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Governance in Practice

Decentralization and People's Participation
in the Local Development of Bangladesh



ACADEMIC DISSERTATION

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To my parents

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List of Abbreviations

ADP Annual Development Programme
ADB Asian Development Bank
AL Awami League
ASA Association for Social Development
ASPADA Agro-Forestry Seed Production and Development Association
ASRC Administrative and Services Reorganization Committee
BAKSAL Bangladesh Krishok Shromik League
BBS Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
BD Basic Democracy
BNP Bangladesh Nationalist Party
BRAC Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
BUC Birunia Union Council
CARR Committee for Administrative Reform /Reorganization
DAC Development Assistance Committee
DC District Commissioner
DDC District Development Committee
EU European Union
IDA International Development Association
JBIC Japan Bank of International Co-operation
LCA Local Cultural Appraisal
LGED Local Government Engineering Department
MP Parliament Member
NICARR National Implementation Committee for Administrative Reform/Reorganization
NGOs Non- Governmental Organizations
OECD Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PIC Project Implementation Committee
PIO Project Implementation Officer
PRA Participatory Rural Appraisal
PROSHIKA Proshikkon Shikkha and Kaj (Training Education and Work)
RDP Rural Development Programme
SDO Sub-Divisional Officer
TDC Thana Development Committee
TDCC Thana Development Cooperative Committee
TI Transparency International
TIB Transparency International of Bangladesh
TK Taka (Bangladeshi currency)
TP Thana Parishad
UCCA Upazila Central Cooperative Association
UDCC Upazila Development Coordination Committee
UN United Nations
UNCHS United Nations Centre for Human Settlements
UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNDP United Nations Development Programme
UNESCAP United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

UNO Upazila Nirbahi Officer

UP Union Parishad

USA United States of America

USAID United States Agency for International Development

VDP Village Defence Party

VGD Vulnerable Group Development

VGf Vulnerable Group Fund

ZP Zila Parishad

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Mohammed Asaduzzaman

ABSTRACT

The issue of ‘governance’ and ‘good governance’ has gained importance among practitioners of public administration, international aid agencies (IAA) and the OECD countries, due to rapid economic growth, remarkable breakthroughs in information technology, and as the role of third sector in poverty alleviation in the developing countries has emerged.

Decentralized local governance and people’s participation are two of the major policy concerns regarding governance and good governance. It is widely argued that decentralization ensures people’s participation, promotes political education and training, equal and efficient distribution of resources, trustworthy relationship among various actors of central and local governance and enhances responsiveness of the central government for citizen’s demands and priorities. It has been widely accepted that poor governance and weak institutions have constituted significant constraints on administrative, economic and political development since the independence of Bangladesh. Hence, decentralization and people’s participation have been the political rhetoric of almost all successive regimes in Bangladesh. However, recent experiences show that these two important issues were actually not promoted by any successive government in Bangladesh since the independence. Given this background, the aim of this research, is to find out the threats and challenges of decentralization and people’s participation in Bangladesh.

The research has been conducted as an empirical study. Methods and techniques of qualitative research have been used to collect primary data for the study. These have included case study method, formal and informal questionnaires, participatory rural appraisal (PRA), local cultural appraisal (LCA), chain and purposeful approach (snowball approach) and participant observation. In addition, a considerable size of data and information has been gathered from various secondary sources.

Governance, good governance, decentralization and people’s participation constitute the key concepts of this study and they have been extensively clarified and analyzed through reviewing contemporary literatures ranging from neo-classical writers to political economists. Critical overview of decentralization policy and people’s participation in Bangladesh in general is presented from historical perspective. The grassroots level reality of decentralization and people’s participation is presented through analyzing data from the case studies,

interviews and PRA sessions. The role of local government institutions (public, private and non-profit) are also presented in a comparative manner.

This study has identified two different factors that reveal the existing threats and challenges for decentralization and people's participation in Bangladesh. These are classified as independent factors and dependent factors. Political intervention and bureaucratic resistance are considered as independent factors. Corruption, weak institutional framework, lack of resources, coordination and adequate knowledge are identified as the dependent factors. This study states that the dependent factors can not be eliminated unless and until the independent factors are effectively removed.

The major findings of this research are: a) despite frequent reform measures, the policy of decentralization and people's participation is still entrapped around the discourse of governance as merely an illusionary vision, due to strong political and bureaucratic intervention; b) formal, informal and background (invisible) actors seriously jeopardize even the theoretical application of people's participation; c) as a result, corruption has swelled and expanded into every sector of the country; d) although the contemporary non-profit and private institutions are structurally weaker than the public institutions, functionally they are stronger; and e) strong public institutions can not work properly given their various malfunctioning practices whereas weak institutional structures (NGOs) are able to work effectively due to their good practices. Based on these findings, the study assumes that a 'partnership based form' of local governance system would work for the future decentralization and people's participation in Bangladesh.

Keywords: Governance, Good Governance, Decentralization, People's Participation, Union Parishad, Upazila, NGOs and Bangladesh

Chapter One: Study Background: Research Context, Scope, Questions, Objectives and Assumptions

1. Introduction

‘Governance’¹, as a subject, received widespread attention in the domain of public administration of developed and developing countries at the end of the last century (Olowu 2003:501). Concurrently, international institutions such as the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the European Union (EU), and other donor agencies, have given more importance to the issue of governance - particularly for aid receiving countries. In addition to external pressure, the domestic political changes, including regime change to democratization, and the collapse of the pre-existing political order, have also led to a new articulation of governance that underlies new institutional arrangements (Cheung 2005:257). Governance is widely known as a magical potion to cure the challenging multidimensional problems confronting both developed and developing countries in the contemporary world (Khan 1997:1). These days, governance issues are not only occupied the central stage in the development discourse, but also considered as the crucial element to be incorporated in the development strategies of third world countries (Hye 2000:1). By definition, governance is understood as the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social resources for development (World Bank 1994).

Decentralization, people’s participation, democratization, accountability, partnerships (i.e. between the state, civil society, private sector and the NGOs), equity, empowerment, competence and efficiency, sustainability and transparency are some of the desirable criteria necessary in the evaluation of the quality of governance (World Bank 1994, Siddiqui 2000:1, Peters 2001, Leftwich 1994). Adding the adjective ‘good’ to governance (Siddiqui 2000) has given a sense of enchantment and almost become an obsession in the recent debates on

¹ ‘Government and governance are not synonymous terms, although both share goals oriented objectives. Government occurs when those with legally and formally derived authority and policing power execute and implement activities; by contrast, governance refers to the creation, execution, and implementation of activities backed by the shared goals of citizens and organizations, who may or may not have formal authority or policing power’ (Rosenau 1992 in Bingham, Nabatchi and Leary 2005:548). According to Richards and Smith (2002), government is bureaucracy, legislation, financial control, regulation and force. Governance, on the other hand, is defined by a growing use of non-regulatory policy instrument, which are proposed, designed and implemented by non-state actors working together with state actors (Jordan, Wurzel and Zito 2003).

international development and public administration in developing countries (Williams and Young 1994 in Jamil 1989). Given the above background, the present study aims to explain and analyze both the theory and practice of two major issues of governance: decentralized local governance and people's participation in the local development of Bangladesh.

A theoretical explanation of 'decentralization' and 'people's participation' is presented in the following chapter. Simply, decentralization is the opposite of centralization,² where centralization is a concentration of administrative and economic decision-making powers in a single head or centre (Bhattachan 1996:21, Kochen and Deutsch 1980). It is a continuous learning process and a wider part of national, political and economic change and it cannot be planned independently (Conyers 2003:115). Cheema and Rondinelli defined decentralization more clearly and precisely. According to them, "decentralization is the transfer of planning, decision making or administrative authority from the central government to its field organizations, local administrative units, semi-autonomous and parastatal organizations, local governments or non-governmental organizations" (Cheema and Rondinelli 1983:18). The term 'people's participation' is defined here from two broad perspectives: procedural and philosophical. According to the procedural perspective, it is understood as the involvement of local people in the decision-making and planning process of local level development programmes (Westergaard 1986, Uphoff 1987). Procedurally, it is also considered as a great source of empowerment for local people (Arnstein 1969). "Empowerment is considered as the deliberate nurturing and facilitation of individual or collective efforts that aim at increasing the feeling of influence and responsibility in managing and controlling lives in pursuit of enhancing personal and collective wellbeing" (Järvinen 2007:103). From a philosophical perspective, participation is essential for upholding democratic values and practices for sustainable development in developing countries (Leeuwis 2000, Ahmed 1987, Taylor 1995). Thus, participation is conducive to empowerment of local people and empowerment is a factor of sustainable development (Todaro 1989, Esman 1991 in Islam and Farazmand 2008:48).

Decentralization and people's participation are two of the major popular concerns of good governance that has touched multilateral aid agencies, social scientists and subsequently

² Simon identified two different aspects of centralization: first, decision-making powers may be centralized by using general rules to limit the discretion of the subordinate; and second, decision-making powers may be centralized by taking out of the hands of the subordinate, the actual decision-making function (Simon 1961:234). Hutchcroft distinguishes centralization and decentralization in this manner: that which exists in the administrative realm of civilian and military bureaucracies and that which exists in the political realm of legislature, elections, political parties, patronage systems, et cetera. (Hutchcroft 2001:24).

most of the third world governments in the last three decades. The impact and influence of people's participation is so widespread that a rapid growth of its efforts is evident in every specialized branch of development studies (Ahmed 1987). It is primarily seen in terms of empowerment of the disadvantaged, since powerlessness is considered the main reason for their exclusion from development benefits (Siddiqui 2000:8). The issue of participation has thus become one of the basic concerns of the development discourse in developing countries at least for two main reasons (Oakley 1991). Firstly, inadequate or lack of participation has been identified as one of the crucial factors that has thwarted and jeopardized the achievement of developmental goals in the past decades. Secondly, various studies strongly recommend the beneficial effects of participation in terms of successful implementation of development projects, and especially making development enduring. Thus, participation has become an essential part of the developmental process.

Concurrently, 'decentralization' is recognized as a major tool that can lead the process of democratization and development. Decentralization, as a policy, attracted support in the popular discourses of good governance since early 1990, as a means of people's participation and empowerment (Ishii, Hossain and Rees 2007). According to the UNDP, decentralization is the logical application of the core characteristics of good governance at the sub-national and local levels (www.decentralization.ws/srcbook/overview.pdf). It has also attracted more attention from developmentalists in regards to effective and efficient management of development projects and activities (Ahmed 1987, Cheema and Rondinelli 1983). Decentralization is considered as an efficient programme that can improve performance of local governance and efficient local government in that it can provide more responsive and innovative services and, in turn, can be held more accountable for operations by local voters than nationally provided operations (Guess 2005:217-218). The Human Development Report of 1991 states that decentralization has often been quite successful, encouraging local participation, increasing accountability of local officials, reducing costs and increasing efficiency, wherever it has taken place (Ramachandran 2002).

In addition, decentralization of power from the centre to the periphery is also considered as one of the best tools of good governance that empowers people by enlisting their participation in the developmental process. This bridges the market inequalities between different regions and people, and structures a society's progressively ordered socio-economic transformation. It is widely known that through decentralization efforts, local government,

being closer to the people at the grassroots level, can make optimal use of local resources to address their basic needs (Dahal 1996). Moreover, through decentralization, attempts are made to provide citizens with the opportunities to become involved in decisions about the allocation of major public goods (Saarelainen 2003:37). According to Rondnelli (1981), there are at least two major arguments for encouraging such decentralization programmes in developing countries. Firstly, decentralization is necessary to accelerate the pace, and spread the benefits of growth, integrate diverse regions in heterogeneous countries and utilize scarce resources more efficiently to promote development in poverty-stricken or economically lagging areas. Secondly, if the poorest groups in developing societies are to obtain a large share of government services, means must be found to decentralize public service delivery and involve beneficiaries in planning and decision-making at local levels. In addition, decentralized decision-making is crucial for effective organization in that it promotes internal competition and entrepreneurial talent (North 1990 in Guess 2005:218).

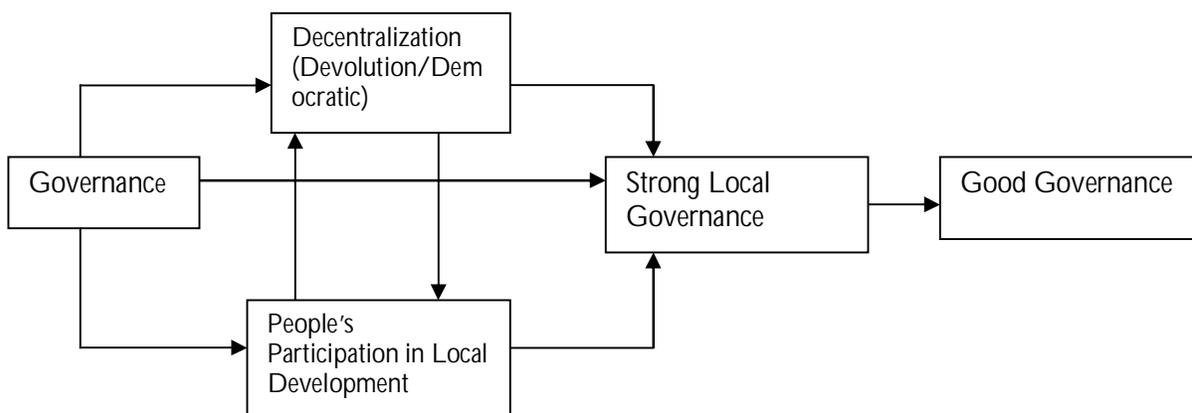
The emergence of these two concepts ‘decentralization’ and ‘people’s participation’ is not simply a coincidence. The two concepts are very much interrelated, interdependent and follow some common historical background. During the last three decades, the relationship became much closer. For example, in the areas where participation was identified as one of the goals of development, decentralization was considered as a means to achieve it. Again, when decentralization was seen as a reform package, participation was regarded as one of its vital objectives (Ahmed 1987). In order to properly implement development plans, the people who are essentially the real clients of the development operations, are to be involved at every stage of the development activities (Rahman 2001). To be effective, a development strategy must be based on the participation of individuals and community groups targeted for development. The most impoverished sectors of the society that are the focus of development strategies must not be passive beneficiaries, but active participants in developing, designing and implementing development measures (Bourgon 2004). Thus, decentralization of power from the centre to the periphery and people’s participation in the local development have been considered as the two basic tools for achieving national goals of development and ensuring good governance of developing countries (see figure 1).

In the world map, Bangladesh is widely known as a developing country. The Wall Street Journal index of economic freedom placed Bangladesh 143rd out of 157 countries in 2007, which is two slots down from the previous year (Hagerty 2007:180). According to the

US Congressional Research Report 2008, Bangladesh is placed at the 12th position among 177 countries in the index of 'failed and ineffective' nations, considering the factors such as weak political leadership, the armed forces, police, judiciary and public administration (The Daily Prothom-Alo, July 20, 2008)³. In order to overcome this situation, Bangladesh has become a test case for the international aid agencies, especially the World Bank and Western Donors. They believe that poor governance and weak institutions in Bangladesh have acted as significant constraints on administrative, economic and political development since the independence (Kochanek 2000:530). The international aid agencies, therefore, embarked upon a set of major reform programmes designed to strengthen political institutions in Bangladesh and ensure good governance based on decentralization and people's participation (ibid). However, it is claimed that these reform initiatives have been seriously encumbered due to administrative and political dysfunctions at the governmental level. Bangladesh, therefore, has been selected for this research, to uncover present challenges that currently prohibit decentralized local governance and people's participation in the local development.

³http://prothom-alo.com/archive/news_details_home.php?dt=2008-07-20&issue_id=989&nid=MTc1NTY, accessed on July 20, 2008

Figure 1: Decentralization and People’s Participation: Theoretical Framework



1.1 Bangladesh: at a Glance

Bangladesh emerged as an independent state in 1971. Although a new state, Bangladesh is an old country with a long recorded history dating back several thousand years. In its recent past, it belonged to Pakistan (1947-1971) and was known as East Pakistan. Prior to this though, different parts of the present Bangladesh territory had been under British rule (1765-1947). Mughal and other Muslim rulers, as well as Buddhist and Hindu rulers had taken over and ruled what is presently known as the country of Bangladesh. The culmination of generations of ubiquitous discontent with alien rule and the strong expression of desire for a better life through rapid social and economic development, was the nine-month long bloody war of independence in 1971 (Rahman 2001). Unfortunately, after more than three decades of self-rule and experimentations with a variety of development policies and a series of five-year plans, Bangladesh is still best known for its corruption, poverty and underdevelopment.

Compared to its size (147,570sq.km), Bangladesh has a large population (134.8 million), resulting in a high population density of 834 people per sq. km (BBS 2005:4). Bangladesh is expected to reach a population of 185 million by the year 2015 (UNESCAP 2002). It has been stated that the rapid population growth at a rate of 1.5% per year has taxed the natural resource base to the point of breakdown (Nabi 2003 in Sarker and Rahman 2007:98). It has already mentioned that Bangladesh is one of the poorest countries in the world, where the majority of its total population lives in the rural areas (Hossain 2001,

UNESCAP 2002) under conditions of extreme poverty, malnutrition, illiteracy, unemployment and low per capita income (470 US dollars) (BBS 2001). Available statistics indicate that the poverty situation has worsened since the country's independence in 1971 (Atiq 1986). Contemporary studies allege that Bangladesh is in a much worse situation than most of the developing countries of the world confronting poverty (Sarker and Rahman 2007:98). An increasing level of economic inequality, particularly in terms of landholding, exacerbates the extent of poverty in Bangladesh. Land is the main productive asset in rural areas, mostly concentrated in the hands of a minority. Less than 10% of rural households control over half of the agricultural land, while more than 50% of the rural households are practically landless. Landlessness in Bangladesh is quiet a distressing feature that constitutes both the cause and consequence of poverty. Evidence shows that landlessness is growing at a faster rate than that of population growth (Abdullah and Murshid 1986). Although some development indicators in terms of per capita income (life expectancy, education, and communication, among others) show that there has been considerable progress in the living standard over the last two decades, many studies claim that the poverty dimension in Bangladesh is manifold and is still widespread in the country (Sobhan 1998 in Sarker and Rahman 2007:100).

1.2 Research Context and Scope

The above-mentioned socio-economic features of Bangladesh clearly indicate the sub-human conditions of the rural inhabitants. Therefore, it is imperative to draw and implement comprehensive development programmes to cater to their needs. During the early 1960s, policy analysts pointed out that a top-down approach is fruitless in promoting development in rural areas (Khan 1983). The government accepted this, and plans were made for the creation of an independent, powerful and effective local government system. This has been increasingly recognized as a vehicle for improving the social and economic condition of those living in the rural areas. Since the independence, the country's decentralized local government has been identified and considered as one of the means of establishing, practicing and enhancing a democratic political system. Each successive regime highlighted local government as the vehicle through which people's participation in governance would be ensured.

Thus, decentralization has become a central policy agenda in Bangladesh state's approach to rural development, as people's participation has become the key approach to achieving decentralization goals. As a result, during the last three decades, successive governments have experimented with, and proposed a number of decentralization policies aimed at the proper management and implementation of local level development projects through effective and efficient people's participation. However, most of these attempts have resulted in an only partial solution to complex and multidimensional problems. It is observed that since 1971, local government systems in Bangladesh have come and gone, following the changes of government at the national level, and none of the systems was allowed to function long enough to become consolidated (Westergaard and Alam 1995:679).

The history of Bangladesh shows that each regime change was accompanied by a change in its local government structure (see Table 1). Each government's stated objective was to establish decentralized local governance. Nevertheless, it has been seen that the two crucial elements of self-governance, that is, devolution of power and the expansion of financial boundaries of local institutions, have not been initiated in the locally elected bodies. Therefore, the issue of people's participation remained limited to theory only (Khan 2000). Moreover, these attempts have produced neither substantive or sustainable development, nor any real participatory institutional base of local governance (Ahmed 1987). The evidence shows that the last three successive governments elected to office in 1991, 1996 and 2001, have all thus far notably failed to implement any elected governmental tiers outside the Union Parishad that was already in place (Parnini 2006:203). On the contrary, the democratic governments have empowered the Members of Parliament (MPs) and civil servants to make the local government more and more subservient to the central state. According to the UNDP,

Over the years the successive governments in Bangladesh, have simply twisted the inherited local bodies to suit their political needs. Due to frequent changes and experimentations, the institutions have suffered and could not take a permanent and viable shape. There is also a noticeable tendency towards building and expanding institutions rather hurriedly without going through necessary stages of development and maturation. (Aminuzzaman, 1993:259)

Table 1: Tiers of Local Government in Bangladesh

Mujib Regime 1971-1975 (Three Tiers)	Zia Regime 1975- 1980(Four Tiers)	Ershad Regime 1981-1990 (Three Tiers)	Khaleda Regime 1991-1996 (Two Tiers)	Hasina Regime 1996-2001 (Four Tiers Proposed)	Khaleda Regime 2001-2006 (Four Tiers)
<i>District Board</i> at District Level (dominated by the bureaucrats)	<i>Zila Parishad</i> (dominated by the bureaucrats)	<i>Zila Parishad</i> (dominated by the bureaucrats)	<i>Zila Parishad</i> (dominated by the bureaucrats)	<i>Zila Parishad</i> (dominated by the bureaucrats)	<i>Zila Parishad</i> (dominated by the bureaucrats)
<i>Thana Development Committee</i> at Thana Level (dominated by the bureaucrats)	<i>Thana Parishad</i> (dominated by the bureaucrats)	<i>Upazila Parishad</i> Election held in 1985 and 1990 (elected chairman)		<i>Upazila Parishad</i> (dominated by the bureaucrats, election was not held)	<i>Upazila Parishad</i> (dominated by the bureaucrats, election was not held)
<i>Union Parishad</i> First election held in 1973 (elected body)	<i>Union Parishad</i> Second election held in 1977 (elected body)	<i>Union Parishad</i> Election held in 1983-84, 1988 (Elected body)	<i>Union Parishad</i> Election held in 1992 (Elected body)	<i>Union Parishad</i> Election held in 1997 (Elected body)	<i>Union Parishad</i> Election held in 2003 (Elected body)
	<i>Gram Sarker</i> (selected body)			<i>Village Parishad</i> (Proposed not implemented)	<i>Gram Sarker</i> (selected body)

During the last three decades, academic professionals and researchers have conducted a number of studies on decentralization and people's participation. These studies mostly emphasized the structural aspects of decentralization and people's participation, rather than the contextual and situational aspects. On the other hand, both these issues have not been explored cohesively. Nevertheless, a few studies have emphasized the theory and practice of these issues using multiple techniques of qualitative research but detailed academic research with focal interest on the recent trends of decentralization and participation has not been conducted. More studies are needed from the contextual perspective, to identify and highlight the challenges of these two important issues of governance in Bangladesh. In this backdrop, the present academic work is a small initiative of this big responsibility, like the 'tip of the iceberg'. This study, thus, bears more importance and its findings would significantly

contribute to the contemporary landscape of public administration of developing countries in general, and Bangladesh in particular.

1.3 Research Questions

Bangladesh is a country with a tradition of over 100 years in decentralized local government structure. Bangladeshi history shows that there were only four major reforms in the local government system between the years 1870 to 1972. However, the independent Bangladesh has already applied seven reforms for establishing decentralized local governance (Aminuzaman 1993). Surprisingly, it has not been able to achieve the expected level of decentralization and people's participation, despite its efforts lasting more than three decades. Local government institutions in Bangladesh could not truly become firmly rooted at the grassroots level. As a result, it has failed to become a representative democratic local government institution for people's participation and sustainable development. In the context of Bangladesh, it is found that the rural people do not only constitute the majority, but also have been generally excluded from the local development decision-making and planning process (Siddiqui 2000). On the other hand, administrative and political corruption, bureaucratic intervention, elite domination, foreign aid dependency and extreme poverty are the familiar features of governance in Bangladesh. Therefore, it can be said that each successive government was more interested in capturing and establishing political control over the local governance institutions rather than reforming. Considering the above-mentioned situations, the central research question of the present study is "*Why, despite all the efforts is there no genuine decentralization policy and people's participation at the local development in Bangladesh?*" Moreover, the study has been trying to find the subject of decentralization and people's participation whilst bearing some specific questions in mind:

- a) What are the challenges of a decentralization policy and people's participation in local development programmes in the state of governance in Bangladesh?
- b) How has the policy of decentralization been initiated by the successive regimes in the political and administrative history of Bangladesh and under what circumstances?
- c) What were the objectives of these decentralization policies?

- d) How do local governance institutions perform and who gains the benefits of these institutions?

The study has been trying to answer the above questions following different strategies of qualitative research such as literature reviews, the questionnaire method, case study method and Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) method. This study, therefore, is both descriptive and analytical in nature.

1.4 Research Objectives

Following the above questions, the main objective of the study is to examine and analyze the degree of local government decentralization initiatives undertaken by the successive governments of Bangladesh and the nature of people's participation in the decision-making and planning process of the local level development projects. More specifically, the general objectives of this study are:

1. To review the main features of local governance decentralization programmes of each regime and examine the causes of their failure;
2. To analyze the performance of present local governance institutions;
3. To conduct case studies of local development projects to observe the scope, nature and constraints of people's participation in a comprehensive manner

Nowadays, it is widely believed that the traditional governmental framework alone is unable to meet the present challenges of developing countries. A number of documents, including the Global Strategy for Shelter up to the year 2000, the Habitat II Global Plan of Action in 1996, the Earth Summit of Rio in 1992 and the United Kingdom White Paper on International Development, place the governance approach in general, and the partnerships in particular, at the top of the policy agenda of the current development discourse of developed and developing countries (UNCHS 1993). Thus, any research can hardly be meaningful, particularly in the case of developing countries, if it fails to consider issues such as the nature of the state, the rural power structure, the way in which national and local politics operate and NGOs intervention in development.

Hadingham and Wilson (2003) clearly outlined that the way in which decentralization is initiated and the impact that it has, is heavily dependent on the context in which it takes place. According to Sarker (2006:1287), “despite the normative emphasis put forward by good governance exponents, decentralization has to be explained contextually.” Guess⁴ (2005:220) states that there are three types of constraints in the implementation of decentralization: (a) background support and local technical capacity; (b) cultural-institutional issues; and (c) technical design and sequencing issues. According to him, each constraint should be recognized by policy makers as a trigger point for review, course corrections, or possibly halting a decentralization programme (2005:220). Samaratunge, Alam and Teicher⁵ (2008) clearly identified contextual factors: political history, party politics, macroeconomic considerations, state tradition, role of International development Agencies (IDAs), and the state of civil society and how these factors play a dominant role in implementing New Public Management Reforms (NPMRs) in Asian countries like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Singapore. Therefore, this study aims to consider the above issues when attempting to respond to the aforementioned research questions and objectives.

1.5 Underlying Research Assumptions

The opponents argued that decentralization has, in fact, resulted in widespread corruption, elite domination, leakage and dissipation of development resources, and excessive political influence and expansion of central bureaucracy; instead of greater accountability, effective people’s participation in the decision-making and planning process of development programmes and better utilization of scarce resources (Siddiquee 2007, Aziz 2007, Mathew 2007, Ghatak and Ghatak 2007, Sarker 2006, Cheung 2005, Smoke 2003, Onyach-Olaa 2003, Crook 2003, Conyers 2003, Zafarullah and Huque 2001, Khan 1991, Huque 1986). Various studies have also found that the successive governments have introduced decentralization programmes for the sole purpose of permanently consolidating state power through mobilizing

⁴ See, for details, Guess (2005); he has discussed the constraints of implementing decentralization programmes from the developing countries’ perspectives.

⁵ See, for details, Samaratunge, Alam and Teicher (2008), authors, in their recent scientific article, who also identified how the contextual factors have played important roles in the successful implementation of NPM reforms in Asian countries.

the rural elites (Khan 2000, Thorlind 2000, Siddiquee 1996, Rahman and Khan 1997). To support such arguments the following assumptions have been formulated for investigation.

Assumption 1

It is widely known that decentralization is one of the most effective tools for participatory rural development whereby the members of various socio-economic and political groups are represented in the decision-making and the planning process (Islam 1989). According to USAID analysts, decentralization is necessary to increase the scope of decisions, and incentives available to local participants, as well as to build institutions and to encourage structure, and to focus and stabilize such participation (in Islam 1998). However, in situations of extreme asset disparities and extreme poverty, its opponents claimed that the rural elites enjoy the benefits of decentralization. Therefore, it can be assumed that although decentralization may shift the centre of political power and responsibility for development functions from urban to rural areas, it is unlikely to reverse the process of elite domination.

Assumption 2

People's participation has become a common issue of development discourse in Bangladesh (Siddiquee 1996). Contemporary scholars argue that no development scheme can make any headway or be meaningful without the support of the active participation of the people for whom it is designed. Consequently, a series of reforms has taken place during the last three decades, all aimed at widening the scope of grassroots participation. However, in a situation where multidimensional problems like illiteracy, lack of resources, inadequate degree of managerial ability, lack of skills and fatalistic attitudes are common phenomena, these reforms might not produce expected outcomes and these problems severely limit people's participation in local development in Bangladesh. Therefore, we may assume that people's participation does not only depend on decentralized local government, but also on other factors such as empowerment of rural people through proper education, capital building through welfare and the necessary technical support.

