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*Decentralized Local Governance Policy Framework
for Bangladesh*

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Decentralized Local Governance Policy Framework for Bangladesh

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Abstract

It is widely recognized that unless we do have an aggregated or national decentralized local governance policy, we will not have a vision and road map for local governance development in the country. Thus, this social input – proposed national decentralized local governance policy for Bangladesh - is crafted for consideration of the Local Government Division (LGD), Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives (MLGRD&C), Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh. The proposed decentralized local governance policy envisions placing democratic decentralization along with the fiscal autonomy and local administrative reforms in an attempt to develop political capacity of local citizens for demanding accountability and engaging local authorities towards Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and economic advancement of the rural areas.

Even the proposed policy is trendy of its kind with crafting vision, mission, goal, objectives and principles, designing structural, functional and legal frameworks, and addressing key issues and concerns, it would just be a paper work if it does not go with a strong advocacy strategy to finalize as well as to implement the policy. Given this reality, the full study report would focus on policy advocacy as well as implementation strategy.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Context and Purpose

The absence of a local governance policy is supposed to be a prioritized governance problem in Bangladesh, which affects effective implementation of current round decentralization theory i.e. democratic decentralization in line with the fiscal autonomy and local administrative reforms. The absence of the avowed policy also affects inherent and institutional linkages of the local government bodies. In some cases overlapping of functions are evidenced in different LG institutions, while in other cases lack of coordination and inter-cooperation are missing. More importantly, unless we do have an aggregated or national decentralized local governance policy, we will not have a vision and road map for the local governance development in the country.

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Despite the fact that we have a local government friendly constitution² and separate Act or law for every local government unit, the nonexistence of the stated policy allows the Acts to run the local government institutions with separate identity without unique vision, mission, goal, objectives and road map for sustainable development of the local governance in Bangladesh.

Thus, as part of Management Research Report (MRR) of MDM program at Asian Institute of Management (AIM), Manila, a proposed national decentralized local governance policy framework for Bangladesh is developed, which is, indeed, a proposed policy for consideration of the Local Government Division (LGD), Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives (MLGRD&C), Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. Importantly, the AIM study would widen to fit an advocacy strategy for the final policy to be initiated, adopted and/or adapted by the LGD followed by the approval of the Cabinet. The study also recognizes that the implementation of the policy would require a sound implementation strategy, and thus it would incorporate a tailor-made draft implementation strategy for the proposed policy to be implemented by the LGD, concerned line ministries, departments and agencies under the guidance of the proposed National Local Government Commission in this policy framework. The policy advocacy as well implementation strategy, however, is not the part of this working paper. The full study report would focus on policy advocacy as well as implementation strategy.

1.2 Theoretical Perspective

Decentralization is a multifaceted phenomenon that stems from the country context governance reform needs, international development trends, continual pressure from development agencies, and most importantly from the failure of the centralized approaches to the development. Many countries of the globe, especially developing countries of Africa, Latin America and Asia, are currently undertaking public sector decentralization policy and programmes for a number of reasons, but one thing is common, at least in paper aspiration, and this is to cast new light on local governance to devolvement. Smoke (2003) notes down that many countries around the world have

²Please see Article 11, 59 and 60 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.

attempted - for several reasons and with varying degrees of intention and success - to create or strengthen sub-national governments in recent years.

In general sense, decentralization is the process of transferring power from national government to its agency, private institution, regional and local government. According to L.D. White, "the process of decentralization denotes the transfer of authority, legislature, judiciary or administrative from a higher level of government to a lower". And Mawhood points out decentralization as "a structure of government where bodies are created at the local level separated by law from the national centre in which local representatives are given formal power to decide on a range of public matter". Though traditionally there are four forms of decentralization (i.e. deconcentration, delegation, devolution and privatization),³ most of the thinkers, for example, Mawhood, Uphoff, Rondinelli and Cheema pertinently emphasize on devolutionary decentralization which resulted in democratic decentralization.⁴

Formally, devolution is the creation or increased reliance upon sub-national levels of government, with some degree of political autonomy, that are substantially outside direct central government control yet subject to general policies and laws, such as those regarding civil rights and rule of law (USAID, 2000). While, theoretically, devolution does not necessarily mean democracy, there is a tendency to equate the two (Oxhorn, 2004). Democratic decentralization goes further than the devolution does in terms of autonomy, responsibility and accountability of the local authority, and participation, opportunity and emancipation of the people. A full-fledged democratic decentralization not only creates environment for wider participation, social inclusiveness and for citizens to demand accountability of local authority, but also generates a sense of transparency and accountability of the country's political system and government. Two

³The use of the term 'decentralization' varies depending on its different modes, but the most commonly used are, deconcentration that means redistribution of administrative responsibilities within the central government, that is to be decentralized units of central government; delegation indicating delegation of decision-making and management authority for specific functions to semi-autonomous or parastatal organizations outside the normal bureaucratic structure of central government; devolution meaning transfer of authority to autonomous and independent units of local governments with corporate status (often with supervisory power and financial role retained by the central government); and privatization that encompasses transfer of functions from government to non-government organizations (Rondinelli and Chema, 1983 cited in Hussain, 2010).

⁴ For details please see Begum et al.,1998; Mawhood P.,1985; Rahman M.H.,1989; Rondinelli D.A.,Cheema G.S. (eds.),1985.

interlinked and inevitable components of this latest form of decentralization are structural decentralization and institutional democratization.

Structural decentralization refers to devolution in the organization and relationship of government units, in relation to one another including a shift of production and provision functions to more localized government units (Hicks and Kaminski, 1995; Rainey, 1997). Basically, structural decentralization alters the balance of exercising the power among levels of government favoring localized levels of government; even to some extent this component allows local people's representatives to govern the local government, but values associated with legacy do not always change until it goes with institutional democratization.

Institutional democratization refers to this shift in values, rules, skills, and interactions, favoring transparency, equity, responsiveness, accountability, and other traditional democratic values (Hodgson, 2006; McGill, 1997; OECD, 1996). Evidence of institutional democratization can be found through functioning oversight and accountability mechanisms and the systematic incorporation of public input into government decision making (Coston, 1998; Klingner, 1996).

The current decentralization literature recognizes the importance of the central state in bringing about this higher standard of decentralization and so demands from central governments sophisticated coordination and oversight as well as the willingness to allow autonomy (especially fiscal autonomy) and democratic participation at the local level (Crook, 2003; Olowu, 2003; Dauda, 2006). In turn, local Government institutions must show a certain worthiness of autonomy by providing an innovative, transparent and accountable administration along with a participatory political process geared in alleviating marginalization and poverty (Dauda, 2006).

In fact, the emphasis on decentralization began with the broadening of the concept of development beyond economic growth to include growth-with-equity and fulfillment of basic needs of the poorer sections of the community. This entails wider participation in the economic, social and political processes and structures that enables the poor to help themselves in increasing their productivity and incomes. It is also believed that decentralization is a more efficient way of meeting local needs (Alam et al., 1994 cited in

Hussain, 2010). And Rondinelli (1981) puts forward two major arguments for encouraging decentralization. Firstly, decentralization is necessary to accelerate the pace and the spread of the benefits of growth, integrate diverse regions and use the scarce resources more efficiently to promote development in poverty stricken or economically backward areas. Secondly, poorest groups are to obtain a larger share of government services and means must be found to decentralize public service delivery and involve the beneficiaries in planning and decision making at local level.

Furthermore, in a world of rampant ethnic conflicts and separatist movements, decentralization is also regarded as a way of diffusing social and political tensions and ensuring local cultural and political economy (Bardhan, 2002). Moreover, decentralization is considered a means to achieve good governance in terms of a high level of public participation, accountability of public officials and low corruption, which is a crucial condition for poverty alleviation (Steiner, 2007).

Especially the developing countries for accelerating the development process and bringing the administration closer to the people whom they need to serve have realized the importance of decentralization. In the last quarter century, over 75 countries have attempted to transfer responsibilities of the state to lower tiers of government. Significantly, most of these lower-tier governments have been elected, so that the decentralization is not just administrative or fiscal, but also political (Shah and Thompson 2004). And different types of decentralization like political, administrative, fiscal, and market decentralization show different characteristics, policy implications, and conditions for success (World Bank, 2000). Importantly, it is gratifying to see that researchers are recognizing that decentralization takes place within a particular political context and, therefore evolves differently in each country (Smoke, 2003); yet, the requirements still set uniformly high standards (Dauda,2006).

Most importantly, globally there has been a widespread emphasis on democracy as the current round of decentralization⁵ and Bangladesh is also stepping ahead to the democratic decentralization but the basic challenge here is formulation of a

⁵ Plenty of global evidence support that democratic decentralization provides the environment for wider participation and inclusiveness that can be conducive to local good governance leading to economic advancement and poverty reduction.

decentralized local governance policy. Anecdotal evidence, participant observation and past experience as well as studies (for example, Talukdar, 2009) support that the absence of the policy results in the unstable local government structure as well as the frequent changing pattern of the local governance power dynamics, weakens the inherent institutional linkages between and/or among the local government units. The policy absence also allows the local government bodies to govern these institutions without a definite vision as well as road map for the development of local governance in the country.

Nevertheless, a more balanced and nuanced view of democratic decentralization, and integrated perspective on how to approach it in Bangladesh is probable to emerge with the support of this study and policy framework. Specifically, the study is likely to discover success factors and barriers for positive outcomes of democratic decentralization as well as its considerable ways for overcoming limitations to the Bangladesh context⁶ to get the development encountered through local governance.

1.3 Specific Objectives

There are four specific objectives of the study:

- i. An analysis on strengths and weaknesses of the Local Government Division for the policy design and implementation overseeing, and opportunities and threats of external environment⁷ for identifying expected outcomes and challenges of the policy implementation.
- ii. Stakeholder as well as Force field analysis for understanding the set of connections of the forces for and against the proposed policy so as to craft the policy advocacy strategy in a right way.

⁶Here in its local government, the Upazila Parishad and Zila Parishad are facing a transition period although there is a probability that the stalemate of their evolution would somewhat be over by amending some controversial aspects of laws, and by absolutely functioning new local government Acts with swiftly issuing subsequent rules and regulations, and by conducting Zila Parishad election soon. These prescriptions, however, are unlikely to work sustainably unless the focus shifts to the holistic approach with the system perspective that calls for a decentralized local governance policy.

⁷Here external environment denotes the society as a whole in general and local government institutions in particular.

- iii. Development of a national decentralized local governance policy framework for Bangladesh.
- iv. Tailoring a proposed policy implementation strategy (which is, however, not the part of this working paper).

1.4 Study Methodology

This is a qualitative as well as explorative⁸ study by nature. It allows in-depth interview of key stakeholders including chiefs of local government institutions, local government officials and senior officials of the Local Government Division, and Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs, discussion with experts, practitioners and a legislator. The study also follows review of published materials, project documents, staff memoranda, and judicious using of participant observation and past professional as well as consultancy experience. As such, the study anchors *Focused Synthesis Method*⁹ and *Participant Observation Method*.¹⁰ It also involves other supportive study techniques like *SWOT Analysis*¹¹ and *Stakeholder as well as Force-field Analysis*.

The *SWOT Analysis* has been carried out based on the participant observation, review of available published documents,¹² and project reports, staff memoranda and in-depth interview of key stakeholders, while the *Force-field Analysis* has been undertaken based on the *SWOT Analysis* and discussion with stakeholders, experts, practitioners and policy makers. And the *Proposed Policy Framework* has been crafted based on the understanding of the *SWOT Analysis* and *Force-field Analysis*, and on the experts' opinions, findings from the discussion with stakeholders, review of the constitution and

⁸ See Booth, Colomb and Williams, 2003; Rugg and Petre, 2006; Dawson, 2002.

