

Afzal Hosan, Enlighten Chairman of Ramnagar

Advocate Afzal Hosan (47) chairman of Ramnagar union of Sadar upazilla of Jessore district. He has elected chairman for two times through direct election. Union Parishad-UP is considered as a viable institution for socio-economic development at the semi-urban and grassroots level.

Case 1: I know what should be done

'I was not aware on my duties, responsibilities and capacities during my first period of chairmanship. Usually I was come UP office and back home without doing any development activities. The people of my union are believed that the UP is only responsible for preparing citizen certificate and distributing the relief during natural disaster. I have done such type of official activities with my best efforts. Due lack of information and dissemination mechanism, people of the UP is in misunderstanding about any kind of development project implemented by the union parishad. But PRC project has developed a good number of working areas where I am now giving efforts. Now I informed about my duties and responsibilities '

While UP implemented any project with amount of BDT 50,000 the people thought that chairman and UP will have thieved amount of 50,000. Because the people of UP are not adequately informed about the detail budget of the project.

Case 2: Never seen participatory open budget

Mr. Gias, age 45, a resident of ward number 6 under Ramnagar UP in Jessore district, mentioned that he did never see such type of participatory budgetary process in his life because he knew that the village police would come to house to house, and in most taxpayers have been reluctant to pay their taxes. On the other hand, local residents/citizens would not keen to know what their UP is doing because there was system of sharing information. Open budget opens their eyes and mouth, which has increased ownership to their UP activities particularly on planning and implementation. They have realized that development at grass root level through UP is not possible if they do not participate in open budget and planning.

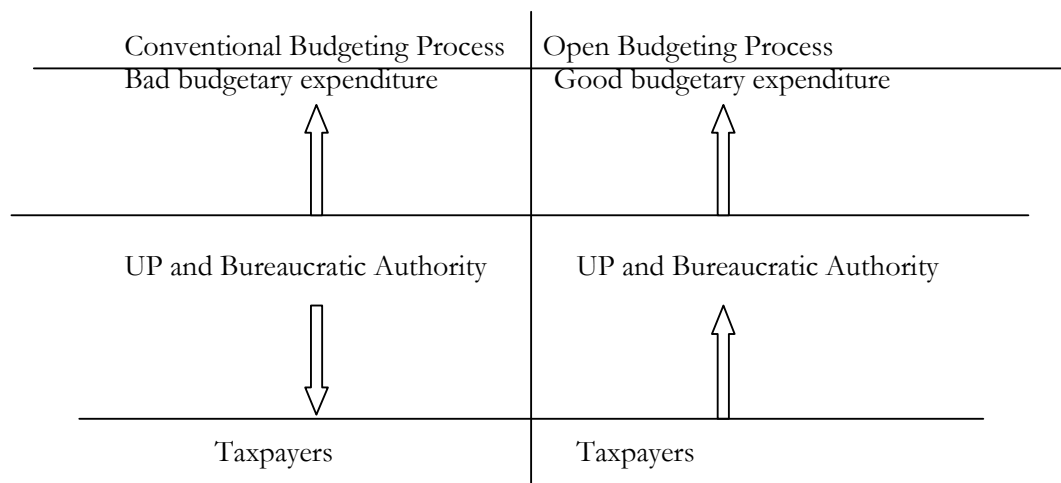


Figure 1: Perception of people on participatory open budgeting process

Targeting the objective, (poor and disadvantaged people are enjoying better access to service delivery in education, agriculture and health and alternative dispute resolution) Peoples Reporting Centre- PRC has been implemented in Ramnagar union since October 2003. That PRC project has been implemented by SSS.

Due to increase of local tax collection, (about 62% people have been paid their tax in last year) Union Parishads have been able to undertake some development activities/ project from their own fund, which are rarely found in Bangladesh. Furthermore such kinds of planning of development activities have been come up from participation of local citizens and general people. After completion of ward level meetings, an open space budget meeting is held at UP office premise presided over by UP Chairman, where residents from whole Union are invited to attend. In this meeting, compiled list of households of whole Union and their tax amount agreed upon at the ward level meetings is presented. In addition, agenda of the meeting include the last year performance of the UP; fund received from the government; next year budget along with proposed development plans. Moreover, the UP members have to respond many questions raised by the residents regarding UP activities and fulfilling their demands, for example, why the particular road of a village not completed, why not giving priority in education sector.

The Chairman of the Ramnagar Union Parishad has introduced a decentralized system of dispute resolution ADR. Union Parishad delivers judiciary services through resolving local disputes by alternate resolution process, namely Salish, an informal process of settling petty disputes; mostly it handles local conflict among neighbor families and family related cases. UP functionaries spend more than 50% time of their official duties in solving these disputes. Local people prefer Salish than formal judicial process because formal judicial system has various difficulties, such as, delay in judgment and more expensive. Chairman also introduces the various formal systems with adequate manpower. UP has been provided Samon, Notice to the conflicted parties and maintained official register.

The UP Chairman of had mentioned that local tax collection has increased than the previous year due to participatory open budget and citizen committee initiative. The Chairman of Ramnagar Union Parishad has motivated his people to buy a water- sealed latrine. As a result, sanitation coverage has increased from 10% to 80% within one year. In Ramnagar union taxpayers increased from 10% to 62% in 2005-06 from 2004-05 and they have been paid their taxes. Birth registration process is progressing through 100% achievement in Ramnagar union.

Personal Detailed of Chairman

Md. Afzal Hosan

BA (Hons) MA (LLB)

Acted as a lawyer since 1985.