Assumption 3

Nowadays, it believes that the multidimensional problems of local and national government institutions cannot be solved without the cooperation of the country's various sectors (Olowu 2003). It is claimed that voluntary agencies (NGOs) offer opportunities for citizens to contribute funds, time, and skills to promote certain services and activities. As one of the poorest countries in the world, Bangladesh has inherited the colonial administrative structure, where the state is weak and decision-making power is centralized in a very complex bureaucratic system. In this situation, it can be assumed that the success of decentralization depends on the participation of local people and various sectors and catalysts such as civil society, the private sector and NGOs.

1.6 Limitations of the study

The interest of decentralization and people's participation has dramatically increased in the contemporary discourse of governance and good governance in the developing countries. The researcher was inspired to work on these issues, as their concern has also been mounting too in the recent discourse of public administration in Bangladesh. The present study is the outcome of that inspiration. However, this study has some limitations: theoretical and methodological. Reviewing the literature concerned, the key concepts of this study, such as governance, good governance, decentralization and people's participation are defined without following any particular theory. Although following a specific theory for this study could have proved better. But it is true that selecting a particular theory is challenging and difficult in social science research. However, the way the key concepts have been defined might be useful for the researchers to have a broader understanding on the issues.

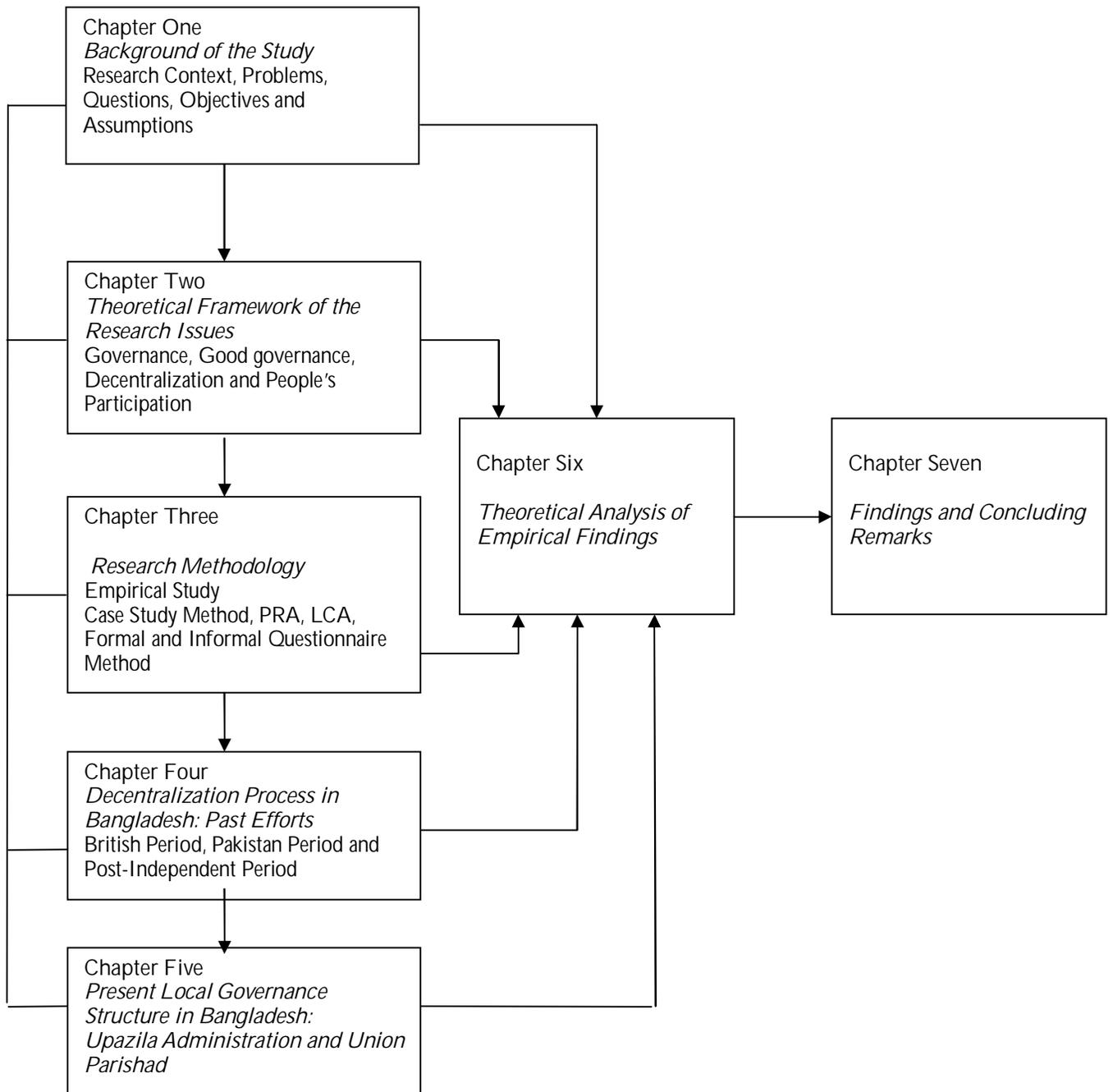
The selection of methodology is always quite a difficult task in social science research. The methods of social research are interrelated and interdependent. Although this research has been conducted in a scientific manner, it is only based on the different techniques of qualitative research, such as interviews, case studies, Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), et cetera. Limited quantitative data has been used, therefore methodological limitations can be found in this study.

Another weakness of this study is that it was carried out within only one Upazila among 476 Upazilas in Bangladesh. One might argue that the findings of this study cannot be generalized for the other parts of the country. However, rural Bangladesh is commonly known and perceived as relatively homogenous in terms of economic conditions, social situation and physical environment. The most unique feature of the country is that it does not have any major ethnic divisions. Hence, it can be said that the findings and observations of this study can be extended to analyze the failure of decentralization and people's participation in other parts of Bangladesh. In addition, a large volume of information has been collected from secondary sources to supplement the empirical evidences. The findings thus may be useful for the analysis of decentralization and people's participation in any developing countries.

1.7 Structure of the Study

This study is presented in seven chapters. Background of the research, that is, context of research, research problems and central questions, objectives and underlying assumptions are presented in chapter one. Chapter two deals with the theoretical framework of the key issues of the study: governance, good governance, decentralization and people's participation. Chapter three presents a detailed theoretical description of the methodology used in this study. The process of decentralization in Bangladesh is discussed elaborately from a historical perspective in chapter four. Chapter five gives a short description of the current local government structure of Bangladesh, with special reference to the Upazila administration and the Union Parishad. A theoretical analysis of the empirical findings of the research is presented comprehensively in the chapter six. Major findings and conclusions of this study are presented in the seventh and final chapter. The whole structure of this study is shown in figure 2.

Figure 2: Structure of the Study: at a Glance



Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework of Key Concepts

2. Introduction

Due to tremendous economic growth, global capitalism and remarkable breakthroughs in information technology, the issue of governance has gained more significance among practitioners of public administration, international aid agencies and member countries of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (Jreisat 2004, Brinkerhoff et al. 2002, Peters 2001, Tiwari 2002). Other important factors that have also motivated recent interest in governance are the widespread failure of economic adjustment programmes, the misuse of public funds, the corruption in many developing countries, the collapse of centrally planned economies, centralized bureaucracy, the fiscal crisis of welfare states, as well as the role of the state in the high performing East Asian economies and the recent Asian financial crisis (Ahrens 2002 cited from Jreisat 2004, Huque 2003, Salamon 2002). Thus, the term 'governance' has become the hottest issue in the discourse of contemporary political and global development (Ara and Khan 2006:91).

The fundamental distinction between the terms 'government and governance' has briefly been highlighted in the beginning. To compete with the present global economy and to achieve the millennium development goals, the word governance rather than government is frequently used by the contemporary scholars and aid agencies. It is, because, the role of the states have been changed. The traditional public administration has been started to moving towards the theories of cooperation and networking (Frederickson 1999 in Nabatchi and O'Leary 2005:548, Hye 2000:3). It is now recognized that the governments of the developing countries with its public sector alone have failed to provide state services or to reach to the mass people and to solve the problems such as poverty, illiteracy, unemployment et cetera. It is further argued that though government has failed it is not as a result of its inherent weakness, nor because it was inevitable, but mostly due to wrong or inadequate use of its resources (Hye 2000:16). The emerging role of the third sector (NGOs) in poverty alleviation in many developing countries in Asia and Africa is now recognized in the global economy. As a result, third sector occupies the central and dominant position in the discussion of governance and good governance (Turner and Hulme 1997, Clark 1990). According to Turner and Hulme

(2001), although the third sector is not a part of the state, are not primarily motivated by commercial considerations or profit maximization, are largely self-governing, and they rely on voluntary contributions to a significant degree (Sarker 2003:528).

According to the contemporary development perspective, the market and the private sector have crucial roles to play in good governance and development. The international aid agencies categorically emphasized for widening the scope of the private sector and reducing the role and scope of the public sector over the years. They believe that the private sector is more efficient than the public (Sarker and Rahman 2007). The proponents of privatization argue that efficiency, service delivery, performance and results are better achieved by private sector than the public sector (Cook and Kirkpatrick 1988, Hope 1996 in Islam and Farazmand 2008:39). A recent study shows that the civil servants of Bangladesh generally believe that private sector positively affects national development- economically, socially, politically and administratively (ibid:50). Thus, the private sector is viewed as an important tool in ensuring decentralized local governance and people's participation in local development of the developing countries.

Likewise, no one can isolate the role of the civil society in the current world affairs, both at national and international levels. Civil society⁶ is considered as a dominant player of the governance landscape. It can make in promoting and nurturing responsive governance both at local and national levels. It is claimed that strong civil society is crucial for good governance and is also considered as one of the prerequisites of democracy. Civil society organizations provide check and balances on the state power and the private sector and they channel people's participation in economic and social activities (Rahman and others in Sarker and Rahman 2007:97). According to Monshipuori (1998), by allowing 'pluralism in associational life' weak government like Bangladesh can be become stronger (Parini 2006:195). Therefore, in order to attain the responsive decentralized governance and to ensure people's participation in local development, state should encourage civil society and include it as an actor to work with other organs of the state. The restructuring policies of the World Bank, millennium development policies of the UNDP and other international aid agencies led to a planned reduction of the role of the state of developing countries, and strongly suggested to create space for the NGOs, the civil society and the private sector (Hossain 2001). Good

⁶ Civil society is considered as a 'space' independent of the state and the market (Cohen and arto 1992 in Parini 2006). According to Salamon and Anheier (1998) it is in terms of activities that are undertaken for the public good by groups or individuals in the space between the family, the state and the market (ibid).

governance, the recent popularly known phenomenon in the literature of international aid agencies, has become a precondition for aid receiving countries. To ensure the characteristics of good governance, these international institutions are constantly pressurizing the developing countries to incorporate third sector and civil society organizations with the mainstream of the central and local government. Therefore, the theoretical dimension of governance issues such as decentralization and people's participation have been changed significantly during the last few years. It is now believed that the degree of success of decentralization policy and people's participation would significantly depend on how effectively the other actors involve to the governance system of the state.

Given the above background, the aim of this chapter is to provide a clear theoretical understanding of key words in this study, such as *Governance and Good Governance*, *Decentralization* and *People's Participation*. For the sake of clarity, the chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section describes the theoretical aspects of governance and good governance and their relation to decentralization and people's participation. The concept of decentralization is reviewed broadly in the second section. The theoretical overview of people's participation is presented in the third and final section.

2.1 'Governance' and 'Good Governance': A Theoretical Discussion

Introduction

In spite of the recently expressed interest in governance, the term is not new, but rather old (Peters 2000). Contemporary public administration scholars believe that the current course that governance is taking is the ultimate product of the public administration. Public administration is a strong vehicle for conducting state activities and expressing the values and preferences of the citizens, the communities, and the entire society (Bourgon 2007:7). It is also argued that public administration is essential for the development and civilization of all nations (Frederickson and Smith 2003). Recent decades have been marked by tremendous changes in global politics. The rise of third sectors in developing countries, the changing role of the international aid agencies towards the aid receiving countries, and the significance of people's participation in development through decentralization, are enforcing practitioners to re-

theorize public administration, in order to adapt and meet the demands of the changing environment of both developed and developing nations. On the other hand, excessive political influence and bureaucratic control over local governance have been blamed for conditions of massive poverty, corruption, economic stagnation, lack of political stability, confused priorities, chaos, and violation of human rights of citizens and non-citizens alike (Jreisat 2004). Werlin states that the primary reason for the wealth and poverty of nations is its governance, and not its natural resources (Werlin 2003 in Jreisat 2004).

2.1.1 Governance: Present Theoretical Debates

Governance as a theory is still growing in the domain of public administration. Due to its varying nature, in the past three decades it has been under huge debate as a theory and practice among the practitioners and international aid agencies. Before presenting some particular definitions of the concept, the theories of governance shall firstly be briefly reviewed, that is, how this concept has been addressed as a theory, and its relation to decentralization and people's participation. Criticising the traditional public administration, Gary Stoker (1998) discussed the theory of governance under five broad propositions. These five propositions are: 1) governance refers to a set of institutions and actors that are drawn from, but also beyond the government; 2) governance identifies the blurring of boundaries and responsibilities for tackling social and economic issues; 3) governance identifies the power dependence involved in the relationships between institutions involved in collective actions; 4) governance is about autonomous self-governing networks of actors; and 5) governance recognizes the capacity to get things done which does not rest in the power of government to command or use its authority. These propositions provide a broader canvas to the changing world of government and emphasize on power decentralization, as well as on local self-government and involvement of all sectors in the governance process.

Gye Peters (2001) presented four renowned models of governance in his famous book, 'The Future of Governing'. These models are: 1) *The Market model*, according to which the private sector can provide better services than the traditional public sector; 2) *The Participatory state model*, which is different from the market model as it puts more emphasis on greater individual and collective participation by segments of government organizations that have been commonly excluded from decision-making; 3) *The Flexible government model*,

according to which the government should be contextual and flexible. In order to face environmental challenges and changes, and to meet the people's demands, appropriate and suitable policies should be made by the government; and 4) *The Deregulated government model*, which focuses on less bureaucratic control, more managerial freedom and recommendation based on societal needs and collective decision-making. In fact, Peters' models have paved the way for viewing governance from broader perspectives, and decentralization and people's participation have been placed in high priority in achieving the goals of governance in developed and developing countries of the 21st century.

Werlin (2003) highlights governance from a different viewpoint. Firstly, he critically discusses Heady's theories of governance, that is, organizational theory, cultural theory and structural-functional theory. Then he proposes his own theory, which is known as the 'political elasticity theory of governance.' He highlights the following limitations of Heady's theories: *Organization theory* is a finely ordered system of super-ordination and subordination, in which higher offices supervise lower ones; *Cultural theory* is a semi-feudalistic system of government, which fails to incorporate politics into the system of governance; proponents of the *Structural-functional theory* have failed to differentiate political hardware (characteristics of the structure) from political software (the quality of social relationships essential for effective performance). To overcome the limitations of Heady's theories of governance, Werlin proposed the political elasticity theory, which, to him, attempts not only to reduce the confusion and tension of public administration, but also to link comparative administration to comparative politics and development studies (Werlin 2003). He basically emphasized governance as an integrated system between the soft form and the hard form of political power, and decentralization of power by various methods that affect the behaviour of wider circles of citizens, participants and subordinates.

Despite interpretational and contextual differences, the above theories of governance are closely related, as they focus on a more people-oriented, integrated and decentralized local governance system. However, it is quite difficult to judge which theory would guarantee and ensure the promotion of people's participation and decentralization of developing countries like Bangladesh. According to White and Killick (2001), there is no accepted theory of poverty that establishes a hierarchy of causes, nor is there any widely adopted model that might serve the same purpose (cited from Werlin 2003). Jamil Jreisat (2004:1006) more precisely states that for any national governance system to succeed in an increasingly

interconnected, rapidly changing world, it needs to develop a governance system based on a learning and decision-making process, in order to be able to grow and adapt to citizens' expectations, as well as to operate effectively across shifting boundaries. He further argues that in fostering reform activities, public institutions must rely on their own internal learning process, while adapting to international standards and practices (Jreisat 2004). Farazmand (2002) very succinctly expresses this idea as "thinking globally and acting locally." Therefore, considering Jreisat's arguments, this study has followed Werlin and Peters' theories of governance, to assess the existing nature of the decentralization and people's participation in Bangladesh. Following the above discussion, the definitional aspects governance is reviewed in the following section.

2.1.2 Governance: Definitional Aspects

Despite the numerous attempts made in recent years to define the term 'Governance,' the definition of the concept remains controversial (Olowu 2002). Nonetheless, there has not been any agreement on a particular definition. In the 14th century, the term governance was utilized and defined, as an action, method, or function of governing (Halfani 1994). For Landell and Serageldin (1991), governance denotes "how people are ruled, how the affairs of the states are administered and regulated, as well as a nation's system of politics, and how this functions in relation to public administration and law." The following useful definition was given by John Graham, Bruce Amos and Tim Plumptre (2003). For them, "governance is the interaction among structures, processes and traditions that determine how power and responsibilities are exercised, how decisions are taken, and how citizens and other stakeholders have their say." Therefore, it is about power, relationship, and accountability: who has the influence, who makes the decisions, and how decision-makers are held accountable.

For Halfani and his colleagues (1994), governance refers to a "system of government concentrating on effective and accountable institutions, democratic principles and electoral process, representation and responsible structures of government, in order to ensure an open and legitimate relationship between the civil society and the state." For them, the relationship between the civil society and the state is crucial, as this differentiates the study of governance from the study of government. The nature of the relationship between the civil society and the state is the most important feature in this definition. They believe that credibility and

legitimizing of government can be achieved through power decentralization and sharing, people's participation, accountability, transparency, and responsiveness. Similarly, the OECD (1995) definition of governance includes "public administration and the institutions, methods and instruments of governing and also incorporates relationship between government and citizen (including business and other citizen groupings) and the role of the state."

Two different major schools are popularly known in the current debate of governance discourse, which are International Aid Agencies and some European scholars. Both these schools have defined governance from their own perspectives. The World Bank defined governance as, "the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development" (World Bank 1994). They highlighted the administrative aspects of governance, addressing civil service reform, public sector downsizing, service delivery and contracting out, capacity building and institutional strengthening (World Bank 1997 cited from Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff 2002). Moreover, the World Bank researchers addressed governance from three dimensional perspectives (Kaufman et al. 2000) namely: a) the process by which governments are selected, held accountable, monitored, and replaced; b) the capacity of the governments to manage resources efficiently and formulate and implement and enforce sound policies and regulations; and c) the extent of participation of the citizens in the affairs of the state.

The proponents of the other school, like Jan Kooiman (1993) and other scholars define governance as the forms in which public or private sectors engage in problem solving, not separately, but in conjunction. This school, therefore, views governance as forms of multi-organizational action rather than involving only state institutions (Kooiman 1993). In fact, they have redefined the role of the state and distinguished governance from the traditional public administration. The UNDP (1997) adopted a similar approach to define the notion of governance. According to the UNDP, governance is the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority in managing a country's affairs on all levels. This perspective of governance comprises the mechanisms, processes, and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations, and mediate their conflicts (Hyden 2001).

From the above discussion, it clear that all definitions are closely related and mutually reinforcing. Despite narrow differences in its meanings, the proponents of governance emphasize three important issues, specifically, decentralization, a people-oriented governance

system, and enhancement of people's participation through networking governance. Therefore, it can be said that as a system, governance is rarely static and it should be politically neutral, locally reliable and contextually acceptable. The outcomes of governance cannot be assessed by its theoretical aspects and romantic assumptions only. As Ahrens states, there is no evidence that either democratic or non-democratic states are better suited to initiate and consolidate policy reforms effectively and to promote sustained economic development (Ahren 2002 cited from Jreisat 2004, see also Archibugi 1998). The outcomes of governance in any country have to be considered by its results. Good performance is inescapably related to satisfaction of criteria such as the participation of people in decisions affecting them, the capacity to aggregate and coordinate various interests in order to bring about consensus on policies, and managing of institutions and regime structures with efficiency, accountability and transparency (Jreisat 2004). Here, for this particular study, the term governance is measured based on the above statement. In addition, from a broader perspective, it is considered as a continuous process of the state; a participatory form of governance whose existence and effectiveness depend on how it perceives the needs and demands of the locality, promoting people's participation in the decision-making process and decentralizing power to the local institutions. The above is comparatively true because the main concern of public administration is the cooperative group behaviour of different actors of the state (Simon, Smithburg and Thompson 1974:4). The term 'governance' has received extra flavour in the current discourse of development in developing countries by having the term 'good' added to it. 'Good Governance' entered the vocabulary of development administration and international development cooperation in the 1990s. Therefore, it is much wiser to briefly clarify the term, since it has become an official issue on the agenda of international aid agencies. Moreover, decentralization and people's participation have been considered as important tools of good governance in the contemporary development discourse of developing countries, such as Bangladesh.

2.1.3 Good Governance

The term good governance became a strongly desired value (Zafarullah and Huque 2001) and an obsession of current debates on development in developing countries (Williams and Young 1994 cited from Jamil 1998). In fact, it has become a common phenomenon in the literature of international aid agencies as a precondition for aid receiving countries during the last three decades (Rhodes 1997). Therefore, the term 'good governance' is reviewed in this section from the donors' perspectives, that is, how the literature of aid agencies perceives good governance. However, an overview of the literature provides various interpretations of the term. In general, good governance is associated with efficient and effective administration in a democratic framework. It is equivalent to purposive and development-oriented administration, which is committed to improving the quality of life of the people and enlarging the scope of people's participation in the decision-making process of development. In short, it is a citizen-friendly, citizen caring, responsive, decentralized local government system, an autonomous political society, an efficient and accountable bureaucracy, strong civil society and a free media (Huque 2001, Minocha 1998, Stowe 1992).

The Human Development Report of 2002 observes that there is no single answer to the question of what is good governance. However, the factors that make institutions and rules more effective, such as transparency, participation, responsiveness, accountability and the rule of law, may be regarded as the characteristics of good governance. The world leading institutions such as the World Bank (1994, 1997), UNDP (1997, 2002), and the OECD (1995) have become the great proponents and frequent users of this concept, especially for the aid receiving countries, to promote democracy, decentralization, accountability, transparency, rule of law and people's participation in their development.

The World Bank (1997), from its lending experience in many developing countries, has realised that good governance is central in creating and sustaining an environment which fosters strong and equitable development and its essential complements to sound economic policies. The World Bank has also identified a number of aspects of good governance, such as political accountability, freedom of association and participation, rule of law and independence of the judiciary, bureaucratic accountability, freedom of information, a sound administrative system, partnership between the government and the civil society organisations, et cetera (Blunt 1995). These aspects have been considered as preconditions in ensuring good

governance in aid receiving countries. The OECD uses the World Bank's views of good governance and defines it similarly.

The UNDP's apprehension of good governance is fairly similar to that of the World Bank. According to the UNDP (1997), good governance means equal participation of all citizens in decision-making. It is transparent, accountable, and equitable and it promotes the rule of law. It allows the local people and the most affected to be heard when decisions are being made and when resources are handed out. In fact, unlike other aid agencies, the UNDP emphasizes more on identifying the basic characteristics of good governance. These characteristics are: participation, power decentralization, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, consensus orientation, equity, effectiveness and efficiency, accountability, strategic vision, et cetera. Although the UNDP has given the above characteristics of good governance, it believes and recommends that the societies should determine which of the core characteristics are important to them, considering their contemporary (both internal and external) socio-economic and political situations. The UNDP (2002) further argues that good governance advances sustainable development for three reasons: 1) enjoying political freedom and participating in the decisions that shape one's life are fundamental human rights; 2) it helps to protect people from economic and political catastrophes; and 3) it can promote sustainable development by empowering citizens to influence policies that promote growth and prosperity and reflect their priorities (cited from Hope 2005).

It needs to be pointed out from the above discussion that the notion of good governance is still developing in terms of its definition, its ethical connotations and its usefulness (Kruiter 1996). Therefore, the meaning of good governance cannot be confined in a timeframe. Cultural heritage, traditional values, environmental realities, political culture, and economic structure have to take into account in defining and determining characteristics of good governance for a particular country such as Bangladesh. Decentralization and people's participation, among others, are two of the major concerns of the current buzzword of good governance. Contemporary literatures suggest that good governance would not be attained in any developing countries unless and until power is transferred from the centre to the local institutions and people's participation is ensured in local development (Hye 2000, Siddiqui 2005, Haque 2003, Huque 2003a, Peters 2001, Fung 2006, Dibia 2003, Schneider 1999). The theoretical aspects of decentralization and people's participation are presented in the following sections.

2.2 ‘Decentralization’: A Theoretical Debate

Introduction

In recent years, the term ‘decentralization’ has been frequently used and widely recognized as a means of implementing and promoting both democratic and developmental objectives across the developing nations (Eaton 2001, Aziz and Arnold 1996, Hutchcroft 2001). However, it is a complex phenomenon and often confused with the terms of development, participation and democratization (Smoke 2003). There is a common tendency among the proponents of decentralization to understand it as a sound and appropriate development strategy. These attempts date back to the 1950s and 1960s, when a group of writers propagated a new theory known as development administration. As a result, the concept of decentralization has emerged as one of the most important topics in the discourse of public administration and management (Pollitt 2005, Hadiz 2004, Cheema and Rondinelli, 1983), and occupied the centre stage of policy experiments in a large number of developing and transition economies in Latin America, Africa and Asia (Bradhan 2002:185).

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) cites new factors that have emerged and accelerated the decentralization process in Asian countries. First and foremost is globalization, which has increased the people’s awareness and civic consciousness and has created more opportunities for participation in governance. Second is the impact of economic and social changes in the last 20 years in the forms of liberalization, privatization, and market reforms which have brought forth new demands on central governments, prompting them to reassess their limited capability to deliver services. Lastly, the change in the perception of donors in support of better governance, which has linked effective governance with local participation and autonomy, has contributed to such reforms (<http://www.decentralization.ws/srcbook/overview.pdf>, accessed on 13-10-2004).

On the other hand, many western scholars have described the notion of decentralization as a doctrine of development by relating it to the concepts of planning, management and participation (Smith 1971, Hart 1972, Uphoff et al. 1979, Conyers 1985, Cheema and Rondinelli 1983, Rondinelli and Nellis 1986, Hyden 1983). Thus, the rhetoric of decentralization entails many positive notions such as popular participation, democracy, development, coordination, integration, responsiveness, accountability, as opposed to the negative notions of centralization (Turner and Hulme 1997, Ahmed 1987). This section

attempts to analyze the term decentralization from various perspectives such as economic, administrative, intergovernmental and neo-liberal democratic/new institutionalists' viewpoints. It is divided into three parts. The first part analyzes and describes the meanings of decentralization from the perspective of current academic debates in public administration of developed and developing countries. Different forms of decentralization are highlighted in the second part. The third part examines the rationale of decentralization as a major doctrine of development and people's participation of the most developing nations. Major critics of decentralization are also discussed in the third part.

2.2.1 Decentralization: A Conceptual Framework

Despite its growing popularity, the concept of decentralization is still dubiously used not only in the field of bureaucracy, but also in the academic world of both developed and developing nations. The various interpretations given to 'decentralization' during the last three decades are now fairly familiar to scholars and public administration practitioners. It is also widely accepted that these interpretations are closely linked to the context in which they are considered a public policy (Hye 1985:1, Shrestha 2000:58, Conyers 1985:22). In fact, the issue of decentralization lies at the very heart of the dominant contemporary theories of public administration and management (Pollitt et al. 1998). Fesler (1965) described that

It appears that decentralization is a simple term. Yet the appearance is deceiving and often leads to simplistic treatments that generalize too broadly, starting from a doctrinaire position of predetermining answers to concrete problems, or concentrating on a single phase of decentralization to the exclusion of others. Decentralization is a term of rich conceptual and empirical meanings; it can designate static fact and dynamic process; and it can also refer to pure ideal-type and to moderate incremental change. (in Lundquist 1972:1)

Parsons (1961) defines decentralization as sharing part of the governmental power of a central ruling group with other groups, each having authority within a specific area of the state. Mawhood (1987) defines decentralization oppositely, as the devolution of power from the central to the local government. To him, deconcentration as administrative decentralization, which is the transfer of responsibility from central to local government. Mawhood further expresses his view that decentralization must be distinguished from

deconcentration. He claims that in the implementation of a deconcentration policy, the local government does not control its own budget, and a separate legal existence is granted authority to allocate substantial material resources for a range of different functions.

Smith (1985) clearly defines decentralization as the delegation of power, from top level to lower level, in a territorial hierarchy, which could be from the government within the state, or offices within a large organization. Smith further emphasizes the 'transfer of power' as a central issue of decentralization, although this transfer of power is not necessarily limited to within the governmental structure, but also to within other organizations, possibly private ones. Cheema and Rondinelli (1983) criticize Smith's view, and they have more clearly stated that decentralization is the transfer of planning, decision-making or administrative authority from central government to its field organizations, local administrative units, semi-autonomous and parastatal organizations, local government or non-governmental organizations.