⁹ Focused Synthesis allows collecting and documenting information as well as data from a range of sources as diverse literature review, researcher's personal experience, web and media evidence, anecdotal evidence and stories, and discussion with experts, practitioners and stakeholders (Talukdar, 2012).

¹⁰Such research involves a range of well-defined, though variable techniques: informal interviews, direct observation, participation in the life of the group, collective discussions, analyses of personal documents produced within the group, self-analysis, results from activities undertaken off or online, and life-histories (DeWalt, DeWalt and Wayland, 1998).

¹¹ Strengths and weaknesses analysis of internal environment and opportunities and threats analysis of external environment.

¹²The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Acts/Laws, different Committee Reports, National Population Census, and Monthly Statistical Bulletin, Bangladesh

concerned laws, rules, regulations and circulars, and international guidelines on decentralization.¹³

Here population as well as sampling has purposively been framed, whereas area has conveniently been selected. Table 1.1 shows the list of population stratum and Table 1.2 shows the sample area.

Table 1.1: List of Population Stratum

| Stratum | Population |
|------------|--|
| Stratum -1 | Elected Representatives of Local Government Institutions |
| Stratum -2 | Public Officials of the Local Government Institutions |
| Stratum -3 | Senior Officials of the Local Government Division and Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs |
| Stratum -4 | Local Governance Experts and Practitioners |
| Stratum -5 | Politicians and Legislators |

Table 1.2: Area Selection

| Area Stratification | Number of Sample Area | Name of the Sampled Area |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|--|
| 7 Administrative Divisions | 1 Administrative Division | Dhaka Division |
| 64 Zila Parishads | 1 Zila Parishad | Narayang Zila Parishad |
| 482 Upazila Parishads | 2Upazila Parishads | Naranganj Sadar Upazila Parishad and Mymensingh SadarUpazilaParishad |
| 4498 Union Parishads | 1 Union Parishad | Bokthaboli Union Parishad at Naranganj |
| 398 Municipalities | 1 Municipality | The then Gazipur Municipality ¹⁴ |
| 10 City Corporations | 1City Corporation | Narayanganj City Corporation |

¹³International guidelines on decentralization and the strengthening of local authorities, UN-HABITAT (2007), envisions to serve as a catalyst for policy and institutional reform at the national level to further enable and empower local authorities.

¹⁴ It is now a City Corporation

| | | |
|--|------------------|---|
| 38 Ministries including Secretariats of the Prime Minister and the President | 2 Ministries | Local Government Division, Ministry of LGRD&C, and Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs |
| 345 Members in the National Parliament | 1 Legislator | Gazipur 1 Constituency |
| 27 Public Universities | 1 University | Dhaka University |
| 15 UN Organizations | 1UN Organization | Local Governance Cluster & CHTDF at UNDP-Bangladesh |

1.5 Arrangement of the Working Paper

Following this *Introduction*, the paper continues with *SWOT Analysis* - internal and external environment analysis - and *Stakeholder* as well as *Force-field Analysis*. Then the study crafts the *Decentralized Local Governance Policy Framework for Bangladesh* based on the *SWOT and Force-Field Analysis*. Finally the write-up draws a *Conclusion*.

2. SWOT Analysis

2.1 Initial Remarks

The *Environmental or SWOT Analysis* has two sub chapters. The First one deals with the *Internal Analysis* that includes analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of the proponent agent. The Second one is *External Analysis* that focuses on the opportunities and threats analysis of external environment. The proponent agent of the proposed policy is the Local Government Division, Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives, Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, while the external environment is to be everything outside the internal organization, but mainly concerned about country context and social, political as well as local government institutional perspective.

Figure 2.1: SWOT Diagram

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| Internal and External Analysis | Helpful to achieving the objective | Harmful to achieving the objective |
| Internal Origin attributes of the organization <i>Local Government Division</i> | S Strengths | W Weaknesses |
| External Origin attributes of the environment <i>Country context and social, political as well as local government institutional perspective</i> | O Opportunities | T Threats |

Source: Adapted from PCARRD, 2010

2.2 Internal Analysis

The government is committed to establishing strong local government institutions at various levels through Active participation of the elected representatives in the administration as well as development Activities, while the Local Government Division is implementing various development and service-oriented Activities for poverty alleviation and for making the rural people's life more comfortable, sound and meaningful.¹⁵ The Activities of the LGD extend up to the grass- root level of the country. The Union Parishads, Upazila Parishads, Zilla Parishads, Municipalities and City Corporations are the local government institutions under this Division. In addition, the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED),¹⁶ Department of Public Health Engineering (DPHE), Dhaka WASA, Chittagong WASA, Khulna WASA and NILG are the different Departments /Directorates/Institutions of this Division.¹⁷

¹⁵ www.lgd.gov.bd

¹⁶As a part of the government's programme for improvement of socio-economic conditions and poverty alleviation, Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) is implementing different projects for development of infrastructure both in the rural and urban areas, such as, construction /reconstructions/rehabilitation of roads including bridges and culverts, development of small scale water resources, development of growth centers /rural markets, construction of Union Parishad Buildings, cyclone/flood shelters, bus terminals, municipal markets, improvement of slums and so on.

¹⁷ www.lgd.gov.bd

With the help of these Departments/Institutions, LGD is working to mobilize local resources, establish good governance at the local level. It is also providing civic/utility services to the citizens of municipalities and city corporations, developing rural and urban infrastructures, supplying safe drinking water, disposing solid wastes and sanitizing all over the country.¹⁸

LGD is also responsible for planning and implementation of development projects in the local level, conducting survey/ research regarding local governance and arranging training programme for enhancing knowledge and efficiency of the elected representatives. These Activities are directly and indirectly contributing in the national goal of socio-economic development through poverty reduction, human resource development and creating employment opportunities.¹⁹

Mission of LGD²⁰

Improving the standard of living of the people by strengthening local government systems and institutions and by implementing Activities for social, economic and infrastructure development.

Major Specific Functions of LGD²¹

- a) Manage all matters relating to local government and local government institutions;
- b) Finance, control and inspect local government institutions established for the running of local government and local administration;
- c) Manage all matters relating to drinking water;
- d) Develop water supply, sanitation and sewerage facilities in rural and urban areas;
- e) Construct, maintain and manage Upazila, Union and Village roads and bridges/culverts including those of towns and municipal areas;
- f) Manage matters relating to village police;

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰Source:http://www.lgd.gov.bd/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=26&Itemid=83&lang=en

²¹Source: Ibid *plus discussion with experts and senior LGD Officials*

- g) Develop, maintain and manage growth centers and hats-bazaars connected via Upazila, Union and Village roads;
- h) Develop, maintain and manage small-scale water resource infrastructures within the limit determined by the government;
- i) Administration and control of sub-ordinate offices and organizations under the Division;
- j) Liaise with international organizations and matters relating to treaties and agreements with countries and world bodies relating to subjects allotted to this Division;
- k) Draft all laws on subjects allotted to this Division;
- l) Issue rules, regulations and circulars concerned to the related laws/Acts;
- m) Make inquiries and statistics on any of the subjects allotted to this division;
- n) Design, draft and initiate related policies to get those approved from the Cabinet.

Strengths and Weaknesses Analysis of LGD

Given the mission and functions of LGD, an in-depth interview of a number of its senior officials as well as elected chiefs of local government institutions and discussion with experts, the following strengths and weaknesses of LGD, particularly regarding its aptitude towards decentralized local governance policy initiation, adoption and adaptation and/or policy implementation are noted hereunder:

Strengths

→ LGD has a strong organogram with a number of qualified senior officials and it is one of the oldest divisions under one of the oldest ministries. It is under the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives, which is a strong ministry under the stewardship of a Minister and a State Minister. Importantly, its Minister is the Secretary of the ruling party.

→ Plenty of Evidence, for instance, from management of Local Governance Support Project-Learning and Innovation Component, and Upazila Governance Support Project, support that LGD has outstanding project management and overseeing ability. It has

adequate amount of resource allocation and sufficient number of development projects, and apparently seems that it has relatively less corruption practices.

→ This Division drafted all of the exiting local government Acts/laws²² that are trendy of these kinds except some substantive constraints. It has also proven records of initiating and developing concerned rules, regulations and circulars.²³

→ More importantly, experts believe that it has enough policy initiation and adoption ability. The reason why it is yet to initiate a decentralized local governance policy is that this is subject to a substantive political decision of the national government. Unless the government provides LGD with green signal to do so, it cannot do anything regarding this policy, and that is why this proposed policy requires a strong advocacy strategy.

Weaknesses

→ This Study supports that it has inability to manage and disburse ADP and other project grants in time. Participant observation supports that LGSP and LGSP-LIC grants, for instance, would have not been disbursed in time. And in some years' last fiscal quarterly installment was used to being disbursed almost nearly the national budget initiation time, which would get serious concern of the local government institutions as the expenditures were subject to adjustment before the end of the fiscal year. Therefore, the stated quarter fund might be misused and/or utilized in improper schemes.

→ Participant observation supports that its MIS is yet to be full-fledged and website is not being updated in time.²⁴

→ Participant observation also supports that its out-reach and communication system is yet to be ICT based in satisfactory level in practice, in spite of the fact that the lowest

²² The Local Government (City Corporation) Act, 2009; The Local Government (City Corporation) (Amendment) Act, 2011; The Local Government (Pourashava) Act, 2009; The Local Government (Union Parishad) Act, 2009; The Upazila Parishad Act, 1998; The Upazila Parishad (Reintroduction of the Repealed Act and Amendment) Act, 2009; The Upazila Parishad (Amendment) Act, 2011; The Local Government (Union Parishad) (Amendment) Act, 2010; Village Court Act, 2006; The Zila Parishad Act, 2000; Chittagong Hill Regionnal Coucil Act, 1998; Rangamati Hill District Council Act, 1989; Khagrachori Hill District Council Act, 1989; Bandarban Hill District Council Act, (1989).

²³ Most of the old local government rules and regulations were drafted and/or issued by this Division. And it is currently on progress of drafting all rules and regulations under the Acts/laws passed on or after 2009.

²⁴ See the website www.lgd.gov.bd

unit of the rural local government institutions (i.e. the Union Parishad) holds the *Union Information and Service Centre* with well equipped ICTs and services.

→This Study also supports that many of its senior officials have some political bias in favor of the ruling party. Thus, despite the fact that it has ability to discharge its obliged duty of initiating and designing the relevant policies, it is inactive here with the issue of national decentralized local governance policy since it is a politically sensitive decision. Once again, unless the political wing of the government is willing to put forward the issue to the agenda of LGD, it will not be doable.

→After the policy approval, the major concern would be how to implement the policy. And regarding the likely policy implantation, research notices that LGD does not have enough capability at this moment. As such, the proposed policy implementation strategy may focus on its competency building as well.

2.3 External Analysis

Country Context

Bangladesh²⁵ emerged as an independent nation state in 1971, but it has a long recorded history of several thousands of years. In its recent past it was the part of Pakistan (1947-1971), and was known as the East Pakistan. Prior to this, different parts of the present Bangladesh territory were under the British India (1765-1947), the Mughals and other Muslim rulers, and before them under Buddhist and Hindu rulers (UN ESCAP, 2009).

