

Research Brief

State of Accountability of the Transferred Departments at the Upazila Parishad and its Consequences for Allocation and Utilisation of Resources A Study of three Departments

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1. Introduction

The study entitled '*State of Accountability of the Transferred Departments at the Upazila Parishad and its Consequences for Allocation and Utilisation of Resources: A Study of three Departments*', was conducted in 2015. It was carried out as part of the Sharique Local Governance Project, implemented by Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation (HSI) and BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD), which was mandated by Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC). Principal research objectives of this study were twofold: a) to explore the *de jure* but mainly *de facto* nature of accountability relations between officials of the transferred departments (service delivery departments) and elected

representatives of the Upazila Parishad (UZP) at the Upazila level and b) the implications of such relationships on the i) allocation and ii) utilisation of resources at the local level. The study is based on the case study of two Upazilas. The three departments studied are Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), Department of Public Health and Engineer (DPHE) and Department of Livestock Services (DLS). The study mainly applied qualitative research techniques that included literature review, in-depth Key Informant Interview (KII), document review, and consultation with academics, practitioners and central government officials.

2. Rationale for the Study

According to UZP Act 1998 (amended in 2009 & 2011), Government is supposed to transfer the services of seventeen departments under the jurisdiction of locally elected UZP. In line with UZP (Rule 24 of the UZP Act), all officials of these transferred departments should be answerable to the elected representative of UZP, and the Chairperson of the UZP will evaluate the performance of the officials by writing an Annual Performance Report (APR) (Rule 24 of the UZP Act) for each official. Several other studies in recent years have shown that elected representatives of UZP are largely constrained (due to unclear policies and political reasons) to make the transferred department officials accountable to them. This study contributes to the existing literature by providing a systematic empirical analysis of the actual nature

of the accountability relations (administrative, financial) between the elected representatives of UZP and the transferred department officials and their implications for the allocation and utilisation of resources at the local level. The three departments that this study has empirically examined, in a comparative fashion, has never been attempted earlier. In addition, this study explores the broader political economy factors that influence the accountability relations between these two set of actors. Such empirical investigation, the authors believe, will immensely contribute to the development of policy advocacy surrounding decentralised development strategy and making local officials effectively accountable to elected representatives.

3. Research findings:

3.1 Upazila governance processes: reflection from three departments

After analysing the mandates of the three departments and responsibilities of transferred officers at the Upazila level, the study has found that there are no clear instructions (how to supervise, take disciplinary action etc) about how these officials would be accountable to the elected body of UZP. Government officials (placed at District and Upazila levels) pointed out that practically there are no specific linkages (formal rules of business, procedures, etc) between the elected body and the transferred service delivery departments at the Upazila level. In fact, most of the officials the study interviewed did not have clear understanding of the linkages. They also observed that there are no clear instructions from the Cabinet

Division in this regard. Officials of the transferred departments argued that although they found out from the UZP manual that some departments have been transferred to the elected body of UZP, they did not receive any letter or circular from their respective line ministries. Also, the UZP manual tends to lack clarity regarding some issues about the nature of linkages (how to coordinate, supervise and monitor the transferred departments) between the UZP elected representatives and the transferred officials. With regard to the mandate of the UZP Chairperson to write APR of the officials, the latter argued that the former is not technically proficient to evaluate an official, especially members of technical cadres. The study has also revealed that since the current APR does not have any consequences (legal, punitive) for the career of the administrative officials, it is hardly any reason for concern for them. For this reason, Upazila chairpersons (UZCs) tend to lack

incentives to write APR since they perceive that APR will never be considered as an important tool of performance evaluation by the government officials. Thus, this accountability tool (to exact accountability of the officials by the elected representatives) has largely failed to function as intended by the policy makers.