General Secretary, District Lawyer Association, Jessore

Organizing Secretary, Bangladesh Union Parishad Federation, Jessore

Founder President, Kazipur High School, Jessore

Chairman elected in 1993 (first time), 2003 (second time)

Virtually the people of Ramnagar union have been more concentrated towards the development activities of the *Parishad* for the PRC project. The role of chairman also has more effective through the PRC implementation.

Sultan Ahamed, CC member as a catalyst of effective UP

As a local level representative institution Union Parishad (UP) has been working on a regular and continuous basis for the last 135 years. As per legal framework, Union Parishad has been given a host of institutional roles, functions, duties and responsibilities for carrying out local development activities. Though the most of these functions are related to physical infrastructure (*i.e.* road, culvert and bridge etc.); productive and income generating activities (*i.e.* agriculture, livestock, fisheries); social development (*i.e.* education, health, cooperatives etc); and local dispute resolution. Along with that, Union Parishad is involved in carrying out activities *i.e.* Food for Works, Rural Maintenance Program, Vulnerable Group Development Program, Relief activities including formulation of beneficiaries list etc.

But most of the UP of Bangladesh cannot operate in a fully democratic manner and participatory approach because of ineffective standing committee system and lack of community participation and furthermore, community initiative did not grow out as an efficient organization. As a result, people's rights to participation, rights to information, and rights to equal opportunity have been denied by the local level governance. Moreover perception of the people is not quite positive on the issue of transparency, accountability and honesty of the union.

Considering the real picture of LGI in Bangladesh, PRC project has been implemented with specific objective, '**Involve Citizen Committees, General People, CSOs, CBOs in budgeting, planning, and implementation and monitoring UP activities**'. PRC has developed a several number of Citizen Committee- CC at ward level consist of 10-12 members. The member of CC has been doing a lot of activities to mediate local expectations between general people and UP. Md. Sultan Ahamed, is a member of CC of 5 ward of *Fatapur* union in Jessore district has been serving as a local level mediator since 2003.

Personal Detailed of CC member

Md. Sultan Ahamed (61), BA
Ex-Head Master, Baliadanga govt. model primary school
Member of managing committee, Baliadanga mosque
Office Secretary, Primary teachers association, Jessore
Director, Talent pre-cadet school, Jessore
Father of 2 sons and 2 daughters

We are practicing the culture of accountability;

Md. Sultan Ahamed, members of CC of 5 ward of *Fatapur* union of Jessore district say, 'we have been participated in the yard meeting for identifying the demand and expectation of general people. Then we talk with the UP representative on the identified problem for further action. Moreover we have been participated in the sharing meeting, which held at UP complex with active participation of general people and UP representatives. At the initial stage some people were feel hesitation to say anything in front of chairman in sharing meeting. On the other hand, some people were expressed more than expectation that making the UP representative embraced situation. But after certain meeting the participants of local community people have been more constructive to discuss with the local level representatives. We have developed the culture of accountability claiming through exchanging views between UP and general people.

The only participatory mechanism of UP was the standing committee on several service delivery issue such as education, agriculture, health and ADR was not enough effective due to time constraint of members, lack of scope of participation and moreover the committee members were not adequately conceptually clear on the issue of their roles, agenda and responsibilities. But now the standing committees are functioning well. When we have designed and formed the committee I (one) member has included from CC. the CC member has been participated in the meeting of standing committee with some findings that he has gotten from the yard meeting of PRC project. As a result the meeting agenda, discussion and decision have been come up in concrete way and manner. The decision of meeting also has been monitored by the CC members, and put up to the next meeting for further discussion.

We have been enjoying access to information from the local level governance;

CC member Sultan also say, 'By nature the people of Union were not come to UP for sharing their views in development activities. But after PRC project, people are participated in UP activities including development planning, relief distribution and decision making than previous year through CC members. Furthermore, some people may have concept that all kind of relief distribution list has formulated through the union *Parishad* members and chairman and includes the relatives of the *parishad*. But in *Fathepur* UP, members of CC with consultation of the general people have formulated list for relief distribution. As a result the real demand of relief has been properly identified and these incentives have been distributed to the proportionately poor people with supervision of CC members. Under the mechanism most of the relief and other service of government has been distributed to the appropriate persons who demand the public service. Thus the people of the union has allowed to enjoying access to information of the local level governance and UP has ensured the rights to information for their community people from their micro mechanism'.

CC has created a mechanism of participation and information dissemination;

By the way of discussion, we asked the chairman about his views and comments on the issue of role of CC. He has answered with satisfaction and say, 'most of the load of distribution has transferred to the CC from my responsibilities'. Now I am more transparent to the public on the issue of distribution and information dissemination. On the other hand CC members have been doing a good number of activities for the community such as tree plantation, sanitation and drainage clear from their volunteerism which inspired the other people of community as well as the political forces of union. Along with that the interaction between UP and CC has reduced the gap of information dissemination for the entire community. Now the people of union are not in mysterious situation about the development project including any kind of incentives. Thus the formation of CC has been enhanced the transparency and accountability of UP to the community people

Furthermore, as an institution CC has been developing and functioning since PRC in 5 ward of fathepur union. CC has implemented a good number of initiatives such as reinvention of connecting road of Baligonga, Cleaning the drainage system of village; participate in yard meeting to aware the community people on various issues etc. The financial support for those initiatives has rise from the subscriptions of general people. Such kind of the practice has revealed that general people are willing to pay for their own infrastructure development, need only an initiative.