The country is located in South Asia surrounded by India, Nepal, Myanmar and Bay of Bangle with 147,570 square kilometers (56,977 square miles) area²⁶ and 142.3 million populations²⁷ out of which 75% leaves in rural area.²⁸

²⁵Bangladesh, officially the People's Republic of Bangladesh, is a sovereign state located in South Asia. The capital as well as largest city is Dhaka, located in central Bangladesh. The official state language is Bengali.

²⁶Total Area 147570 square kilometers (Effective Land Area 119624 sq + Reversion Area 8236 sq + Forest Area 19710 sq) (See Monthly Statistical Bulletin, Bangladesh, February 2011).

²⁷According to the provisional results of 2011 Population and Housing Census, the enumerated population on 15th March, 2011 was 142,319 thousand (Source: 2011 Population and Housing Census: Preliminary Results).

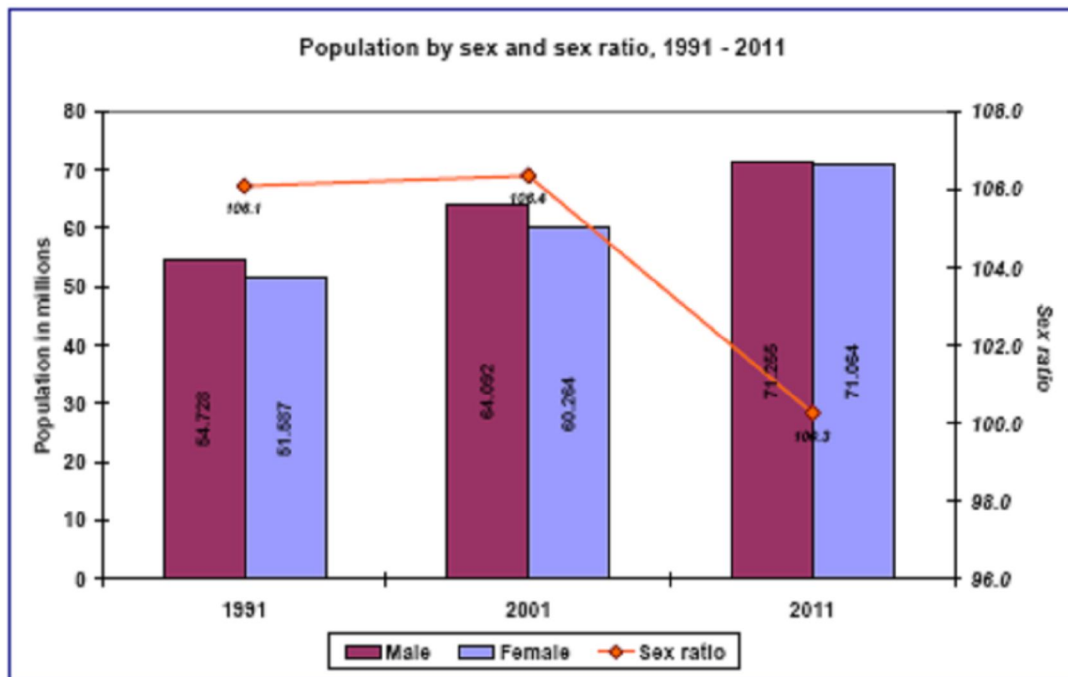
²⁸See Monthly Statistical Bulletin, Bangladesh, February 2011.

Table 2.1: Enumerated Population by Sex and Sex Ratio, and by Division

| Division | Enumerated population 2011 in thousands | | Sex ratio | | |
|------------|---|---------|-----------|-------|-------|
| | Males | Females | 1991 | 2001 | 2011 |
| Bangladesh | 71,255 | 71,064 | 106.1 | 106.4 | 100.3 |
| Barisal | 4,006 | 4,140 | 103.5 | 103.6 | 96.8 |
| Chittagong | 13,763 | 14,316 | 105.6 | 104.4 | 96.1 |
| Dhaka | 23,814 | 22,915 | 108.3 | 109.0 | 103.9 |
| Khulna | 7,782 | 7,781 | 106.2 | 106.6 | 100.0 |
| Rajshahi | 9,183 | 9,146 | 105.1 | 106.3 | 100.4 |
| Rangpur | 7,824 | 7,840 | 104.8 | 104.8 | 99.8 |
| Sylhet | 4,882 | 4,925 | 104.2 | 104.9 | 99.1 |

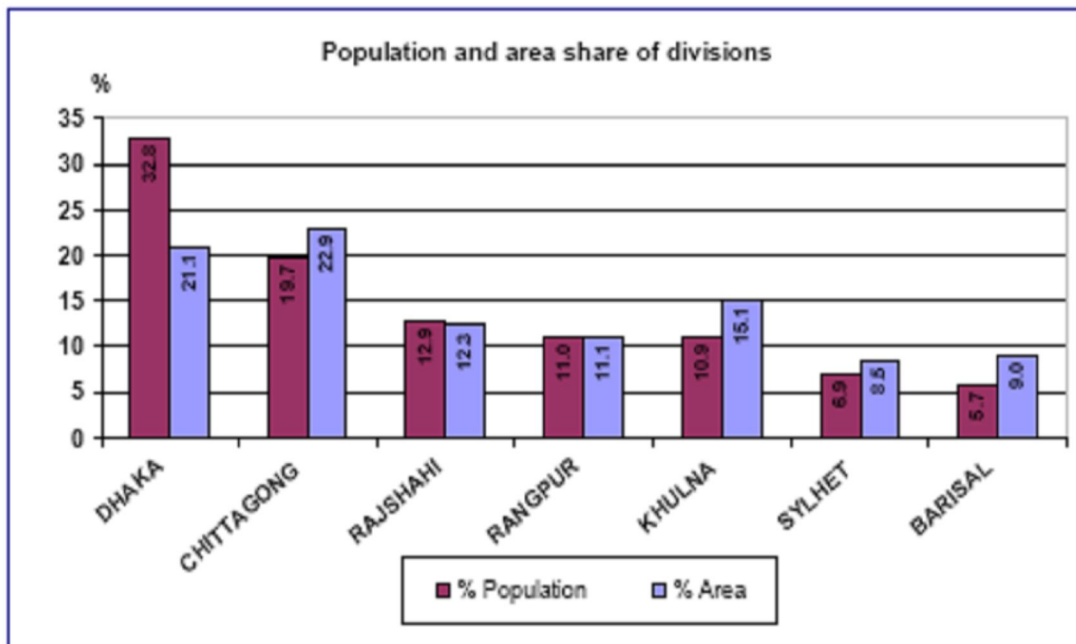
Source: 2011 Population & Housing Census: Preliminary Results

Figure 2.2: Total Population by Sex and Sex Ratio, 1991-2011



Source: *Ibid*

Figure 2.3: Population and Area Share of Divisions, 2011



Source: *Ibid*

The constitution, formulated immediately after the independence, equally lauded for democracy and decentralized local government system in Bangladesh. It is unlikely that none of these aspects of the constitution has reached into sustainable standard over the span of the periods. Even though strengthening local government institutions is imperative here, it has been straining for years just at academic works, political debates, election manifestos, and at reform objectives and talk shows.

The Local Government System in Bangladesh traces back to Chowkidari Panchayat Act of 1870 followed by the Bengal Local Self Governed Act of 1885, but it (*the Local Government in Bangladesh*) has far long heritage as well as history, which is dated back to thousands of years. Thus, present structure of *the Local government in Bangladesh* (see *Institutional Analysis*) has been resultant from a long legacy, reforms, evolution and revolution. Herewith the bottom-line history of it, has been acknowledged in five stages: i) Buddhist and Hindu Rules (dated back to 2300 years), ii) Muslim Rules (1206-1765), iii) British Indian Rules (1765-1947), iv) Pakistan's Rules (1947-1971) and v) Independent Bangladesh's Rules (1971-2013).

Study²⁹ identifies that in spite of a long heritage of the Local Government in Bangladesh, until recent development, decentralization herein was hardly considered a pragmatic means to achieve good governance. Moreover, changing pattern as well as power dynamics of the local government structure is a severe challenge for the development of a pro-poor local governance system in Bangladesh. However, the Upazila election in early 2009 followed by Union Parishad election and appointment of administrators at District Councils was a milestone towards democratic decentralization in Bangladesh. The key likely challenges here for decentralization are some controversial laws, marginalized populations, and lack of political determination for full-fledged political, fiscal and administrative decentralization, scarcity of local resources, material, finance, expertise and competent leadership, nonexistence of a local government commission, and more importantly the absence of a decentralized local governance policy.

In fact, this study exposes that most of the challenges are inbuilt in the absence of a decentralized local governance policy that could leverage to mitigate the all other problems. The local government here in general is facing a transition period. It is probable that the stalemate of its evolution will somewhat be over by forming a robust decentralized local governance policy followed by a pragmatic implementation strategy of the policy.

Social and Political Analysis

Discussion with experts and key stakeholders support that certainly the establishment of Bangladesh triggered not only the formation of a new nation but also a new social order. Immediate after independence in 1971 Bangali elites moved into the areas vacated by West Pakistanis, and basically Bangali Muslims established control over all small and medium sized industrial and commercial enterprises. The following year nationalization of non-Bengali-owned large industries helped Bangali to control and influence much over establishment. And the rapid rise of a new business and executive

²⁹ Through in-depth interview of elected representatives and public officials of local government institutions, senior officials of the Local Government Division and Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tract Affairs, and discussion with experts, practitioners and a legislator, and participant observation as well as past professional and consultancy experience.

class, and the expansion of the elitist civil and military bureaucracy made a central-periphery relationship within the country.

Further to these, party affiliation, political Contacts, and evidence of revolutionary service became the main force factors for admission to the fast growing new elite of political and industrial functionaries, while the established middle class and its values got less attention. In the rural area, new alliance or fellow of elites, was used to living in urban or sub-urban area with links to the villages, continued to establish their sociopolitical control through buying local land and property, operating rural-based enterprises and using influence of local administration.

After the brutal killing of the father of the nation and most of his family members in August 1975, society went through under the control and predominant thinking of military leadership and military bureaucracy until 1990, and during that period corruption, human rights violation flourished, and social disorder and internal clash both within military and civil-military flared up.

Since 1990, democratic governments³⁰ have been governing the state except military-backed interim government regime 2007-8. Throughout the democratic regimes until now, human rights based approach to development is colossal, for instance, success in MDGs is considerably notable but at the same time, corruption, nepotism, party affiliation and political Contact s became the key forces to succeed or to be socially influential. And traditional middle or elite class families of the society get less importance unless someone of the family members has strong link with the party affiliation and/or political Contact s. More importantly, in countryside, society is dominated by politically affiliated new generation.

Regarding local government, politically affiliated new generation has strong interest to engage with local governance process, whether as elected representative or societal representative. And they are now advocating for the democratic decentralization and local governance. Civil society organizations also put emphasis on local governance development. Donors and development partners like UNDP, WB, USAID, SDC, EC,

³⁰Basically run by Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), headed by Begum Khaleda Zia – Wife of former Military President Freedom Fighter General Ziaur Rahman, and Awami League, led by Sheikh Hasina – Daughter of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Danida and DFID are supporting and advocating for more legitimate, inclusive and effective local government system that make the local government institutions more responsive to the needs of their people.

