules and Regulations of Union Parishad

The people of Bangladesh prefer legal provisions to tradition or own initiatives. Nobody is eager to take any initiatives unless it is being

covered by existing rules and regulations, even if it brings something good to common people. During the study 58 percent respondents expressed that the existing rules and regulations are not conducive to local people's involvement in development process especially in project implementation level. Whereas as there are no government rules and regulations in selection and planning level, UPs hardly invite local people to participate in development project planning process. Rather in absence of any clear-cut policy-guideline, personal desire of the UP representatives gets preference. In that case less important issues are being selected over local people's urgently felt issues which eventually provide benefits for a few at the cost of hundreds.

However, to culture participatory practices in local development project, there are clear provisions for inclusion of certain number of members in PICs from local elites/community people in different project guidelines. But in some cases such practices are confined to mere official formalities whereas in some others cases like LGSP, participatory culture are largely being practiced. Participation friendly guidelines can be the reason behind it.

Socio-economic Background and Participation

Generally it is assumed that literate and economically solvent people have easy access to the implementation process of local development projects. Male are more privileged than female to tag into the development project cycle. The study however, reveals a connection between participation and socio-economic backgrounds of the participants.

Income Level and Participation

Comparatively rich respondents mostly claimed their involvement in development process. In The study reveals that only 23 percent respondents who had lower monthly income (below 8000 taka) claimed of participation in development project implementation process while 77 percent respondents who claimed of participation were found to be economically solvent (at least 8,000/- taka monthly income).

Table 2 Relation between Income Level and Participation (n=100)

Income level (in taka)	Below 2000	2001-4000	4001- 8000	8001- 10000	Above 10000
No. of Respondents	10	28	30	23	9
No. of Respondents Claiming Participation	2	2	3	15	8
%	20	7	10	65	89

Source: Survey Data

So a positive relation between respondents' monthly income and participation is being observed in Table 2 which indicates that people with low economic condition are not generally invited to participate in PICs of development projects.

Educational Status and Participation

Participants claiming participation in project implementation stage especially in inclusion in PICs were mostly retired government officials, established businessmen or school teachers. The study reveals a relationship between respondents' educational status and participation.

Table 3 Relation between Education Level and Participation (n=100)

Education level	Illiterate	Primary School	High School	S.S.C	H.S.C	Degree and above
No. of Respondents	14	31	26	13	11	5
No. of Respondents Claiming Participation	2	2	4	9	9	4
%	14	6	15	69	82	80

Source: Survey Data

Data (Table 3) indicate that only 27 percent respondents with lower education level (less than S.S.C) claimed of participation in project implementation process while 73 percent respondents with higher education level (at least S.S.C) said that they participated into it especially as members of PICs. So it is clear that illiterate people hardly understand the nitty-gritty of a project and thus their illiteracy is a great hindrance to their participation in PICs whereas their number is significant in the implementation stage where the project area is.

⁵ Local Governance Support Project (LGSP) is a project started in July 2006 and being implemented under the supervision of Local Government Division with the financial assistance of Government of Bangladesh (GoB), WB, UNDP, UNCDF, EC and DANIDA. The very aims are to increase the fiscal power of UP, to ensure the participation of local people in development planning and implementation and to accelerate the development activities based on local demand.

Gender and Participation

In Bangladesh, traditionally and culturally it is assumed that male group's participation in rural development activities is higher than that's of female folk. This inconsistency was clearly marked during survey where 38 percent male respondents claimed participation in the implementation of at least one UP-led development project while this percentage is only 14 in case of female respondents. Hence, it is observed that male respondents avail more opportunity than female in the implementation of development projects and by which the vulnerability of female folk to the involvement in project activities has been clearly visible.

Politico-cultural Factors and Participation

Politico-cultural background of people plays a dominant role in shaping the participation outcome. From time immemorial rural politics in Bangladesh is dominated by local elites who are directly or indirectly involved in power politics. Building up nexus with local administration, these rural elites control the access to local development intervention which ultimately discourages local people's participation in development projects. The cultural factor i.e. samaj tradition and patron client relation largely dominates the participation scenario in UP level development projects. Failing to break through the unholy alliance, a portion of local people is becoming unwilling to involving in development project cycle.