Cheema and Rondinelli's definition of decentralization seems to be more comprehensive than others. This is because it does not only include government organizations, but also non-government organizations. Rondinelli himself has made it clear that he has paid more attention primarily to the technical, spatial and administrative aspects of decentralization. He believes that improvement in these aspects will immediately lead to the organizational development needed to provide a foundation for the participation in complex economies and policies (Rondinelli 1990). However, Rondinelli's view of decentralization seems to undermine the territorial dimension of state power. The main constraint of Rondinelli's definition is that it tends to exclude the transfer of power from the central to the peripheral state (Conyers 1986). Its attention is limited to territorial, as opposed to functional decentralization, thus excluding the transfer of authority from central to peripheral organizations at the national level, as for example, from a government department to a parastatal agency (Conyers 1985:22-23). Additionally, Rondinelli and others quietly ignore the other important dimension of decentralization, specifically that of people's participation in state decision-making (Mohan and Stokke 2000).

The Development Assistance Committee (DAC) describes decentralization as one of the best means of promoting and enhancing local participatory development and as the best art of good governance. According to the DAC report, decentralization might promote efficiency, equity and political participation (OECD 1997). The UNDP also sees decentralization as a

way of enabling people to participate more directly in the governance system and can help empower people who were previously excluded from decision-making (UNDP 1997). These statements are basically related to the devolutionary⁷ form of decentralization that promotes direct participation and accountability, autonomy and periodic free elections. Since devolution involves the transfer of power to civil society, the subject is highly political and therefore, contextual aspects need to be taken into account before implementation.

Decentralization does not always meet the expectations concerning increased participation for all. This is greatly reflected in perceptions and its uses in different states and institutions. The World Bank Report (1997) states that the clearest and most important principle of decentralization is that the lowest level of government should provide public goods and services. Furthermore, it is claimed that decentralization should ensure the high quality of services (World Bank 1997). In this perspective, decentralization is administrative, rather than political.

However, it is insufficient to focus only on the technical and administrative aspects of decentralization. There is a lot of diversity that exists within a country in relation to wealth, gender, caste or class, ethnicity et cetera, something that influences the country's power structure. Any kind of decentralization of the responsibility for planning and/or implementation alters the balance of power; it changes the extent to which particular individuals, groups or organizations influence both what is planned and what actually happens, and therefore the extent to which they benefit from development (Conyers 1990). Due to this, a transfer of the points of power to lower levels will have political consequences on civil society.

From the above notes, it can be said that the theoretical debate of the concept of decentralization discussed here can be broadly classified into two approaches; which are *democratic decentralization*⁸ and *the liberal developmentalist approach*. Smith can be regarded as one of the pioneers in the democratic decentralization approach. According to this approach, decentralization policies highlight local government as the institutional vehicle for promoting local democracy through political education, training in leadership, political

⁷ Devolution is another form of decentralization, which has also been discussed in the second section of this part.

⁸ Democratic decentralization means a meaningful authority devolved to local units of governance that are accessible and accountable to the local citizenry, who enjoy full political rights and liberty. It helps building popular participation into local governance, and thus the local government becomes more responsive to citizens' desires and more effective in service delivery (see for details Blair 2000:21).

stability, local consultation and more effective public accountability (Siddiquee 1997, Smith 1985). The proponents of the liberal developmentalist approach are Maddick, Cheema and Rondinelli, Uphoff and Esmam, Conyers, Mawhood and UN agencies. This approach highlights the importance of decentralization for better organizational performance in providing goods and services effectively and efficiently, and in fostering rural development through direct participation of the people at the grassroots level.

Finally, in view of the above discussion, two major fundamental dimensions can be identified as pillars to define decentralization. They are: decentralization as a means, and decentralization as a philosophy. As a means, decentralization is a process of transferring functions and powers from central to local government units considering the socio-economic and political context of the localities. As a philosophy, it signifies the sharing of powers and functions between and among various levels of government and other public and private organizations as per the legal constitutional provision and other legal conditions. Therefore, in this study, the concept of decentralization has been considered both as a means and as a philosophy. The degree of authority and power that is transferred by the central government to the local institutions depends on the various types of decentralization, which are commonly known in the literature of public administration as forms of decentralization. Different forms of decentralization are discussed in the following text.

2.2.2 Different Forms of Decentralization

Decentralization can take a variety of forms depending on the nature of the government, local institutions and local context as well. The degree of authority to be transferred from the centre to the periphery also determines the selection of the forms of decentralization. Different forms of decentralization are found in the contemporary public administration literature. However, the most popularly used and known forms of decentralization have been given by Cheema and Rondinelli. They have given four major forms of decentralization: deconcentration, devolution, delegation and privatization (Cheema and Rondinelli 1983).

Deconcentration

Deconcentration refers to the handing over of administrative or managerial responsibility to the field level civil servants of sub-national units within the line ministries or other sector specific national agencies (Martinussen 1997, Turner and Hulme 1997, Adamolekun 1991). Simply, it can be defined as the transfer of authority and responsibility from the central level government organizations to their respective field level agencies. This form involves the redistribution of administrative responsibilities among the different levels of central government. It is often regarded as the shifting of the workload from the headquarters to the field staff, without transferring the final discretion. Under this arrangement, the local governance, that acts as the central government agent at the local level, enjoys and exercises a position of conferred authority. In fact, less significant powers are transferred to the local arms of the central government by administrative means, rather than by a legal arrangement (Conyers 1981).

Therefore, deconcentration units enjoy only limited discretion. Turner and Hulme argue that deconcentration can pursue the objective of technical efficiency leading to greater effectiveness, but not to popular participation (Turner and Hulme 1997). Mawhood (1987) has given the same argument. To him, “the hope of cracking open the blockages of central bureaucracy curing managerial constipation and stimulating the whole nation to participate in national development plans ends in chaos and bankruptcy.” Therefore, it is often considered to be the weakest form of decentralization. However, the basic features of deconcentration can be summarized (Shrestha 2000:66-67) as follows:

1. the deconcentrated agencies are located at the field level as agents of central government without autonomous status;
2. the relationship between the central government and deconcentrated agencies is based on the theory of the hierarchical pattern of power relationships;
3. the deconcentrated agencies are not free from the government’s central command system; and
4. the deconcentrated agencies have an intra-organizational pattern in their power relationship with the central government agencies.

Devolution

Devolution is recognized as one of the most important forms of decentralization. It is seen as the ideal form of decentralization, as it combines the promise of local democracy with technical efficiency (Turner and Hulme 1997). Devolution initiates the transfer of power to locally constituted political bodies (Siddiqui 2005, Wahhab 1996) with their own discretionary authority (Martinussen 1997). Riggs (1964) highlighted devolution as an alternative form of decentralization. To him, devolution is the full responsibility for policy determination in regard to specified subjects transferred to the recipient of authority (Riggs 1964:342). Maddick (1963) defined devolution as “the legal conferring of powers to discharge specified or residual functions upon formally constituted local authorities.” Smith (1985) called this a democratic form of decentralization. Rondinelli, McCullough and Johnson (1989) recognized it as an organizational form of local government, which should be given autonomy and independence and be clearly perceived from a separate level, over which central authorities exercise little or no direct control (cited from Rahman and Khan 1997). Devolution uses legal means to create or strengthen sub-national units of governments outside the direct control of central government (Rondinelli and Neills 1986). Conyers (1987) defined devolution as the legal transfer of significant power, including law-making and revenue-raising, to the locally elected bodies. Cheema and Rondinelli (1983) identified the following five fundamental characteristics in explaining the pure form of devolution:

1. powers are transferred to autonomous units governed independently and separately without the direct control of the central government;
2. the units maintain control over a recognized geographical area;
3. each unit enjoys corporate status and power, enabling it to secure its own resources and to perform its functions;
4. devolution implies the need to develop local government institutions; and
5. it is an arrangement of a reciprocal, mutually beneficial and coordinative relationship between central and local government.

It can be said from the above characteristics that the local governments have recognized geographical boundaries, corporate status and are considered as separate levels of government. Thus, devolution is politically the most significant form of decentralization, as it

provides an opportunity for effective participation of the local people in the local level decision-making process, through the local government institutions elected by them. The effectiveness of devolution does not only strengthen the local government system as a whole, but it also promotes people's participation in local development, which finally paves the way for good governance in developing countries.

Delegation

Delegation is another form of decentralization, which implies the transfer or creation of local authority to plan and implement decisions concerning specific activities or a variety of activities, within special boundaries of an organization that is technically and administratively capable of carrying them out without direct supervision by a higher administrative unit (Cheema and Rondinelli 1983). Some major characteristics of such delegation can be identified as follows (Shrestha 2000:67-68);

1. the delegation organizations are autonomous bodies with operational freedom;
2. delegation is used as a means of removing some important functions such as providing goods and services to the people, from normally inefficient government bureaucracies;
3. delegation is occasionally used as an instrument for maintaining public control over some highly profitable or valuable resources; and
4. it is the entrustment of powers and authority to be exercised by subordinate staff.

Thus, compared to deconcentration, delegation involves a transfer of power, although ultimate power remains in the hands of the central government. For example, many developing countries utilize this practice in the creation of boards, authorities, specific functions like water supply, power generation and distribution, agricultural development, rural development and road transport. Therefore, allowing the operational authority to be exercised by semi-autonomous agencies outside the normal ministerial structure is considered decentralization in the form of delegation. Hyden (1983) has described the expansion of parastatals in post-independence Africa. He holds the view that the combination of a strong desire to gain control of the national economy and the absence of strong pressure for extension of the private sectors from an indigenous capitalist class, have paved the way for an inordinate

expansion of parastatals, particularly in commercial and manufacturing sectors in many African countries (Siddiquee 1997:28).

Privatization

In many countries, the process of decentralization has been facilitated by the transfer of some planning and administrative responsibilities of public function from the government to private or voluntary agencies. Parallel organizations of the state, such as trade associations, professional organizations, civil society, political parties, cooperative and other voluntary agencies, shoulder responsibilities, normally performed exclusively by the government. Thus, privatization is the shift of certain responsibilities from the public sector to the profit and non-profit oriented private sectors, commonly known as NGOs, and the greater interaction between the private and public sectors (Siddiqui 2000:6). From the macro perspective, it implies a wide range of policies and actions to encourage private sector participation in public service provision and to eliminate or modify the monopoly status of public enterprises (Rondinelli and Kasarda 1993, Vickers and Yarrow 1988 in Sarker 2003:527).

It has already mentioned that the private sector and NGOs play a significant role in the rural and local development of many developing countries in Asia and Africa (Hossain 2001, Wamai 2004, Dhakal 2002, Orjuela 2003). They operate schools, health clinics, et cetera, and also provide production facilities to small-scale farmers. In fact, foreign and local NGOs of various types are now in operation in the third world on a much larger scale than ever before. Aid agencies strongly argued that private sector enterprises can play a crucial role in fostering economic growth. They also argue that non-government organizations have a potentially important role in achieving equitable development, and thus many governments in developing countries have pursued a privatization and deregulation policy (Asaduzzaman 1999, Cook and Kirkpatrick 1988 in Siddiquee 1997). As a form of decentralization, privatization can take place on two levels: the central and the local level. The functions and responsibilities of the state can be transferred by the central government or by the local government institutions to the private sector or other parallel organizations (Shrestha 2000:69).

These four types of decentralization have different effects on the organizational structure, the degree of transferred power, the amount of people's participation and the preconditions for successful implementation. Devolution seems to be the most acceptable form

of decentralization, as long as one is concerned with the notions of ‘democratization’, ‘debureaucratization’ ‘participation’ and ‘partnership’ in the development process (Rahman 1997:517). In fact, the devolutionary type of decentralization has been placed in immense priority, with the advent of the new paradigm of governance in both developed and developing nations. Good governance proponents state that devolution promises a more effective, efficient and accountable government system, it ensures people’s participation in the local development process, and it improves the quality of services delivered (Sarker 2006:525). However, it is found that most of the developing countries in Asia and Africa apply a combination of these four forms of decentralization in their state policy (Cheema and Rondinelli 1983). Their government structure is a combination of all these four forms, with an emphasis put on the difference in the degree of authority transferred to the decentralized units depending on the country, region and society. However, Conyers has identified five basic factors⁹ that should be considered during the selection of a decentralization policy. These factors are important because they are more local, cultural and contextual in nature. They might help the state policy makers in selecting the right form, for the right place, at the right time.

The above presents the overall critical view of the concept of decentralization, and its different forms are presented. However, the discussion of decentralization will remain incomplete without discussing its rationale, importance and drawbacks. So the following texts deal with its justifications and limitations in the light of developing countries.

2.2.3 Why Decentralization? Advantages and Disadvantages

The contemporary scholars and international aid agencies have referred to this concept using many attractive adjectives and phrases, such as ‘very fashionable idea’, ‘the latest fashion’, ‘fashion of our time’, ‘global and regional phenomenon’, ‘art of good governance’, ‘democratic decision-making’, ‘popular participation’, ‘power to the people’, ‘local democracy’, et cetera (Hadiz 2004, Conyers 1983, Manor 1999, Hutchcroft 2001, Siddique 1997, Dahal 1996). Its proponents believe that in meeting the diverse and complex challenges of the state, decentralization appears to be the solution (Huque 1998). Additionally, it leads to

⁹ 1. The functional activities over which authority is transferred; 2. the type of authority or powers which are transferred in respect to each functional activity; 3. the level(s) or area(s) to which authority is transferred; 4. the individual, organization or agency to which authority is transferred at each level; and 5. the legal or administrative means by which authority is transferred (Conyers 1986 in Siddiquee 1997).

good governance practices involving wider people's participation in development (Hadiz 2004).

As a result, in the last three decades, decentralization has emerged with a colossal list of rationale and justifications (see for details Furtado 2001, Turner and Hume 1997, Smith 1985, 1988, World Bank 1994, Conyers 1985, Rondineilli 1990, 1986). The proponents of democratic decentralization approach highlighted the benefits of decentralization on both the national and local level of governance (Siddiquee and Hulme 2000, Turner and Hulme 1997). According to them, elected local government is an institutional vehicle for political education across the nation, political stability, social equality, responsive public services and more effective public accountability (Smith 1985). Smith, one of the liberal democratic theorists, believes that decentralization has by no means been only associated with solutions to the problems of industrial or post-industrial states. It has also proved an indispensable ideological concept throughout the Third World and is widely regarded as a necessary condition for social, economic and political development (Smith 1988:214, Smith 1985).

Advocates of the liberal developmentalist approach highlight that decentralization can increase the number of public goods and services, as well as the efficiency with which they are delivered. It can also enhance rural development through the active participation of local people in local development programmes (Sarker 2006, Ryan 2004, Siddiquee 1997, Pollitt et al. 1998). On the other hand, the neo-institutionalist literature emphasizes reasons for decentralization being a global policy, in the following manner;

...the advent of multiparty political system in Africa; the deepening of democratization in Latin America; the transition from a command to a market economy in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union; the need to improve delivery of local services to large populations in the centralized countries of East Asia; the challenge of ethnic and geographic diversity in South Asia; as well as ethnic tensions in other countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ethiopia, Russia) and attempts to keep centrifugal forces at bay by forging asymmetrical federations; and the plain and simple reality that central governments have often failed to provide effective public services. (Litvack 1998)

The demand of decentralization has become universal and considered to be an integral part of the contemporary neo-institutionalist lexicon, especially those aspects intended to draw

greater attention to social development (Hadiz 2004, Smith 1985). According to The World Bank, decentralization potentially leads to greater prioritization of local needs in development policy, as it encourages greater accountability of those who govern local communities. It can also enhance political stability, and even national unity (in Hadiz 2004).

Moreover, the public sector management theorists consider decentralization a method of revitalizing managerial motivation and improving service to the recipients or users. They have highlighted the rationale of decentralization in this manner: 1) it reduces the gap between the top and lower level management of the organization; 2) saves money; and 3) gets closer to the customer (Common et al. 1992). Thus, the notion of decentralization has been reflected in the public sector management in the last two decades with more delegation and a more decentralized style of management.

Referring to the above discussion, we can summarize the arguments of decentralization in the following manner (Siddiquee 1997:49-53);

- 1) It is widely recognized that the success of any development project or programme depends on its actual information, data and problems. Particularly for local level development in developing countries, it is pivotal to recognize the local problems and demands in order to make proper plans for their management. Decentralized administration helps to collect detailed and accurate information about local conditions (Huque 1989). Its proponents claim that decentralization of development functions to lower levels increases the knowledge and sensitivity of local bureaucrats and local representatives to local problems and demands. Local problems are easily visible to these representatives since they work at a local level (Siddiquee 1997). Furthermore, the demands of the local people are easily identifiable since the representatives come in close contact with them. Thus, it helps to gather reliable and up-to-date information, locate the genuine problems of local areas, better identify the project and make optimal use of local resources (Siddiquee 1997, Smith 1985, Inghman and Kalam 1992, Dahal 1996).
- 2) The international aid-giving agencies and OECD member countries are deeply concerned with people's involvement in development activities, both on the planning and implementation levels. It is argued that decentralization could be the best instrument for ensuring and increasing people's participation in development. In addition, by decentralizing development activities to the local administration and local

government, the local people can be involved with their greater commitment and support (Smith 1985, 1988, Conyers 1985, Siddiquee 1997, World Bank 1997, Huque 1989). Therefore, Rondinelli (1981) states that decentralized local governance is needed to institutionalize the participation of local people in development planning and management (in Siddiquee 1997).

- 3) Decentralization policy reduces the gap between the state and the local people. It leads to a more effective and efficient delivery of state services, reducing cost and saving time (Common et al. 1992). It is thus viewed as a way to make government more effective and efficient (Bradhan 2002: 185). According to the proponents of the public choice theory, public goods and services can be provided more efficiently and economically by smaller decentralized local bodies (Siddiquee 1997, see for details Martinussen 1997, de Jong, Loquai and Soiri 1999). They also argue that decentralized local governments could compete among themselves with regard to the relative quality of goods and services. The relative costs thereby allow citizens to choose between residence in one local government jurisdiction with high quality goods and services and low costs, rather than in another with the opposite set of characteristics (Adamolekun 1991).
- 4) Decentralization advocates state that it helps to improve the access of dependent groups to bureaucratically provided services. It is also believed that the deprivation of the poor will only be alleviated if they can be mobilized at the local level by transferring the necessary power and authority (Smith 1988). Thus, it is seen as a defence against arbitrary power on the one hand, and on the other hand, it ensures the government's and its activities' accountability and responsiveness to the people (Hadiz 2004, Siddiquee 1997, Smith 1985, and Adamolekun 1991). Smith (1985) believes that local democracy provides more opportunities for accountability and control than field administration, public corporation or appointed agencies. Thus, decentralization reduces the distance between government representatives, people's representatives and local inhabitants. It also facilitates the creation of an environment and opportunity for participatory forms of local governance.
- 5) Decentralization is considered as one of the best mechanisms to improve coordination, supervision and monitoring of development activities undertaken by different agencies (Litvack et al. 1998, Siddiquee 1997, Turner and Hulme 1997, Ingham and Kamal

1992). Hence, its advocates have also vividly considered it on administrative grounds. They identified a number of administrative advantages of decentralization, such as overcoming the limitations of centrally-controlled planning, cutting through red tape, making officials knowledgeable on local needs and demands, leading to equality in government resource allocation, developing administrative capability among local government institutions, raising trust¹⁰ and building a good relationship between the public officials and the local people, and lastly, increasing governmental responsiveness and accountability (Adamolekun 1991, Huque 1989, Kochen and Deutsch 1980). According to Pollitt, “it can bring managers closer to service users and increase the organizations’ responsiveness to the latter. It can increase the motivation of staff, many of whom can more readily identify with their local organization than with a remote head office” (Pollitt 2005:378).

- 6) The proponents of decentralization also claim that although the direct effects of decentralization are political and administrative, the ultimate goal of this programme is to improve the living standards of local people through equitable benefit sharing. According to the UN, decentralization helps local inhabitants to get involved in politics, and that political involvement strengthens their material position (UN 1979 in Siddiquee 1997).
- 7) Smith (1985), the leading proponent of decentralization, strongly supports that democratic decentralization contributes to the establishment of social harmony, community spirit and political stability. Indeed, political stability has been considered as a prerequisite for development in developing nations, where it has also become a necessary pre-condition for foreign investment. Therefore, its advocates believe that decentralization paves the way towards greater representation of various geographically based political, religious, ethnic, and tribal groups in the development process (Siddiquee 1997). Greater representation strengthens local government and educates local people on political values, which in turn help them select leaders they can trust. Trust in government is considered a fundamental condition for political stability (Smith 1985). According to Rondinelli (1981), decentralization can increase

¹⁰Harisalo et al. defined trust as a capital. To them, trust capital is like a tree from which financial and human capital sprout. They defined it as a conviction, resulting from human interaction, on how people relate to other people, their immediate circle and society. Human interaction, to them, describes all those diverse situations in which people encounter each other, organize their relations and solve their problems (see Harisalo et al. 1997).

political stability and national unity, by giving groups in different regions of the country the ability to participate more directly in the development process, thereby increasing their chance in maintaining the political system (in Siddiquee 1997). In addition, it is believed that 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 autonomy (Bradhan 2002:185).

The above discussion summarizes the fact that the proponents highlighted the notion of decentralization as one of the significant tools in participatory forms of governance needed to meet the multidimensional challenges in developing nations. However, the opponents of decentralization argue that it is not a panacea. According to them, not all government functions can, or should be decentralized. In addition, the size and the context of the country and its territory should be taken into account before introducing a decentralization policy. The arguments of liberal developmentalist practitioners have been criticized by its opponents in the following manners (see Siddiquee 1997:54-55, Hutchcroft 2001);

- liberal developmentalist writers have failed to recognize the importance of contexts within which decentralization takes place; and
- they have failed to take into account the political economy of Third World countries.

Opponents claim that the liberal developmentalist writers have considered illusionary views of decentralization; its theoretical decoration is romantic and lucrative, while its practical implementation is difficult. Decentralization, according to its opponents, has primarily failed to grasp the realities of developing societies in terms of their socio-economic structure, the relationship between groups and classes and the mechanisms through which power is exercised (Siddiquee 1997). They also argue that the liberal developmentalist writers have highlighted power from an extremely narrow perspective. According to this approach, power has been distributed equally and people enjoy its benefits without conflict. Its opponents, though, claim that the equal distribution of power within a society is a dreamy, unrealistic view of liberal developmentalist writers. Smith, being an advocate of the decentralization policy, himself criticized such an impractical view of democratic decentralization. To him, power does not only reside in the right to vote and the ability to influence local policy-making. He believes that gaining access to the state's decentralized

services depends on various factors other than voting, even if that right is exercised (Smith 1985).

Critics claim that, in most developing societies in Africa and Asia, the concept of class still plays a dominant role; therefore, the elite may be the only ones benefiting from the results of decentralization. Caiden and Wildavsky (1974) express their suspicion that decentralization makes projects more vulnerable to pressure from the local elite, and when responsibility is dispersed these elite benefit from it (in Siddiquee 1997). Alavi (1972) fairly expressed the same picture in his model of 'overdeveloped administration' in post-colonial countries based on his scholarly work in Bangladesh and Pakistan. He states that the power of the military-bureaucratic oligarchies in mediating the competing interests of the indigenous bourgeoisie, the landed classes and metropolitan interests in post-colonial societies (Smith 1988:124). Based on the experiences in India, Smith also explained that, "political alliances and support depend on economic status and particularly on access to land. The political power of the poor and landless is reduced by their dependence on wealthier landowners and patrons, instead of being increased with the right to vote. Economic dependency is so pervasive that it is generally useless for a political rival to try to win support by intervening on behalf of badly treated tenants. Those who command the community's resources, mainly land, have access to the sources of power other than a patron-client¹¹ relationship with those economically dependent on them" (Smith 1985:192). As Fesler describes, "in villages and towns where economic and social power is strongly hierarchical, the local government tends to be dominated by landlords and other possessors of economic power. Although they do not hold government offices but effectively influence the choice of officials... Being a conservative government, village government is likely to resist opportunities to expand its services to the common people and increase regulation of those having economic power or traditionally high status" (in Smith 1985: 200).

People's participation in local development is one of the important motives of decentralization that is seriously criticized. Its opponents maintain that decentralization does not guarantee the transfer of power to the local people, nor does it necessarily mean the

¹¹ Powell (1970) clearly defines the term patron-client. To him "the patron client relationship - an exchange relationship between roles - may be defined as a special case of dyadic ties involving a large instrumental friendship in which an individual of higher socio-economic status uses his own influence and resources to provide protection and/or benefits for a person of lower status who, for his part, reciprocates by offering general support and assistance, including personal services, to the patron" (in James 1972:178).

increase of people's participation (Olowu 2003:41). Rather, it may mean that control has shifted from a national to a regional centre, which ultimately generates new bureaucratic elite that could guard their vested interests more egotistically than their central predecessors (Mullen 1985 in Siddiquee 1997). On the other hand, most critics argue that, based on the African nations' experience, governments often tend to be reluctant to decentralize authority to subordinate units, as they consider it to be a threat to their position (see for details Olowu 2003, Crook 2003, Smoke 2003, Conyers 2003)¹². The ruling parties in developing nations are unwilling to lose their control over the local government. They restrict their activities to political gestures and consequently no fundamental changes take place in local governance (Siddiquee 1997, Turner and Hulme 1997).

Empowerment of local people through political education and training is another important argument of decentralization, but it has not gone unchallenged. The opponents heavily criticize the issue of empowerment through decentralization. They strongly argue that decentralization is a policy that disables rural inhabitants, making them inactive and dependent rather than empowered. It is also argued that decentralization creates new political elite throughout the country, who serve the interest of the central government. In addition, this new group makes the local institutions defunct by taking control over them. According to Griffin, "power at the local level is more concentrated, more elitist and applied more ruthlessly against the poor. So, greater decentralization does not necessarily imply greater democracy, let alone 'power to the people'. It all depends on the circumstances under which decentralization occurs" (Griffin 1981 in Sarker 2006:1288).

2.2.4 Conclusions

From the above discussion, it seems that there is a huge and never-ending debate on the issue of decentralization. Its proponents strongly argue that decentralization is the foremost condition for the development of developing nations. In their perspectives, decentralization ensures people's participation, political education and training, equal distribution of resources, and promotion of equity through strengthening local institutions. They also argue that decentralization increases efficiency, effectiveness and responsiveness of central-local

¹² Why the central government is reluctant to transfer authority to the local governance institutions is clearly illustrated by these authors from the African perspective in their recent scholarly writings.

government, ensures efficient delivery of services, builds trustworthy and friendly relationship among the government representatives, people's representatives and the local people, increases the flow of information from the bottom up and enhances the responsiveness of the central government to citizens' demands and priorities. On the other hand, the opponents heavily criticize the proponents' arguments of decentralization. To them, its proponents' views look good and attractive in theory, but in practice, they are very difficult to execute in the developing world where class issues play a dominant role. They believe that decentralization creates opportunities for the local elite and bureaucrats to grasp the local power and destabilize local institutions. They also argue that the benefits of decentralization go to the hands of the elite and they abuse it for their narrow interest (see for details Crook 2003:86). The central government always uses this local or regional elite class for its own political interest, rather than the people's interest, by giving them power and authority in the name of decentralization.

Thus, it can be said that decentralization is a continuous learning process (Conyers 2003:116), and neither the views of its proponents, nor its opponents' views are good or bad. The arguments of its proponents are not absolutely right; on the other hand, views of its opponents are not absolutely wrong either. It is strongly believed that the success of any policy or strategy depends on the social, economic and political factors of the country where it occurs (Vartola 2000:3). However, for this study, decentralization is considered as an important tool of empowering local governance institutions, local people and their participation in the local development in Bangladesh. Therefore, bringing administration close to the people is a very relevant rationale and logical demand for decentralization in Bangladesh (Westergaard and Alam 1995:681).

2.3 People's Participation: Theoretical Analysis

Introduction

The institutionalization of people's participation is the cornerstone of the current magic word, 'good governance' (Kim, Halligon, Cho, Oh and Eikenberry 2005, Roberts 2004). It has become development orthodoxy (Cornwall 2003, Burde 2004) and an essential part of good development practice for developing nations, NGOs and International Aid Agencies

(Williams, Veron, Corbridge and Srivastava 2003). Currently, it is believed that the multifaceted challenges of the 21st century demand a complex account of the ways in which those who are subject to laws and policies should participate in making them (Fung 2006). Thus, the provision of such people's participation is essential for enhancing public trust and confidence in governing institutions, formulating state policies based on people's needs, and receiving necessary feedback on people's reactions to such policies (Haque 2003). Although the issue of people's participation has gained momentum in the public administration and international development discourse in the last three decades, it is not entirely new; in fact, it is as old as human civilization (Haque 2003). The scholars and practitioners of public administration and political science have considered people's participation in local development as an important part of democracy and development of developed and developing countries (Roberts 2004, Blair 1981, Cooper 1983, Faience 1977, White 1994, Grote et al. 2002, Peters 2001, Schumpeter 1976, Maldon et al. 2004, Raman 2000).

Historically, the terms 'people's participation', 'decentralization', 'development' and 'democracy' are very much interdependent and interrelated, and share some common historical background. At first glance, it may come into view that people's participation is a simple phenomenon, but in practice it is not (Cooper 1983). Historically, the popular concept of people's participation has suffered from ambiguity in definition and lack of concrete quantified achievements (Ahmed 1987). However, the aim of this section is to analyze the theoretical background of 'people's participation'. Merits, demerits and different forms of people's participation are also presented reviewing the contemporary literatures.

2.3.1 Definitions of People's Participation

As it has already been mentioned above, historically, the concept of participation suffers from the ambiguity of the given definitions (Ahmed 1987). Therefore, it is particularly difficult to establish a universal definition of people's participation. An understanding of the concept is often assumed. In practice, development actions are often based on different perceptions of participation. This is partly due to the lack of experience in effective participation practice, especially in developing nations (Meldon, Kenny and Walsh 2004). However, the literature gives a series of definitions of participation, some of which are presented below.