It is also evident that there was no sequential development of the local government, thus to local governance in Bangladesh, yet it has a long heritage and history. With the recent development, both the political and administrative decentralization have occurred only in upazilas, while in districts there would have been only administrative aspects of decentralization but this unit holds huge local resources. The Union Parishads hold only the political decentralization. As far as laws/Acts are concerned special local government units should have been (politically, administratively and fiscally) strongly decentralized, but in reality elected parishads are yet to form there. The urban local government units are in principal politically, fiscally and administratively decentralized, but they have the limited transferred services.

Furthermore, there are a number of growing concerns, for instance, lack of capacity and accountability of local government bodies, absence of the consistency at state works for stepping ahead with decentralized local governance. Thus, the scholars, practitioners and local elected representatives have been lauding the need for an enduring local government commission for years. This has also been supported by the local government committees/commissions sine 1990s. Finally, the recently past military backed interim government put forward the Local Government Commission Ordinance, 2008, by which the commission actively began to exercise its portfolio from November 2008, but the following parliament did not endorse the ordinance. Why did the Parliament not endorse the Local Government Commission Ordinance, 2008? Perhaps, the elected government was not ready to unlock the door for local discretion and full-fledged autonomy. Along with the other factors, the Government might have the aversion to the commission members who were appointed by the controversial military backed interim government. However, the Local Government Commission Ordinance, 2008 was somewhat rational to the context.³¹

³¹In addition, in early 2008, the Local Governance Cluster of UNDP-Bangladesh conducted a comprehensive study to address the formation modality and role of the probable Local Government Commission that was also trendy of its kind.

Importantly, after much-awaited upazila and union parishad elections, the zila parishad election has now become pertinent and inevitable. If things move ahead as these should be, it is likely to unlock the potentials for local government in Bangladesh, particularly for the rural local government that may acquire new responsibilities and more resources. The current round emphasis on democratic decentralization, globally as well as in Bangladesh, makes citizens' sense to increasingly look forward to the local government for better services, local economic development and more secure local governance.

Meeting this overreaching goal, however, is still subject to developing the relationship between the Government and local governments. In reality, though local governments are apparently capable of solving the local problems, the national government in Bangladesh, like many other countries including some developed countries, does have the extensive stride to control on the local governments. Herein Bangladesh the key aspects and notions of this control are:

- Political motives in local government reform initiatives³²
- Constitutional aspect and legislative notion³³
- Fiscal aspect as well as notion³⁴
- Administrative aspect³⁵

³²Discussion with experts and key stakeholders supports that despite the fact that many reforms have taken place for rural local government development in Bangladesh, unlike most of the reforms that would have narrow political motives have resulted in a fragile local government system for years. Even during democratic regimes, many of the administrative and local government reform committees/commissions worked to produce reports manifesting the then government's desire.

³³Experts refer Articles 11 and 59 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh that promote and prescribe to have democratic local governments, but the Article 59 (2) and the Article 60 of the Constitution empower the legislature to determine the frame, terms of reference, nature of power and autonomy of local governments. Furthermore, discussion with legislator, experts and Key stakeholders provides the insight reflection that the Local Self-Government would not just be the creation of central government or of the Act of legislature, but also it ought to go under the control of rules and regulations of central government. In addition, Members of the Parliament hold wide-ranging control over local government bodies.

³⁴ Stakeholders also observe that local government institutions cannot impose new tax or increase the rate of imposed taxes or finalize the budget without approval of the Government. Besides, the Central Government gets extensive control on functions and spending of local institutions through the financial aid to those institutions.

³⁵ Referring the enacting local government Acts and ordinances stakeholders also notice that the Government may transform any institution or service maintained by the Local Government to the Government management and control, and reciprocally may alter any institution or service maintained by the Government to the Local

Nonetheless, the present government got outstanding majority in legislature with the people’s mandate to institutionalize self-local governments in Bangladesh. Thus local government institutions are expected to be full-fledged with self-governing, which requires an enlightened and pragmatically decentralized local governance policy in Bangladesh.

Local Government Institutional Analysis

The underneath structure of the Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh is tailored concerning to the precedence based on the spirit of the Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh:

Table 2.2: Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh

| Executive Body | Legislative Body | Judicial Body |
|---|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| President Prime Minister and Cabinet ³⁶ | National Parliament ³⁷ | Supreme Court ³⁸ |
| Department of Defense Services Attorney General | - | Lower Court |
| Local Government ³⁹ | - | Administrative Tribunal |

Source: Talukdar, 2009

Government management and control. Local government institutions do not have authority to undertake any new work without the administrative approval of the proper authority, and this is adversely affecting to hold innovations. The proper administrative authority of the Government can postpone implementation of any undertaken activity or even suspend any decision taken by own subordinate department in the Local Government. In addition, the Government can investigate against local government bodies. Finally, the Local Government Bodies in Bangladesh are working under the stewardship of the Local Government Division, Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives.

³⁶As we hold a unitary as well as the parliamentary form of government, herein reality is that the Prime Minister is the kingpin of the Government, and the President holds just an ornamental position.

³⁷ There are 300 elected members and 45 nominated women members.

³⁸ Consist of Appellate and High Court Divisions.

³⁹ Three-type rural local government institutions (i.e. ZilaParishad, UpazilaParishad and Union Parishad), two-type special local government institutions (i.e. Chittagong Hill Regional Council and Chittagong Hill District Council), and two-type urban local government institutions (i.e. City Corporation and Municipality) excluding the cantonment board.

Bangladesh has a unitary form of government, where President is the head of the state and Prime Minister is the head of the government. And the Prime Minister is supported by a number of ministers. There are now thirty-eight ministries including the Cabinet Division and Secretariats of the Prime Minister and the President.⁴⁰ Importantly, two ministries coordinate with the local government institutions: one is for rural and urban local government institutions, and another is for special local government institutions at Chittagong hill area. Table 2.3 shows which one is responsible for what.

Table 2.3: Ministries Responsible for the Coordination of LG Institutions

| Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs | Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives <i>Local Government Division</i> | |
|--|---|---|
| <i>Special Local Government</i> | <i>Rural Local Government</i> | <i>Urban Local Government</i> |
| Chittagong Hill Regional Council ⁴¹ (1) | | |
| Chittagong Hill District Councils (3) Traditional Raja (3) and Mouza Based Headman -karbari (472) System | Zilla Parishad (64-3) = 61 | City Corporation (10) |
| Upazila Parishad ⁴² (25) Municipality ⁴³ (3) | Upazila Parishad (482-25) = 457 | Municipality (398-3) = 395 |
| Union Parishad ⁴⁴ (118) | Union Parishad (4498-118) = 4380 | Cantonment Board ⁴⁵ (One in Every Cantonment Area) |

Source: Talukdar, 2009

⁴⁰A ministry headed by minister or minister of state shall be responsible for conducting the business of his/her Ministry/Division in the Parliament unless otherwise directed by the Prime Minister. The Secretary is the administrative head of a ministry or division, assisted by Additional Secretary, Joint Secretary, Deputy Secretary, Senior Assistant Secretary and Assistant Secretary. Few ministries are consisted of more than one division (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ministries_of_Bangladesh).

⁴¹ There is legal debate whether it is to be considered as local government unit/institution not.

⁴² Basudeb Acharja, a senior official (Joint Secretary), Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tract Affairs, in an in-depth interview points out that Hill Upazilas are not linked with Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tract Affairs, and these are linked with Local Government Division of Ministry of LGRD&C.

⁴³ Mr. Acharja also notices that Hill Municipalities are not linked with Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tract Affairs, and these are linked with Local Government Division of Ministry of LGRD&C.

⁴⁴ Mr. Acharja also observes that Hill Union Parishads are not linked with Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tract Affairs, and these are linked with Local Government Division of Ministry of LGRD&C.

⁴⁵ Literarily, this is not considered as a Local Government unit/institution.

For administrative convenience, the country is divided into seven administrative divisions (i.e. Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna, Sylhet, Barisal and Rangpur), each headed by a Divisional Commissioner. There are 64 districts under the seven administrative divisions. A Deputy Commissioner, assisted by Additional Deputy Commissioners, administers a district. Each district should have an elected Zila Parishad (District Council) headed by an elected Chairman.⁴⁶ Districts are divided into a number of upazilas headed by elected chairs and assisted by Upazila Nirbahi Officers. The total number of upazilas is 482.⁴⁷ Under the policy of decentralization, upazilas are now to be the focal point of administration. In consequence, the administrative structure of the Government, including the field administration and local government, has been documented below:

Table 2.4: Administrative and Local Government Structure of the Government

| Bangladesh Secretariat | | Field Level | | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|--|------------------|--|
| Ministries | | Field Administration | | Local Government | |
| Unit | Head | Unit | Head | Unit | Head |
| Division | Secretary/Additional Secretary | Division | Divisional Commissioner (Joint Secretary) | - | - |
| Department | Joint Secretary | Zila (District) | Deputy Commissioner or DC (Deputy Secretary) | Zila Parishad | Indirectly Elected Parishad Chairman ⁴⁸ |
| Section | Deputy Secretary | Upazila | Elected Parishad Chairman supported by Upazila Nirbahi Officer or UNO (Senior Assistant Secretary) | Upazila Parishad | Elected Parishad Chairman |
| Sub-Section | Senior Assistant Secretary | Union | Elected Parishad Chairman | Union Parishad | Elected Parishad Chairman |

Source: Talukdar, 2009

⁴⁶ See the Zila Parishad Act, 2000. In reality, elected Zila Parishad is yet to be constituted.

⁴⁷ See the Upazila Parishad (Reintroduction of the Repealed Act and Amendment) Act, 2009.

⁴⁸ Although the elected Zila Parishad is yet to be formed, the government appointed administrator is running the functions of a Zila Parishad.

Given the literature review and discussion with experts, it seems that some major changes in our administrative set-up were brought about by various reform efforts, but still there are many concerns, particularly in terms of quality of service delivery and mainstay of corruption. Our administration has fallen back on its most essential tasks even though its involvement in the socio-economic lives of the people remains pervasive. The most basic public goods do not get delivered.

Referring to the local government Acts, and article 59 and 152(1) of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, stakeholders, for instance, Faizur Rahman, Upzila Parishad Chairman at Mymensingh Sadar Upazila, expressed that every Parishad/Council/Corporation must be a body of corporate, which should perform their duties and exercise powers under the concerned Acts/laws and subsequent rules and regulations.

Professor Dr. Akhter Hussain, a local governance expert, observes that in Bangladesh besides the functions that concern the nation as a whole, such as, defense, foreign affairs and finance, the rest of the government's functions may be broadly divided into two types, namely, regulatory functions and development functions. The regulatory functions include maintenance of law and order, collection of revenue and administration of justice. The other functions like, education, health and family welfare, social development and women and children affairs, to name a few, fall in the broad category of development administration.

While interviewing Dr. Hussain, he quoted from Klugman (1994) - "Most of the above mentioned services in Bangladesh are delivered through the line departments of the government. This has been a practice since the colonial days. The existing administrative and service delivery systems fall in the category of the *deconcentration* form of decentralization. Under the *deconcentration* form, redistribution of administrative responsibilities is done only within the structure of the national government. It is in essence nothing but the shifting of the workload from a national government's departmental headquarters to its own personnel located at field level offices throughout the country. This arrangement also does not involve transferring of the

authority to the field level officials to make decisions or to exercise discretion in carrying out the function”.

Dr. Hussain also notices that local government institutions in Bangladesh, of course, do have service delivery functions but these are very limited in scope and scale. Perpetual resource constraints also deter the local government bodies in delivering services that have been assigned to them. Moreover, the local government bodies do not have any oversight role and function about the services delivered by the government departments.