Political Influence in Development Project Selection/ Planning and Inclusion in PIC

Projects are usually selected and framed as the expression of political government as part of their commitment to the people. Consequently, it is assumed that project will be selected on local people's urgent need and demands, not to facilitate some undue advantages to the ruling party local political leaders or elected representatives closest ones. But 57 percent respondents from both community people and elected representatives mentioned that during project selection, UPs had to face to and adjust with the request of local political leaders especially from local MPs, ruling party UZ level leaders and even local MP nominated political persons at each UP.

Furthermore, as the elected representatives view development projects as means of recovering election costs, they, with a view to maximizing their own profits, try to make such projects as less participatory as possible. Hence tendency to include elected representatives' close allies' in PICs is

a grave concern for them. 55 percent respondents mentioned that during formation of PICs, people with strong political background or connivance with UP chairman or local MP, got preferences. So though inclusion of local elites in PICs as part of legal obligation is ensured, it ultimately has resulted in mere formalities. The real spirit of involvement of local people in PICs, therefore, remained in paper not in practice.

Cultural issues are considered as one of the major factors behind non-participation of common people in development process. Traditionally, the principle of hierarchy in interpersonal relationship, obedience to seniors, consult with guardians/ local elites before taking any decision are important values in rural society. Such hierarchism produces a sense of compliance to others weakening individualism in rural society. Likewise unwillingness of socially enlightened class in involving against the existing rural development process weakened the participatory development culture at rural level.

Unwillingness to be involved in Development Projects

Out of hundred cross sections of people 18 percent especially the socially enlightened section like high school/primary school teachers, traders and well-to-do farmers mentioned that they are not interested to be involved in development activities though they feel that they should. Because they think that local politics are inflicted with patrons and stouts. So in the name of participation in development initiatives where their views deem to be not valued, they cannot be a part of that journey. This section of people is dead against the pattern of participation existed in the implementation process they termed as 'meaningless', which had to practice by UPs to maintain mere official formalities. Consequently, they always try to avoid engaging in project activities in spite of request from UP Chairman /members even if they are anyhow compelled to be involved in PICs, they simply kept mum. As a result, the community becomes deprived of their valuable contribution to it.

8. Factors influence on the participatory process in UP-led Development Projects

During the survey respondents both community people and UP level elected representatives were asked to mention the factors restraining the local people from involving into local level development projects. The respondents mentioned series of factors which hinders the appropriate planning and better implementation process of development projects at UP level.

- Political intervention in project selection or inclusion in PICs

Political intervention in project selection is a very common phenomenon at UP level development projects. It was observed at Jagannathpur UP that the respective MP allotted sixty percent of the total grant for Food for Works Programme to only one project by ignoring the UP. Furthermore, this project was implemented by persons having close tie with the MP. Participation of the actual beneficiaries in the project cycle was almost absent. Political consideration in selection of members of PICs is also an inevitable factor at UP level.

- Locally elected representative's personal interest

Sometimes some projects are selected by the locally elected representatives not on the basis of community need but for their personal gains. To achieve this, they recruit their closer ones in project implementation process keeping the original beneficiaries in dark.

- Lack of dissemination of project related information

As local projects are undertaken for the sake of the development of local people, these projects should be selected, designed and implemented in consultation with the local people. Project beneficiaries have the right to know about the project related information. But the practice of disseminating project related information to the beneficiaries is mostly absent at UP level.

- Nexus between elected representatives and local elites

Local development initiatives are mostly seized by economically well-off people who have strong link with ruling party leaders. The local elected representatives have built up an unholy alliance with those local elites on the basis of win-win strategy. It is very hard for the common people to break through this vicious cycle.

- Lack of participation focused guidelines in project selection or planning level

Existing legal provision or policy guidelines needs to be user-friendly and well clarified. In the existing project guidelines, local people's inclusion is clearly incorporated at project implementation or formation of PICs level but not at project selection or planning level.

Elected representatives, therefore, exploit this opportunity to avoid inclusion of the common people in project planning. Such practices, however, are limited in LGSP due to participation-friendly guidelines and effective monitoring, evaluation and audit system.

- Lack of strong monitoring and evaluation process of development projects

Transparency and sustainability of development projects largely depends on not only beneficiaries' attendance but also on proper and effective monitoring, evaluation and auditing system. In most of the development projects at UP level, the monitoring and evaluation system is somewhat poor. The auditing system is not up-to-date. Beneficiaries' participation is almost absent. In some cases where participation is visible, effective realization of that participation is not felt. All these irregularities induce elected representatives to keep the beneficiaries away from the development projects and to gain undue or personal benefit. Whereas in LGSP, due to effective monitoring, evaluation and auditing system, the projects are run and implemented with the minimum satisfaction of the beneficiaries.