3.2 The process of flow of funds to the transferred departments at the UZP level

Examination of the flow of funds and allocation of resources at the Upazila level reveals that all transferred departments largely depend on the central government for their operation at the field level. In addition, they sometimes request the Upazila elected body to contribute some funds, from the block grants it receives, to run the service delivery operation. For instance, the elected body has provided funds for organising agriculture fair or distribution of medicine for cattle. However, the personal relationship between the head of the transferred departments and UZC and/or UNO is a factor when it comes to receiving grants from UZP. Generally, the fund flow from central government to the transferred departments is strictly top-down in nature (amount of fund is decided by the national level executives and Parliament although local officials provide information on local specific demands). There are also bottlenecks/problems in the fund disbursement process from the central government to the local level. One such bottleneck is the slow bureaucratic process of fund disbursement from central to local government. This happens since the decisions related to clearance of the fund disbursement process go through multiple government agencies under different ministries at the central level. Another problem is that all ministries are not perceived to be equally important (for instance, Ministry of Agriculture usually gets priority over the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock) and therefore certain transferred departments at the Upazila level tend not to receive the funds that these departments deserve (e.g. DLS

receives only .08 BDT per cattle at Upazila level which is very low compared to the allocated fund in the agriculture sector).

The study has also found that all transferred departments suffer from shortages of funds (both financial and human resources), which hamper the quality of services provided by these departments at the local level.

3.3 Fund utilisation process of the departments

For utilisation of non-development fund, all three (DAE, DPHE, DLS) departments follow the concerned department's manual, codes, rules, instructions and orders issued by the Finance Division of GoB. Departments have to implement two types of projects:

- (i) Projects funded directly by the parent ministry and
- (ii) UZP projects derived from the block grants of UZP

Upazila vice-chairpersons are the head of different committees related to these departments but they lack de facto authority over the development activities. One major reason is that the vice-chairperson tends to have very limited formal power. Given the nature of political governance of the country (partyarchy, partisan administration etc), vice chairpersons, who do not belong to the ruling party, are generally sidelined in the Upazila governance process. In this political context the dominant incentive of vice -chairpersons tend to be to stay absent or remain strategically inactive in the committees, if they care to attend. Where Upazila vice chairpersons are from the ruling party, they usually have a close relationship with the MP of the ruling party, which enables them to be pro-active and influential in making decisions in the committees.

The beneficiary selection process is generally influenced by the MPs. For instance, MPs recommend the beneficiary lists to the transferred departments for allocating tube-well, seeds, fertilizer and agricultural

equipments dealership, etc and the officials of the departments are de facto compelled to sanction the resources to the individuals included in such lists. Although elected members of the UZP have some influences over the selection process, Union Parishad chairpersons tend to have very little influence over such process. This is due to UP chairpersons' lack of political capacity to bargain with the officials to obtain resources from the transferred departments. This means the fund utilisation process is largely dominated by the MP. The local level department officials have also very little say in the selection process. In such situation individuals (beneficiaries) linked to the ruling party MP tend to benefit from the projects.

Influences of the local political elites also matter. DAE services/projects (distribution of power tiller, distribution of seeds, subsidies related to fertilizer, irrigation such as- diesel, electricity rate etc.), which are meant for the poor farmers, do not necessarily reach the target group because of informal political influence of local political elites. In a few cases, local beneficiary groups get

opportunities to involve in the project implementation process (e.g. WATSAN committee for water and sanitation project at DPHE). Though there is a provision of citizen engagement in utilising funds (e.g., tube-well distribution), this study found very little evidence of such engagements.

Usually very little funds for organising events such as exhibitions and fairs can be obtained by the local department from the Ministry of Agriculture at the central level. These funds tend to be so inadequate in some heads that the local departments are forced to adjust from other sources. For instance, some expenditures are also made for the MPs (honorarium for attending the program), which the departments manage through manipulating vouchers. Such practices indicate that MPs are deemed as very influential and important actors to the transferred officials. The following table summarises the de facto role of various actors in the processes of project implementation/fund utilisation:

Table 1: Role of various actors in the processes of project implementation/fund utilisation