Despite these limitations, a senior official of the Local Government Division, observes that there has already been introduced a performance evaluation system in the local government institutions to enhance their capacity, accountability, transparency and healthy competitions among themselves. In addition, LGD took initiative for additional allocation and award for local government institutions given the results of performance evaluation.

2.4 Concluding Remarks

Globally as well as nationally, there are plenty of evidence that democratic decentralization provides the environment for wider participation and inclusiveness. Again, developing local political capacity for demanding accountability, and engaging local authorities towards human and economic poverty reduction are apparently ways to ensure the sustainable human and economic development of the country. Though globally there has been a widespread emphasis on democracy as the current round of decentralization that can be conducive to poverty reduction through a rights-based approach, for a country like Bangladesh, the key likely challenges are marginalized populations, lack of local resources, material, finance, expertise, competent leadership and absence of a national decentralized local governance policy.

In spite of the extensive stride with decentralization for accomplishment of MDGs, especially poverty reduction, rural poverty is still being a major obstacle for human development in Bangladesh. Again, despite the fact that there is a long heritage of Local Government in Bangladesh, until the *Local Government Institution Accelerating and*

Strengthening Committee's report published in 2007 and local government Acts/laws passed in the national parliament in 2009, decentralization herein was hardly considered a pragmatic means to achieve good governance. Yet we do not have a permanent Local Government Commission and elected body at the Zila Parishad and Chittagong Hill District and Regional Councils.

In addition, we need to empower our local government institutions regarding governance and service delivery through equitable distribution of government resources to them in time and systematic capacity development of them for the quality public service delivery. And there is an increasing call for allowing them to oversee all public expenditures at local level and control on their own resource, and thereby mobilize them.

In fact, local government in Bangladesh, especially its rural local government institutions, is passing a transition period. There are understanding gaps between the elected local government bodies and the legislators, and political elites and civil society proponents. There is also a shadow stress between the local bureaucracy and elected representatives.

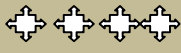
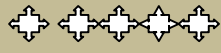

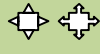
However, to surmount this transition and to bridge the gaps both from the viewpoints of structural decentralization⁴⁹ and institutional democratization,⁵⁰ meticulous intellectual contributions, particularly forming a robust decentralized local governance

⁴⁹ Structural decentralization alters the balance of power among levels of government favoring localized levels of government; even to some extent this component allows local peoples' representatives to govern the local government, but values associated with legacy do not always change until it gets touched with institutional democratization.

⁵⁰ Institutional democratization refers to this shift in values, rules, skills, and interactions, favoring transparency, equity, responsiveness, accountability, and other traditional democratic values (Hodgson, 2006; McGill, 1997; OECD, 1996). Evidence of institutional democratization can be found through functioning oversight and accountability mechanisms and the systematic incorporation of public input into government decision making (Coston, 1998; Klingner, 1996). The current decentralization literature recognizes the importance of the central state in bringing about this higher standard of decentralization and so demand from central governments sophisticated coordination and oversight as well as the willingness to allow autonomy (especially fiscal autonomy) and democratic participation at the local level (Crook, 2003; Olowu, 2003). In turn, local Government institutions must show a certain worthiness of autonomy by providing an innovative, transparent and accountable administration along with a participatory political process geared to alleviating marginalization and poverty (Dauda, 2006). It is gratifying to see that researchers are recognizing that decentralization takes place within a particular political context and, therefore evolves differently in each country (Smoke, 2003); yet, the requirements still set uniformly high standards (Dauda, 2006).

policy⁵¹ and strategy for consideration of the Local Government Division, are sturdily essential, while the *SWOT Analysis* would help here understand policy perspective (as summarized at Table 2.5).

Table 2.5: SWOT Perspective to the Policy Design

| | | | |
|---|------------------------------------|---|--|
| <p>Local Government Division</p> | <p>Internal Environment</p> | <p>Strengths </p> | <p>Weakness </p> |
| <p>Country context and social, political as well as local government institutional Perspective</p> | <p>External Environment</p> | <p>Opportunities </p> | <p>Threats </p> |

The Table 2.5 shows the opportunities of external environment prevail over the threats, whereas weaknesses of internal environment outweigh the strengths. Thus, the proposed policy and its advocacy as well as implantation strategy would be design based on the perspective of opportunities of the external environment and weaknesses of internal environment.

3. Force-field analysis

3.1 Initial Remarks

Force-field Analysis follows the *SWOT Analysis* and discussion with stakeholders, experts, practitioners and policy makers. It is a useful technique for looking at all the forces for and against a plan. It helps one weigh the importance up these factors and decide whether a plan is worth implementing. It starts with the stakeholder matrix and ends up with force-field matrix as well as analysis. In effect, *Force-field Analysis* helps

⁵¹A number of recent studies suggest that the outcome of decentralization policies crucially depends on the extent to which central management is replaced by democratic institutions ensuring that the community can exercise control over government affairs at the local level (Eckardt, 2008).

frame a policy strategically and design its advocacy as well as implementation strategy carefully.

3.2 Stakeholder and Force-field Matrixes

Here stakeholder matrix shows the stakeholders' interest or disinterest for the development of a robust decentralized local governance policy in Bangladesh, and their degree of influence as well as resources at disposal to the same, whereas force-field matrix demonstrates here forces for development of the stated policy and forces against the same.

Table 3.1: Stakeholder Matrix

| Stakeholders | Interest | Impact +/- | Degree of Influence (1-5) | Resources at Disposal (1-5) | Average Score (1-5) |
|-------------------------------|--|------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------|
| Local Government Institutions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> →Development of a robust local government system →Empowerment of the local government bodies →Systematic improvement of the local governance and rural development →Enhanced institutional arrangement and balance of power | + | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| Legislators ⁵² | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Keep control over the local resources and intergovernmental transfers as well as social security funds → Hold influence over the local people of his or her constituency | - | 4 | 3 | 3.5 |
| Legislators ⁵³ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → A few number of legislators believe in decentralization and deliberate democracy →They want to improve local governance system and pro-poor development | + | 2 | 1 | 1.5 |

⁵²Based on the in-depth interview of a legislator, the study notes that majority of legislators are against the development of local governance system, and thus they disfavor the call for a decentralized local governance policy in Bangladesh.

⁵³Yet a significant number of legislators are in favor of the development of local governance system, and thus they advocate for a decentralized local governance policy in Bangladesh.

| | | | | | |
|--|--|-------|---|---|-----|
| Local Government Division | <p>→Keep bureaucratic control over the local government institutions</p> <p>→Want to show obedience and loyalty to the government political will</p> | - | 2 | 4 | 3 |
| Government | <p>→Influenced by the legislators who are against the development of the local governance</p> <p>→Influenced by the bureaucrats who are against decentralised and deliberate democracy</p> <p>→ Fear of demand from people for increased accountability, transparency and deliberate democracy as well as governance</p> | - | 2 | 5 | 3.5 |
| Prime Minister | <p>→ Neutral (personally believes in essence of a robust local governance system but officially she is neutral, and goes with the Cabinet or government stand)</p> | (+/-) | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| Main Opposition Political Party and its Alliance | <p>→The main opposition party and its alliance do not show interest so that government forms a decentralized local governance policy for the same reason as discussed for the government case as they expect to come in power despite the fact that they do not oppose it strongly</p> | - | 1 | 2 | 1.5 |
| Small Political Parties | <p>A number of small political parties have some keen interest for advancing decentralization and local governance system as it goes with their political mandate</p> | + | 2 | 1 | 1.5 |
| Local Bureaucrats | <p>→ Their main interest vested with the loss of budgetary and bureaucratic control</p> | - | 1 | 1 | 1 |

| | | | | | |
|--|--|---|---|---|-----|
| Civil Society Organizations | →Pro-poor governance and rights based approach to development through deliberate local governance | + | 3 | 4 | 3.5 |
| Experts and/or Academics | → Advocate for a nuanced system of democratic, fiscal and administrative decentralization, and for an improved local governance system so as to meet MGDs with decentralized and deliberate democracy | + | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Development Practitioners | →Improved and empowered local governance system and systematic rural development | + | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Donors as well as Development Partners | →Decentralized and deliberate democracy, and thus to ensure inclusive governance | + | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| Peoples/Citizens | →Empowerment, entitlement and rights to development and basic public service delivery, and getting out from poverty, hunger and social injustice | + | 2 | 4 | 3 |
| Media | →Demonstrate themselves as a catalyst and social change agent as a group, and help people to know the right things, facts and between the lines →Support people empowerment, entitlement and rights to development, and basic public service delivery through deliberate and decentralized governance | + | 3 | 3 | 3 |

Table 3.2: Force-field Matrix

| Forces for Change or Development (1-5) | | Plan of Action | Forces against Change or Development (1-5) | |
|--|--|--|--|-------------|
| 4 | Local Government Institutions | Development of a proposed decentralized local governance policy for Bangladesh, and then tailoring a policy advocacy strategy and a policy implementation strategy | Legislators | 3.5 |
| 4 | Donors as well as Development Partners | | Government | 3.5 |
| 3.5 | Civil Society Organizations | | Local Government Division | 3 |
| 3 | Peoples/Citizens | | Main Opposition Political Party and its Alliance | 1.5 |
| 3 | Media | | Local Bureaucrats | 1 |
| 2 | Experts and/or Academics | Forces for –Forces against= 23.5-12.5=11 So forces for outweigh the forces against, and as such aforementioned plan of Action is justified | | |
| 1.5 | Legislators | | | |
| 1.5 | Small Political Parties | | | |
| 1 | Development Practitioners | | | |
| | | Prime Minister (Neutral Force) | | |
| 23.5 | Total | (+/-) 5 | Total | 12.5 |

Figure 3.1: Force-field Column Chart

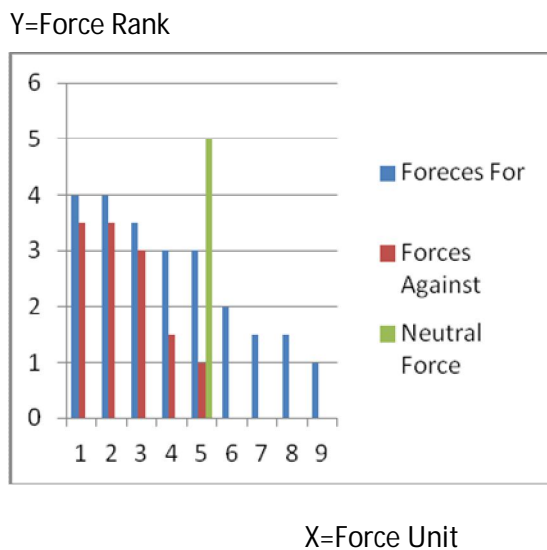
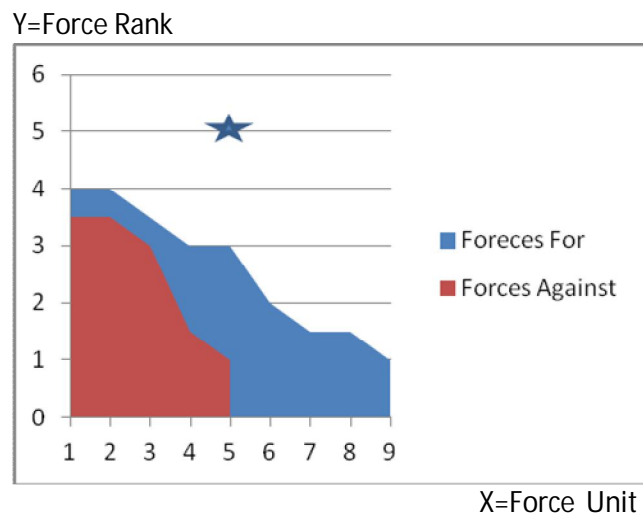


Figure 3.2: Force-field Area Chart



3.3 Analysis of Key Forces

The main forces for are local government institutions, development partners, civil society organizations, citizens, media, local governance experts and some small political parties, while key forces against are legislators, government, Local Government Division and even main opposition political party.⁵⁴ The research also observes that there are a few number of legislators who are in favor of strengthening local government system, and thus they acknowledge the importance and essence of decentralized local governance policy here for Bangladesh. It is true for the Local Government Division officials as well, but at the force field figure, study does not document it, as these officials are not officially extending their support, given the context that they are loyal to the government intention.