- Absence of active local civil society or watchdog organizations

Institutionalization of participatory practices at UP level is still in nascent stage. In this backdrop local civil societies' strong role can help ensure transparency, accountability and people's participation and thereby culturing participatory practices in LGs. So strong Local Government Institutions (LGIs)-Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) interface is a crying needs for nurturing participatory practices at UP level.

- Socially enlightened/ conscious class's avoiding tendency

Participatory practices in development project cycle can only be flourished through the meaningful participation of beneficiaries into it. In UP level project selection process, either the local MP/ UZ level ruling party political leaders or UP chairman/members' personal choices got preferences to local needs. To fulfill that desire, PICs are formed with the likeminded people avoiding the representation of cross section of people. Government instructions are obliged in black and white but the spirit of representation of cross section of people become meaningless. This malpractice discourages the socially

enlightened/ conscious persons to be involved in local level development projects.

- Lack of local peoples' awareness about their rights, roles and responsibilities

No development initiatives can gain ground unless the beneficiaries become aware of their rights, roles and responsibilities. In rural Bangladesh, majority people are illiterate and involved in farming. They consider voting is their only duty to the state. Many are ignorant of their potentiality in involving in the development initiatives.

9. People's Participation: A Quantitative Summary

Participation as process is a complex mechanism depending on the context of a society. In the present study 'people's participation at UP level development projects' has been taken as dependent variable whereas 'institutional and regulatory framework (structure and rules and regulations)', 'socio-economic factors (gender, educational status and income level)' and 'politico-cultural factors (number of political interferences and unwillingness in participation)' are identified as independent variables. At the outset, there were some general hypotheses that the higher the income level, the higher the participation; or people from educated background are more prone to the participation etc. However, existing structure and prevailing rules and regulations of UP, gender, political interference and unwillingness of the conscious community people may impede the participation. With a view to testing the initial hypotheses, survey was conducted among cross-sections of community people; besides, some development projects have been studied for this purpose. The collected data has been analyzed for statistical generalization and validation of relationship between dependent and independent variables. Table 4 presents the relationship found between different factors and participation.

Table 4 Relationship between Factors with Participation

Indicators	'r'	Level of Significance
Institutional and Regulatory Framework		
• Structure	.661	0.01
• Rules and Regulations	.608	0.01
Socio-economic Factors		
• Income Level	.526	0.01
• Educational Status	.568	0.01
• Gender	.238	0.05
Politico-cultural Factors		
• No. of Political Interference	-.437	0.01
• Unwillingness in Participation	.438	0.01

Pearson's coefficient correlation has been conducted to test the initial hypotheses. From Table 4 a high degree of positive correlation is observed between existing structure ($r=.661$) and rules and regulations of UP ($r=.608$) and participation which indicates that the existing structure and rules and regulations of UP are the two very significant factors that affect participation. Moreover, a positive relation is found between income level and participation ($r=.526$) and educational status and participation ($r=.568$). This means that if income level and educational status increases, the participation increases as well. In case of political interferences and participation a high degree of negative correlation ($r=-.437$) has been observed through which it has been established that higher the political intervention in participatory processes of development projects, lower the scope of participation of beneficiaries into it. It is also seen that there is a low degree of correlation ($r=.438$) (though significant) between unwillingness of community people and participation. This means that generally the majority portion of community people is interested to be involved into local development activities. But the smaller section including school teacher, social worker, imam etc. who have a clean image in rural society are usually unwilling to be involved into development projects. As regards gender, during correlation testing it is difficult to quantify the persons. Subsequently, a low degree of correlation between gender and participation ($r=.238$) in 0.05 level has been observed. But during Chi-Square test surprisingly a significant relationship between gender and participation has been found ($\chi^2=5.669$). So it is evident that gender matters in the context of participation. In synthesis, it is clear that all the factors initially assumed to determine the

major causes behind less or non participation has been proved to be more or less significant.