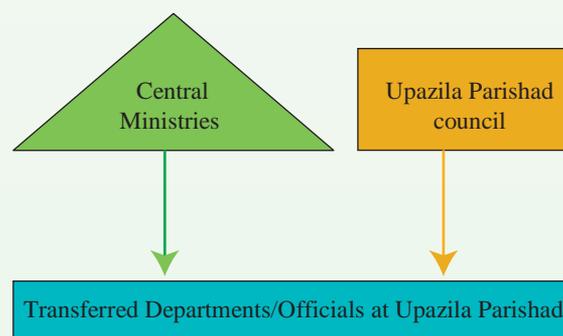
Departments	Role of elected body of UZP/UP	Role of MP	Role of UNO	Role of Citizens
DAE	De facto, very little role of the local elected body in beneficiary selection (fertilizer, seeds and agricultural equipments dealership) and utilisation processes	De facto, MPs are highly influential in beneficiary selection process. MPs have strong incentives to get involved in the process the amount of resources and size of the projects tend to be large here	UNO plays the role of a mediator in beneficiary selection process to mitigate the tension between the MPs and UZP elected body	There is no formal provision of active participation by the citizen in resource allocation and utilisation process

DPHE	Upazila and union parishad chairpersons can somehow manage (based on informal negotiations) to participate into the beneficiary selection and tube-well distribution process.	Representatives of the local elected body are highly influential in selecting beneficiaries and allocations of tube-wells	UNO plays the role of a mediator in beneficiary selection process to mitigate the tension between MPs and UZP elected body	Citizens are found to be somewhat active here through WATSAN committee
DLS	UZP elected body rarely takes part in beneficiary selection and input distribution process but UP chairperson plays a coordinating role for selecting beneficiaries for DLS services	MPs have very little incentive to get involved here since the amount of resources and size of projects tend to be very low	UNOs hardly play any coordinating/mediating role since MPs or elected body rarely try to influence beneficiary selection and distribution process of DLS	There is no formal provision for active participation by the citizen in resource allocation and utilisation processes at the Upazila level. In such situation individual citizens try to get the services by lobbying with the up chairpersons.

4. Conclusion

The principal objective of this study was to shed light on whether the transferred departments are answerable and responsive to UZP elected body with regard to the following issues: functional (assignment responsibility), financial and fund utilization (resource, budget and expenditure obligations, beneficiary selection and distribution). The study has revealed that officials of the transferred departments are strongly accountable to their higher authority i.e. to their ministerial hierarchy above. They strictly follow the order of their higher authority at the Zila level, which in turn receives order from the concerned ministries. Officials of transferred departments have very limited relations with the UZP representatives in terms of formal accountability. The study shows that mechanisms for such type of accountability do not exist between UZP elected body and the officials of the transferred departments. Also, the transferred officials have very little incentive to be answerable to the UZP for their functions and activities.

Figure 1: De-facto dual accountability



Source: field visit, 2015

- Symbolizes strong accountability
- Symbolizes weak accountability

One of the underlying reasons as to why departments are not held accountable to the UZP elected body, is the latter group's very limited control over resources of the transferred departments. This means that the government officials only have incentive to practice bureaucratic accountability and not democratic accountability through the elected local representatives. The study also found that the accountability relationship between

transferred departments and elected representatives is not regulated by formal accountability mechanism; rather it is a relationship of what almost all of interviewees (both government officials and elected representatives) prefer to term 'coordination' (informal negotiation, collaboration and collusion), which actually means very little formal accountable relationship.

The study also observed that although the transferred departments are linked with UZP through Committees and other meetings, these linkages do not ensure any real transfer of power and authority to the UZP in terms of utilisation of departmental funds. In practice, the transferred departments continue to be

accountable to their respective ministries and follow their rules and regulations. Whatever was the intention of the government behind this transfer policy, it is currently not working at UZP. The departments in general work according to the rules and procedures of their respective ministries and in a few cases elected representatives of UZP cooperate with them in implementing policies/decisions. Thus, based on the evidence from both research findings and literature review, it can be argued that the transfer policies are yet to bring any qualitative changes in the process of allocation and utilisation of funds and general administrative activities at the Upazila level.

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