The fundamental thought of participation is to provide local people with a significant role and decision-making power at the local level development programs that are designed for them and which affect their lives. Blair (2000) has identified a consequential formula of participation, that is, participation leads representation, representation ensures empowerment and empowerment gives benefits for all. Finally, all these improvements reduce poverty and enhance equity among all groups which leads the country to the way of good governance (Blair 2000:23). Therefore, participation could be defined both “an end and a means” (Oakley et al. 1999, Ahmad 1998). As an end, participation lifts the marginalized people from being excluded to being in partnership with public institutions. As a means, it enables them to contribute to the development in a meaningful manner for their own, as well as for society’s benefit (Ahmad 1998).

Thus, participation can be seen from two parameters, efficiency and empowerment. In the efficiency parameter, participation is considered a tool for achieving better project outcomes. In the empowerment parameter, it is a process that enhances the capacity of individuals to improve their own lives, and it facilitates social change to the advantage of disadvantaged or marginalized groups (Cleaver 1999). Therefore, reversing power is the key to participation. As Cernea (1985) argues, putting people first in development projects is not just about organizing people, but it means empowering them to be social actors rather than passive subjects, and to take control over the activities that affect their lives. Sherry Arnstein (1969) has given a useful and influential definition of participation. Although it is quite old, it still possesses great value, especially for those who see participation as a tool of empowerment. He states that participation is a categorical term for citizen power which means redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future. He further argues that, it is the strategy by which the have-nots determine how information is shared, goals and policies are set, tax resources are allocated, programmes are operated, and benefits like contracts and patronage are parcelled out.

International aid agencies defined people’s participation in a more comprehensive manner. According to the UNDP (1993), participation means that people are closely involved in the economic, social, cultural, and political process that affects their lives. This definition highlights people’s participation as a continuous social process where people may have complete or partial control over it. The World Bank interprets the issue similarly. On the other

hand, for the OECD, people's participation stands for partnership, which is built upon the basis of dialogue among the various actors, during which the agenda is jointly set, and local views and indigenous knowledge are deliberately sought and respected. This implies negotiation rather than the dominance of an externally set project agenda. Thus, according to the OECD, people become active actors in the development process instead of only being beneficiaries (OECD 1994).

Following the above perspective, people's participation can also be defined as the active involvement of local people in the planning and implementation of development projects/programmes. Westergaard (1986) defines people's participation as collective efforts to increase and exercise control over resources and institutions on the part of groups and movements of those hitherto excluded from control. In this regard, another quite useful definition has been given by Norman Uphoff (1987), who described people's participation as a process of involvement of a significant number of persons in situations or actions that enhance their wellbeing. This definition highlights people's participation as a kind of local autonomy in which people discover the possibilities of exercising their choice, and thereby becoming capable of managing their own development.

The above definitions emphasize the procedural meanings of people's participation. However, it has its own philosophical meaning. Philosophically, participation is necessary for upholding democratic values and practices in the modern polity, which in turn creates an objective situation for the continuity of sustainable development (Leeuwis 2000, Ahmed 1987, Taylor 1995). It enforces the rights of free speech, free assembly and free press, as those who take part in debates and discussions share information and beliefs (Taylor 1995). Thompson (1970), states that people should be considered the best judges of their own interests (the principle of citizen autonomy), and on the other hand, people are capable of making better political and social decisions than they do at present (the principle of citizen self-improvement) (in Fagence 1977). Milgrom's and Roberts's (1992) statement could be more suitable in this regard. In their words "people are fundamental first in the sense of being indivisible decision makers and actors; it is people - not organizations - who actually decide, vote or act. The actions of individuals determine the behaviour and performance of organizations. Furthermore, only the needs, wants, and objectives of individuals have ethical significance... Finally, it is the people who ultimately create and manage organizations, judge

their performance, and redesign or reject them if this performance is found inadequate” (quoted from Kivistö 2007:14).

The above definitions of people’s participation make it crystal clear that it is quite difficult to find a universal definition of the term, as it still remains a chameleon with its characteristics of elusiveness (Quddus 1994). The scholars, practitioners and aid agencies have defined and explained the concept from various perspectives such as, means and ends, efficiency and empowerment, procedural and philosophical, et cetera. Therefore, it can be said that participation is contextual and its meanings differ from person to person, society to society and nation to nation. Shirley White’s opinion might be most appropriate in this regard. She opines that the term participation is kaleidoscopic; it changes its colour and shape at the will of the hands in which it is held. It can be very fragile and elusive, changing from one moment to another. It can be seen from the eye of the beholder and shaped by the hand of the power holder (White 1994:16).

2.3.2 Criticisms of People’s Participation

Although the term people’s participation has become a mandatory part of the current development jargon, it has not been left without criticism. The majority of the criticism is derived from two different perspectives: procedural or technical, and contextual. Cooke and others criticize participatory techniques as they produce homogeneous local viewpoints where none previously existed; they privilege certain voices whilst suppressing others; and they are insufficiently sensitive to the form of knowledge they produce (Cooke and Kothari 2001). Some argue that local knowledge produced through participatory techniques is problematically authentic, but necessarily reflects and is mediated by project-community and intra-community power relations (Mohan and Stokke 2000, Mosse 2001). The other criticisms are contextual, suggesting that developing nations are poor candidates for citizen participation initiatives, for various reasons such as being costly, lack of representation and authority, difficulty of diffusing citizen goodwill, the power of wrong decisions and persistent selfishness (see Table 2) (Irvin and Stansbury 2004: 58-60).

Table 2: Disadvantages of People’s Participation in Government Decision-Making

	Disadvantage to citizen participation	Disadvantage to government
Decision Process	Time consuming Pointless in decision is ignored	Time consuming Costly May backfire, creating more hostility towards government
Outcomes	Worse policy decision if heavily influenced by opposing interest groups	Loss of decision-making control Possibility of bad decision that is politically impossible to ignore Less budget for implementation of actual projects

Source: Irvin and Stunsbury 2004

Opponents also claimed that participation can be a destabilizing force in that it can unbalance existing socio-political relationships and threaten the continuity of development work. The elitist theorists argue that the rulers are rational and more informed, whereas the masses are apathetic in political and government matters and incapable of taking an active and responsible role in society. They emphasize that the masses have the right to vote for representatives who can make decisions for them (Schumpeter 1976). Some criticize that the proponents of people’s participation have failed to properly address the issues of power and power sharing (Biggs 1995 in Cleaver 1999). This applies especially to the post-colonial countries of Asia and Africa, where bureaucracy still plays a strong role and democratic political system is uncertain.

However, the term has received a growing recognition among the scholars and practitioners of public administration, international aid agencies and OECD member countries that decision-making without people’s participation is ineffective and no development project can do without it (White 1994; King, Felty and Susel 1998). Moreover, it is now widely accepted that the reform package, such as the decentralization programme of developing countries, will not be successful and able to bring positive changes in the fate of the local people, unless they participate as actors rather than beholders. The people’s participation process is not a simple task, but a rather difficult one, due to its complex nature and the varying contextual realities of the developing nations. As a result, different modes or forms of

people's participation are found in the development literatures. Some of these forms are briefly discussed in the following text.

2.3.3 Forms of People's Participation

Due to a lack of a commonly accepted definition and its quantitative indicators, it is difficult to present universally accepted forms of participation. As a result, different forms of participation exist in the literature of public administration and development. Arnstein (1969) has given eight influential and comprehensive levels of participation in her article, "A Ladder of Citizen Participation." These levels are manipulation, therapy, informing, consultation, placation, partnership, delegated power and citizen control. Here, Arnstein recognizes the last three levels, that is, partnership, delegated power and citizen control, as a real form of people's participation that she named 'citizen power'. The United Nations Capital Development Fund¹³ (1996) has also suggested eight levels of participation: manipulation, information, consultation, consensus building, decision-making, risk-sharing, partnership and self-management. Pretty (1995) has proposed seven different and more detailed levels of people's participation: manipulative participation, passive participation, participation by consultation, participation for material incentives, functional participation, interactive participation and self-mobilization (cited from Meldon, Kenny and Walsh 2004). Elaine Sharp (1990) has given four major comprehensive guidelines of people's participation in the development activities of local government, which are: open government policies, information gleaning devices, neighbourhood organization activity, and co-production strategies (cited from Dibie 2003). Although, scholars have given different forms or levels of participation, they all emphasize the degree of people's participation at different levels.

Whatever the forms of participation may be, the application of theoretical participation in developing countries like Bangladesh needs to be understood in terms of its existing contextual realities. The Bangladesh experience shows that the decision-making power is highly centralized in the bureaucratic system (Zafarullah 1992, Anisuzzaman 1985); on the other hand, development policies and planning emphasize to ensure people's participation in

¹³ http://www.seemotion.org/download/undp_guidebook_on_participation.pdf (accessed on 10.4.07).

local development programmes (Alam, Huque and Westergaard 1994, Siddiquee 1997, Aminuzzaman 1993). This situation has been named as the context less nature of public administration in post-colonial countries (Haque 1996).

Therefore, the above-mentioned forms have a narrow scope in examining and ensuring people's participation in developing nations, but may be a good theoretical guideline for the policy makers. However, from the experiences of developing countries, Uphoff (1987) mentions four major areas of participation (see figure 3), which are distinct from one another, even though they are interactive and have effects on one another (in Asaduzzaman 2000). They are:

- Participation in decision-making, identifying problems, formulating alternatives, planning activities, allocating resources, et cetera;
- Participation in the implementation of carrying out activities, managing and operating programmes;
- Participation in economic, social, political, cultural or other benefits, individually or collectively; and
- Participation in evaluation for its outcomes and feedback purposes.

Uphoff's model has been further elaborated to identify two sets of indicators in participation: opportunity indicators and prevalence indicators. Opportunity indicators refer to the aspects of programme structure and strategies that determine the total level of access available to the public (such as, location of the basic unit, degree of decentralization, linkages, incentives, etc.). The prevalence indicators try to show the actual process of people's participation in the various four stages of development programmes, that is, participation in decision-making, implementation, benefits-sharing, and evaluation (Asaduzzaman 2000:99-102, Ahmed 1987:16-17). These four stages are discussed in the following.

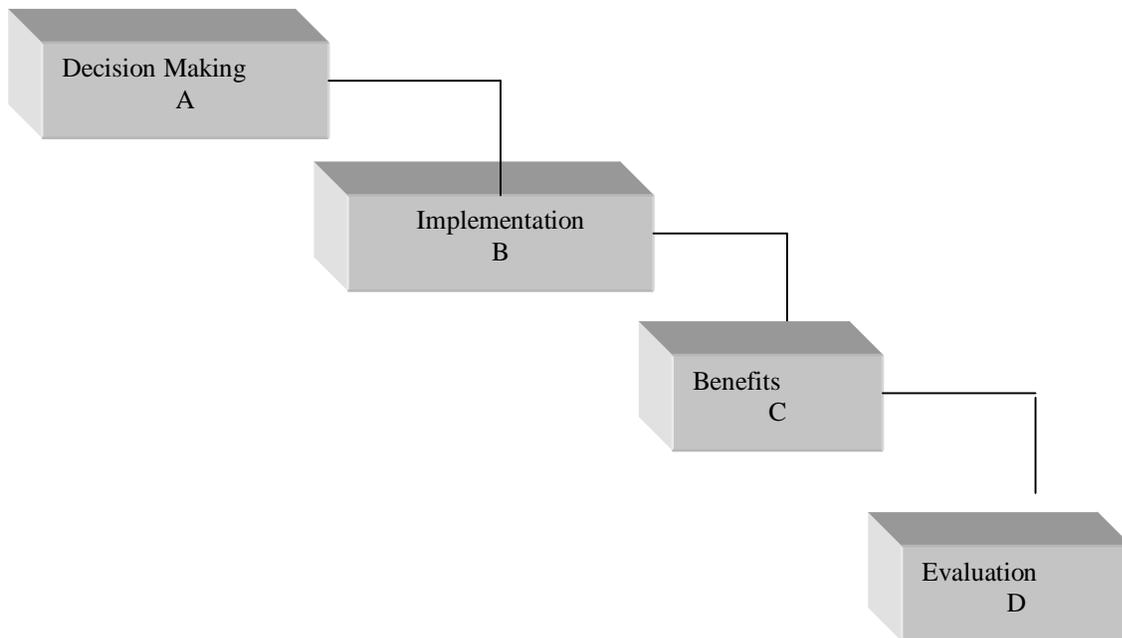
- 1) *Participation in decision-making*: there are three distinctive types of decisions; which are initial decisions, ongoing decisions and operational decisions. Essentially, an initial decision is about a project's concerned needs and priorities, where to start and how to carry it out. Ongoing decisions are taken after the initial decision has been made. Operational decisions concern the enumeration of initial and ongoing ones, which encompass the substance of project decision-making.

- 2) *Participation in implementation*: in this stage, participation can be made in three principal ways; resource contribution, as administration coordination efforts and finally as programme enlistment activities. Resource contribution can take a variety of forms such as provision of labour, cash, material goods and information. These are the major inputs to any development project seeking to incorporate local resources in a development enterprise. Participation in project administration and coordination is another way of ensuring people's participation. At this point local people can participate either as locally hired employees, or as members of various project advisory or decision-making boards.
- 3) *Participation in benefits*: benefits of people's participation have already been broadly discussed earlier in this section. However, people's participation in benefits-sharing can lead to at least three kinds of benefits, which are material, social and personal. Material benefits are basically private consumption, income or assets. These can be seen in the acquisition of land, livestock, improvement in dwelling units, et cetera. Social benefits are public goods, services and amenities such as schools, health centres, water tanks, improved housing and better roads. Personal benefits are greatly desired, though often not attained on an individual basis, because with the acquisition of more social and political power through the operation of a project these come to members of groups or sectors. The possible project-generated benefits are self-esteem, political power and sense of efficacy.
- 4) *Participation in evaluation*: Primarily there are three major activities through which rural people can participate in project evaluation; project centered evaluation, political activities and public opinion efforts (Cohen and Uphoff 1980:56). If a formal review process exists, direct and indirect participation occurs in relation to actual project-centered evaluation and concentrates on who participates in it, for how long, and with what power to achieve action on suggestions, and so on. The involvement in project evaluation may also occur through political activities. Elected officials of different constituencies can voice complaints and suggestions through their channels. Possible participation in elections on local, regional and national levels can provide some opportunities for favourable or unfavourable local evaluations to be fed into the policy

process. Participation in evaluation activities is less direct if it aims at influencing public opinion with the hope that this will have the desired ramifications for continuation or possible modification of the project.

Theoretically, compared to other frameworks of people's participation, Uphoff's model is more comprehensive in nature. Moreover, this model was developed based on the experiences of developing nations. According to Ahmed, this framework is comprehensive in nature, describing and analyzing objectives of development programmes. He further claims that Uphoff's model provides a way of observing facts and figures of development participation (Ahmed 1987:17). Therefore, Uphoff's model of people's participation has been taken as a framework for describing and analyzing the nature and scope of people's participation at the local level development programmes in Bangladesh.

Figure-3: Uphoff's Model of People's Participation



2.4 Conclusions

The theoretical background of the key concepts of the study such as ‘governance’, ‘good governance’, ‘decentralization’ and ‘people’s participation’ have been elaborately and critically presented in this chapter. From the above theoretical discussion, it can be said that the success of governance, depends on various situational and environmental factors. As it has already been mentioned, as a system, governance is rarely static and it should be politically and bureaucratically neutral, locally reliable and contextually acceptable. The outcomes of governance cannot be assessed by its theoretical assumptions, but by its results, particularly for developing nations. Good governance, as a condition to aid receiving countries, continues to be an ongoing phenomenon in the development discourse of Asia and Africa. Decentralization, as an important component of the governance system, is heavily criticised by its opponents. According to them, the decentralization policy facilitates the upper strata of society to integrate themselves with the state apparatus and capture the local power and its benefits. However, it is strongly believed that decentralization is still the best means to achieve the national goals of the developing countries. It is also believed that people’s participation in local development cannot be ensured without decentralized local governance. On the other hand, people’s participation as the ends of governance, good governance and decentralization, does not necessarily depend on decentralized local governance alone. The socio-political environment has an overwhelming influence on the total process of people’s participation in development.

From the above literature survey, it is obvious that the theoretical application of decentralization and people’s participation for responsive governance in developing countries does not only depend on their ideas and philosophy. Theoretically although, decentralization and people’s participation are considered as the best tools to overcome the poor governance features of aid receiving countries, the experiences show that these two aspects have not been able to achieve their expected outcomes, rather, they facilitate the elites to capture the state power. For Bangladesh, the poor governance of the country is a product of historically constructed political and administrative structures which the successive government keeps reproducing (Ahmed 1999:295). It is argued that despite regular reform initiatives, the decentralization policy and people’s participation have never been given a fair chance to work due to the country’s repeated periods of authoritarian, semi-authoritarian and military

bureaucratic rule. In addition, the severe drawback of the reform efforts in the history of Bangladesh is the failure to perceive the structural and organizational dysfunctions which the administrative system had inherited and endured since the British colonial period (Zafarullah 1998:81).

Therefore, the theoretical application of governance issues such as decentralization, people's participation must be viewed from the perspectives of the country in which they are executed and implemented, rather than that of others. The existing knowledge of governance has essentially failed to perceive these issues from the contextual and cultural perspectives. The most important drawback is that the concepts are seen from the theoretical perspectives and applied as they are, without reviewing and analyzing the background reality of the country.

The success of the microfinance (micro-credit) programme of Bangladesh and the People's Plan Campaign (PPC) of Kerala in India might be cited as the best examples in this regard. Bangladesh is now popularly known as the land of micro-credit. It is now well known that the microfinance industry has its roots in Bangladesh with the Grameen Bank, and it enjoys international fame, and its model has been replicated in countries all over the globe due to its exceptional success (Hulme and Moore 2006, Develtere and Huybrechts 2005:165, Jain 1996:79). Visionary leadership, strong decentralization, combined with an extensive information and communication system, strategic credit policies and a credit conducive organizational culture, the least bureaucracy in the Grameen's organizational culture and the least dependency on Bangladeshi bureaucracy and politics are the causes of success of the microfinance theory in Bangladesh, which was initiated by the Noble laureate Dr. Muhammad Yunus in early 1970 (Hulme and Moore 2006, Jamil 1998:43, Jain 1996:88, Sarker 2001:10).

Similarly, the PPC¹⁴ has been considered as one of the most successful decentralization policies in India and has won wide international attention for its achievements in regards to social development (Veron 2001:601). The PPC, sought not merely to transfer administrative power from the state government to the panchayets, but to elicit people's participation in local development (Thomas and Franke 2000 in Sharma 2007:37). It is claimed that the PPC was path-breaking in more ways than one, such as it evolved strategies to involve the gram sabha,

¹⁴ PPC is a bottom-up participatory development approach introduced by the Left Democratic Front (LDF) of the state in 1996. This approach is built on the thought of redistribution, community participation and social provisioning. It gave people's participation and NGOs a bigger role - at the expense of top-down planning by the line departments (see for details Sharma 2007, Veron 2001).

that is, the people in the process of planning; the elected bodies closest to the people, the gram panchayet, rather than district and block panchayets, were its main agencies; it encompassed a plethora of strategies, planning, mobilizing, building consensus, and enhancing capacities (Sharma 2007:37). As a result, within India, Kerala has the lowest population growth rate, highest female literacy rate, and lowest infant mortality rate; these indicators are comparable to those of the highest income countries of the world (ibid: 38).

From these two examples, it can be said that despite all the inherited poor governance features, the microfinance theory and the PPC have been successfully working due to their own brand of thinking combined with a western theoretical flavour. Therefore, in order to apply and execute a decentralization policy and people's participation successfully, the role of humankind - the citizens, stakeholders, legal framework, political parties, civil society, NGOs and bureaucrats, who are the tool makers and users, must be understood from the contextual perspective (Bingham, Nabatchi and O'Leary 2005:548). Moreover, the theoretical application of a decentralization policy and people's participation needs to be addressed from the grassroots perspective, which cannot be assessed without carrying out a comprehensive empirical investigation through proper research methods and techniques. To uncover the ground reality of decentralization and people's participation in Bangladesh, the qualitative method has been extensively followed in this study. The following chapter contains an elaborate discussion on the methodological aspects of the study.

Chapter Three: Framework of Analysis - Research Methodology

3. Introduction

From the previous chapter, we learned that the success of the decentralization policy and people's participation does not only depend on their application or tools, but rather the contextual factors play an important role in this regard. Therefore, comprehensive empirical supports are required to examine the existing threats of decentralization and people's participation in the developing countries in general and Bangladesh in particular. The main research questions of this study, as already mentioned, are to observe what the challenges of the decentralization policy and people's participation are in local development in Bangladesh, and how the local governance institutions perform, and who gains the benefits of decentralization and people's participation. Exploring the answer to the above is not simple due to its nature and pattern. Detailed empirical evidence is essential to observe the impact that decentralization has made and the nature of people's participation in local development. Consequently, the qualitative method has been selected and applied throughout the study to collect primary data and information in order to address the research issues precisely. A detailed explanation of the selection process of research methods and data collection techniques of the study is highlighted in the following text.

3.1 Selection of Research Methods

This study has been prepared in an empirical manner, based on two basic characteristics of qualitative research, which Silverman (2001) calls 'a lot about a little' and Denzin and Lincoln (1994) refer to as 'different things to different people.' Hence, primary data is the first choice and main preference. According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994), qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. It means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. It properly seeks answers to questions by examining various social settings and the individuals who inhabit them (Berg 1989). It is believed that the reality can never be fully comprehended; only

approximated (Guba 1990 in Newaz 2003:73). The qualitative method¹⁵ has been developed in social sciences to enable researchers to study social and cultural phenomena. It also emphasizes the holistic treatment of phenomena or research issues (Stake 1996). Thus, this method has been chosen as the principal research method for the study.

It is believed that the goal of understanding a phenomenon from the point of view of the participants and its particular social and institutional context is largely lost when textual data are quantified (Kaplen and Maxwell 1994). Therefore, the nature, problems and questions of this study have forced the researcher to select this particular method. Reasons for such a choice include the fact that the qualitative method explores attitudes, behaviour and experiences through such methods as interviews or focus groups (Newman and Benz 1998, Auerbach and Silverstein 2003, Berg 1989). This method also attempts to get an in-depth opinion from participants using a number of techniques that allow the researcher to obtain firsthand knowledge about the empirical social world in question (Dawson 2002, Punch 1986). These techniques are participant observation, in-depth interviewing, fieldwork, et cetera (Filstead 1970). Moreover, analytically, the qualitative method has been chosen for this study due to the following six reasons (see for details Silverstein et al. 2003). Qualitative research:

1. directly investigates subjective experience;
2. incorporates meaningful stories in addition to measurable variables;
3. allows for naturalistic observation and description, rather than testing general laws;
4. is a tool for diversity;
5. uses the research participants as expert informants; and
6. involves reflexivity; the explicit use of the researcher's subjectivity and values.

In addition to the primary data, a sizable data from secondary sources has also been collected. Secondary data including books, government reports, scientific journal articles, research documents as well as articles found on the World Wide Web, have been used for the theoretical analysis of this study's key concepts, such as governance, good governance, decentralization and people's participation. Secondary data and information have also been

¹⁵ According to John Lofland, there are four people-oriented mandates in collecting qualitative data: 1) qualitative researchers must get close enough to the people and situation being studied to personally understand in depth the details of what goes on; 2) qualitative researchers must aim at capturing what actually takes place and what people actually say; 3) qualitative data must include a great deal of pure description of people, activities, interactions, and settings; and 4) qualitative data must include direct quotations from people, both what they say and what they write down (Lofland 1984).

used to construct the background chapters of this research, particularly chapters four and five. In addition, secondary materials are extensively reviewed and interpreted to analyze the causes of failure of decentralization reform initiatives in Bangladesh.

3.2 Case Study Method

The practice of decentralization and the nature of people's participation in development cannot be assessed without detailed information derived from a systematic empirical case study. The character of this study requires a detailed case study for deeper understanding of research issues (Silverman 2000). Therefore, the case study method¹⁶ of qualitative research has been followed. During the field study, five development projects under the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) of the study unit have been thoroughly examined. Despite many obvious benefits of the case study method, one of its major drawbacks is the accusation of limited generalizability (Bryman 1989). However, this method helps to provide a systematic way of looking at events, collecting data, and analyzing information.

Moreover, following this method, the researchers gain a very clear picture of why the instance happened and what might become important to examine more extensively in future research. Case studies investigate real-life events in their natural settings and they enable the researcher to address "how and why" questions, using a broad variety of empirical tools (Yin 1994). Therefore, the case study method has been followed in examining how the local people participate in the various levels of development initiatives and activities under the present local government structure. In addition, a variety of data collection techniques have been used such as examination of documents, interviews with local inhabitants, informal discussions, participant observation, Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), and Local Cultural Appraisal (LCA). Thus, this study relies on multiple techniques to comprehend, as much as possible, the real picture of the study area and the local people's reality.

¹⁶ According to Stake, case study research is primarily qualitative in the sense of exploring complex holistic patterns rather than seeking to map statistical and/causal relationships between abstracted variables. Stake added more that case study research tends to be more naturalistic, holistic, ethnographic, phenomenological and biographic, rather than quantitative, deductive and causal/comparative (see Stake 1995, Yin 1994).

3.3 Ethical Issues

Ethical tensions are part of the everyday practice of doing research in all disciplines (Guillemin 2004). Ethics are not restricted to fieldwork, but refer to all stages in the research process (Kvale 1996 cited from Ryen 2004). Ethical challenges are constantly present in fieldwork (Ryen 2004). For this study, a normative ethical standard has been maintained. Ethical issues' elements, such as code and consent, confidentiality and trust¹⁷ have been followed during the field study (Ryen 2004). Objectives of the research and purposes of the field study have been clearly explained to the informants of the study unit. 'Informed Consent' as an ethical principle of social research has also been applied for an in-depth field study (O'Sullivan and Rassel 1989). Moreover, two other major dimensions of ethics in qualitative research, such as procedural ethics and ethics in practice (Guillemin 2004) have been followed throughout the field study.

3.4 Selection of Units for Investigation

Bangladesh is commonly known as a village extended country. There are approximately 82,000 villages across the country. Rural Bangladesh is commonly known and perceived as relatively homogeneous in terms of economic conditions, social situation and physical environment. Considering the geographical and ethnic features of Bangladesh, the country's local governance is not expected to be particularly challenging. Compared to other neighbouring countries, Bangladesh is small in size but essentially flat in landscape. It has a good communication network, and all regions of the country are accessible from the capital, Dhaka. The most unique feature of the country is that it does not have any major ethnic cleavages and the same language 'Bengoli' is spoken throughout the country (Huque 1986:79). Therefore, one Upazila (sub-district) in the north-eastern part of the country has been selected for this study (the map of Bangladesh is presented in the following page). The name of the studied Upazila is Bhaluka, and belongs to the Mymensingh district. The maps of the Mymensingh District and the Bhaluka Upazila are presented in the appendices 1 and 2.

¹⁷ Code and consent refer in particular to informed consent. It means that the research subjects have the right to know what they are being researched about, the right to be informed about the nature of the research and the right to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality means that researchers are obliged to protect the participants' identity, and the location of the research. Finally, trust refers to the relationship between the researcher and the participants and to the researcher's responsibility not to spoil the field for others in the sense that potential research subjects became reluctant to research (see for details Ryen 2004)

Bhaluka is situated approximately 80 kilometres from Dhaka, the capital city, and 40 kilometres from Mymensingh, the District City. In terms of socio-economic indicators and physical infrastructure, Bhaluka is considered both as a developed and developing area.

The administrative unit of the Bhaluka Upazila is located next to the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway. Thus, the communication of Bhaluka from the capital city and district town is very good. Recently, some of the big industries have been shifted to Bhaluka. Therefore, Bhaluka is considered as a mini industrial area in Bangladesh. On the other hand, rural and remote areas of Bhaluka are relatively backward and poor in terms of socio-economic indicators and physical infrastructure as compared to other areas, especially around the municipality area. The proportion of the population of the Upazila below the poverty line is at a high level of 31% to 37% and the literacy rate is at 57% (Upazila Statistics Office 2005). Due to these legal grounds and interesting features, the Bhaluka Upazila has been selected as a research unit for this study. The salient features of the Bhaluka Upazila are presented in appendix 3.

A Union Parishad is the most important and lowest tier of the local government in Bangladesh. The Bhaluka Upazila consists of eleven Union Parishads. Among the eleven Union Parishads, one has been selected for extensive field study and primary data collection. The name of the Union Parishad is Birunia Union Parishad, and it is located approximately 10 kilometres from the Upazila headquarters. The Birunia Union Parishad has been selected because of good road communication between the Union Parishad Office and the Upazila Office. The basic facts of the Birunia Union are presented in appendix 4.

Map of Bangladesh; the study unit is indicated in black colour.



Source: LGED 2007

3.5 Selection of Development Projects for the Case Study

It has already mentioned that five development projects of the LGED have been selected for the comprehensive case study. The aim of the case study, as stated earlier, is to examine the nature and scope of people's participation at the grassroots level development programmes in Bangladesh. All these projects were completed during the period of 2002 to 2005. The selection of the projects began with a conversation between the researcher and the Upazila Executive Engineer and his colleagues, regarding the content and purpose of the study. Following an extensive discussion, the researcher informed the officials that he was interested in studying certain projects of his study area which had been completed recently or in the past one to two years. Thus, the researcher selected five development projects with the help of the office secretary of the Upazila engineering office. These projects were selected purposefully as the theoretical application of people's participation is clearly defined in the project proposals.