10. The Way Forward

The main contention behind people's participation in development is that real development must be people-centered. Several decades of development initiatives of Bangladesh have shown that without meaningful participation of local people in development process, sustainable improvement in the standard of living of local people cannot be achieved. In view of the survey findings, some recommendations are proposed to make the development process more people-oriented:

- ❖ Some structural changes can raise awareness and bring power to the marginalized groups breaking the traditional patterns. Local NGOs working with the marginalized section need to be included in the local development design and planning process. This may gradually help institutionalize the participatory practices.
- ❖ Technical skills regarding project design, pre-assessment of projects of UPs need to be increased. Effective measures should be taken to build capacity of the UPs so that they can undertake and carry out local development activities independently.
- ❖ UPs should be conferred with meaningful autonomy. Interference from any quarter i.e. from local MP, UZ level political leaders, must be stopped. At the same time UPs should be kept outside the complex bureaucratic procedure. Reforms of the legal regulatory framework should be made, if necessary.
- ❖ The elected representatives at UP level are mostly unaware of the benefits of participatory development approach. Lack of knowledge on their part may have contributed to their misunderstanding and misconception to this approach. Launching training programs or workshops may help change the mindset of the elected representatives.
- ❖ At present, funds are distributed directly in favour of UPs only under LGSP and direct funding programme from Local Government Division. Government should initiate the process of disbursing funds of various other development projects directly to the UPs.

- ❖ Participatory budgeting needs to be introduced at UP level. In this context, representatives from different social groups should be trained so that they can articulate their demands properly and make meaningful contributions to local development planning.
- ❖ Stakeholder analysis should be carried out before undertaking any project. In addition, participation of key stakeholders in development planning must be ensured in order to make development projects sustainable and viable. NGOs could be mobilized to help UP in such initiatives.
- ❖ Evaluation of selective projects should be done on a regular basis. In evaluating the projects, opinions and perceptions of the key beneficiaries should be sought. Performance audits of UPs can also be done in this regard. Deputy Director of Local Government should undertake sample-based intensive evaluation of these development projects.
- ❖ A "Citizen based Monitoring Team" can be formed in each UP comprising of civil society members, local media, school teachers and socially enlightened persons which would work as a watchdog and recommend measures to improve participation level.

11. Conclusion

The role of decentralization has long been recognized in development. In fact, sustainable development largely depends on how decentralization is designed and implemented. Since its independence successive governments in Bangladesh have taken various reform measures with a view to ensuring development for all, but these reform initiatives have not significantly fulfill the declared objectives. Development decisions, which affected the lives of millions, had been monopoly of a powerful few. The unholy nexus between the rent-seeking politicians and self-seeking bureaucrats stifled, in many ways, development of self-reliant L.G. Local government as a decentralization strategy has continued but mass people's integration in it has remained a mirage. Consequently, development programs at local level did not include those for whom those were meant.

Mapping the level of participation of local people in UP-led development projects was one of the prime objectives in this work. The survey has

produced some interesting results. It has been found that the level of participation in development projects in the study area is very insignificant. The poor and the marginalized, characterized by economic, social and political backwardness are mostly excluded in the local development projects. The study further reveals that the elected representatives are keen to exploit personal benefits from development projects. They seem to have enduring ties with the local elites and share these benefits. This kind of unholy alliance keeps the poor and the marginalized people outside the development wheel. Furthermore, in some cases it is observed that UP representatives are under tremendous pressure from the local MP to follow his directions and to include his nominated persons in the projects.

Besides, the structure of UP, participation-unfriendly rules and regulations, high rate of illiteracy among rural poor, unwillingness of socially advanced classes, and other socio-economic issues like gender, economic condition etc. were identified as main reasons behind non-participation.

However, despite some limitations and drawbacks, it seems that some participation takes place sporadically in various forms, especially in the Local Governance Support Projects (LGSPs). For example, Jagannathpur UP has already started practicing participatory budgeting. In some other rare occasions, open meetings are also held for identification of local priorities. But these initiatives are very few and do not have significant impact on the overall development process. In most cases, these initiatives are rather personal than institutional. It is evident that participatory practices are still in its nascent stage at the UP level development projects in Bangladesh and these practices needs to be institutionalized.

There is still a long way to go. Day by day community people are becoming more conscious as citizens and as a result, voices are growing from the civil society organizations as well as citizens' groups for participatory governance at local level for better and sustainable management of public resources. The policymakers also must come up with comprehensive policy guidelines with a view to freeing the LGIs from unnecessary political and bureaucratic controls and strengthening them by integrating people from all walks of life in the development as well as governance process.

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