Notwithstanding Table 3.1 shows that neither the Local Government Division nor the government holds strong negative influence, but the resources at their disposal are very high. Importantly, the media observation and past participant experience, particularly with UNDP, allow the study to document the Prime Minister's, and Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives Minister's attitude towards local governance.

The former one has strong personal positive mind-set for strengthening local government system and so to the improvement of pro-poor local governance, but officially she is neutral, while the concerned Minister holds vigilant attitude that allow him to stress back to the concern of history of decentralization in Bangladesh. In fact, historical evidence supports that during the autocratic regimes there were strong emphases on decentralized local governance system, but those were intentional decentralization, intended to sabotage the democracy at the central government. Substantiations of that type of artificial decentralization make him a bit worried to fortify the democratic decentralization. His individual belief, in fact, goes with Davey (2003) who points out that extent of local discretion would be a matter of balance

⁵⁴Although Local Government Division is a part of the government, the study puts it here separately because the former is particularly responsible for this policy initiation, while the government is a holistic mechanism where Prime Minister as well as Cabinet is the main concern.

between national and local interests. Neither central control nor local autonomy should have unchallenged priority.

Importantly, research notices that the Prime Minister and the concerned Minister for the local government are two powerful forces for the decision whether proposed decentralized local governance policy would be adopted or adapted so as to proceed to the Cabinet for approval. Even if the Prime Minister would alone get convinced with advocacy movement for the proposed policy, and thus she holds official stand to go with this policy with adoption and/or adaptation, in the context Bangladesh political culture, the advocacy movement would succeed.

As such as part of the policy advocacy strategy, there are calls to engage such consultants who are champions for policy advocacy in the context of Bangladesh, and to appoint senior lobbyists who have records of accomplishment of political influence to the ruling party including to the Prime Minister.

The result of these two-dimensional forces (i.e. forces for and against), however, allows the Local Government Division to move steadily toward paradigm shifting to the development of local government system and local governance practices. The avowed movement is evidenced to the performance of developing and/or modifying all Acts/laws concerning the local governance, and of conducting local government elections.⁵⁵

Given this analysis, it is to acknowledge that this is the time for mitigating the academic and/or policy bankruptcy for the development of a robust local government as well as local governance system in Bangladesh. Thus, developing this proposed national decentralized local governance policy followed by policy advocacy strategy and implementation strategy is significant to the context of Bangladesh.

3.4 Concluding Remarks

Stakeholder matrix at Table 3.1 indicates that different interest groups or stakeholders hold different interests of rationale coupled with the positive or negative impact concerning the degree of influence and resources at disposal towards the development

⁵⁵Despite the fact that ZilaParishad election is yet to held

of a decentralized and nuanced local governance system. Thus, the fashion and approach of a proposed decentralized local governance policy for Bangladesh followed by policy advocacy and implementation strategies depend to a certain extent on this *Force-field Analysis*. And in effect, force field matrix at Figure 3.1 shows that forces for proposed policy and those for advocacy and implementation strategies sturdily outweigh the forces against the same, and thus development of the proposed policy as well as that of advocacy and implementation strategies is optimistic and evidence based.

4. Decentralized Local Governance Policy Framework

4.1 Initial Remarks

Following the *SWOT as well as Force-field Analysis* and taking into account the *International Guidelines on Decentralization and the Strengthening of Local Authorities*⁵⁶ along with the *Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh*,⁵⁷ local government Acts/laws in Bangladesh and GAF⁵⁸ *proposed Decentralization Policy in Bangladesh*,⁵⁹ the present *Proposed Decentralized Local Governance Policy for Bangladesh*, has, after a couple of months of research,⁶⁰ been tailor-made. Figure 4.1 shows the how decentralized local governance policy would be crafted.

⁵⁶See UN-HABITAT, 2007

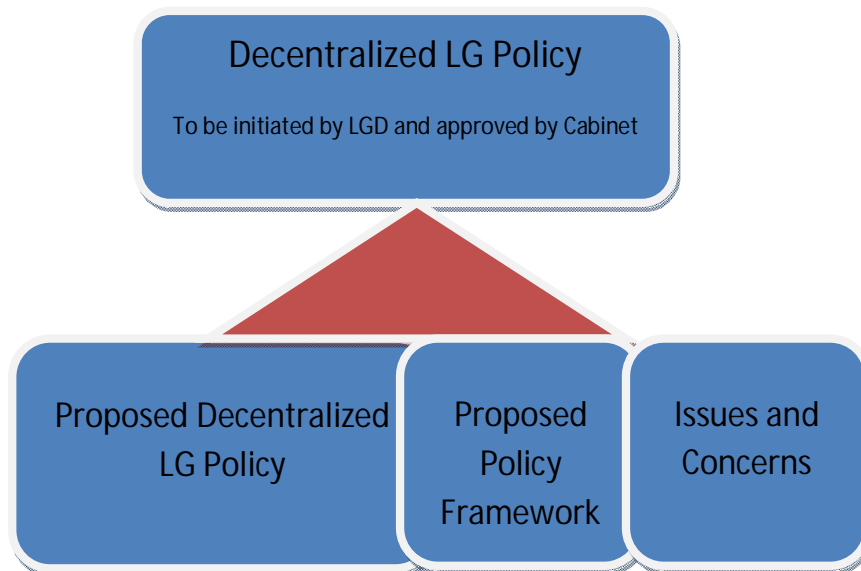
⁵⁷See Articles 11, 59 and 60 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.

⁵⁸Governance Advocacy Forum (GAF) is a renowned platform operating at national level that aims to promote democratic decentralization, strong local government and governance through policy advocacy (see <http://www.gafbd.org/html/aboutus.asp?st=1>).

⁵⁹GAF proposed *Decentralization Policy in Bangladesh* was drafted by Professor Akhter Hussain, Department of Public Administration, Dhaka University, in 2010.

⁶⁰The methods and/or techniques of research applied here are in-depth interview of a number of senior officials of the Local Government Division, and Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tract Affairs, and Public Officials and Elected Chiefs of local government institutions, and also discussion with experts, practitioners and a legislator, and participant observation along with social and mass-media observation, and review of constitution, local government Acts/laws, rules and regulations, and international guidelines on decentralization.

Figure 4.1: Crafting decentralized local governance policy



4.2 Proposed Policy

Vision

The vision is to develop robust local governance and pro-poor local development system outfitted with structural decentralization and institutional democratization through politically, fiscally and administratively decentralized local government institutions in pursuance of the constitutional commitment and the *international guidelines on decentralization*.⁶¹

Mission

To develop a fully decentralized local government system at all spheres of the local government units so as to ensure a full-fledged deliberate democracy and good local governance through citizen engagement, inclusiveness and empowerment, and through ensuring down-ward, horizontal and vertical accountability and maintaining a robust institutional linkage between national government and local government and among the local government institutions.

⁶¹ *International guidelines on decentralization and the strengthening of local authorities*, UN-HABITAT (2007), envisions serving as a catalyst for policy and institutional reforms at the national level to further enable and empower local authorities.

Goal

To guarantee that this decentralized local governance policy will be translated fully in laws, rules, regulations and practices by 2018, and to ensure that the public services delivery will be made available with fully decentralized approaches so as to meet the civic satisfaction and needs without irrational system loss or corruption practices by 2020.

Overall and Specific Objectives

The overall objective of the policy is to facilitate political, economic, social, administrative and developmental empowerment of local citizens to attain the rights to development and public services, access to the knowledge and information, ability to the decent standard of living, and affordability to long, healthy and secure life.

The specific objectives of the policy are to:

- (i) ensure a full-fledged political, fiscal and administrative decentralization;
- (ii) strengthen accountability and transparency of the decentralized system by making local leaders and service providers directly accountable to the communities they serve through citizen inclusiveness and empowerment with the engagement in decision making, planning, budgeting, implementation and follow up actions (*Adapted from GAF proposed policy, 2010*);
- (iii) enhance the sensitivity and responsiveness of government agencies to the local needs by placing the planning, financing, management, and control of service provision at the point where services are provided, and by enhancing capacities of local institutions so that they are able to take into consideration the local environment and needs (*Ibid*); and
- (iv) develop sustainable development planning and management capacity of local government institutions that will serve as the driving force for planning, mobilization, and implementation of social, ecological, political, and economic development of the community and thus of the country (*Ibid*).

Principles

The basic principles of this policy are as following:

Unity of Diversity: Ensuring that national unity is met with local autonomy, identity, interests and diversity.

Balanced Decentralization: Making certain that a nuanced move towards a balanced political, fiscal and administrative decentralization for the local governance and development is going on, but the democratic decentralization is subject to be met immediately in all local government institutions.

Equitable Distribution: Ensuring that reasonable distribution of reserved, transferred and residual functions and services between the national and local government, and between the local government institutions is customized and similarly equitable distribution of revenue collected from the local level by the national government is tailored between the levels of government as stated above. As such, financial equalization, both vertical (i.e. between state and local authorities) and horizontal (i.e. among local authorities) level would sensibly be ensured.

Material, Financial and Human Resources: Ensuring that the material, financial and human resources of local government institutions are commensurate with their tasks and responsibilities, and the institutions are allowed to determine and appoint their own internal administrative structure with their own resources, in addition to the transferred departments, so as to adapt with local needs and to ensure effective management. Moreover, ensuring that they have access to a broad variety of local financial resources including incurring taxes, levies and service charges provided by the government tax schedule for the particular local government unit, and inter governmental transfers along with development project assistance. Further to these, local government institutions should, within the legislation (i.e. Acts/laws) and/or rules and regulations, have access to national and international capital markets (i.e. sub-national borrowing authority) and/or to the public-private partnership model for capital investment.

Responsibility with Authority: Ensuring that the full control and authority are exercised on transferred departments including their responsibilities and budgets and/or allocations from the national government.

Transparency and Accountability: Ensuring that openness and transparency, and downward, horizontal and vertical accountability of all local government institutions, local government division, and other concerned departments of line ministries regarding local governance are maintained.

Engagement and Empowerment: Ensuring that citizen engagement, inclusiveness and empowerment would be the underlying principle in local decision-making, planning, budgeting, implementation and follow-up Actions. As such, the citizen interest ought to be the central to the outputs as well as outcomes of local governance and development. Thus, the legal provision for standing and steering committees is necessary here. And such committees need to be formed and/or Activated in timely and full-fledged manner with the involvement of local stakeholders, especially diverse sectors of the community leaders, so as to get the civic engagement in monitoring and gearing up public services delivery and other expenditure responsibilities with transparent and accountable way. Importantly, the participation of the women and youth embedded in all local initiatives would be highly encouraged here.