3.6 Selection of Respondents

Three different categories of respondents have been selected from the study unit. Their views and opinions regarding the effectiveness of decentralization, performance of local institutions and the nature of people's participation in local development in Bangladesh were collected. The first category includes Government Officials who are involved in planning and implementation of development projects at the Upazila level. The second category of respondents includes people's representatives' and local political leaders, that is, Parliament members, Union Council Officials (Chairman and members), and Upazila level political leaders. The third category of respondents includes the cross section of Upazila residents representing different socio-economic groups such as local people (male and female), businessmen, local college and school teachers and college students. Following Table 3 shows the type and number of respondents more categorically.

Table 3: Categories and Numbers of Respondents

Category of respondents	Total number
Government officials	11
People's representatives and political leaders	17
Upazila residents	84
Total	112

3.7 Respondents' Selection Process

Different techniques of systematic sampling were chosen as a method of selecting the different categories of respondents. Despite its many limitations, systematic sampling is simple and comparatively less costly (Welman et al. 2005, Tashakkori et al. 1998). The self-selection sampling method has also been followed to select the potential respondents, specifically for category one. There are about 30 government officials at the Upazila level administration. In the initial stage of the field study, the researcher personally met and talked to them regarding the research content, nature, and purpose(s) of the field study. Researcher requested them to participate in this research by giving their valuable opinion. Finally, eleven of them were selected from different departments to be interviewed, who were only those who had shown interest and willingness.

In the second category, there are two types of respondents. For this category, two different selection processes were followed. There were 13 Union Council Officials (people's representatives) in the Birunia Union Council. All of them were purposefully selected. The ex-Chairman of the Birunia Union Council has also been selected because some of the development projects had been started during his term. The rest of the respondents in this category have been selected from the two major political parties of Bangladesh. For the third category, the systematic sampling technique was followed to select 84 people from three different villages in the study area.

3.8 Data Collection Methods

As mentioned above, multiple techniques of the qualitative method have been used to collect data and information from the field, because no single source has a complete advantage over all the others (Yen 1994). These are formal and informal questionnaires, in-depth interview, participatory rural appraisal (PRA), local cultural appraisal (LCA), participant observation, thematic interview, informal discussions, et cetera.

3.8.1 Formal Questionnaire

A formal questionnaire (see appendix 3) was used to collect primary data and information from the study area. This questionnaire consists of 11 descriptive, analytical questions written in the local Bengali language. The motives of this questionnaire were to discover the people's perspectives on the research issues of governance, decentralization and people's participation in Bangladesh. Due to the nature of the questionnaire, it was distributed among the selected government officials and college and school teachers of the study area.

3.8.2 Informal Questionnaire for an In-depth Interview¹⁸

Besides the formal questionnaire, an informal questionnaire was used for an in-depth interview of the villagers. The motives of an in-depth interview were to learn the local people's perspectives on the services provided by the local government institutions, the effects of decentralization, and their participation in local development activities.

¹⁸ In-depth interviewing is a data collection method relied on quite extensively by qualitative researchers (see for details Marshall and Rossman 1995). It allows person-to-person discussion and leads to increased insight into people's thoughts, feelings and behaviour on important issues. It aims to ask questions to explain reasons underlying a problem or practice in a target group. The aim of such interviews is to deeply explore the respondent's point of view, feelings and perspectives.

At the initial stage of the research, it was challenging to reach the local inhabitants. Initially, to overcome this situation, some of the local people of the study unit (rickshaw-drivers, shop keepers, and the school teachers, and religious leaders) were randomly approached. They were asked about how the inhabitants of the study unit, who were quite busy with their seasonal cultivation and were sceptical about trusting the researcher, could be approached. A suggestion was given to approach Mr. Shahidul Master (a master in local terms means a teacher), a reliable, responsible person who is respected to the villagers. In any local crisis, people would always find him beside them, but on the other hand, he did not have any political affiliation. Regardless, a meeting with Shahidul Master was arranged, where the details of the research and purpose of the field study were explained to him, resulting in his agreement to assist with conducting in-depth interviews with the selected villagers. In fact, he expressed his feelings of content and pride to be a part of this study, as this was the first time in his life that someone had asked him to do such “noble work”, as he called it. Thus, it was made possible for the researcher to visit people’s homes, either with Shahidul Master, or alone, and conduct interviews. Although at first this appeared to be time consuming, it eventually turned out to be an effective technique, which the researcher has named Local Cultural Appraisal (LCA). This approach is further described in the following.

3.8.3 Local Cultural Appraisal (LCA)

Access to the informants is one of the major challenges of qualitative research, especially for the social science researchers who are applying this method for their academic work. Cultural bindings, situational influence and the living conditions are the major constraints to accessing the informants in developing countries like Bangladesh. The issue of access is not addressed adequately by the contemporary techniques of qualitative research, that is, how to access the key informants for an in-depth interview. These techniques only deal with how to select the informants, what would be the selection criteria, how to conduct an interview, how to collect data, how to analyze data, et cetera. Therefore, qualitative research has a drawback in the aspect of accessing key informants. Marshall and Rossman (1995) do highlight one technique named ‘Negotiating Entry’, but it is concerned with gaining access to the respondents from an organizational rather than a local perspective. In order to overcome this situation, the researcher introduced a new technique, namely ‘Local Cultural Appraisal’ (LCA). LCA is a technique that helps the researcher to discover the possible local ways or means to access key informants for an effective, in-depth interview. It might facilitate researchers to observe the local socio-cultural traditions, values and bindings of the study unit from a micro perspective. This method has been followed especially during the in-depth interviews with the local inhabitants.

3.8.4 Snowball or Chain Approach¹⁹

This approach of qualitative research is especially useful when researchers are trying to reach populations that are hard to find. Although this method would hardly lead to representative samples, it is very helpful for collecting information in a short time. It saves time and is less costly as well (Patton 1990). This method has been followed in this research, especially during the case studies of the development projects.

3.8.5 Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA)²⁰

The PRA technique of qualitative methods has been followed to collect necessary information and data from the study area. It is a short-cut and less expensive but effective technique, because the researcher facilitates local people in analyzing information, practicing critical self-awareness, taking responsibility and sharing their knowledge of the life and conditions to plan and to act. A total of seven PRA exercises were conducted during the field visit, and three of them were female groups. Different key diagrammatic techniques of PRA have been followed to find the real facts and figures for this study from the grassroots people, such as rapport building, social mapping, Venn diagrams, pair-wise ranking, time trend analysis and semi-structured questionnaires.

3.8.6 Participant Observation²¹

Participant observation as a straightforward technique and a very useful way of collecting qualitative data (Trow 1972), it has been followed in this research. This technique was especially used for the local political leaders and government officials. During the field study

¹⁹ Snowball sampling is an approach for locating information-rich key informants (see for details Patton 1990). It is a method that helps researchers initially contact a few respondents and then ask them whether they know of anybody with the same characteristics that they are looking for in their research.

²⁰ PRA is a methodology for interacting with villagers, understanding them and learning from them. It constitutes a process of involvement with rural people for indigenous knowledge building exercises. It is a way of learning from, and with villagers to investigate, analyze and evaluate constraints and opportunities (see for details Mukherjee 1994).

²¹ Participant observation is a method in which the observer participates in the daily life of the people under study, either openly in the role of the researcher or covertly in some disguised role, observing things that happen, listening to what is said, and questioning people over some length of time (Becker and Geer 1972). According to Delamont (2004) the term participant observation does not usually mean real participation; researchers do not usually catch fish, teach classes or dig coal, rather they watch these things being done, and help occasionally.

period, for example, the researcher attended many formal occasions and government-sponsored programmes with the local political leaders and government officials. Such involvement and participation facilitated the researcher to acquire some interesting information about the local administration and nature of the local politics.

3.9 Field Study Timetable

The duration of the field study in Bangladesh was six months, starting from January 2005 and continuing through to June 2005. During this period the researcher collected necessary data and information from the field. A detailed schedule of the field study is shown in the Table 4.

Table 4: Time framework for field study - January 2005 to June 2005

S. N	Techniques used for data collection	Period	Location	Respondents/Informants
1	General Observation	January 1-15, 2006	Bhaluka Upazila & Birunia Union Council	
2	Interview & distribution of structured questionnaire	February 15-30, 2005	Bhaluka Upazila Office, Bhaluka Degree College	Government Officials (11), Local political leaders & College & School teachers
3	Case Study	February 16-March 15, 2005	Birunia Union Council	Five development Projects of LGED
4	Interview with unstructured questionnaire	March 16-April 15, 2005	Mohammadpur & North Mohammadpur Villages of Birunia Union Council	64 Villagers
5	Visiting Libraries and Government offices	Different phases of empirical study	Dhaka University Library, PATC library Savar, LGED Head office Dhaka, NILG Dhaka, Statistics Office Bhaluka, Land Office, Birunia Union Council Office	
6	PRA, Participant Observation, Thematic Interview	May-June 20, 2005	Birunia Union Council, Bhaluka Upazila	Local people of Birunia Union Council's different villages, Government officials, local political leaders

3.10 Conclusions

A detailed explanation of the research method followed in this study has been presented in the above text. Following the research objectives and questions, data and information have been collected from multiple sources. As Yen (1992) states, “the use of multiple sources of evidence allows researchers to address a broader range of historical, attitude and behavioural issues” (in Saifullah 2001:33). Therefore, this study is basically prepared based on the triangulation approach to find the answer of the research questions precisely. The summary of the research methodology, research objectives, field study objectives and key participants of

this research are presented in the following table 5. The empirical evidence is presented in the following chapters (chapters 4, 5 and 6) in a descriptive manner.

Table 5: Summary of research methodology and field study objectives

<i>Research Objectives</i>	<i>Field Study Objectives</i>	<i>Research Methodology</i>	<i>Principal Informants</i>
To review the past reform features of decentralization and examine the causes of their failure.	Searching libraries and concerned offices to collect secondary materials. In addition, local government officials and local people of different sectors of the study unit were interviewed to find the real causes of failure of decentralization initiatives.	Formal and Informal Questionnaire Methods of Empirical Research	Selected local governance officials and local people such as Upazila officials, Union Parishad officials, local political leaders and local people. About 112 people were interviewed using formal and informal questionnaires.
To observe the performance of local governance institutions.	Visiting the study unit extensively to disclose the grassroots perceptions regarding the role of local governance institutions.	Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA)	Villagers (both male and female) of five different villages of the study unit. About 172 people willingly participated in seven PRA sessions.
To examine the nature, scope and constraints of people's participation in local development.	Examining comprehensively the local development projects to see the nature of people's participation and its constraints.	Case Study Method	LGED officials, contractors and labours, and people of the project areas.

Chapter Four: Decentralization Process in Bangladesh: Historical Perspective

4. Introduction

The decentralization process is not new in the history of Bangladesh. Its existence in varied forms is deep-seated in the country's long history. The aim of this chapter is to critically and chronologically review the decentralization process in Bangladesh from the historical perspective. The chapter has been divided into three sections. The first section deals with the British period, the second highlights the Pakistan period, and the final section addresses the Bangladesh period.

4.1 Decentralization in the British Period

It has been found in the literature on the government and politics of ancient India that before the arrival of the British on the Indian subcontinent there was a well developed and effective local participatory administrative system in different parts of India (Aminuzzaman 1993). In the verdict period, there had been some forms of participatory and democratically elected local bodies, like 'Gram Janapad' and 'Panchakula' rural settlements (Tinker 1954 cited from Ahmed 1996), commonly known as Gram Panchayet which Sir Charles Metcafle regarded as the 'village republic' of India (Siddiquee 1997, Aminuzzaman 1993, Rahman 1997). The main functions of this body were maintenance of the law and order situation, management of commons, resolution of local conflicts, and external political relations (Siddiquee 1997). It is assumed that this republic was autonomous, participatory and financially solvent. However, such indigenous and self-dependent institutions could not last long due to the massive political change in the history of the Indian subcontinent. After 1757, the British East India Company took over the power of the Indian subcontinent and ruled for more than one hundred years. The British colonial ruler made several decentralization policies on the Indian subcontinent. These policies are briefly discussed in the following text.

4.1.1 Permanent Settlement Act of 1793

The Permanent Settlement Act of 1793 was the first major reform of the British colonial ruler in India. The purpose of the act was to create a group of people who would be in charge of tax collection from the local people. By this act, the British colonial ruler successfully created a loyal and faithful group called Zamindars (Landlords) (Siddiquee 1997, Rahaman 2000). The legacy of the Zamindari system still plays a dominant role in Bangladesh. The creation of the Zamindari system shattered the previous self-sufficient and independent local institutions of Bengal²². However, the merciless attitude in rent collection caused huge suffering to villagers, which led to waves of agrarian unrest and lawlessness (Siddiquee 1997). On the other hand, most of the Zamindars were urban-based and they created another group called Talukdar, as their helping hand, which was also powerful, with delegated tax collecting authority (Siddiquee 1997, Rahaman 2000). In fact, in the absence of Zamindars, this group created many problems in the localities under their jurisdiction. Talukdars' unlawful attitude to the villagers was also cause of social unrest against the colonial rule. The British colonial ruler took another necessary reform measure to control the situation of unrest and establish their existence at the grassroots level once again.

4.1.2 The Bengal Village Chaukidari Act of 1870

In response to the above situation, the British colonial government created the Bengal Village Chaukidari Act of 1870 (Huque 1988), which was the first British response to the demands of the local people (Siddiquee 1997). The act was passed in response to Lord Mayo's resolution on financial decentralization, which was proposed, among other things, to extend opportunities for the development of local self-government (Siddiquee 1997, Rahaman 2000). This time the British ruler reviewed India's previous village republic system and introduced that system in a different form and as an act. However, the Chaukidari Act of 1870 created a primary unit of local government called the Union, which consisted of several villages (Chowdhury 1987). This was presided over by a five-man committee, called a Panchayet (Rahaman 2000). The Panchayet was not an elected body. The District Magistrate selected the members of the

²² The present Bangladesh and some parts of West Bengal in India were known as the Bengal region in the British period.

committee and also had the power to remove the members of the Panchayet (Huque 1988). The Panchayet was primarily responsible for maintaining law and order in the villages. The committee was also given authority to appoint village Chowkidars (Watchmen) and to assess and collect tax from the villagers to meet the expenditures of maintaining the Chowkidars (Chowdhury 1987). In fact, it is claimed that by introducing the Chowkidari Act in 1880, the British Government swindled the people of Bengal. Once again, dissatisfaction and discontentment was generated among the villagers due to the brutal, unruly attitude of the Panchayet and Chowkidar members. The Panchayet members were extremely unpopular among the villagers for their corruption and the unpleasant nature of their duties (Siddiquee 1997). According to Tinker, they were well known as the servants of the government rather than the representatives of the local people (Tinker 1968, cited *ibid*: 71). This system can be regarded as the new version of the Zamindari system, with more formal power.

4.1.3 Lord Ripon Resolution

Lord Ripon, the pioneer of the modern local government system in India, issued a resolution for local administration to fulfil the partial demand of the people in 1882 (Rahman 2000). It was the first time that Lord Ripon realised that there should be representative institutions at the local level. Therefore, his resolution gained immense importance with certain principles, which influenced the nature, scope and direction of the local self-government in the sub-continent. In fact, he advocated the development not only for improvement in administration, but it was also desirable as an instrument of political training. However, the basic objectives of the resolution were three-fold, and were: 1) financial decentralization should be carried to the local bodies; 2) administration of the local bodies should be improved; and 3) local bodies should be developed for political and popular education (Tinker 1954 in Wahhab 1996). Lord Ripon said in his famous resolution that his aim was not primarily to improve the administration, but to foster the small beginnings of independent political life. In his words, “I am planting a tree, which will give shade and food for generations of men” (in Rahman 2000).

Ripon’s resolution emphasized that all local bodies should contain a two-thirds majority of non-officials; and after a certain period these non-official members should be elected (Siddiquee 1997). The resolution further emphasized that all these local bodies should be headed by a non-official Chairman. According to Tinker, Lord Ripon was the only liberal-

minded person, and the majority of others were conservatives and supporters of paternal administration (in Rahman 2000). Therefore, many claimed that Ripon's resolution was more democratic, progressive, and participatory for establishing a representative local governance institution in the Indian subcontinent (Siddiquee 1997, Huque 1988, Rahman 2000). Unfortunately, the British government was not interested in executing Ripon's recommendations in their full spirit, they were implemented half-heartedly. The colonial government was strongly in support of a centrally controlled administration at the local level. However, the resolution was finally accepted in 1885, as an act with some modifications, after a long discussion and debate between the British government and the secretary of the state of India.

4.1.4 The Bengal Local Self-Government Act of 1885

The Bengal Local Self-Government Act of 1885 created a strong network throughout the country. The Act of 1885 created a three-tier system of local government, which consisted of the District Board in the district, the Local Board in the subdivision and the Union Committee in a group of villages (Huque 1988, Sarker 1997). District Boards under the chairmanship of District Magistrates, were charged with vital responsibilities of such public utilities as communication, health and sanitation, water supply, education, relief and vaccination (Siddiquee 1997, Huque 1988). The Local Board at the sub-divisional level was simply a co-ordinating body between the District Board and the Union Committee, without any independent authority and financial power (Rashiduzzaman 1968). In fact, the Local Board acted as an agent of the District Board, while the real power remained in the District Board. The Union Committees were divested of financial power, but invested with the management of local ponds, schools and roads. The management of rural police remained with the Chaokidari Panchayet. This was, in fact, very contradictory. The British government intentionally did not delegate policing authority to the Union Committee; instead they created conflicting groups to ensure their control in the local areas.

The Act of 1885 did not provide an elected Chairman for the Local and District Boards. The District Magistrate and the Sub-divisional officer, respectively, were appointed Chairman of the District Board and Local Board. Two thirds of the Union Committee, Local Board, and District Board members were elected by an informal election and one third were

nominated by the government (Wahhab 1996). Thus, the idea of election of Ripon's resolution was not implemented because the then provincial head did not favour the election system. The British Government nominated their loyal trustees for these positions. Therefore, the government's widespread control over the local bodies through the nomination system severely hampered the growth of the Local Self-Government system in Bengal. On the other hand, the participation of the village oligarchies in the councils was ensured. They mediated the articulation of power between the village and the colonial administration. Again, this is a pointer to the contradictory aspects of colonial administration (Rahman et al. 1997, Sarker 1997). The Act of 1885 was more for administrative convenience rather than political motives, as it did not reflect the demands of the local people. As a result, although the act was primarily saluted by the people, gradual frustration and discontentment increased due to its undemocratic nature and functions.

4.1.5 The Act of 1892

In 1892, a new act was passed to further recentralize the decision-making power of the local areas. According to this Act, the District Magistrate was further empowered and given the authority to appoint Village Chaowkidars (Siddiquee 1997). The Village Panchayets could only recommend the name of the Chaowkidars; their control was transferred to the provincial government's police department. On the other hand, by this Act, the villages were made completely dependent on, and subservient to the District authorities (Siddiquee 1997). Thus, once again, the colonial government hampered the growth of participatory local government bodies in Bengal.

4.1.6 Hobhouse Commission in 1907

With the passage of time, the colonial government realized that the existing system of governing local bodies in Bengal was highly unpopular among the common citizens. Therefore, in 1907, they set up a Decentralization Commission, known as the Hobhouse Commission, to review the existing local bodies systems and to advice on a decentralization policy (Huque 1988). The Commission submitted its report in 1909 (Siddiquee 1997). It recommended the development of self-government as an apparatus of administrative

devolution (Rahman 2000). The conclusion was reached that the existing local bodies had failed due to the absence of their control over their services, excessive government control and undue interference in matters of routine work (Rahman 2000, Chowdhury 1987). The Commission suggested that the Panchayet members should be elected, and that the Panchayet should be repositioned at the lowest levels of administration (Tinker 1968, Tapper 1966 quoted from Siddiquee 1997). It also suggested that the Local Board should have independence and a separate sphere of duties. For the District Board, the Commission recommended that there should be more elected members in the board and its Chairman should be a non-official one. Moreover, the Commission strongly recommended the creation of a sub-district board anywhere, as the principle agency of local self-government (Wahhab 1996, Siddiquee 1997). However, once again, the commission's recommendations were bypassed and implemented half-heartedly. The British government was not interested in creating independent political institutions in the local areas because they were afraid that such political bodies might pose a threat and become a challenge for colonial rule in the future (Siddiquee 1997).

4.1.7 The Montagu-Chelmsford Report of 1918

Meanwhile, the consequences of the First World War had changed many things in the Indian subcontinent, as in the rest of the world. The local and national political leaders became more cautious, demanding participatory and representative local government bodies. As a result, the colonial ruler commissioned a report known as the Montagu- Chelmsford Report of 1918 (Rahman 2000, Huque 1988, Wahhab 1996). This report emphasized on to establish representative local bodies. For election matters, it recommended that local bodies should have a majority of elected members. The Chairman of the District Board should be an elected non-official as far as possible. Another important change of this report was the establishment of dyarchy under which the Local Self-Government became a transferred subject to be administered by the Indian Minister, that is, the transfer of control over Local Self-Government from British bureaucracy to Indian leadership (Rahman 2000).

4.1.8 The Bengal Self-Government Act of 1919

As a consequence of the Montague-Chelmsford recommendations, and to fulfil the demand of the people, the British Government finally passed the Bengal Self-Government Act of 1919 (Huque 1988). This Act is considered as an important development and a landmark in the history of the Indian local government system (Siddiquee 1997). Under this Act, a two-tier local self-government system was introduced: District Board at district level and Union Board at union level. A Union Board consisted of 9 members. It also provided for the nomination of one-third of the members; however, it was abolished in 1946. This Act also empowered the Union Board significantly with the authority for municipal functions, including some powers of finance (Chowdhury 1987, Rahman 2000, Sarker 1997, Rashiduzzaman 1968). The basic functions of the Union Board were the maintenance of roads and bridges, sanitation, waterways, and the establishment and maintenance of local dispensaries. The District Board consisted of 16 to 70 members – one-third of who were nominated by the government. This system was continued until 1956 when the nomination system was abolished. The provision of the Act was that the Chairman of the Board should be elected. The District Board was responsible for the functions of road communication, health and sanitation, including vaccination, water supply, registration of births and deaths, maintenance of dispensaries and rest houses (Ali 1995).

Despite the introduction of the Bengal Self-Government Act, the local government structure remained under the bureaucratic control of the colonial ruler. In fact, the local bodies enjoyed little autonomy in their daily routine activities. The biggest drawback of the Act was that the franchise was limited in that only males over the age of 21 years who paid a certain amount of taxes and possessed an educational qualification could vote in the election. Through this regulation, people's access to the political system was restricted, and the voices of the people were ignored in selecting their leader. On the other hand, the Union Board could not discharge their responsibilities freely, due to excessive control and interference by the government. Therefore, people's participation in local development activities was limited, and local bodies did not get any shape of democratic institutions. According to Tinker (1968),

Indian local self-government was still in many ways a democratic façade to an autocratic structure. The actual conduct of business was carried on by district officials, with the non-

official members as spectators, or at most critics. No proper system of local management over local affairs had evolved; in particular the English technique of giving elected members a share in every body administration through the committee system was still at a very elementary stage (quoted from Siddiquee 1997).

From the above discussion, it is apparent that the colonial rulers' intention was to prolong their administration in the sub-continent. Although they had appointed many Commissions and passed several Acts for participatory local administration, the process of decentralization was very slow indeed. In fact, the motive of the reforms was more administrative-oriented rather than people-oriented. Rajat and Roy (1975) describe the contemporary situation as:

...there was a growing self-assertiveness among the prosperous Muslim jotedar class in East Bengal which reflected itself in their attempt to capture Union Boards from the high caste Hindus who monopolized those local self-government bodies. The ally of the Muslims rural rich in this attempt to capture local power was the urban Muslims service and professional class, which made a determined bid for capturing political power in the province as a whole (quoted from Rahman and Sarker 1997).

4.2 Decentralization Process in the Pakistan Period (1947-1970)

After more than 100 years of direct authoritarian rule, the British colonial government finally left this sub-continent in 1947, creating two independent countries, India and Pakistan. Pakistan was divided into two parts: East Pakistan - the present Bangladesh, and West Pakistan - the present Pakistan. Bangladesh had been ruled by the Pakistani government for 23 years. The experience of decentralization during the Pakistan period was unpleasant. Until 1958, the then Pakistani government had not taken any major initiatives to reorganize the local bodies of Pakistan, except for a few changes in their composition (Ahmed 1990). To rule the local bodies they simply followed the later part of the British system, until 1958, when the military took over. Soon after, the military government came to power and General Ayub Khan inaugurated a decentralized system of local government known as the 'Basic Democracy' (BD) Order in 1959 (Jahan 1972).

4.2.1 Basic Democracy

The Basic Democracy of Ayub Khan introduced a four-tier local government system, which consisted of the Union Council, the Thana Council, the District Council and the Divisional Council (Huque 1988, Wahhab 1996). The Union Council was the basic unit; it covered a number of villages and was run by a body of 10 members. Two-thirds of the total members were elected directly, and the rest were nominated by the government. The Union Council Chairman was not directly elected, but the members among themselves elected one as the Chairman (Huque 1988). Although the Union Council had been given a wide range of activities, most of them were optional, and due to lack of financial support they were unable to implement them (ibid 1988).

The next tier was the Thana Council, which was an innovation, because prior to this there was no unit at the Thana level. In this aspect, the credit should be given to the then military government for having such a great idea to establish an independent institution at the local level (Rahman and Sarker 1997, Rahman 2000). However, the Thana Council consisted of both the people's representatives and official members. The Sub-Divisional Officer was the Chairman of the Thana Council. The Chairmen of the Union Councils at the Thana level were the representative members of the Thana Council, and Thana level officials were its official members, respectively. The Thana Council provided a massive development programme, which was known as the rural works programme at the local level (Rahman 2000). The aim of the rural works programme was to involve the local people in the development activities and create employment opportunities for the local people. The Thana Council was functionally diversified but administratively consolidated. Thana administrators came to serve as the critical linchpin in the national administrative structure. Politically, this served to strengthen government operations and extend its influence and authority (Rahman and Sarker 1997).

The third tier was the District Council, which, during the British period, was known as the District Board. The District Council Chairman was the Deputy Commissioner (Wahhab 1996). Half of the members of the Council were officials and half were non-officials, the latter being chosen from among an electoral college consisting of all Union Council Chairmen within the District (Siddiquee 1997). Interestingly, the leadership of the District Council was kept safely in the hands of the bureaucracy, a tradition that still continues in Bangladesh today (Ibid 1997). It was, in fact, a bureaucratic institution vested with more power and authority.

The last tier was the Divisional Council at the divisional level. Like the Thana Council, it was another innovation of the military ruler. The Divisional Council consisted of official and non-official members, headed by the Divisional Commissioner. Unfortunately, this tier was never made operational.

Thus, the people did not directly elect all bodies from the Thana Council upward. Although the primary aim of BD was to organize people to deal with problems in their own areas and inculcate in them a spirit of self-help (Rahman 2000), it was practically never achieved. Like the colonial regime, this BD served the interest of the military ruler. These bodies were used to prolong the military rule and create a loyal local elite group who would serve the interest of the central administration. The BD provided opportunities for the rural elite created by the colonial ruler to be involved at the lower echelons in the decision-making process of local issues (Sarker 2006, 1997). On the other hand, by creating these bodies, the central bureaucracy had been extended to the grassroots level to legitimate a military regime. The whole system was designed in a manner so that the government-controlled bureaucracy held power. Besides, they were made financially corrupt, as they were distributed funds for small constructions in rural areas under the rural works programme that were not auditable (Huque 1988:40, Jahan 1972). According to Tepper (1976),

Basic Democracies shifted power to rural elite, away from urban centres. The most unique non-evolutionary aspect of Basic Democracies was the use of local council to alter the basic formulae by which the state was governed. Ayub Khan used the Basic Democrats as an electoral college to choose the head of state the national and provincial assemblies. This had the effect of politically decapitating the urban centres and institutionalising rural notables as important actors in the national arena. (in Rahman and Sarker 1997)

From the above, it can be said that the experience of the development of Local Self-Government during the Pakistan period was not pleasant either. The policy of BD itself was good and its motives were clear and transparent; establishing a representative, participatory local government system. But the hidden motive of the military ruler was abusing this system to prolong his power. Therefore, it can be said that despite long expectations, the BD did not reflect the demand of the people, and the local government system of Pakistan period

remained unchanged, undemocratic, non-participatory and bureaucratic-oriented (Asaduzzaman 1985).

4.3 The Decentralization Process in Bangladesh (1971-2005)

Bangladesh is a former British colony and inherited an administrative system absolutely influenced by the British colonial model (Samaratunge, Alam and Teicher 2008:28). From the very beginning, the country's decentralized local government has been identified and upheld as one of the means of establishing, practicing and enhancing a democratic political system. Each successive regime highlighted local government as the vehicle through which people's participation in governance would be ensured. Thus, decentralization has been considered a central element of Bangladesh state's approach to rural development, and people's participation has become the key issue of achieving the goals of the decentralization policy. The following section will briefly and critically discuss the major initiatives of local governance decentralization in different regimes of Bangladesh.

