

NGOs and UPs

Towards Institutional Interactions

by Dr. Salahuddin Aminuzzaman

The Government of Bangladesh (GOB) has time and again categorically emphasised the need for and importance of involving the NGOs as partners of development especially at the local level.

UP-NGO Interactions: Empirical Analysis

Though there have been some general discussion on the role of NGOs in strengthening the local government bodies, but no serious empirical study has so far been undertaken to examine the institutional interactions between the NGOs and the Union Parishads. Considering the expanding role of the NGOs and the overall importance of Union Parishad as the primary local government unit in Bangladesh, in our study we have tried to examine the present mode and pattern of institutional linkages between the UPs and the NGOs and identify the likely areas where UPs and the NGOs can enter into effective and meaningful collaboration. Empirical data for this study was drawn from 30 Unions representing six divisions.

Summary of Empirical Findings: especially among the poor, about the NGOs is that these are the "extension agents" of the international donor agencies and are supposed to provide free relief goods, credit and other logistic supports to the poor and destitute. Presence of an NGO in rural areas usually, at the beginning, generates a lot of enthusiasm and interest among the poorer section of the people.

Rural elite and leaders seem to have clear understanding about the role of NGOs in their respective localities. Empirical findings on the level of awareness of the sampled UP officials reveal that 92 per cent of the sampled respondents are aware of the existence and the overall activities of the NGOs working in their respective localities. This indicates the overall awareness and interest of the UP officials regarding the programmes and activities of the

NGOs.

Respondents were further asked to name the projects being administered by the NGOs. A significant percentage (83.14 per cent) of the respondents were able to describe the projects and their beneficiaries. Rest of the respondents gave some vague impressions about the NGO programmes. This once again illustrates a considerably high degree of understanding of the UP officials as regards to the NGO operations in their respective areas.

The researchers were interested to know whether the NGOs maintain any formal communication with the UP officials in organising and managing their projects. It is quite evident from the findings that the NGOs are working almost in 'isolation' from the local bodies especially from the Union Parishads. Ninety-four per cent of the respondent UP officials noted that the NGOs do not formally communicate (official letters, formal meetings etc.) with them at any stage of their programme operations. Though the respondents reported that in some occasions, field functionaries of the NGOs visit them socially and at times ask for suggestions and casual advice, but they do not maintain any formal communication with the UP as such. Even those who reported (only 6 per cent) the existence of formal communication with NGOs could not specifically refer to the content of such communication. Upon further scrutiny it was revealed that most of these communications were merely letters from the NGO head offices appreciating the overall support rendered by the UPs to the concerned NGOs.

However, to make the NGO projects more effective and responsive, the UP officials strongly believe that there

should be some mode of formal linkages between the NGOs and the UPs concerned in organising and managing the projects. A significant majority of the respondents (75.33 per cent) emphasised the need for formal communications between the UP and the NGOs. This demonstrates a greater degree of interest on the part of the UP officials to maintain a formal channel of communication and interactions with the NGOs at the operational level.

The respondents were asked to identify the functional areas in which UPs and NGOs could launch such collaboration. Almost 75 per cent of the sampled UP officials decisively noted that NGOs should consult the UP in project selection, about 65 per cent observed that NGOs could formally involve in the process of implementing the projects, and 63 per cent emphasised that NGOs should be in touch with UPs in identifying the target groups. UP officials, thus, claimed that a more formal and structured linkages with the NGOs at the local level would help the later in getting administrative and political support, resolving local level functional problems, and also monitoring and evaluation of the projects.

UP officials, considering their limitation of resources and capability, have specifically marked some programme areas and projects where NGOs could provide necessary support and assistance to the Union Parishads. The suggested areas of programme support are: health and family planning services, design and management of income generating and poverty alleviation projects, mass education, livestock and fisheries, social forestry and environment, infrastructure and agricultural development.

UP leaders, on the other hand, also asserted that UPs can extend meaningful and effective support to the NGOs in their programme operations. UP officials, in general, expressed their keen interest to extend their support and assistance to the NGOs in solving different operational and field-level problems during project implementation (74.66 per cent), the implementation of projects (65.33 per cent) and identification of target groups (56.66 per cent), monitoring and evaluation of NGO projects (51.33 per cent) and land planning (47.33 per cent).