Equality and Non-discrimination: Ensuring that all individuals are equal and are entitled to the human rights including the rights to development and public services, access to the knowledge and information, ability to the decent standard of living, and affordability to long, healthy and secure life without discrimination of any kind.

Rule of Law: Ensuring that local government institutions, alongside the state authorities at different levels, have obliged to respect, protect and fulfill human rights, rule of law and social justice.

Legislative Provision: Ensuring that in addition to the constitutional mandates, legislative provisions (i.e. Acts /laws) clearly declare the local government units, and articulate the roles, responsibilities and institutional linkages as well as inter governmental relations among the local government institutions and between local government and national

government. Furthermore, it is to be ensured that rules and regulations are aligned with the concerned Acts/laws.

Code of Conduct: Ensuring that the different codes of conduct for local public civil servants and political office holders are made available by the government, that guide politicians and officials of local authorities to discharge their tasks with a sense of responsibility and accountability to the citizens. However, the material and remunerative conditions of local politicians should be as high as they could continue their commitment to the common good of society with strong integrity and high degree of transparency. As such, disclosure of asset and liabilities of local political office holders are necessary.

Public Service Delivery: Ensuring that the public services delivery will be made available with fully decentralized approaches that meet the civic satisfaction and needs without irrational system loss and/or corruption practices.

Institutional Capacity: Ensuring that bridging communal leadership and institutional capacity building initiatives are initiated both at local level and national level, and these are supported by the national government and development projects.

Empowerment of the Local Authorities: Ensuring that local government bodies are freely exercising their powers, including those bestowed upon them by the national government, within the limits defined by legislation. This means these powers must be exclusive, and should not be undermined by other authority – not even by any individual legislator. Legislation, however, must address the provisions for separation of authorities for revenue assignments, expenditure responsibilities and public services delivery, and administrative, political and social justice authority. This prescription allows authority for revenue assignments including inter-governmental transfers to the councilors, authority for expenditure responsibilities and public services delivery to the secretary of the concerned local government institution, and administrative, political including networking, stakeholder-partnership, public-private partnership, local government borrowing and social justice authority to the chief elected representative (i.e. chairman or mayor). This chief political official, however, should have the discretionary authority to oversee the all other assignments and responsibilities,

especially the public services delivery affairs. And the political officials should not involve directly in implementation, rather they will oversee and make accountable the other implantation authorities.

Thus, local government institutions' right to develop partnership with civil society, especially with Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and Non Government Organizations (NGOs), and with private sector and other interested stakeholders, and also with other spheres of government, needs to be addressed by the legislation and/or rules and regulations so that inclusive development process here is set forth. Furthermore, participation of local government representatives in national and/or regional decision making and planning as well budgeting process is significant to the context of empowerment of local authorities and so to the balanced national development. And as such, national and/or regional government should involve consultation with local government bodies and their associations regarding any policy, Act/law, rules and regulations, and also relating to planning, budgeting and designing of development projects/programmes on local governance and development.

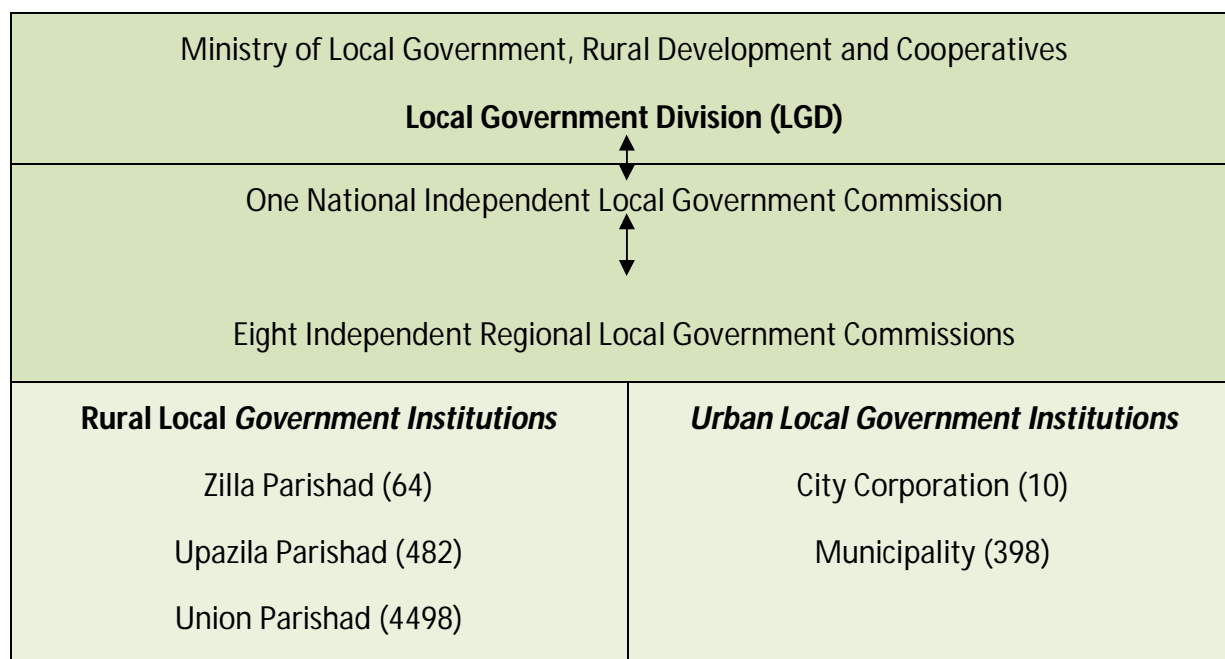
Supervision of Local Authorities: Ensuring that supervision, suspension or dissolution of local government elected representatives or local councils are exercised in accordance with procedures in Acts/laws, but these must be done by an independent local government commission, and subject to oversee such suspension or dissolution Activities by administrative courts and/or high courts to which appeals may be made. In addition, the independent local government commissions will help the government to ensure that the constructional mandate and spirit for the local governance development through the decentralization and local governance policy will be translated fully in laws, rules, regulations and practices as soon as possible.

4.3 Proposed Policy Framework

Structural Framework

There will be two types⁶² of local government institutions in Bangladesh, namely rural local government institutions and urban local government institutions under a total eight regional local government commissions⁶³ and one national local government commission, while 'division' would no longer be treated as administrative unit of the government. Importantly, rural local government and urban local government units will never be geographically overlapped, which means that the rural local government units and urban local government units must be with separate constituencies fitted with clear-cut area mapping. The proposed structural framework of the local government is presented at Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Proposed structural framework of the local government



⁶²Currently there are three types of local government institutions in Bangladesh (i.e. Rural Local Government Institutions, Special Local Government Institutions and Urban Local Government Institutions).

⁶³ Regions will be Dhaka, Chittagong, Hill-Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna, Sylhet, Barisal and Rangpur.

The Local Government Division would, however, be downsized with limited number of senior officials and support staff, and with limited scope of responsibilities. The basic tasks of the LGD would be liaison with the national local government commission. Given the commission's advice and recommendations, it will deal with international organizations with matters relating to treaties and agreements, and with countries and world bodies regarding the subjects allotted to this division. And it is likely to draft Acts/laws on subjects allotted to this division for the legislative body, and thus issue rules, regulations, circulars, guidelines and strategy papers concerned to the related Acts/laws, and design, draft and initiate related policies to get approved from the Cabinet.

Furthermore, it will also maintain scope for public inquiries, MIS and statistics on any of the subjects allotted to this division. The LGD would also provide secretarial support to the concerned minister and/or state minister so that they defend well in the relevant parliamentary standing committee. However, the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED), Department of Public Health Engineering (DPHE), and National Institute of Local Government (NILG) will go under the stewardship of the National Local Government Commission. And as where applicable local offices of these departments and Dhaka WASA, Chittagong WASA, Khulna WASA, and five other new (proposed) WASA will operate under the concerned local government institutions and under stewardship of the regional local government commissions given the guidance as would be determined by the Acts/laws and/ or rules and regulations.

Functional Framework

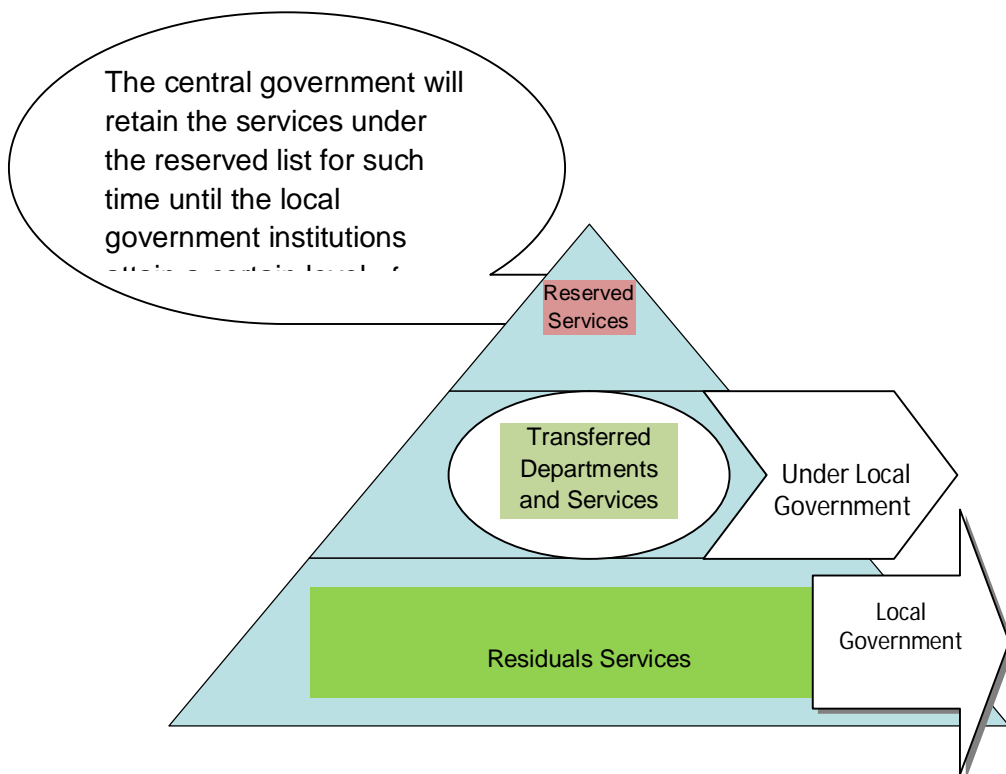
In order to establish an effective decentralization framework, government services and functions should be divided into three, namely, reserved, transferred and residuals. The services and functions under the reserved list will include the regulatory services such as: maintenance of law and order, administration of justice, and national revenue collection and other regulatory administrations that are central and national in nature (GAF proposed policy, 2010).

The central government will retain the services under the "reserved list" for such time until the local government institutions attain a certain level of maturity. The rest

functions and services should be included in the “transferred and/or residual lists”. The services under the transferred list should be transferred to the local government bodies. These could include, for example: primary and secondary education, health and family planning, agriculture, youth and sports, water supply and sanitation, disaster management and relief, rural development and cooperatives, livestock and fisheries, and social welfare (Ibid).

And all services and functions under the residual list, for instance, social justice, and social safety and benefit schemes, and government development projects, must be governed by the local government bodies with efficient delivery and transparent administration. In line with the existing enactments, the above devolution should take place at the *Zila*, *Upazila* and *Union Parishad* levels as, relevant administrative set-up and infrastructure facilities currently exist at these levels (Ibid). For the municipality and city corporations, further to these services, inclusive city governance system and services must be incorporated. Figure 4.2 shows the proposed functional framework of the local government.

