

National Policy Dialogue on
Image of Union Parishad and People's Participation
6th September 2009
National Press Club, Dhaka

Background:

Union Parishad the century old institution has been serving people within its limited resources and authority. The institution directly and indirectly controlled by the central government from its inception. Historically Union Parishad failed to follow a unique standard of governing system because of fragile and inconsistency practice of democracy in the country. Union Parishads are struggling for image crisis because of suffering from scarcity of resources, little control over jurisdiction, political interference to meet its local need.

Objective of the seminar:

The objective of arranging national seminar was to share the underlying impediment responsible for image crisis and barrier of people's participation in Union Parishad with policy maker so that the issues addressed in policy level.

Paper presentation: In order to address the issues of UPs image crisis and peoples participation Democracywatch presented a key note paper based on practical experience through PRC project. The key issues and recommendations included in the paper identified while working with citizen committee member, representatives, government officials and community peoples of 28 UPs. The key issues hindrance the images of UPs are vague concept of community people and to some extent elected representatives about the functions of UPs, negative news presentation, operated by non democratic way, culture of information secrecy, lack of accountability, lack of adopting sustainable project, inequality, extremes centralization. DW proposed following recommendations for increasing images of UPs and people's participations.

1. Initiative should take to inform people on underlying law, ordinance, policy and public affairs circular related with Union Parishad function through national broadcasting. Besides local government activity should publicize by Zila administration, Upazila Parishad and Union Parishad.
2. Representative's orientation on UP activities, types and authority should arrange immediately after elected. Coordination between government and non government initiatives should also address.
3. Media should come forward to disseminate local government news more objectively. Local successful initiatives should publicize attractively.

4. Debate should start on policy level In order to amend Union Parishad operating system in parliamentary democracy instead of presidential system
5. Necessary steps should take to implement Right to Information Act 2009 in Union Parishad including all government and non government institutions in local level.
6. In order to develop the culture of accountability inter personal relationship should encourage between government and non government institution and community people by taking different activity such as public hearing, word meeting etc.
7. Specific policy should formulate regarding people's participation in UP activities.
8. Government should take initiatives to generate a comprehensive database of women, children, disable and destitute of UPs.
9. An intergovernmental fiscal transfer policy should formulate according to local and national level long term plan
10. Sustainable development project should be adopted in order to ensure socio-economic development of people and transfer the allocation directly to the UPs. All kind of bureaucratic hazard should abolish in project permission.
11. In order to reduce dependency on central government local resources (Hat Bazar, Jal mahal, Balomahal, Pathar Ghat, Shallo Ghat and land) authority should hand over and build the capacity for imposing and collection of local taxes.
12. Legal authority should entrust in order to adopt loan from financial institution/ bank

Major issues discussed:

After presentation a lively discussion was held among the participants moderated by Dr Salahuddin Aminuzzaman, Professor, Department of public administration, Dhaka University.

Welcome speech by Taleya Rehman, Executive director, Democracywatch:

In her welcome speech Taleya Rehman said according to the constitution Parliamentarians are the supreme of preparing law of the country as well as for the local government. But local government should control by the people they elected not by the parliament member. She focused on the Bangali version of constitution where local government translated as Sthaniy Sashan instead of sthaniy Sarker. She proposed to bring change in constitution for constitutional recognition of local government. She said for better implementation of the law local government representative's opinion should include in the law. Only top down policy could not ensure good governance bottom up policy should give also importance.

Panel discussant Dr Badiul Alam Muzumder, Secretary, Suzon:

He mainly focused to preserve independent characteristics of local government. He criticized central government control over local government. According to him local resource is local people's resource so the resource ownership should handover to the people who represent them. He also gives importance on the role of local government representatives for greater decentralization. He urged to the Member of Parliament not to interfere on local government decision making process as an advisor.

Panel discussant Mahabubur Rahman Tulu, President BUPF

He welcomed the recommendations included in key note paper and said these proposal is much important for local government. He said most of the UP members are not aware of their duties and responsibility. They need training and motivation for ensuring transparency and accountability. He demanded for authority over local resources of UPs. He also proposed digital Union Parishad for ensuring digital Bangladesh.