UP officials appear to be quiet concerned about their po-

litical representativeness. They consider representativeness as the strongest strength of the UP as an institution. Popular participation and political accountability is considered to be the important aspects of the institutional strength of the UP. It also appears from the findings that the UP officials are fully aware of the fact that their power base and representation are democratic and popular. Besides, UP officials noted that as a grassroots level popular institution, UP in general receive a lot of support from the national government.

UP leaders have found to be concerned about their limitations too. Given the role and functions delegated by the Local Government Ordinance, they were asked to identify some of their institutional and functional weaknesses. As regards to weaknesses, the UP officials have categorically noted that lack of financial resources weakens the UP severely (84.67 per cent), which is followed by the high degree of control of the Thana and District level officials of the national government (65.33 per cent). The other weaknesses include failure to mobilise local resources, lack of manpower and logistics, too much dependence on national government and poor management skill.

UP officials also acknowledged that because of local politics and culture of *murabbi* (rule of elders), *gusht* (kinship) lineage, they failed to mobilise the local resources through collection of taxes and tolls. Lack of adequate manpower is also a

problem for the UPs. Apart from the Secretary and the *chaulkidars*, UPs do not have any staff to organise, plan and implement the local level development projects, which, eventually, make them dependent upon the local level national government functionaries.

UP leaders are, however, quite appreciative of the performance of the NGOs. UP officials have given a sort of impressionistic observation as regards to the strengths of the NGOs. They duly recognised the institutional strengths of the NGOs. A significant percentage (67.61) of the respondents regarded that NGOs, in general, receive generous logistic support from the donors which makes their work easier and more effective. 63.88 per cent of the UP officials noted that regular flow of fund have made the NGOs responsive to the clientele need and functionally more active. UP officials also recognised that the technical skills of the NGO staff contribute significantly to their institutional strengths. UP officials admitted that NGO staff are highly disciplined too. Furthermore, NGO officials tend to maintain good links with the Thana Level Officers (TLOs) which contribute to the overall effectiveness of the NGO functionaries at the local level.

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Tomorrow: Towards an Effective Partnership.

THERE are several theories that provide alternative explanations of why NGOs emerge and survive in society and point to the conditions under which the institutional form is likely to perform better than the state and the market.

As far as the role of NGOs are concerned there are three different perspectives: first, the notion that NGOs represent a force towards democratic pluralist civil society; second, a view that NGOs have particular strengths in poverty alleviation and sustainable development; and third, that the NGOs offer the prospect of enhancing efficiency of public sector.

There has been considerable debate on the role of NGOs in Bangladesh. Hardline analysts reject the idea that NGOs can play any role in the social transformation process. This group of critics acknowledge that the NGOs are efficient mobilizers of the rural poor, but reject the claim that the NGOs can play an effective role in social transformation. They argue that the NGOs are weakening the local government bodies by installing a parallel institution for local level development through ad-hoc projects. This school of observers argue that the NGOs are not politically strong enough nor have any social commitment to be able to bring about any changes in the existing power structure; rather it is claimed that the NGOs either knowingly or otherwise serve the interest of international corporate capital.

NGOs in Bangladesh

Since the early 1970s, NGOs became a part of the institutional framework for approaching rural development, poverty alleviation programmes and disaster management in Bangladesh. There has been a steady growth of a number of national NGOs over the last one and a half decades. As of date, there are as many as 14,000 registered NGOs in Bangladesh. About 1,078 NGOs are funded by external donors of which 135 are foreign and 943 are local NGOs.

The significance of the NGOs' involvement in the overall development programmes could

be seen from the pattern of inflow of foreign resources to the sector. The proportion of total foreign aid to Bangladesh disbursed through NGOs was about 1 per cent only in 1972-73. During the mid '80s, on an average about 16.39 per cent of the total foreign aid inflow was mediated through the NGOs. By the end of Fiscal Year 1986-87, the proportion has further increased to 19.4 per cent. From June '90 to December '96, NGOs have implemented 3,873 projects at a cost of Taka 498.9 million.