4.3.1 Mujib Regime (1971-1975)

Soon after gaining independence, the government introduced three tiers of local government system through Presidential Order No. 7 of 1972 (Ali 1995). These were known as Union Panchayat, later on, Union Parishad²³ in 1973 (Union Council), Thana²⁴ (sub-district) Development Committee (TDC) and Zila (District²⁵) Board (Rahman and Sarker 1997,

²³ **Union Parishad** is the lowest unit of self-government in Bangladesh. Every union is divided into three wards and each ward is divided into three villages. The Union covers an area of approximately ten to fifteen square kilometres and a population of approximately twenty to thirty thousand. At present, there are 4,401 unions in Bangladesh. The provision of each union is one elected chairman, twelve elected members - three from each ward, and three elected female members - one from each ward. Elections are held every five years.

²⁴ **Thana** is the lowest administrative unit of Bangladesh, which stands at the intermediate level in between the union and the district. Now, Thana is known as Upazila. Every Upazila is divided into a number of unions. The Upazila covers an area of approximately one hundred kilometres and a population of approximately two to three hundred thousand. At present there are 476 Upazilas in Bangladesh. A senior assistant secretary, known as the Upazila executive officer, heads each Upazila.

²⁵ **District** is the highest level of local administration in Bangladesh, which is divided in a number of Upazilas. The district covers an area of approximately five to seven hundreds kilometres with a population of approximately ten to fifteen hundred thousand. Currently, there are 64 districts in Bangladesh. A deputy secretary heads each district.

Rahman 1997). Each Union Parishad was divided into three wards. Provision was made to elect the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and nine other members of the Parishad. The main objective of this body was direct participation of the people in the management of their affairs through a representative body. The TDC and Zila Board were headed by the Circle Officer (development) and Deputy Commissioner, respectively, who were the chief government officials at the Thana and the District (Rahman 1997). The functions of these two bodies of local government focused on supervising the development programmes while monitoring and coordinating different tiers (Khan 2000).

In 1975, the Mujib government also introduced the District Governor Scheme to decentralize the administration of Bangladesh with the aim to make a recommendation to the governors in matters of administration, coordination and implementation of development programmes. The District Administration Act of 1975 also provided for reorganization of the Thana Administration and for the constitution of an administrative council for each Thana. It is believed that it was the most significant breakthrough in terms of local government institution building (Aminuzzaman 1993).

The Sheikh Mujib government also took the question of administrative reform as a priority concern, and on March 15, 1972, set up a committee under the name of the 'Administrative and Services Reorganization Committee' (ASRC) (Rahman 2000). It is argued that the report of the ASRC was the first comprehensive report that dealt with almost all aspects of administration. The report pleaded for democratization of administration in the country, and strongly argued for devolution of authority to the local government. Unfortunately, the report of the ASRC was not formally published (Ali 1995, Siddiquee 1997, Khan 2000, Rahman 1997). Thus, the Mujib government was not willing to introduce decentralized local governance in the country. Rather, the government was thinking of establishing a party-oriented administration at the local level for party control and their party's interests. Huque clearly states that,

...over four years following independence, then, virtually no attempt was made to revive or reconstruct local government in Bangladesh. The AL which was, prior to independence, the party of the deprived East Pakistani bourgeoisie demanding an equal share of the capitalist pie, could hardly meet the political expectations of a nation comprised mostly of landless labourers and small farmers living in the rural areas. Political activities were concentrated in the capital

and participation was monopolized by urban residents who had easy access to the centre of power. (Huque 1988: 49)

4.3.2 Zia Regime (1975-1980)

Major General Ziaur Rahman, the first military government of Bangladesh, came into power through a successful, yet bloodless, civil military revolution on November 7, 1975. Soon after assuming the state's power, he initiated a committee to reform the service structure, which did not involve any changes to the local government administration. However, the government of Ziaur Rahman took two initiatives to ensure people's participation over the decision-making process at the local level in matters relating to development with the introduction of the Thana Development Committee (TDC) consisting solely of elected Union Parishad Chairmen (Rahman and Sarker 1997, Ali 1995). The TDC could design development schemes and disburse government allocated funds for the Thana level works programmes. It is argued that though the TDC was intended to transfer some powers from the government representatives to people's representatives, in reality it did not enjoy that transfer, and it was dominated by the bureaucracy (Siddiquee 1997). Secondly, Zia's government initiated the appointment of District Development Coordinators (DDCs) from among the elected members of Parliament of the ruling party (Rahman and Sarker 1997). The responsibilities of the DDCs were to coordinate and assist in the implementation of different development schemes in respective administrative districts, periodically directed. Since these decisions were politically motivated, empirical evidence shows that there was no scope for the establishment of decentralized local governance (Khan 1985, Siddiquee 1997, Wahhab 1996).

It is claimed that Zia was more ambitious to capitalize and mobilize the local power in favour of his political party. In doing so, he initiated a major reform policy in 1980 and introduced the 'Gram Sarker' at the grassroots level in the country (Haque 1988, Rahaman 2000). The Gram Sarker was a body consisting of a gram pradhan (village executive) and eleven elected members representing different classes of the village. These members were called Montri (ministers) and represented various interests including the functional groups composed of farmers, youth and women (Aminuzzaman 1997). It was called a mini-government which could undertake planning and promotional programmes (Rahman 1997) of agriculture, health, education, family planning, cottage industries, fisheries and livestock and

women's affairs. It was the most admirable attempts made by the Zia government, but the experiences were mixed. One study shows that through the Gram Sarker policy, Zia was trying to build a broad based party structure and gain easy access to the rural voters (Siddiquee 1997). Another survey reported that over 98% of the Gram Sarkers belonged to higher families who traditionally dominated the politico-economic and social scenes of rural societies (Alam 1981 cited from Haque 1988). The representation of local people was quite absent in this body. The contemporary situation is rightly summarized by Ahmed and his associates (1988) in this manner:

...these institutions in reality remained busy canvassing and mobilizing support for the government in the rural areas in cooperation with the party in power and party affiliated interest groups such as youth complexes and village defence fronts. Thus, in essence, these local bodies were not much different from General Ayub's Basic Democracies in the 1960s... These local bodies had virtually no autonomy, they depended largely on the central government for funds and instructions; they could carry on their functions only with the patronage of the senior bureaucrats, and in fact, through these institutions the web of central control extended up to the village. (cited from Siddiquee 1996)

4.3.3 Ershad Regime (1981-1990)

General Ershad, the second military government leader, took up the question of reforming the administrative system as the first of a series of other reforms (Rahman 1997). Ershad government appointed the Committee for Administrative Reorganization and Reform (CARR), a high power committee consisting of seven members, to review the administrative structure and recommend an appropriate, sound and effective local government system (Khan 1987, 1985, Schroeder 1985, Ingham et al. 1992, Morshed, 1997). CARR recommended a three-tier local government system: the Zila Parishad (District Council), Upazila Parishad (Sub-District Council), and Union Parishad (Union Council) (Siddiquee and Hulme 2000). The CARR also suggested abolishing sub-divisions and divisions as an administrative unit (Siddiquee 1997, Ali 1995, Morshed 1997). Among the three tiers, the Upazila Parishad was considered as a major landmark in the history of local government reform in Bangladesh (Siddiquee and Hulme 2000). The Upazila decentralization programme has been elaborately

discussed in the next chapter. However, the momentum that the Upazila system engendered did not last long. There was general dissatisfaction against the Ershad regime. The dissatisfaction thus turned into a mass movement, and the Ershad regime was overthrown at the end of 1990.

4.3.4 Khaleda Regime (1991-1996)

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) came into power by a free and fair election in 1991, and Khaleda Zia, wife of late President Ziaur Rahman, became Prime Minister. Soon after assuming power, Khaleda's government dissolved the Upazila Parishad, claiming gross mismanagement and corruption by an Ordinance, and replaced the Upazila with the Thana Administration (Rahman and Sarker 1997, Aminuzzaman 1993). It is argued that her attitude towards the Upazila brought her a larger number of allies from civil bureaucrats who were also unhappy with losing substantial power to local politicians, and it was seen as a victory of bureaucrats (Rahman and Khan 1997). However, in 1991, Khaleda's government appointed the 'National Committee on Local Government Structure', a reform commission (Huda Commission) to recommend a participatory local government administration (Sarker 2006, 2003, Rahman 1997). Reviewing the existing structure, the Huda Commission recommended a two-tier system of local government, which consisted of the Zila Parishad (District Council) and Union Parishad (Union Council). In fact, this commission did not emphasize the issues of people's participation and local government decentralization in Bangladesh. However, the recommendations of this commission were only partly implemented.

In addition, the Thana Development Coordination Committee (TDCC) was established at the Thana level, as a coordinating body in between the Union and Zila Parishad (Rahman 1997). The TDCC consists of all the Union Parishad Chairmen, women members and government officials of different line ministries. The chairmanship of the committee rotates monthly among the Union Parishad Chairmen, in alphabetical order, while the Thana executive officer acts as the committee's secretary (Sarker 2003). The TDCC has the responsibility of assessing the needs and demands of the Union and the Thana. It would also prepare the development plans of the Thana, comprising the demands of the Union Parishads in the light of the national development policy (Rahman 1997). However, experience shows that the TDCC had little decision-making power, virtually no popular participation, and

pushed central-local relations back to bureaucratic control (Turner 2000 cited from Sarker 2006). Thus, during her five years of rule, Khaleda Zia failed to form participatory decentralized local governance, but rather reinstated the bureaucracy that dominated the previous Thana administration.

4.3.5 Hasina Regime (1996-2001)

In 1996, the Bangladesh Awami League came to power with the alliance of former President General Ershad (Jatiya Party). Sheikh Hasina, daughter of late President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, became the Prime Minister. Soon after she came to power, the Hasina government renamed the Thana administration as Upazila Parishad by an ordinance without any defined structure and functions (Sarker 2006). Although the previous Upazila system was reintroduced, the Upazila Chairman election issue was undecided and did not hold in the Awami League regime (ibid 2006). Thus, it remained a bureaucratic institution dominated by the local level bureaucrats. In addition, Hasina's government followed the practice of earlier governments, viz. it took steps to change the local government system and set up a reform commission (Rahmat Ali Commission) in 1997. The major concern of the commission was to recommend a workable and grassroots-oriented local level administration. The commission recommended a four-tier local governance from grassroots to district level; the Gram Parishad (Village Council), Union Parishad (Union Council), Upazila Parishad (Upazila Council), and Zila Parishad (Zila Council) (Rahman 2000, Siddiquee 1997). However, the irony is that the commission's recommendations were not implemented during her five year rule.

4.3.6 Khaleda Regime (2001- 2006)

In October 2001, the Four Party Alliance led by the BNP, came to power with a vast majority. Begum Khaleda Zia became the Prime Minister for the second time in the political history of Bangladesh. From the very beginning, the BNP led coalition government has laid emphasis on empowering the local governments. They have introduced four-tier systems of local government which was recommended by the earlier Hasina Government, but renamed the Gram Parishad to the Gram Sarker. These tiers are: (a) Zila Parishad at district level, (b)

Upazila Parishad at Upazila level, (c) Union Parishad at union level, and (d) Gram Sarker (Village Government) at the village level (Sarker 2003, 2006).

At the district level there is a Zila Parishad, which is at present represented by the government representatives (bureaucrats). Although according to the commission's recommendations, the Zila Parishad must consist of the locally elected bodies. In fact, the fate of the Zila Parishad is still undecided, and is the most ineffective tier. Like the Zila Parishad, the existence of the Upazila Parishad is on paper only. Though the government was committed to reintroducing the Upazila system, it could not conduct Upazila elections during its tenure. As a result, the power is concentrated in the hands of government representatives and their allies (Ibid 2006). The Union Parishad is the only local level institution still alive with little power and authority. The 7th Union Parishad election was held in 2003.

The Gram Sarker Act of 2003 has been passed for the creation of Gram Sarkers (Village Governments). This body has been created at the ward level. According to the Act, each Gram Sarker will represent 1 to 2 villages comprising of approximately 3,000 people on average. A Union Parishad member will be the Chairman of the Gram Sarker, and all 13 members would be nominated in a general meeting of the ward's voters under the prescribed and directing authority. The selection of Gram Sarkers was completed in 2004. In the course of constituting the Gram Sarker, many reports were published by the media which provided evidence of politicization of the Gram Sarker, such as: (a) reference to a statement of a law maker of the majority of the coalition government that they would have to make sure to fill Gram Sarkers with their party loyalists; (b) aspirants for members of Gram Sarkers started visiting the houses of ministers, (c) the government hurriedly went into constituting Gram Sarker for political gain (www.newagebd.com/2005/august/18). However, the Gram Sarker policy has been abolished by the present military backed interim government in 2007.

4.3.7 Conclusions

From the above discussion, it can be said that the history of Bangladesh shows each change in government was accompanied by a change in its local government structure, and it has become a political and administrative tradition of the country. The stated objective of each government was to decentralize administration in order to make an independent and empowered local governance system. Nevertheless, it has been seen that the two crucial

elements of self-governance, for example, devolution of power and the expansion of financial boundaries of local institutions, have not been initiated in the locally elected bodies. The major issue, people's participation, has remained limited to theory only (Khan 2000). Moreover, these attempts have not produced any substantive-sustainable development or any real participatory institutional base at the local level (Ahmed 1987). The Local Government Commission Report of 1999 pointed out, "since inception the local government institutions have undergone frequent changes in their functions and responsibilities. There is no rational basis or satisfactory explanation behind these changes." However, one explanation might be that each government has tried to establish its own party control at the grassroots level for winning the national elections, rather than decentralizing power from the centre to the periphery. As a result, the local government institutions could not truly become firmly rooted at the grassroots level, despite regular reforms for more than three decades. The existing structure and functions of local government in Bangladesh is briefly highlighted in the following chapter.

Chapter Five: The Present Local Government Structure of Bangladesh

5. Introduction

It has already mentioned that the genesis of central and local government in Bangladesh has a long tradition, dating back to the end of the nineteenth century (Westergaard and Alam 1995:679). This chapter attempts to briefly sketch the local government structure in Bangladesh, with special reference to the Upazila Administration/Prishad and Union Parishad. The performances of these two public institutions are extensively evaluated during the field study. More importantly, the empirical findings of the study have been collected from these two institutions. This chapter has been divided into three sections. The total overview of the administrative structure of Bangladesh has been briefly drawn in the first section. The second section deals with the structure and functions of the Upazila Administration. The structure and functions of the Union Parishad are presented in the third section.

5.1 Government Structure of Bangladesh: at a Glance

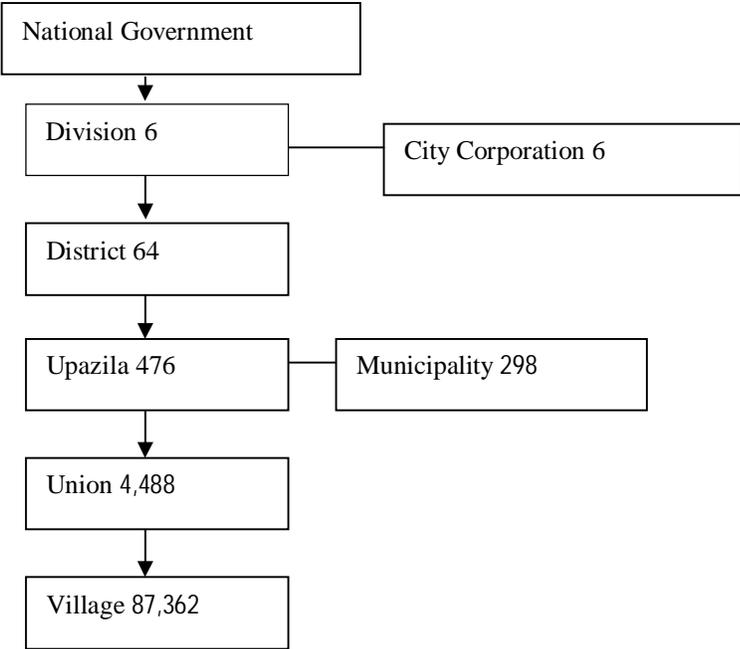
Bangladesh has a variant of the Westminster type of parliamentary form of government (Zafarulla 2002:82). The members of Parliament elect the President of the state for a term of five years as provided in the Constitution. The Prime Minister is the head of the government, who is also the leader of the majority party in the Parliament elected by the people. The Parliament is the highest legislative body having the power to make laws, orders, and regulations. There are 300 Parliament members elected by the franchise people for the term of five years, while 30 seats are reserved for women elected by the members of Parliament.

In addition, a non-party ‘neutral’ caretaker government is another most important constitutional part of the present governance system in Bangladesh. The caretaker government system was introduced in 1996, through the thirteen amendments of the Constitution. “During the period between the dissolution of an incumbent Parliament and the installation of a new cabinet after elections, the party government becomes inoperative. A non-party neutral caretaker administration then assumes the responsibility of managing the affairs of the state during the interregnum” (ibid:82). The main function of the caretaker government is to conduct a free and fair election within three months (ninety days) of the Parliament’s

dissolution. According to the thirteen amendments, there are 11 members in the non-party caretaker government headed by the Chief Advisor. The head of the state, following the rule of the constitution, appoints the Chief Advisor and the remaining ten advisors (distinguished personalities of the state) are appointed as per advice of the Chief Advisor. The Chief Advisor enjoys the power of the Prime Minister while the remaining ten enjoy the status of Ministers. The whole body is collectively responsible to the President. The caretaker government shall be dissolved on the date the new Prime Minister assumes his office (Bangladesh Gazette 1996).

Since independence, Bangladesh has a unitary form of government (Bangladesh Constitution 1994:6, Rahman 2000, UNESCO n.d.). The local government institutions are divided into six territorial units, and these units have direct or indirect corresponding local government bodies. There are 6 territorial Divisions, 64 Districts, 476 Upazilas, 298 Municipalities, 4,488 Union Parishads and 87,362 Villages. The hierarchy of local government units can be shown through Figure 4.

Figure 4: Hierarchy of Local Government Units



Division is primarily a coordinating unit which stands between national and sub-national units. The Divisional Commissioner, a high level bureaucrat, is appointed as the administrative head of the division assisted by an additional commissioner with a number of

officers and staff. The Divisions are subdivided into 64 districts. *District* is well known as the most vital unit of field administration, as it carries out most of the regulatory functions of government. The Deputy Commissioner (DC) is the chief administrative officer of the government, who coordinates development and other government activities in the district. The DC is the mid-level civil servant. He is responsible for the collection of taxes, maintenance of the law and order situation, coordination of development activities and supervision of the local government. Like the Division, Districts are also subdivided into 476 Upazilas, which are further subdivided into 4,488 Union Parishads. The Upazila Administration/Parishad and the Union Parishad are considered as the root of local development, people's participation and decentralization. According to the current decentralization policy, both these local institutions are regarded as the focal point of the country's local governance. The origin of the Upazila administration has already been briefly and critically pointed out and highlighted in the previous chapter. The aim of this chapter, as already mentioned above, is to discuss the existing structure and functions of two local governance institutions: Upazila Administration/Parishad and Union Parishad. The following section introduces a descriptive analysis of the Upazila decentralization scheme.

5.2 Upazila Administration: An Approach to Decentralization and People's Participation

5.2.1 Genesis of the Upazila

The then Military government of General Ershad deeply expressed his desire to introduce a new and people-friendly local governance system in Bangladesh. To initiate such a grassroots-oriented governance system, the military government appointed a high level committee on March 1982, known as the Committee for Administrative Reform and Reorganization (CARR) (Sarker 2006, Aminuzzaman 1993, Siddiquee and Hulme 2000, Khan 1985). The central aim of this committee was to review the structure and organization of the existing civilian administration and to recommend an appropriate system based on devolution of authority and responsibility with the objective of taking the administration closer to the citizens (Khan 1987, 1985, Schroeder 1985, Ingham and Kamal 1992). The committee submitted its report on June 1982. The report was divided into three major dimensions: a) observations on the prevailing bottleneck of administration; b) recommendations to overcome the situations; and c)

suggestions to implement the recommendations. However, the committee identified some major inadequacies in the overall productivity of the administrative system and process in Bangladesh (Siddiquee 1997, Aminuzzaman 1993, Morshed 1997):

- 1) The Tadbir (lobbying) based approach to decision-making;
- 2) Lack of sound and durable political process to give appropriate, consistent and uniform policies with regard to public welfare;
- 3) Vertical functional departmentalism that vitiates area-based coordination;
- 4) Weak local government system tendered weaker by lack of appropriate political direction;
- 5) Weakening of traditional administrative and representative institutions at different levels of administration;
- 6) Creation of parallel political and administrative institutions leading to conflict in jurisdiction; and
- 7) Reluctance on the part of the political authority to devolve power to the representative institutions at the local level.

In order to remove the above inadequacies, the committee emphasized the representative local government system in general. The particular recommendations were (Khan 1985):

- 1) Elected local council at Union, Thana and District Level and the Chairman of these councils would be directly elected by the people;
- 2) The elected Chairman of the District and the Thana would be the chief coordinator for all development activities;
- 3) All elected Chairmen of the Union Parishad (UP) would be members of the Thana Parishad (TP) and the elected Chairmen of the TPs would be members of the Zila Parishad;
- 4) To establish adequate devolution of administrative, financial and judicial powers in favour of the ZP and TP;
- 5) To strengthen the ZP and TP further, the existing Thana would be upgraded as Upazilas (sub-district) and the existing sub-divisions would be gradually upgraded into district;

- 6) The Upazila should be given responsibilities to: (a) act as development agencies for some development projects on behalf of the central government; and (b) prepare its own Periodic Development Plan and Annual Development Programme in consulting with the relevant Union Parishads;
- 7) Besides the central grants, the Upazila and the UP should also be given additional taxation power to raise local revenue; and
- 8) To strengthen the Upazila further, all administrative ministries should be asked by the government to work out the schedule of administrative, financial and procedural powers that may be further decentralized in favour of the Upazilas.

The CARR Chairman summed up the expected results of such a decentralization programme and it was expected to lead to: 1) improvement of the socio-economic conditions of the people; 2) involvement of the local people in the constructive decision-making process; 3) creation of opportunities for cooperation and coordination among the policy makers, persons involved in implementation and local people with a view to ensuring a dynamic development process; 4) improvement of government officials' accountability to the people's representatives and a fair distribution of administrative responsibilities among the local level authorities; 5) preparation and implementation of the projects in accordance with the needs of the local people; 6) facilitations of judicial process; and 7) closing the gap between the people and the administrators (Huque 1989). But the irony is that the recommendations of the CARR were not implemented accordingly. However, the government took immediate measures to implement the major recommendations. A high-powered 'National Implementation Committee for Administrative Reorganization/Reform' (NICAR) was appointed to facilitate and implement the recommendations of CARR (Rahman 2000). Finally, based on the recommendations of NICAR, the Local Government Ordinance of 1982 was issued and the institutional set up of the Upazila Parishad started (Schroeder 1985) against a background of past failures in previous decentralized programmes (Ingham and Kalam 1992). At the end of 1984, 460 Upazilas had been created. Presently, there are now 476 Upazilas (BBS 2005).

5.2.2 Initial Structure and Composition of the Upazila Parishad

According to its framework, the Upazila Parishad consists of a directly elected Chairman and a combination of elected and official members (Sarker 2003, Siddiquee 1997, Aminuzzaman 1993). The UP Chairmen within an Upazila continue to be ex-officio members of the Upazila Parishad. In addition, the Chairman of the any municipality located at the Upazila and the Chairman of the Upazila Central Cooperative Association (UCCA) become members of the Upazila Parishad. Three other non-official female members and one male member to be appointed by the central government from local people are included in the Parishad. Specified officials of the nation-building departments, like education, engineering, agriculture, youth, fishery, women's affairs, health, et cetera, posted at the Upazila as ex-officio officials are also members of the Upazila, but without voting rights (Sarker 1997, Noor 1986). The members of the Upazila Parishad can be divided into two categories: elected and representative members, and ex-officio members. The latter category does not have voting rights, while the former category enjoys the voting right in the Parishad. Different categories of members in the Upazila Parishad are presented in the following Table 6.

Table 6: Composition of the Upazila Parishad

Chairman	
Voting members	Non-Voting members
<p><u>Representative Members</u></p> <p>Union Parishad Chairman</p> <p>Paurashava Chairman</p> <p><u>Appointed Members</u></p> <p>Three female members</p> <p>One Male member</p> <p>UCCA Chairman</p>	<p>Upazila Nirbahi Officer</p> <p>Upazila Health and Family Planning Officer</p> <p>Upazila Education Officer</p> <p>Upazila Agriculture Officer</p> <p>Upazila Engineer</p> <p>Upazila Cooperative Officer</p> <p>Upazila Livestock Officer</p> <p>Upazila Fisheries Officer</p> <p>Upazila Social Welfare Officer</p> <p>Upazila Rural Development Officer</p> <p>Upazila Mass Communication Officer</p> <p>Upazila Revenue Officer</p> <p>Officer in Charge, Police station</p>

Source: Siddiquee 1997

Many claimed that the most incredible milestone of the Upazila Parishad is the provision of an elected Chairman. The first election of the Upazila Parishad Chairman was held in two phases, in May and in June of 1985. This is the first time in the history of public administration in Bangladesh that an elected office has replaced the central bureaucracy at the Upazila level. Previously, an official of the central government headed this level. According to the Upazila rules, the Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) who is an agent of the central administration and chief executive of the Upazila will act as the Principal staff officer of the Upazila Parishad (Noor 1986, Aminuzzaman 1993, Siddiquee and Hulme 2000). The Chairman was granted substantial power and authority, including the authority to control and coordinate the activities of the government officials working at this level. Such an initiative and historical change pointed towards a shift in the control over the local decision-making from the bureaucracy to democratically elected members. It can also be said that the Upazila Parishad system has paved the way to people's access to the local administration for the first

time in the political history of Bangladesh. At the same time, the composition of the Upazila Parishad shows that a number of well trained and technical officials of major nation-building departments are placed in it and a number of new departments and posts were also created. This led to high criticisms of bureaucratic expansion and establishment at the local administration of Bangladesh which Wood termed as ‘bureaucratic reproduction’ (Wood 1982 cited from Siddiquee 1997) in the name of decentralization.

5.2.3 Functions of the Upazila Parishad

The establishment of the Upazila Parishad has introduced a kind of sharing of responsibilities between the centre and the Upazila. The Upazila Parishad has been designed to work as a focal point of all administrative and development activities in Bangladesh. A huge number of important functions, which had been formerly performed by the central government, were transferred to the Upazila. This was, in fact, a remarkable shift from the earlier situation, as the subject transferred to the Upazila Parishad covered almost all development functions. The functions of the Upazila Parishad were divided into two broad categories: transferred subjects and retained subjects. The central government has retained mostly regulatory subjects, such as the Judiciary, Thana Administration, Registration, Statistics, et cetera, while all other development activities were transferred to the Upazila. The list of transferred and retained functions is presented in the following Table 7.

Table 7: Lists of Transferred and Retained Functions

Transferred Functions	Retained Functions
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Formulation of Upazila development plans and programmes on the basis of the Union Parishad plan and implementation 2. Giving assistance to the Union Parishad 3. Promotion of health and family planning 4. Management of environment 5. Promotion of socio-cultural activities 6. Primary education and child development programme 7. Live-stock, fisheries and forestry 8. Agriculture including extension services, input supply services and irrigation 9. Small and Cottage industries 10. Rural Works programmes 11. Food for Work Programmes 12. Assistance to the Zila Parishad in development activities 13. Promotion of employment generation activities 14. Implementation of government policies and programmes within the Thana 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Civil and criminal judiciary 2. Administration and management of central revenue 3. Maintenance of law and order 4. Registration 5. Maintenance of essential goods including food 6. Generation and distribution of electric supply 7. Irrigation scheme involving more than one district 8. Education above primary level 9. Large scale industries 10. Food control and development of water resources 11. Marine fishing 12. Compilation of national statistics 13. Inter-district and inter-thana means of communication 14. Research organization, such as the council of scientific and industrial research

Source: Noor 1986, Rahman 1991, Siddiquee 1997

The main function of the Upazila Parishad is to prepare an Upazila development plan covering all spheres of agriculture, education, health, communication, et cetera. Prior to the preparation of the annual development plan, project proposals were invited from the Union Parishads, as well as from the Upazila Parishad officials in charge of the various sectors. The selected projects were to be included in the annual development plan in an Upazila Parishad meeting. There were a number of project implementation and selection committees in every Upazila with a maximum of seven members. The Chairman of the Upazila Parishad, UNO, the Upazila Engineer and Union Parishad Chairmen are generally the members of the committee (Lein 1989 in Alam et al. 1994). They are expected to visit every union at the project's identification and selection stage. They are also supposed to discuss the necessity and priority

of the projects with the Chairman and members of the Union Parishad, as well as with the local people. The development projects are implemented under two different systems: either through contractors or through the Project Implementation Committee (PIC), depending on the size and nature of the projects. Contractors are selected through a tender committee following the Upazila Parishad Rules of 1986. The tender committee is formed by the UNO and Upazila Engineer as its Chairman and member-secretary, respectively. The officer of the concerned department would likely serve as the member of the committee. In addition, a project inspection committee of three or five members would be formed. The membership would include elected or official members of the Upazila Parishad, as well as important personalities of the locality. Besides, some development projects are implemented locally by the PIC (particularly the Rural Works Programme or Food for Works Programme) with a maximum of seven and a minimum five members. The PIC Chairman should be selected from the elected UP officials, while other members are included from different categories of the locality (social workers, religious leaders, school teachers, freedom fighters, Ansars and VDP members, women representatives etc.). The members of the committee are collectively and directly responsible for implementing the project. Therefore, the primary data for this research has been collected from both these categories of the project.