Open discussion Dur-Afsan Chowdhury, UNDP

According to her local representatives are considered as unskilled and ignorance for performing their duties and responsibility that is why the institutions are suffering from image crisis. She mainly focused on the training for local government representatives for better performance and image for UPs. She proposed public university and NGOs for involving in training for local government representatives together with government initiatives.

Open discussion Sarder M Asaduzzaman, Program Officer, HRGG-PSU, DANIDA

He mainly divided the problem and recommendation identified in the key note paper into two parts. According to him some are structural which must be addressed by policy maker in national level and some issues depend on the attitude

of representatives. Peoples participation will not ensure only incorporate in the law but mostly depend on the enthusiasm of representatives. Elected representatives should create a favorable atmosphere in the UPs so that people feel encourage to participate.

Open discussion Jamil Ahmed, Head of program, Jatree

He said in order to built positive image of Union Parishad media has very significant role to play. But the coordination and communication between local government representatives and journalist need to address properly. Journalist should invite not only as a reporter in local government program but also considered as significant stakeholder. He also proposed for a comprehensive database of local government in collaboration with BUPF and donor agency.

Special guest Hans Hoffmeyer

According to him local government has been considering a key issue of local development. Decentralization in Bangladesh is slow and there is no such recipe how decentralization occurred in a country. Bangladesh is still struggling for decentralization. There has no clear vision of decentralization in the country. There exists a lack of legal recognition of local government he stated.

Special guest Monowar Hossain Chowdhury, MP, Member of Local government rural development and cooperatives parliamentary standing committee:

In his speech he rejected the allegation of conflict between UP representatives and parliament member. He assured that there will be no conflict happened between local government representatives and Member of Parliament if the by laws for every ordinance enact. He said we must give time to the newly elected bodies for better output. He agreed that NGO can able to provide training for the representatives beside government.

Special guest Ashraf Ali Khan Khasru, MP, Member of Local government rural development and cooperatives parliamentary standing committee:

According to him non democratic government has plunged the image of local government. Most of the non democratic government used local representatives for serving their own vested interest. Besides Bangladesh is still struggling with it's over population and illiteracy. Most of the elected representatives are not aware about their roles and responsibilities. We will welcome the initiatives of NGOs if they provide training to the local elected bodies for capacity development.

Chief Guest Ad Rahmat Ali MP, Chairman of Local government rural development and cooperatives parliamentary standing committee:

He said people of Bangladesh have the supreme power; no laws enact without the concern of peoples welfare. Only Constitutional change could not reduce the tension between local government and Member of Parliament. Everybody should work as corresponding each other. He recommended the UP representatives to use the UP complex properly in collaboration with local administration. He also acknowledged the problem of coordination in field level administration. He along with his committee member invited a team for further discussion on the proposed recommendations.

Chairperson M Hafizuddin Khan, Former Advisor, Caretaker Government

He hoped that present government initiative will benefit local government. He urged all to wait and see the consequences of present laws. He gives emphasize on training for elected representatives. He urged the Member of Parliament to take initiatives to implement the recommendations. He also give emphasized to come out all form the culture of secrete.

Seminar recommendations:

During discussion session each and every participant agreed with the recommendation stated in the key note paper in addition they suggested following measures

Public University and non government organization should include in training for representatives: The images of UPs mostly depend on the performance of elected representatives. Most of the elected representatives need training and motivation for performing efficiently during their tenure. National Institute of Local Government (NILG) can able to provide training a very few number of representatives. It is recommended that public University and non government organization should also take the responsibility of training.

Local resources should hand over to the UPs: Local people are the owner of local resources and the resource authority should hand over to the local representatives.

Representatives should take initiatives spontaneously: Elected representatives have some responsibility to build their image and increasing peoples participation in UPs activity.

Way forwarded:

In order to increase the image of Union Parishad and encourage people's participation Democracywatch recommendations considered highly significant. According to the proposal of Parliamentary standing committee Democracywatch will constitute a five member team to work on this recommendation along with the committee for further implementation.