The Government of Bangladesh (GOB) has time and again categorically emphasised the need and importance of involving the NGOs as partners of development especially at the local level. Nevertheless, there seems to be a noticeable ambiguity in the policies of the GOB on the role and scope of the involvement of the NGOs in Bangladesh. Different GOB plan documents have vaguely indicated the possible involvement of the NGOs, but could not identify any specific package of intervention strategy. As a result, NGOs are getting involved in a wide variety of projects. In the absence of an integrated plan, NGOs are working in the local areas almost completely in isolation without any interaction with the GOB functionaries and/or the Local Government bodies.

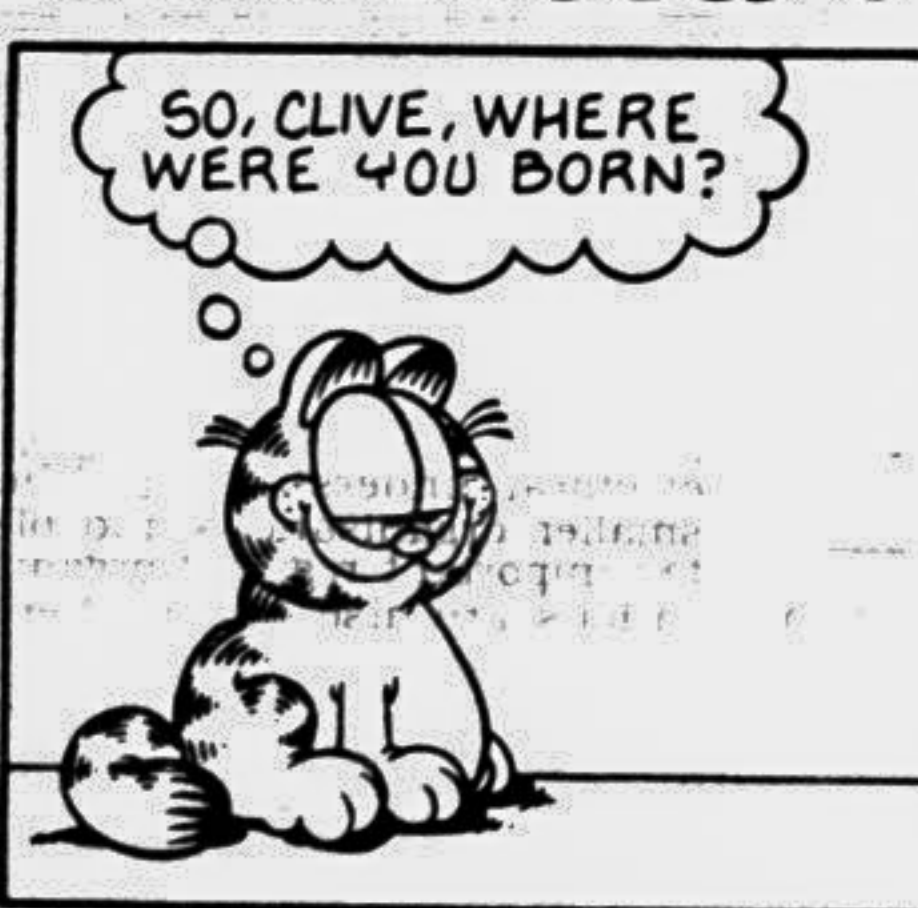
A review of the overall development management scenario and NGO operations indicates the following general trends:

a. The GOB has, in principle, accepted NGOs as partners of development management. Some experimental collaborative programmes between GOB and selected large NGOs have been designed.

b. The GOB has authorised some NGOs as contractors for the delivery of selected social services e.g. education, health, etc.

c. Donors are increasingly putting pressure on GOB to make use of the services of the NGOs. Donors argue that GOB's institution-building at the local level should be from outside and below through the NGOs and their demonstration effect.

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S Korea donates 5 ambulances

The Republic of Korea has donated five ambulances for development of health sector of Bangladesh, reports UNB. South Korean Ambassador to Bangladesh Tae Kyo Han handed over documents of the vehicles to Health and Family Welfare Minister Salahuddin Yusuf when he called on him at his office yesterday.