The Parishad was also responsible for implementing all government policies and programmes occasionally entrusted by the central government. In addition, it was also responsible for coordinating the activities of the Union Parishads. One of the most vital characteristics of the Upazila Parishad was the significant autonomy it was granted to exercise its transferred activities. The Upazila Parishads were also empowered to make their development plan, as well as to allocate and implement development projects without seeking approval from the higher authorities. It can be said that, at least from its theoretical composition, by devolving such authority to the locally elected officials, the Upazila system was to lead in a new era of 'bottom-up' planning and participatory development within a democratic framework (Siddiquee and Hulme 2000). Many believe that this was a unique feature and a great breakthrough in the history of local government in Bangladesh. This approach of devolving authority was a break with the past to the extent that it had distributed the civil state, its infrastructure and resources much more widely in the countryside (Crow 1989 in Rahman and Sarker 1997).

5.2.4 Finance of the Upazila Parishad

The central government ensured funds as grants, in order to implement the development programmes by the Upazila Parishad. The Parishad also received its income from several sources permitted by the government. There are three categories of funds available under its control: 1) block grants from the central government in every fiscal year (annual budget); 2) local resource mobilization through taxes, levies, fees and tools from eight different sources; a) lease money on jalmahals (inland natural fisheries); b) tax on professions, trade and calling; c) tax on dramatic and theatrical shows; d) street light tax; e) fees for fairs, exhibitions, et cetera; f) fees for licences and permits; g) tolls on services and facilities maintained; and h) lease money from local haats and bazaars; and 3) the Food for Works (Sarker and Rahman 1997, Rahman 1991). The revenue collection authority of the Upazila Parishad is also a new innovation in the sense that the previous Thana Parishads did not have their own sources of income. Moreover, the operational autonomy shifted to the Parishad to sanction their own budgets without any unnecessary intervention by the central government. Thus, the authority of the central government was reduced and it was shifted to the locally elected officials. To establish a truly decentralized and self-sufficient participatory local institution, this arrangement could be regarded as the powerful and timely initiative in a situation where bureaucracy played a dominant role in all aspects of local governance.

5.2.5 Upazila: the Present Structure

After a long journey of its experimentation, abolition, and reintroduction, the Upazila system is still alive in a different form. The present structure of the Upazila is completely dominated and controlled by the central and local bureaucracy. The UNO is the chief administrator of the Upazila, while the first class officials of the concerned ministries head other departments of different line ministries. At present there is no people's representative at this level. Election of the Upazila Chairman has not been held since 1991. However, there is a development coordination committee named the 'Upazila Development Coordination Committee' (UDCC), whose composition is the same as the previous structure of the Upazila Parishad, except for the position of the Upazila Chairman. This committee meets once a month under the presidency of the Union Parishad Chairman, while the UNO acts as a member secretary. The

Chairmanship of the UDCC rotates among the Union Parishad Chairmen. The Parliament member of each constituency is appointed as the advisor of this committee. The functions of the previous Upazila Parishad are delegated to this committee.

5.2.6 Upazila Decentralization Myth: Bad Practice of a Good Theory

Given the background information, it can be said that the Upazila system's initiative has a number of groundbreaking components, which has made it different from the previous local government units. Although, theoretically, the system had been considered as a landmark in the political and administrative history of Bangladesh, in practice, soon after its establishment it was criticised by political parties and scholars alike. A number of research findings show the diverse picture of the system. These findings can be divided into three categories: *administrative, political* and *economic*. The Upazila decentralization scheme was introduced to establish a directly elected local government body at this stage. However, the findings show that the central government deputed a number of high officials at the Upazila, and the Upazila Parishad did not have full control over personnel matters as they were transferred by the central government (Alam, Huque and Westergaard 1994, Zafarullah 1997). It is also criticised that the Upazila system enhances the scope of the expansion of central bureaucracy to the local institutions. Thus, the system empowered bureaucrats rather than local institutions (Khan 1987, Siddiquee 1997, 1996, Siddiquee and Hulme 2000, Schroeder 1985). It is generally said that the Ershad regime exploited every opportunity to weaken the system's democratic form and strengthen the bureaucratic hands (Khan 2000). Another study revealed that one major problem of Upazila decentralization was non-cooperation and reluctance of bureaucracy to delegate authority to the lower levels of administration, and/or to help ensure people's participation in the local planning process (Khan et al. 1988 in Islam 2005). Westergaard and Alam (1995:683) found in their study findings that the conflict between the Upazila Chairman and the UNO was also a visible feature that caused delay in the decision-making process and implementation of development projects. The relationship between the UNO and other Upazila officials of different line ministries was relatively hostile due to role conflict. The numerous forms of conflicts, tension and resentment constrained Upazila activities and performance (Siddiquee et al. 2000, Schroeder 1985).

Politically, according to many studies, the Upazila decentralization programme widened the scope of misusing political power by the rich strata of society, as they enjoyed the benefits of the new system. It was often claimed that the unpopular military government established the Upazila in order to build up a political support base at the local levels (Rahman et al. 1997, Siddiquee 1997, 1996, Khan 2000, Ingham et al. 1992). Through decentralizing authority to the Upazila level, it sought to win political support of the rural elite, create a patron-client relationship with them, and thereby achieve its long-term political goals: civilianization, legitimization and continuation in power. A number of studies had indicated that the Upazila election had favoured the rich and well-born. The elite controlled the participatory structures. Hence, it implies that a direct network was established between the state elite and rural wealthy and well-born citizens, where the decentralizing reform played a crucial role (Sarker 1997). One study shows that while some of the projects were wanted by the poor, they were not represented on the local bodies, nor were they involved in project selection (Westergaard and Alam 1995:684). Crook and Manor (1994) also found in their study that the local poor people received very little in the way of projects intended to assist them (in Westergaard and Alam 1995:684). Moreover, it was claimed that the system used to channel development funds into the hands of better-off individuals (Alam, Huque and Westergaard 1994, Ingham and Kalam 1992). Thus, it led to massive corruption in the local government institutions. One of the major criticisms against the Upazila system was that it had decentralized corruption to local levels (Mahtab 1985:1312). Another study shows that close to 40% of the resources allocated for development purposes went elsewhere due to widespread corruption (Siddiquee and Hulme 2000).

The financial power of the Upazila Parishads was very limited. The Parishads were mostly dependent on central grants from the government to carry out their functions and for financing their annual Upazila development program (Westergaard and Alam 1995:683, Khan 1985). This dependency made the local bodies vulnerable to central pressure and manipulation to mobilize local support for the regime in power. Finding shows that the revenue generated by an average Upazila each year ranged between Tk 300,000 to 500,000, which is a tiny fraction, between 3 to 5 percent, of their total annual budget (Siddiquee 1997).

The preceding discussion makes it clear that in practice, the initiative of the Upazila decentralization programme did not fulfil the necessary criteria for decentralization. Although the elected officials dominated the Upazila, it was practically dependent on the central

government in three major aspects: policy-making, financial matters and personnel matters. Such a dependence syndrome led to massive corruption and mismanagement at the local level.

Despite long lists of criticisms and antipathy, many scholars believe that at least theoretically, the initiative of the Upazila decentralization scheme was a landmark in the political and administrative history of Bangladesh. This can easily be proved by the past two regimes commitments to reintroduce the system. More importantly, the issue of reintroducing the Upazila system was a priority at the top of the election manifesto of all political parties in the two last national elections. Moreover, the present interim government has been planning to held Upazila election ahead the national election of December 2008. Scholars also claim that the political motive for abolishing the Upazila Parishads altogether was not made clear (Westergaard and Alam 1995:684). Some empirical studies indicate that by the time of its abolition, the Upazila had become a well-rooted machinery of the local government institution in the peripheries of Bangladesh. Massive development of the Upazila system incurred a huge amount of national expenditure, but it also helped develop a sizeable infrastructure and development programme (Aminuzzaman 1993). It can be said that eight years is not sufficient time to evaluate the performance of the Upazila system. It is implied that in general, such institutional change needs adequate time for its maturity, development and empowerment, and particularly in Bangladesh where bureaucratic culture is deeply rooted in all organs of the state, and where political culture is non-cooperative and confrontational in nature.

The Upazila decentralization policy has been elaborately discussed in the above texts. Secondary information has been extensively used to review the Upazila system. The structure and functions of the Union Parishad is presented in the following section.

5.3 Union Parishad (UP): Structure and Functions

The history of local government in Bangladesh is full of rhetoric and devoid of commitment. The local institutions are created, abolished and reintroduced in all regimes in a competitive manner. However, despite the frequent experimentations of local institutions, there is only one local government unit, named the Union Parishad, which has been working with a (semi)democratic character since its creation. The Union Parishad (UP) is the lowest tier of the local governance institution in Bangladesh (Tareque 1994:31). It is acknowledged as the most important and viable local institution, through which participatory development and

democratic process and practices can be achieved and ensured. It has a long history, as the premise of the UP originated in the proposal of the famous Ripon Resolution of 1883 (Siddiqui 2005). Based on the Ripon Resolution, the Union Committee was established under the Bengal Local Self-Government Act of 1885 (Siddiquee 1997b). Since then, the UP has been working as a local government unit in Bangladesh.

5.3.1 Union Parishad Present Composition: Old Wine in a New Bottle

The UP is the only local government body that has been working without any fundamental changes since its creation. From 1959 onward, the changes were minor, and consisted of regrouping functions and shifting the emphases among the functions. The most unique feature of the UP is that its elections were held regularly after the post-independence period. At present, the UP consists of one Chairman, directly elected by the voters of the entire union, and nine members elected by the voters of nine wards. In addition, there are three reserved seats for women members, each one elected from their wards, respectively (Siddiqui 2005, Sarker 2006). A large number of functions have been prescribed in the ordinance. In practice, however, UP functions are usually confined to the following areas (see for details Sarker 2006, Siddiqui 2005, Rahman 2000, Tareque 1994):

- assessing and collecting taxes;
- maintaining law and order through the village police;
- maintaining birth and death registration;
- maintaining the union plan book and preparing a comprehensive union plan;
- constructing and maintaining roads, bridges, culverts, et cetera;
- constructing and maintaining ponds;
- maintaining haats and bazaars;
- developing local resources and their uses;
- maintaining UP information and records;
- motivating people to adopt family planning methods;
- reviewing the development activities of all agencies at the union level; and

- adopting and implementing development schemes in the field of agriculture, forestry, fisheries, livestock, education, health, cottage industries, communication, irrigation and flood protection (Siddiqui 2005).

Apart from the above functions, the UPs are also assigned with the responsibility of implementing government and donor-assisted projects: Vulnerable Group Development, the Rural Maintenance Component Programme and Rural Infrastructural Maintenance Programme.

The main source of finance is the government block grants (Sarker 2006). UPs have the power to raise revenue from various local sources, although these are limited and generally unbuoyant, as collection rates have been very low for decades. However, the other sources of income of the UPs are (Siddiqui 2005, Noor 1994):

- tax on the annual value of buildings and land or a union rate to be levied in the prescribed manner;
- tax on professions, trade and callings;
- tax on cinemas, dramatic and theatrical shows, and other forms of entertainment and amusement;
- fees for licenses and permits granted by the Parishad;
- fees (lease money) from specified haats, bazaars and ferries to be determined by the government; and
- fees (lease money) from Jalmahals (water estates) situated entirely within the Union boundaries.

Despite the democratic character, many studies have shown that both in theory and in practice UPs lack adequate resources, authority, institutional capacity, manpower and dependency (central-local, political, bureaucratic and financial) (Sarker, 2003, 2006, Siddiqui 2005, Siddiquee 1997, Rahman et al. 1997, Alam et al. 1994, Westergaard 2000, Khan 2000, Khan 1987). However, the ground reality of a decentralization policy and people's participation and the performances of local governance institutions: the Upazila Parishad, the UP, NGOs and the private, are described in a comprehensive manner in the following chapter, based on the empirical data of this study.

Chapter Six: Theoretical Analysis of Field Information: Decentralization, People's Participation and the Role of Local Governance Institutions; Grassroots Perspectives

6.1 Introduction

Analysis of primary data is the foremost part of qualitative research. Wiseman (1974) states that constant interplay of data gathering and analysis is the heart of qualitative research (in Saifullah 2001:36). In chapters four and five, development of decentralization process in Bangladesh has been analyzed extensively interpreting secondary information. This chapter intends to analyze the primary data collected from the research unit in a descriptive manner, rather than following any statistical techniques or matrix. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), a descriptive analysis provides a sense of what the observed world is truly like; while the researcher's interpretations are meant to present a more detached conceptualization of that reality (in ibid 2001:36-37). The chapter is divided into four sections. The profile of the key informants is presented in the first section. The views of the principal informants regarding the application of the decentralization policy and people's participation are highlighted in the second section. The third section deals with the findings of five case studies. The performance of local governance institutions is discussed in the fourth and final section.

6.1.1 Respondents' Profiles: Age Distribution

It has already been mentioned that three categories of respondents were selected and interviewed as the principal informants from the research unit. They are: local government officials, UP officials and local political leaders, and a cross-section of Upazila inhabitants representing different socio-economic groups. The respondents profile is divided into two categories: age and education.

The age data of the respondents is presented in Table 8. The data shows that the majority of local government officials (64%) and of UP officials belong to the age group of 40-49 years. The local political leaders also belong to the age group of 40-49 years or over. The leaders of the two major political parties are in the age group of 60 years or over. Most of

the local people interviewed belong to the age groups of 30-39 and 40-49 years. The data evidently indicates that middle-aged people are leading the local governance institutions.

Table 8: Respondents' Age Groups

<i>Category of Informants</i>	<i>Age in Years</i>					<i>Total</i>
	<i>20-29</i>	<i>30-39</i>	<i>40-49</i>	<i>50-59</i>	<i>60+</i>	
Upazila Officials	Nil	04 (37%)	07 (64%)	02 (19%)	Nil	11 (100%)
UP Officials	Nil	03 (23%)	04 (31%)	03 (23%)	03 (23%)	13 (100%)
Local Political Leaders	Nil	Nil	01 (25%)	01 (25%)	02 (50%)	04 (100%)
Local People	13 (15%)	36 (43%)	30 (36%)	04 (5%)	01 (1%)	84 (100%)
Grand Total	13 (11%)	43 (38%)	42 (37%)	10 (9%)	06 (5%)	112 (100%)

6.1.2 Respondents' Educational Profile

Education is one of the most important and popular indexes to assess the social structure of any country. Durkheim (1956) states that education makes people conduct consistent with the authority of moral rules (in Doftori 2004:31). It has been said that man is the principal architect of a nation's development activities and education provides maximum support to make him perfect through flourishing a balanced combination of his personality and inherent qualities (Kamrunnessa 1992, in Asaduzzaman and Jinia 2000:147). Therefore, it is important to briefly highlight the respondents' educational background.

The following Table 9 illustrates the picture of the educational qualification of the respondents. The data shows that all of the local government officials (Upazila Officials) are highly educated. The field study information reveals that the minimum level of education is a Bachelors degree and the maximum is a PhD. On the other hand, the educational profile of the UP officials (people's representatives) is not pleasing. The majority of the UP Officials (approx. 61%) read at a grade nine, while half of them only completed class/grade five. Some

of the officials have not even attended school at all. Basically, this presents an unparallel and uneven feature of Upazila and UP officials. The educational profile of other UP Officials of the Bhaluka Upazila shows the same substandard picture. During the field study, the basic profile of 104 UP officials of eight UPs was also purposefully collected. Their educational background is presented in Table 10. The data reveals that approximately 63% of the UP officials attended school only up to grade nine, while 22% only have a maximum of a grade five reading level.

Table 9: Educational Background of the Respondents

Category of Informants	Nil	Below Class V	Class VI-IX	SSC-HSC	Graduation+	Total
Upazila Officials	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	11 (100%)	11 (100%)
UP Officials	02 (15%)	04 (31%)	04 (31%)	03 (23)	Nil	13 (100%)
Local Political Leaders	Nil	Nil	Nil	02 (50%)	02 (50%)	04
Local People	25 (30%)	20 (24%)	17 (20%)	13 (15%)	09 (11%)	84 (100%)
Grand Total	27 (24%)	24 (21%)	21 (19%)	18 (16%)	22 (20%)	112 (100%)

Source: Field Study, SSC - Secondary School Certificates, HSC - Higher Secondary School Certificate

Table 10: Educational Profile of 104 UP Chairmen and Members of Eight UPs of Bhaluka Upazila

Category of UP Officials	Nil	Below Class V	Class VI-IX	SSC-HSC	Graduation+	Total
UP Chairman	Nil	Nil	02 (25%)	05 (62 %)	01 (13%)	08 (100%)
UP Members (Male)	01 (1%)	18 (25%)	27 (38%)	20 (28)	06 (8%)	72 (100%)
UP Members (Female)	01 (4%)	05 (21%)	13 (54%)	05 (21%)	Nil	24 (100%)
Grand Total	02 (2%)	23 (22%)	42 (40%)	30 (29%)	07 (7%)	104 (100%)

6.2 Decentralization Policy in Bangladesh: Ground Reality – Unheard Voices

The decentralization process in Bangladesh has been elaborately discussed in the third chapter. The problems and causes of failure of the decentralization policy of different regimes have been extensively analyzed by interpreting secondary information. Furthermore, key respondents' opinions regarding the issues of decentralization and people's participation are examined and presented in the following.

In a question regarding the problems of implementing a decentralization policy in Bangladesh, 64% (see Table 11) of Upazila officials reported political unwillingness as a major factor. Most of the Upazila officials claimed that the decentralization is a vital issue that concerns the entire nation and should be initiated by the political parties of the country on the basis of national consensus. They further argued that the political parties in power, as well as the opposition, are equally responsible for establishing decentralized local governance in the country. Respondents expressed that the government officials, both on central and field levels, are in charge of implementing decentralization policy. Unfortunately, according to them, in spite of regular efforts during the last three decades or more, the political parties could not

agree on this national issue, that is, on what would be the local government structure of the country.

About 37% of Upazila officials, including 63% and 75% of the second and third categories of respondents, identified both political unwillingness and bureaucratic resistance as the leading factors that have, for years, jeopardized the country's decentralization policy and made local governance institutions ineffective. According to them, the country's law makers are quite reluctant to lose their control over local governance through increasing its power and autonomy. The Asian Development Bank (2003) states that during the last three decades or more, the Parliament Members have formally sanctioned playing an abnormally direct role in local development, which serves to stifle and control grassroots political processes and are strongly opposed to devolution (cited from Sarker 2006: 1298).

Similarly, the participants also claimed that the local government officials are not willing to loose their control from the public institutions. They are not interested in being subordinates, but prefer that people work under them. In this regard, the relationship between bureaucrats and the local people can be seen as a form of bureaucratic elitism rather than egalitarianism (Jamil 1998:411). During the field study, it was observed that the local level bureaucrats are accustomed to using the word 'under' and in fact, they feel more comfortable and proud to use this word for their subordinates and local people. They maintain that the colonial bureaucratic attitude which still governs and controls the country's entire administrative structure, creates serious obstruction to the transfer of power from the hands of the bureaucrats to the hands of the local elected bodies. Bureaucracy in Bangladesh has always been resistant to substantive jurisdictional and functional concessions to local government (Sarker 2006:1298). Much earlier, Michel (1962) had termed it as the 'iron law of oligarchy' (cited from Zafarullah 2007:162). Moreover, the bureaucracy of Bangladesh can be characterized as classical rather than political (Putnam 1975 in Jamil 1998:404). As a result, according to the respondents, elitism, clientelism, nepotism, and favouritism have been deeply rooted in central, as well as local administration in Bangladesh, which over the years have directly affected the decentralization policy.

Table 11: Impediments of implementing decentralization policy: respondents' views

Respondents' Category	Factors					
	1 Political	2 Administrative	1+2 Both	Others	Not known	Total
Upazila Officials	7 (64%)	Nil	4 (36%)	Nil	Nil	11 (100)
UP Officials and Political leaders	Nil	4 (24%)	13 (64%)	Nil	Nil	17 (100)
Local people	4 (5%)	11 (13%)	63 (75%)	Nil	6 (7%)	84 (100)
Grand Total	11 (10%)	15 (13%)	80 (72%)	Nil	6 (5%)	112 (100)

6.2.1 People's Participation in Local Development: Responses from Local Governance Officials

People's participation in local development has been considered as a means of achieving national goals in general, and as an end to decentralization policy in particular. It helps the policy-makers to make a better policy for the disadvantaged segments of the country and facilitates implementing development programmes effectively and efficiently. The people's views of how they see the dilemma of the theory and practice of people's participation in local development are presented in this section. Views of local governance officials regarding people's participation in local development are highlighted in the following text.

In response to a question, regarding the scope and problems of people's participation, most of the government officials (approximately 69%) answered that people's participation can be ensured in the existing structure of local governance. In their opinion, local people have greater scope of participation in development from two different approaches: direct participation and indirect participation. There are some development programmes, such as Food for Work Programmes and the Rural Works Programmes that are initiated and implemented by the local people with the cooperation of their elected UP officials. In these development programmes, the local people can directly participate in different phases. According to the local governance officials, in the present reality of Bangladesh, it is relatively

difficult to ensure the participation of every inhabitant in the process of development. Therefore, in most cases they participate indirectly through their elected representatives. The local governance officials repeatedly stated that the country has been exercising parliamentary democracy since 1991, which is the true form of indirect participation.

However, the respondents expressed their disappointment to the role of the political parties in general, and ruling parties in particular, regarding people's participation issues. In their opinion, the problem of people's participation in local development programmes is more political and local, rather than structural and administrative. The empirical finding shows that 60% of respondents identified political intervention to the local development activities as the main obstacle in people's participation. To them, leaders of the ruling parties of each regime had acted as the main architects of the local development programmes. They further argued that people's participation in development, either directly or indirectly, can not be ensured unless the local governance institutions are freed from the political control.

Respondents further claimed that the local development programmes are mostly controlled by the local elite under the patronage of central and local political leaders of the ruling party. The grassroots reality shows that the local power structure in Bangladesh is concentrated in the hands of the local elite. Most of the elected UP officials of the study unit came from the upper strata of society. Although their educational profile is low, they are well known as landlords in their areas. Land is the most vital traditional source of their power. During the field study it was informally discovered that the UP officials and local political leaders owned the sizeable land of the study area. This group might be termed as an 'exploitative class' who have good relations with central and local politicians and bureaucrats, and control the destiny of the rural people by remaining close to the citadel of power (Zafarullah and Khan 1989:21) and get the benefits of people's participation. As a result, despite huge external and internal pressure, the elusive phenomenon of people's participation in local development is ignored and remains only in papers as a striking slogan.

Some local governance officials (about 30%) of different departments, such as education, agriculture, fishery, health and engineering, have identified bureaucratic complexity as a constraint to people's participation. In their opinion, the existing bureaucratic system hampers local people's participation in two different ways. Firstly, the bureaucratic attitudes towards the local people, and secondly, the interdepartmental conflicts which they termed as lack of coordination. Respondents claimed that the relation between the bureaucrats

and local people is historically neither friendly nor trustworthy. They further stated that the local governance officials perceive themselves as superior, while common people are treated as inferior, illiterate, and unskilled. Findings indicate that bureaucrats, either local or central, always maintain a huge distance from the common people and it has become a common tradition in the present administration in Bangladesh. Quoting This is further substantiated by Anthony Down that the bureaucrats of Bangladesh are climbers or conservers rather than statesmen, because they always value power, prestige and income (Downs 1967 in Ahmed 1980:179). It can also be said that the local governance officials are deeply imbued with guardianship orientations rather than friendship and democratic orientations. Mr. Khan, the head of a local nation-building department in the study unit, revealed interesting characteristics of local bureaucrats while being interviewed. In his words,

I am a civil servant holding a good position at the Upazila level with power and prestige. Local people salute me, and I enjoy this. I have a number of assistants and they always try to satisfy me by their loyalty and obedience. During field visits my assistants keep me a long distance from the local people so that people can understand my power, status and importance. To be honest, I really don't like this but I am used to doing it. In the seminars, workshops, public meetings we always talk about good governance, people's participation in local development, empowerment of local people, decentralization of local governance. These elusive terms are part and parcel of my daily life since I have started my job. We even use these terms randomly while preparing any project proposal for the central government or donor agency. It is very difficult to get money unless these terms are included as the major objectives of the project. Good governance, people's participation, decentralization are the major policy concerns of the central government and in principle we are here to implement these policies. But in practice we are far from the ends. As a civil servant, I always maintain the dilemma of theory and practice i.e., I don't follow or practice what I say or write. Morally though, I don't support this, but I am supposed to follow this tradition like my predecessors if I want to continue my job smoothly. Therefore, I can tell you straightway that the notion of people's participation in local development is almost absent, at least in my opinion.

Thus, the dominant role of bureaucracy has created a strong partition between theory and practice of people's participation in the grassroots development programmes in Bangladesh. The empirical findings show that due to bureaucratic intervention, the local

governance institutions have failed to foster people's participation, especially the targeted disadvantaged groups of society. As a result, corruption has widened and extended into all spheres and has become an inescapable fact of daily life in Bangladesh.

In addition to the above, the local government officials, particularly the specialist groups, that is, the Upazila Engineer, Upazila Agriculture Officer, Upazila Health Officer, and Upazila Education Officer, clearly identified the problems of coordination among the local departments as one of the major problems of people's participation. During their interviews, they categorically claimed that the UNO (Upazila Executive Officer, the member of the generalist group)²⁶ exercises and enjoys enormous power and authority over local administration. The authority of local governance is concentrated in the hands of the UNO. The empirical evidence shows that the UNO is the head of all development committees and projects of the Upazila, which is the cause of delaying decision-making, red tapism and massive corruption. The members of the specialist group claimed that, in fact, the Upazila administration has been ruled by the sole authority of the UNO and his associates. The officials said that in this situation, the involvement of local people in development activities is quite elusive, since in most cases all decisions are made by a single person.

The UNO is popularly known as the 'Boro Shaheb' (Big Sir) to the other officials and the local people as well. Most of the members of the specialist group claimed that the UNO is not only the barrier to carrying out local development activities smoothly but is also responsible for creating distance and mistrust between the local people and local administration. During the empirical study it was found that the UNO employed a first class officer to search for a maid-servant for his home. Interestingly, that officer was in charge of, and taking care of his maid servants. The concerned officer claimed to the researcher that "it is not only annoying but also disgraceful. However, I am supposed to do that, and otherwise the UNO will create a lot of problems for me and my office."

It is also discovered that the conflict between generalist and specialist groups in local governance is rampant, which is widely known as generalist-specialist conflict in the administrative history of Bangladesh. The finding reveals that the old age generalist-specialist conflict has surfaced and fuelled massively in two phases: first, after the introduction of the

²⁶UNO is a Member of the Administrative Cadre of the Bangladesh Civil Service.

Upazila decentralization, and second, after the abolition of the Upazila decentralization programme. According to the participants (specialist group), the conflict of the later phase is more dangerous and harmful than the earlier phase.

Most of the specialist officials claimed that although the UNO was appointed as Chief Administrative Officer of the Upazila, there was a check and balance of power between the UNO and the elected Upazila Chairman. On the other hand, the UNO tried to maintain a working relationship with other officials, since the Upazila Chairman was the people's elected representative and held the top position in the Upazila Parishad. Moreover, they claimed that the existence of an Upazila Chairman at the Upazila administration facilitated and created a greater scope of people's participation in local development on one hand, and on the other, the local people also had a better opportunity to access the local administration. However, in the absence of the Upazila Chairman, the UNO enjoys absolute power, and thus, the tension and conflict between the UNO and other officials rose to a degree that caused poor performance of the local governance institutions. Therefore, they repeatedly support the reintroduction of the Upazila Parishad system and suggest for holding Upazila election.

6.2.2 People's Participation: Views of the Local People and People's Representatives

In this research, people's participation is considered as an important component of decentralization and good governance. It has already mentioned that the application of people's participation is difficult in the dual political bureaucratic system of Bangladesh. Because decision-making power is centralized in the hands of privileged groups (bureaucrats and the ruling party) and theoretically, development planning emphasizes decentralization of power and decision-making to the local level.

For this reason, it was really challenging to share the issue of people's participation with the local people during the field study. The local people were wondering while talking about this issue. In fact, most of the local people interviewed had never before heard that they had the right to participate in the local development process. They claimed that neither UP officials nor local governance officials enlighten or encourage them to participate in any development programmes. Their views reveal that sometimes they have been asked by the UP officials to attend rallies or meetings on different national celebrations (Independence Day, Victory Day, Martyrs Day, etc.). The participants also expressed that many times they are

forced to attend to the party meetings when central political leaders visit their area. Some of the participants claimed that

Whether we support them or not, we like them or not, we have to attend the meetings of the political leaders. If not, they (UP officials or members of the ruling party) may create problems for us and there are lots of past instances that have happened before; you can see around us if you try. Sometimes we are paid 10 to 15 taka to attend the meeting. We heard that the central party leaders of the ruling party allocate this money and the amount is 25 to 30 taka for each participant. But we get only half of that amount and the rest of the money goes in the pocket of the UP officials or members of the ruling party.