Figure 4.2: Proposed functional framework of the local government



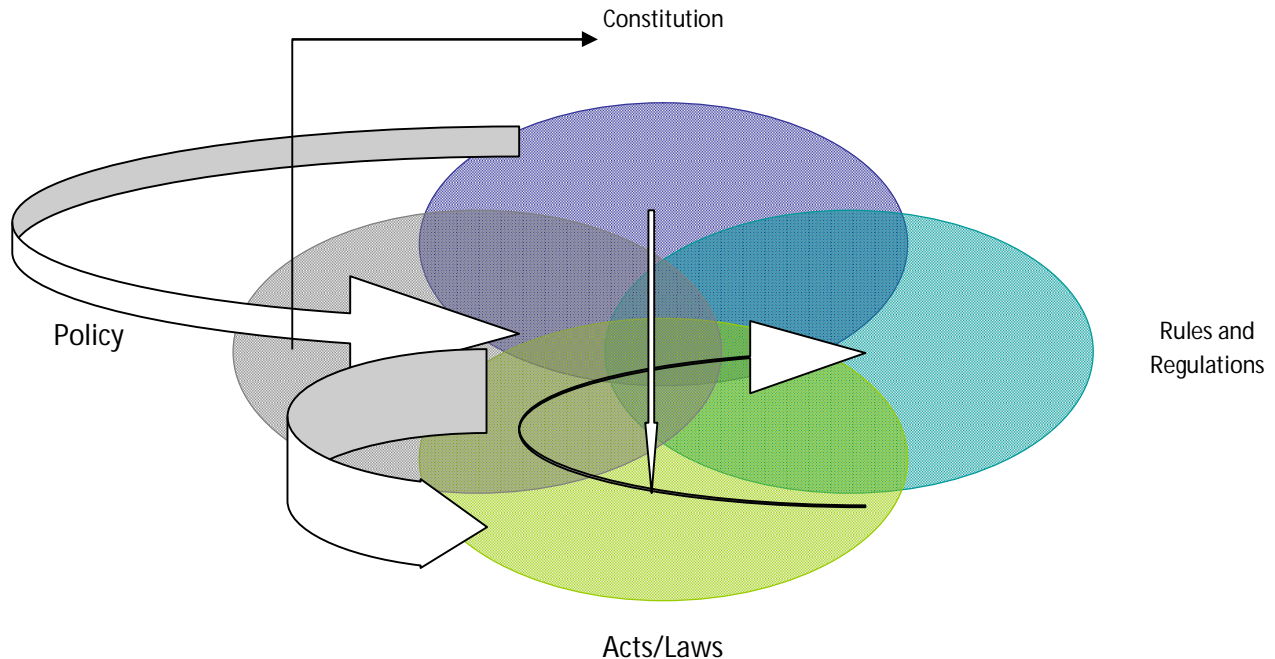
Legal Framework

The local government institutions, especially Union Parishad, Upazila Parishad and Zila Parishad, are passing through a stalemate and transition period. It is probable that this impasse will somewhat be over by amending some controversial laws soon for the purpose of the principles of this proposed policy, and then, of course, by functioning new local government Acts with hurriedly issuing subsequent rules and regulations.

This alone, however, is not the critical factor. Absolute dependency on the mode of the legislature for the power of the local government in terms of the central-local relationship, and of the degree of democratic, administrative and fiscal decentralization, and of functions as well as functionaries of the local government is evidenced in the constitution. This reality leads us to support Indian model of constitutional guarantee that is to say it refers to the 73rd and 74th amendments of the Indian constitution.

The constitutional assurance, however, is not the ultimate to shape the premium local governance. In Uganda and South Africa, for instance, political authorities passed statutory and constitutional guarantees for local government development just 16 years back, but now both countries are noted as examples for democratic development of the local governance, which is resultant from both the constitutional pledge and democratic practices with high sense of political commitment. The success of these two countries has underpinned a lesson that the constitutional pledge is as important as democratic commitment does for a strong local government system, particularly for a country like Bangladesh. Figure 4.3 shows the proposed legal framework of the local government and local governance.

Figure 4.3: The proposed legal framework of the local government



4.4 Issues and Concerns

Institutional Linkages

Institutional linkages at different dimensions, for instance, between and/or among the local government institutions, between transferred and residual service departments within a local government institution, between a local government institution and other reserved and delegated local service departments of the national government, between local government institution and civil society organizations, between local government and proposed national and regional local government commissions, and between the local government and national government, are necessary, and these need to be well defined by law and/or rules and regulations.

Inter Governmental Relations

The current round emphasis on democratic decentralization, globally as well as in Bangladesh, makes the citizens' sense to increasingly look forward to local government

institutions for better services and more secure local governance, which may be conducive to local economic development as well. Meeting this overreaching goal, however, is still subject to developing the relationship between the Government and local governments. And as such, the proposed decentralization and local governance policy recommends local governments to be legislatively self-governing institutions. Notwithstanding Davey (2003) points out that extent of local discretion would be a matter of balance between national and local interests. Neither central control nor local autonomy should have unchallenged priority.

Structuring Local Governments' Borrowing

A local government's fiscal balance can be defined as the difference between its expenditure responsibilities on the one hand, and its own source of revenues and transfers on the other. If any local government expenditure needs are not properly balanced with the resources available to it, this could be resultant in sub-national deficits and the incurrence of debt (UNDP, 2005:6). In such case, it seems that local borrowing may be a co-opted option, but the global anecdotal and empirical evidence suggest that having a loan is not always welcomed, and generally inappropriate for the recurrent spending of the sub-national governments. Local borrowing is appropriate for responsible expenditures (e.g. for long term capital development projects or for sustainable business development or profit generating undertakings).

In many countries, sub-national borrowing is still to be neglected when the legal framework for decentralization is established. In South Asian countries, even in India, there is an insufficient regulation for sub-national borrowing in the decentralization legal framework. And in Bangladesh, there is an absolute absence of the legal framework for the local government borrowing, but this increasingly becomes essential here for advancement of the fiscal decentralization. Given this analysis, the proposed decentralization and local governance policy strongly recommends sub-national borrowing to be legislated here.

Local Government Financial Planning and Management

Apart from the fiscal decentralization, financial planning and management are central to the local governance. In the context of Bangladesh, the local government institutions need support to get their planning, budgeting and financial management capacity improved.

First, local governments must instigate five years integrated development plan with the engagement of key local stakeholders including concerned legislator(s) so as to avoid conflict of interest and unnecessary intervention of government or legislator.

Second, five-year budget and yearly budget, of course, should be realistic, based on the resources that can be practically collected through internal resource mobilization and external assistance. The budget preparation needs to be participatory and open so that it confers impression to the residents that tax and other available resources will be used in their interests. Local public financial as well as expenditure management needs to be strengthened to reinforce the value of money.

Third, there are some other factors to be considered here. For instance, local government procurement is critical to the local public expenditure management. And success of the expenditure management, to a great extent, depends on the worthiness of the revenue administration and timely intergovernmental or project fund transfer. As part of revenue administration the tax base, tax collection and expenditure information should be made publicly available, which intern, bestows local citizens confidence that their money is being used properly, and thus makes them more willing to pay their taxes.

Gender Mainstreaming in Local Governance

Despite the extensive debates on the governance and development approach, there is a widespread belief that Gender and Development (GAD) or gender mainstreaming, poverty reduction and local governance are interrelated and likely to be central to the local government, particularly in Bangladesh context. Globally as well as in Bangladesh, while GAD is the evolution of the Women in Development (WID) programs of the 1970s,

“gender mainstreaming” is the further advancement, and governance version of the GAD (Talukdar, 2009:87).

GAD, however, has been widely accepted in development initiatives by the donor institutions, mainly by the World Bank and the ADB since the Beijing Conference in 1995. The recent development of GAD focuses on ‘gender mainstreaming’ in governance and development in general, and in local government institutions in particular, so that it can reinforce the local governance with inclination to redress the gender inequalities and local poverty.

International guidelines on decentralization recognize the need for gender mainstreaming in local governance with particular focus on women as depressed group of the society. In addition, the Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh prescribes for the gender equality (as described in Part 3, Article 28 of the Constitution).

Central to the Institutional Challenges

Though corruption is a daunting issue, still it is a reality of local governments in Bangladesh. The foremost corruption of local governments here is associated with the land as well as settlement administration and rural social safety net programmes (e.g. Food-for-work, VGD, VGF and some other rural food-based programmes), and to some extent with local revenue and expenditure management.

Firstly, the local land and settlement assignment is still being governed under the national government, but it needs to be administratively decentralized with sensible reform efforts, and this decentralized administration should consistently be answerable to the democratic local government (e.g. to the Upazila Parishad). Secondly, misuse, abuse, or even non uses of the local social safety net programmes destroy the trustworthiness of local leaders to the residents, which adversely affect on local tax collection. Thus, these food-based programmes are considerably being phased out, and social safety net approach should be mainstreamed with the other governance and development programmes with increased transparency and downward accountability.

Thirdly, in order to make the local revenue as well as expenditure management transparent, accountable and efficient, it needs to get comprehensively supported by the national government through decentralization projects.

Local Government Election

Electoral politics at the local level is very important. Involvement of political parties at local political elections is at the center of several debates, but one of the vital aims of democratic decentralization concludes these debates. The augmentation of continual political competition will affect on accountability leverage and political lessons for local leaders.

Nonetheless, the National Election Commission must emerge as one of the most trusted institutions in the country so as to help participatory democracy in the election process and to ensure free and fair national and local elections. Thus, the commission should be keen to transform the involvement of political parties towards a supportive climate for a competitive, free and fair election process. Empirical evidence suggests that free and fair election is vital for the accountability leverage. For example, there was a failure of the Upazila system during the autocratic regime when the Election Commission had less freedom to hold a fair election. Those unfair elections had been resultant unaccountable local governance that generated further mistrust and suspicion between the local government and community people.

Local Government Commission

There are a number of growing concerns, for instance, lack of capacity and accountability of the local government bodies, absence of the consistency at state works for stepping ahead to the local government and so to the local governance. Thus, the scholars, practitioners and local elected representatives are lauding the need for an enduring local government commission for years. This has also been supported by the local government committees/commissions sine 1990s. Finally, the recently past military backed interim government put forward the Local Government Commission Ordinance, 2008, by which the commission Actively began to exercise its portfolio from November 2008, but the following parliament did not endorse the ordinance.

Nevertheless, this proposed policy prescribes one “national independent local government commission” for maintaining relationship with the central/national government and the devolvement of the effective local government and local governance system both substantively and functionally, and *eight “regional independent local government commissions”*⁶⁴ for the regional integration of the local government and local governance.

These commissions will have appropriate powers, functions and authority to look after the affairs of the local government institutions including allocation of financial resources and monitoring and supervision on behalf of the national government (adapted from GAF proposed policy, 2010).

4. Conclusion

The national decentralized local governance policy is significant not only to the context of streamlining the decentralization paradigm but also to the perspective of underpinning the confidence of democratic decentralization to all democratic political parties, particularly to the major two. In reality, political regimes are changing between the two political parties, known as BNP and Awami League. Importantly, one major political party alone cannot strengthen the local government institutions because one political regime is too short to garner durable results in this domain. Thus, a political consensus on the issue followed by a policy initiation of the Local Government Division with adoption and/or adaptation of this proposed policy leading to the approval of the Government is undoubtedly very urgent.

⁶⁴ Ibid

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