During the meeting, they discussed matters relating to mutual interest, said an official handout.

Of the ambulances, two are allotted for Savar Hospital and one each for Khulna Medical College Hospital, Habiganj Sadar Hospital and Bhola Sadar Hospital.

3 youth training centres to be built in CHT

State Minister for Youth, Sports and Cultural Affairs Obaidul Quader yesterday said that three youth training centres with an expenditure of Taka seven and a half crore will be built at three hill districts for imparting training to the vast unemployed youths of the Chittagong Hill Tracts regions, reports BSS.

The minister announced this while exchanging views with the local journalists and cultural activists at Khagrachhari Circuit House here. The minister further said a gymnasium will be built at Khagrachhari Stadium and three modern auditoriums will also be developed at Bandarban, Rangamati and Khagrachhari Shilpakala Academy for flourishing of art and culture.



Five women, residents of a slum at Uttara at a press conference organised by UBINIG at the Jatiya Press Club yesterday claimed that they had been sterilised without their knowledge by an NGO-run clinic at Mirpur. —Star photo

Nat'l Nutrition Week from Apr 22

A meeting of the executive committee of Bangladesh National Nutrition Council was held Tuesday at the conference room of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. Salahuddin Yusuf, Minister for Health and Family Welfare presided, reports BSS.

The meeting decided to observe National Nutrition Week from April 22 throughout the country from centre to thana level. Main objective of the week is to create awareness to

the general mass by arranging rallies and exhibitions of nutrition in various national and local institutions. Besides, workshop seminar, essay competition and publicity through newspaper, radio and television will also be launched.

Meeting also decided to publish an annual report on the various activities on nutrition by government, non-government and related organisation throughout the country in 1997.

Khaleque visits Postogola fire victims

State Minister for Relief Talukder Abdul Khaleque visited the fire affected area at Postogola in the city yesterday, reports UNB.

He distributed 15 kg rice, one saree and one lungi to each affected family, a PID handout said.

Establishment of DIMC: Body formed to make recommendations

A ten-member committee has been formed recently to make recommendations to the Ministry of Health for the establishment of a drug information monitoring cell (DIMC).

The committee, named Adverse Drug Reactions Advisory Committee (ADRAC), will advise the government on setting up of a programme on adverse drug reactions (ADRs) with the aim of collecting and providing information on ADRs and cautioning health professionals about use of drugs.

The committee will also evaluate and make recommendations to the licensing authority of drugs for regulatory actions and providing information to health practitioners.

Earlier, a proposal to set up a DIMC had been shelved at the concerned ministry since 1994.

According to a source in the drug administration, the proposal stated that a computerised drug information cell should have administrative linkages with all hospitals and relevant sectors. In addition, the DIMC should have data filing system for immediate access to any information in case of emergency.

A drug administration official told The Daily Star: "As there is no monitoring arrangement in the country, we have to depend on the World Health Organisation's (WHO) information exchange system to alert the local drug manufacturing companies about adverse effects of certain drugs."



The boundary wall of the Bangla Academy is being decorated with a mural on the occasion of Ekushey Boi Mela (Book Fair) '98, which begins on the Academy premises from Feb 7. —Star photo

Body of young girl found on hilltop at Ctg

CHITTAGONG, Feb 4: Police recovered the body of a young girl from Ispahani Hill top in the port city today, reports UNB.

On a tip-off, police rushed to the spot and recovered the body, which had a scarf tied around the neck. Police suspected that the girl was strangled after rape.

World Vision distributes blankets

World Vision, an international Christian relief and development organisation, distributed 450 blankets among the slum people in the city on Tuesday, reports UNB.

The blankets have been distributed among the slum dwellers of ward number 48, 58 and 60.

136 arrested on various charges

Police rounded up 136 people from different parts of the city on various charges during last 24 hours, said a DMP press release yesterday, reports UNB.

Of the arrested, 15 were wanted criminals, 31 held on charges of murder, dacoity, snatching, extortion and terrorism, and 68 others under DMP act.

Metropolitan

—UNB

Further text of cross-examinations shall be published as and when received.