The local college/school teachers and local businessmen expressed their disappointment when talking about 'people's participation'. Some of them firmly alleged that the country has not been ruled according to the constitution or law since its independence. Most of the respondents claimed that the local governance institutions (Upazila and UP) are controlled and run by the corrupt politicians and bureaucrats. Therefore, they expressed that people's participation in local development is difficult in this situation.

The principal of a local college in the study unit explained the nature of the political and bureaucratic intervention in the local development activities from his own perspective. His statement is presented in the following:

Although I am the principal of this college, I can't make any decisions. We have a governing body to run the college and the President of this body is a political person who is appointed by the ruling party. He is all in all indeed. He takes all strategic decisions on his own. It is very difficult to object to his decision. The problems become acute during the appointment of college teachers. We can't appoint qualified and competitive candidates as teachers because of his intervention. Less qualified candidates get appointments from the political consideration. In most cases political affiliation rather than merit is the main criterion of the selection process. Sometimes an amount of money (bribe) is the matter. As a result, the college's academic environment is seriously deteriorating. On the other hand, in many aspects we are dependent on the Upazila administration. The UNO, as the chief administrator of the Upazila, always tries to intervene in our routine activities, especially during examination time. It is very hard to make any decisions without his consent. More importantly, as teachers we don't get any respect from him. He always acts as a master with the teachers. Therefore, my colleagues are least interested in contacting him and always try to avoid him, but as a head I don't have an

option. So how do you think that there is room for disadvantaged segments to participate in local development activities?

Regarding the issue of people's participation, the UP Officials (elected Chairman and members) opined almost similarly. However, they have identified some additional causes that are hindering the process of people's participation. Most of the UP officials claimed that in the present framework of the UP, the scope of people's participation is limited. To them, the UP does not have a strong financial base and it is completely dependent on the central government for funds or grants. Moreover, the empirical evidence states that institutionally, although the UP is an elected body, its routine activities are controlled by the formal and informal agents. Local governance officials are identified as the formal agent and members of the ruling party and local elites are identified as an informal agent. The ground reality shows that the UP officials' enjoy very little freedom to work independently without the regular intervention of formal and informal agents'.

In addition, lack of coordination between UP and Upazila officials is also identified as a major problem of people's participation in local development. The UP Officials claimed that the UNO and other officials of the Upazila are very much reluctant to accept the leadership of the local elected representatives. They further expressed that although the UP is known as a democratic institution, in practice it is not. The present Chairman of the Birunia UP stated that UP officials are assigned too many responsibilities without authority, power and financial guarantees.

6.3 Nature of People's Participation in Local Development Projects: Experiences from the Case Studies

One of the major objectives of this research is to observe the nature and scope of people's participation in the local development programmes. It is difficult to measure the extent of people's participation only by asking questions to the people or interviewing people's and government's representatives without examining local development projects. In doing so, five development projects of the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) of the research unit have been studied using the case study method. Two case studies, case study one and five, have been studied comprehensively and the remaining three are observed in a more

casual manner. The informal questionnaire technique and snowball approaches of qualitative research were applied to collect the necessary information. In addition, Norman Uphoff's approach of people's participation has been considered as a framework to examine the nature of people's participation. The findings of the case studies are discussed in the following texts.

6.3.1 Case Study One: Construction of Birunia Union Council Complex

Project Profile:

This case study has been carried out on a local development project of the Rural Development Programme (RDP)-21 of the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) in the Birunia Union Council (BUC) under the Bhaluka Upazila in the Mymensingh District. The name of the project was 'Construction of Birunia Union Council Complex'. This project has been selected because it was politically important and locally sensitive. The project started on 02-12-99 and was completed on 30-04-2002. The total cost of the project was 3,042,039 BD Taka (34,568 €) and 70% of its total cost was financed by the Japan Bank of International Cooperation (JBIC). The name of the construction firm was Progoti Trading and Commerce.

6.3.1.1 Findings: Politics of People's Participation and the Minister's Intervention

For this case study, about 44 persons from the study area (local people, UP and Upazila officials) were interviewed. The key respondents, particularly villagers, were asked questions regarding two major issues, which were: (a) their participation in the decision-making and planning process; and (b) their participation in the implementation level of the project. In addition, they were also asked questions regarding other related issues like corruption, misappropriation of resources, political influence, bureaucratic intervention, et cetera, in the local level development programmes, particularly for this development project.

The then Parliament Member of this Upazila is a resident of this UP. His party, Awami League (AL), was in power, and he was also the State Minister of Health and Family Planning of the AL Government. As a Minister of the ruling party he managed three projects of RDP-21, for the construction of three UP complexes in his constituency. The construction of the Birunia Union Council complex was one of them. Although the local people were initially very happy, the real politics started when the question was raised where the UP complex

should be constructed. It has been discovered from the RDP-21 project proposal that the UP complex should be constructed on its own location. The location can also be changed if its old place does not permit the needed space for its construction. Surprisingly, the Minister alone took the initiative to transfer the UP complex from its own location (Birunua) to another (Muhammadpur village), which was near his residence (within 200m). The UP officials along with the local people organized big rallies protesting the decision of shifting the complex. Moreover, the local people, local political leaders and UP officials met the Minister of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives, and submitted written complain against the decision. Consequently, the construction work of the UP complex was delayed for more than three months. However, the MP was rigid on his stance and finally executed his own decision ignoring the voices, demands and protests of the local people.

According to the project proposal, the LGED central authority should take the opinion of the local people if the complex location needs to be changed. During the case study, the Upazila LGED officials were asked whether they had followed the RDP-21 proposal regarding the shifting of the Union Council Complex from Birunia to Mohammadpur Village. They all answered that it was a special case and they received an office order from the concerned Ministry to construct the Union Council Complex in the village of Mohammadpur instead of Birunia, though they refused to show the office order. During the case study, the researcher made many attempts to meet the MP and interview him, but they were unsuccessful. However, once the researcher had the opportunity to talk with him over the telephone, but he was least interested in this issue and said that it had been done for the greater interest of the local people.

It is apparent that this was a clear violation of the legal provision. The local people of the project area were asked about the shifting the UP Complex. A total 26 people were interviewed from the Mohammadpur Village. In their opinion, it is found that none of them gave their positive comments regarding the shifting of the UP complex from its old place. Most of participants claimed that Birunia was a better place than Mohammadpur, because it is a very old local commercial and popular marketplace to the local people. During the field study it is discovered that the people of this Union do not like to visit the new complex but rather they would like to visit Birunia, the old place where, if they needed to, they could meet the UP officials.

The UP Officials were also asked regarding the shifting of the UP complex. They answered similarly like the local people. In addition, the UP Officials claimed that the new complex of the UP does not have any practical utility since people do not like to go there. Therefore, they often meet the people in the Birunia Bazaar to discuss various local issues and problems. However, occasionally, once or twice a month, officials visit the new complex, especially during the training programmes or meetings with higher authorities. The researcher visited the new UP complex several times during the case study period, but did not find any of the UP officials in their offices. As a result, like the local people, the researcher also met them in Birunia Bazaar (Market), or sometimes at their homes for his research purpose.

During the case study period, another allegation regarding the 'tender process' was found from the field. The respondents were asked whether or not the tender committee distributed this project through a legal process? Almost all of the respondents, especially the UP Officials, claimed that the tender committee could hardly select tenders without being influenced by the MP and other local political leaders. Particularly for this project, they expressed that the MP directly dictated to the tender committee whose tender should be selected. This project was distributed to the company whose owner was the district level party leader of the Awami League and had a good relationship with the MP. The LGED officials of the study unit were also asked regarding the allegation of the tender process, and they answered stereotypically that they had followed proper guidelines to select the tender.

A painful picture was discovered during the interviewing of the key informants regarding the payment of the labourers. The Ex-Chairman of the UP disclosed that the construction company hired almost all the labourers from outside of the project area, paid lower wages. Although there is a legal provision that obligates the construction company to hire local labourers to implement the project, the construction company was not interested in recruiting local labourers. The Upazila LGED officials expressed similar opinions and acknowledged that they were informed the matter but admitted their helplessness. According to them, they were only responsible for monitoring the technical part of the project. The UP Officials also expressed similar opinions regarding this malpractice, but they were unable to take any action against the construction company, since its owner had good relationship with the MP.

Moreover, the respondents (villagers) were also asked regarding their scope of participation in the planning and implementation levels at the local development programme.

It is found from their common views that the local people have very limited scope to take part in the planning and implementation process of local development programmes. They expressed that they could only know about a development programme that is going to take place somewhere in the village or in their areas. They are never invited to discuss about the development project, its utility and selection of the project location, either by the UP officials or by the government officials. It is understood that the project officials or the UP Officials are not actually interested in disclosing the project details to the local people, because such forms of formal discussion with the local people might be a hurdle for them in taking control over the project and its resources. The respondents expressed that the government officials and people's representatives only discuss the project with the local elite with whom they have personal, social and more importantly, political attachments. Therefore, due to lack of people's support, their opinions and participation, these projects cause discontent, condemnation, mistrust and unhappiness during their implementation. The respondents exemplified the politics in the construction of the Birunia Union Council complex as the best example of malpractice in relation to political power.

6.3.2 Case Study Two: Construction of Birunia Ghat (Landing stage) at the Bank of Sutia River

Project Profile:

Birunia Bazaar is one of the oldest and busiest local business places of the Bhaluka Upazila which is situated beside the Sutia River. A large section of the population of this area had been suffering from loading and unloading goods from their boats for centuries. The construction of the Birunia Ghat was a long expected demand of the people of this area. Construction of the Ghat started on 15.12.2001 and was completed on 30.07.2004. The main objective of the construction of the Ghat was to provide facilities to the local businessmen for safe unloading and loading of goods and passengers. The total cost of the project was 2,664,974 BD taka²⁷. The Japan Bank of International Cooperation (JBIC) contributed 90% of its total cost and the government of Bangladesh allotted the remaining amount. The Upazila Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) was the project's full time monitoring authority.

²⁷ In 2001 the exchange rate was approximately 1, 00 €= 50, 00 BD taka.

6.3.2.1 Findings: Quandary of Decentralization and People's Participation: Interplay of Light and Shade

This case has been studied to observe the selection processes of the construction company, that is, how the concerned authority distributed the work to the construction company and the utility of the Ghat, that is, how the target people are benefited from the Ghat. The shop keepers and businessmen of the Birunia Bazaar were the principal informants. In addition, one Sub-Assistant Engineer of the Upazila and the ex-Chairman of the Birunia UP were also interviewed.

It has been discovered from the opinion of the principal informants that most of them did not know anything about the selection process of the construction company. In their words, it is hard to know the real story of the selection process. They further added that the selection process, as far as they heard and know, is politically motivated. From the field it is discovered that there is a long list of contractors within the ruling party in the Bhaluka Upazila. Therefore, it is very difficult to predict who will be assigned the project. However, the findings revealed that the owner of the construction company had a very good relationship with the then ruling party and he was a regular donor to the local political leaders and local government officials.

Although initially the monitoring officer of this project denied the allegations made by the local people, he eventually uttered (on the condition of not quoting his name) that most of the time the Upazila LGED office could not follow the project instructions of selecting agencies due to excessive intervention of both local and central leaders of the ruling party. He termed the situation as an 'Upper Handed Intervention.' To him, process of intervention primarily initiates from the local political leaders, and then it progresses to the hands of the central leaders from where the actual intervention starts. He admitted that,

We just carry out the verbal instructions that come from the centre through our big bosses. Our bosses always maintain good relationship with the top and influential leaders/ministers for their promotion, holding lucrative positions and posts. On the other hand, we, the local officials, constantly try to make our bosses happy through carrying out their unwritten commands for our better future and job security even if it is very challenging for us. The most difficult task is to keep papers updated from violating and hiding real facts. Therefore, it is

indeed very hard to pay attention to the demands and priorities of the local people or to ensure their participation in local development.

Another disappointing picture that discovered during the case study is that the local people do not actually benefit from the Ghat due to the nature of its construction. It is quite unfeasible and unsafe to load and unload goods, because the Ghat is so straight and narrow. The shop keepers claimed that the Ghat is risky to load and unload goods from, but it is at least a good place for taking a bath and washing clothes. During the field work the researcher visited the place several times and found that the Ghat was not used for loading and unloading goods. As a result, the Ghat has lost its usefulness on the one hand, and on the other hand, failed to replicate and fulfil the demands of the target population.

6.3.3 Case Study Three: Bhawalia Bazu Bazaar Improvement Work

Project Profile:

Bhawalia Bazu Bazaar is one of the established local markets of the Birunia Union which is situated between the Upazila centre and the Union Council. This market is a central business place for about 1,000 people from two villages (Gowari Bhawalia and Bazu Bazaar) where they come twice a week to buy and sell their daily necessities and goods. The market is open twice a week, on Mondays and Fridays. However, it is found that some shops like tea stalls, hair salons, bike repair stores and the local pharmacy are open throughout the week. Traditionally, most of the local markets of Bangladesh are overcrowded, muddy and dirty, polluted and unhealthy. To provide a safe, clean, hygienic and better trading environment to the local people, the government has taken the initiative to improve the local markets with the help of foreign donors under the project of RDP-21 under the name Improvement of Growth Centre Markets. The project started on 28-5-2001 and was completed on 20-6-2002. The total cost of the project was 1,523,367 BD taka and 90% of the total cost was funded by a donor, with the remaining 10% provided by the government block grants. The name of the construction company is 'Zulhas Traders.'

6.3.3.1 Findings: People's Participation: Perspectives from Benefit Sharing and Project Evaluation: 'Good Work, Shocking Management'

The aims of this case study were to examine two major issues of people's participation: benefit sharing, how the local people share the benefits of development projects and project evaluation, how they evaluate the project. The main informants were three permanent shopkeepers (tea stall, saloon, and grocery store), and three temporary shopkeepers (fishmonger, beef shop and vegetable shop). They were interviewed using an unstructured

questionnaire. In addition, information regarding this project has also been collected from the PRA session-5.

The case study's evidence shows that the people expressed their mixed opinion concerning benefit sharing and evaluation of the project. According to the respondents, they are benefited from this bazaar in many ways, especially after the improvement work. They added that it has now become a safer, hygienic and good trading environment for about 1,000 local people and businessmen from the two villages around the bazaar. The respondents thus expressed that this improvement work provides more facilities and services to the local people. Another benefit that has been repeatedly highlighted by the respondents is that this improvement work not only facilitates a safer local trading environment, but it also work as a flood shelter centre. Findings show that during the late flood of 2002, many affected people took shelter under the shed of this market.

However, the respondents criticized the role of the Bazaar Committee for its mismanagement and imposing illegal terms and conditions on the users of the Bazaar. It is found that the Bazaar committee took the lease of the market with the minimum price, but the shopkeepers are charged and paying two times more than the actual price. Interestingly, during the bazaar day, the meat shops and fish shops were found in the open air spaces, instead of their allocated places. It was discovered that the Bazaar Committee demanded more money from them if they wished to use their allocated places. They also complained that although they use open air spaces, still paying more than before. The greengrocers made similar opinion. Thus, it is found although the local people get benefits from the Bazaar, the shopkeepers suffer a lot for its mismanagement.

6.3.4 Case Study Four: Bhaluka, Goforgaon and Birunia Road Repairing

Project Profile:

The LGED has some regular and routine developmental works under the 'Construction of Rural Roads, Bridges and Culverts' programme, which are mostly funded by the Annual Development Plan (ADP). The Bhaluka-Gofargaon-Birunia Road Repairing project was one of them. This is a very important internal road of the Upazila which connects Bhaluka with its neighbouring Upazila of Goforgaon and Birunia Union Parishad. The length of the work was two kilometres. The nature of the work was to repair broken sections of the road. The work started on 13-3-2005 and was completed on 20-4-2005 and at a total cost of Tk-203,506 BD taka. The ADP of the LGED funded this project. The name of the construction company was 'R.Traders'.

6.3.4.1 Findings: Decentralization and People's Participation: Politics between Local Government and People's Representatives

This case has been studied to find the answer to two questions: how do the LGED choose local development projects and select the construction company; and how do they integrate local people in the selection and planning process of local development activities? The key informants were Upazila LGED officials, the construction company owner, an ex-UP Official, and a female member of the Birunia Union council.

The respondents claimed that the selection process of this project was relatively good. According to them, it is a very important road which connects Birunia with the Bhaluka Upazila centre, the district town and the capital city. But they also claimed that this road has been in repair every year during the months of April and May, that is, before the rainy season, and it gets worse again after the rainy season.

It is found that the owner of the construction company of this project did not have any political affiliation with neither the ruling party nor the opposition, but had good relationship with the Upazila officials. The field study information demonstrates that he stands at the top of the donor list of the Upazila and always donates big amounts on any occasion organized by the Upazila administration.

It is discovered that the members of the ruling party always keep trustworthy and good relationship with the Upazila administration to widen their corruption networks. On the other hand, Upazila officials also maintain very diplomatic relations and use them as a third party for secured bribery and corruption. As a result, in many cases the political leaders do not create any obstruction, particularly in small projects, but rather support the Upazila Officials' decision. The Upazila officials, thus, distributed many development projects to their loyal and obedient contractors and received illegal benefits. The UP officials stated that this project was distributed following the above criterion. However, the contractor denied the above allegation against him. During the interview with him, he confidently mentioned that,

It is known that I don't have any political connection with any political party. I got this work through a free and fair process. Of course, I have good relations with the Upazila officials because of my good reputation as a contractor and I do quality work and I did not pay a single penny to anybody for this work.

Although he refused any deceitful dealing had gone on with the Upazila officials, he agreed that he has good relations with the Upazila officials, which is one of the vital criteria of winning or getting the project. The contractor also revealed the fact that usually the party leaders do not interfere in the small projects, but of course, the big projects are politically distributed among the short-listed contractors. Thus, it can be said that such an unholy agreement and liaison between leaders of the ruling party and Upazila officials adversely affects to the process of people's participation in local development.

6.3.5 Case Study Five: Bhaluka Birunia Road Reconstruction

This case has been studied in a comprehensive manner. The work started on 20-02-2004 and was completed on 18-5-2004 with the cost of -90,000 BD taka. The total length of the work was 2km (Birunia Bazar to Medila village). This project was funded by the government of Bangladesh under the title of the Food for Work Programme (FFW).

This project was implemented by the Project Implementation Committee (PIC). The case study observation revealed that the UP Chairman made the lists of seven PIC Members and submitted it for approval to the District Executive Engineer through the Upazila Executive Engineer. Finally, the District Executive Engineer approved the PIC in consultation with the Upazila Engineer. The Chairman of the committee should be from the UP officials. The other members of the PIC should be from different categories of local people of the project area, such as social workers, school teachers, freedom fighters, VDP members, farmers and women representatives. The members of the PIC are responsible, for implementing the project effectively. The details of the PIC members are presented in Table 12.

Table 12: Background Information of the PIC Members

Name	Position in PIC	Category	Age	Education	Profession
M Hossain	Chairman	UP Member	65	Class V	Agriculture
A Hossain	Member	Social Worker	52	Class VII	Business/Agriculture
A. Ali	Member	Social Worker	45	SSC	Business/Agriculture
I. Ali	Member	Gram Sarker	48	Class VIII	Agriculture
M.A. Sheikh	Member	Farmer	35	Nil	Business/Agriculture
Mainuddin	Member	VDP member	42	Class VI	-----
R.Khatun	Member	Women representative	38	Nil	Housewife

Source: Upazila LGED Office (From Project Proposal)

The composition of the PIC shows that there is one UP member as Chairman, two social workers, a gram sarker, a farmer, a VDP member and a woman representative, respectively incorporated in the PIC. Schoolteachers and freedom fighters are not included in the Committee. However, it can be said that theoretically the PIC has fulfilled the basic requirements.

6.3.5.1 Findings: People's Participation through the PIC

During the case study, allegation against the composition of the PIC was identified. This project was initiated by a female UP member and it was informally decided that she should serve as the chairman of the project. However, the UP Chairman changed this decision alone, soon after the project was approved. She claimed that the UP Chairman alone made the PIC list in association with the UP member who served as Chairman of the committee. She added that the relatives of the PIC Chairman were included in the committee. The finding shows that among the six PIC members, five of them were relatives of its Chairman. It is found that among the five members, one of them was his own brother, three others were his cousins, and the only female member was his cousin's wife. They were included intently as PIC members by the UP and PIC Chairmen to take absolute control over the project resources and project

committee. The formation of such a PIC is a severe violation of the existing specified guidelines of the LGED.

During the interview with the VDP and female member of the committee, information gathered were more interesting regarding their inclusion in the PIC. The female member said that she was included in such a committee for the first time, although she did not know anything about the project. However, she claimed that once she had put her fingerprint on some papers, as she was asked to do that. The VDP member stated that he was included in the PIC as a member to fulfil the requirements of the committee. But he also expressed that sometimes he visited the project area with the Chief of the Committee and was paid some money. .

The UP Chairman and the PIC Chairman have denied their manipulation in making the PIC list. They said that everything had been done in the presence of all of their colleagues, and respected local people from the project area who had prior experiences as a member of the project committee. The PIC Chairman denied very tactfully and diplomatically when asked about the inclusion of his relatives in the PIC. He claimed that this committee was approved by the higher authority, not by him.

PIC Chairman profile: M. Hossain is 65 years old and has attended school up to grade five. He started his political career in the beginning of 1985 as a supporter of the Jatiyo Party (JP), the then military ruler. Initially, he was well known as a broker to the villagers and the party leaders. The party leaders established him as an agent to capitalize local support and control in their favour. Thus, he became a very powerful person in a very short period of time and started enjoying absolute influence over the villagers to satisfy his masters. Meanwhile, he also established a fertile link with the government officials of the Upazila due to his political relationship, loyalty and trustworthy connection with the leaders of the ruling party. Consequently, he was elected as a member of the UP in 1988 for the first time. Since then, he and his family members attained considerable amounts of land and resources. However, he shifted his support to the BNP in 1991, after the fall of the military regime, and was re-elected as a UP member in 1992. He also enjoyed similar power and was appointed chief of many development projects. Interestingly, he tried to shift his support to AL in 1997, after the fall of the BNP government, but could not. Instead, he fled for a few months when he failed to negotiate with his contenders. Finally, he returned to his village after a satisfactory deal with his opposition and was relatively inactive, motionless and defunct as a UP member. He could not win the UP election of 1997 and lost his position to his rival with a huge margin of ballots. Once again he emerged as an influential figure in his area soon after the BNP and its four party alliances won the parliamentary election of 2001. Since then, he has taken absolute control over the area, and local development programmes as well. Moreover, he was elected for the third time as a UP member in the local government election of 2003.

While talking with the concerned Upazila Officials about the irregularity of the PIC formation, they answered traditionally and stereotypically. They affirmed that making the PIC is not the duty of the LGED officials or any other officer of the Upazila. It is absolutely a matter of UP officials to appoint the PIC member following the existing criteria and rules. From the PIC guidelines, it is found that the Upazila LGED or District LGED Officials have no control over the issue. They only approve the committee if it is duly submitted with the UP regulations. However, they said that if they find any claim against the committee submitted for approval, they try to investigate, but normally nobody complains against the submitted committee.

The case study information demonstrated that the misuse of project resources was an ‘open secret’. Although it was very difficult to measure the percentage of misappropriation of the project’s resources, interviews with the UP member, the school teacher of the project area and local inhabitants made it clear that at least, approximately 20% to 25% of total resources are misappropriated by the PIC officials.

From the experiences of the five case studies, it can be said that the scope of people’s participation in the local development programmes is very limited in the contemporary political and bureaucratic system of Bangladesh. The local elites enjoy the benefits of people’s participation through building good relationship with the political leaders and the local government officials.

6.4 Role of Local Governance Institutions: an Empirical Overview

In order to understand the collective view of the local people regarding the role of local institutions, seven PRA sessions (three of which are female groups) were conducted in four different villages of the study unit. The details of the PRA sessions are presented in Table 13. The female PRA sessions were organized with the help of a local schoolteacher and a rickshaw driver. The participants can be categorized as local school teachers, college and university students, farmers, local businessmen, day labourers, rickshaw pullers and NGO members.

Table 13: Basic information of PRA sessions

<i>SL.No</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Village</i>	<i>No. of Participants</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Conducted by</i>
PRA-1	25.04.2005	Muhammadpur	40	Male	Asaduzzaman et al.
PRA-2	25.04.2005	Muhammadpur	7	Female	Asaduzzaman et al.
PRA-3	18.05.2005	North Muhammadpur	22	Female	Asaduzzaman et al.
PRA-4	19.05.2005	North Muhammadpur	27	Male	Asaduzzaman et al.
PRA-5	18.06.2005	Bhaulia	50	Male	Asaduzzaman et al.
PRA-6	19.06.2005	Birunia	9	Male	Asaduzzaman et al.
PRA-7	19.06.2005	South Chanderhathi	17	Female	Asaduzzaman et al.

6.4.1 Facts and Figures of the Studied Villages

The PRA sessions have been conducted in four different villages of the study unit. The basic information of the studied villages is presented in Table 14 under the titles of area, population and literacy. The average literacy rate of the villages is about 41%, while the total literacy of the Birunia Union Parishad and Bhaluka Upazila are 55% and 57%, respectively. The female literacy rate of the studied villages is lower than the male rate. However, the literacy rate of Muhammadpur village is higher than that of the other villages. During the empirical study it was discovered that the two big families, who are residents of this village, control the politics of the Bhaluka Upazila. On the other hand, it is reported that approximately 30% of its total population work in the capital city and district city, and 5% work abroad, especially in the Middle Eastern countries. Another substantial section is employed in different big and small industries of the Upazila. Therefore, the people of this village are more financially advantaged than those in other villages. It is important to note here that during the last few years some large industries have moved to this area, beside the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway. In recent years, the Bhaluka Upazila is well known as a mini-industrial zone of the country.

Table 14: Basic information of studied villages

<i>Name of the Village</i>	<i>Area (in acres)</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>Literacy Rate</i>
Birunia	1017	4273 Male-2163, Female-2110	36% Male-38%, Female-34%
Muhammadpur (North and South)	403	1490 Male-754, Female- 736	51% Male-53%, Female- 49%
Bhaulia	136	590 Male-293, Female- 297	35% Male-43%, Female- 27%
South Chanderhathi	103	2772 Male-1458, Female-1314	38% Male-42%, Female- 35%

Source: Regional Statistics Office of Mymensingh 2005

Like many other parts of the country, agriculture is still the main occupation of these villagers. It is reported that more than 75% of its total population is directly dependent on agriculture for their livelihood. In addition, during the field study, fisheries were also identified as a growing sector of the study area. Rice, jackfruit, jute, and wheat are the main crops. Jackfruit of this area is famous all over the country. According to the local people, the Bhaluka Upazila produces 60% jackfruit of the country. The communication between the Upazila centre and the Union Council Office is good, but inter-village communication and the communication from the village to the Union Council Office is quite bad. Most of the roads are muddy and conditions worsen during the rainy season.

6.4.2 Local Governance Institutions of the Study Unit

Using the different techniques of PRA, the participants identified three categories of local institutions: public institutions, non-profit institutions and private institutions. The Union Parishad and the Upazila Parishad are public institutions. Local and national NGOs are identified as non-profit institutions. The local rice mills, wood mills, haat bazaars and shops are known as private institutions. The roles of these institutions are extensively analyzed in the following texts.

6.4.2.1 Role of Public Institutions: Union Parishad

Local people of the study unit have identified the UP as a vital institution for the local development and people's participation. The participants claimed that the UP is the only local body that can create a steady bridge and healthy relationship between the local people and the central government. However, they have expressed their bitter and painful experiences about the role of the UP.

Majority of the participants claimed that the UP officials do not serve the interest of the local poor people, although they are elected representatives. It is discovered that the UP officials serve the interest of three groups. They are: ruling party members, local government officials and the local elite. The members of these groups always maintain good relationships with each other, to abuse power and misuse government resources. Most of the participants of the PRA-1 believe that abuse of power, mismanagement of project resources and mistreatment are open secrets at the UP level and sometimes is quite visible.

Mr. Pathan, one of the participants, described his own experience that once he was a member of a local development project (Food for Work Programme), but he came to know this after the project had started. He also added that about 40% of the project resources (wheat) had been robbed by the Parliament Member, UP Chairman and members in collusion with the concerned Upazila officials. He tried to report this to the high officials but they did not accept his claim. Moreover, he was threatened to death by the local terrorists if he further investigated the matter.

The empirical findings demonstrate an important fact that the nature of the confrontational politics between the two big political parties, (BNP and Awami League) is also a threat for the UP officials to work independently. The participants claimed that the UP officials those support to the opposition cannot even participate in the regular UP meetings. During the field study one female UP member claimed that her colleagues are not cooperative because her husband is a supporter of the opposition.

Intervention of Mini Government

The empirical findings confirm that (PRA-1, PRA-2, PRA-3 and PRA-5) the UP officials are politically and functionally dependent on to the leaders of the ruling party and local government officials. The local party leaders are identified as the 'Mini Government'. The participants claimed that the UP development activities are controlled by this mini government that has good connections with the central political leaders. The ground reality shows that the UP officials cannot execute and implement their activities unless they maintain a good relationship with the members of this mini government.

Uneven Distinction

It is also found that the UP officials are dependent on to the local bureaucrats in various ways. The professional and educational gap between the UP officials and local bureaucrats (PRA-2 and PRA-5) are identified as the key factors for such kind of dependency. From the empirical data it is learned that most of the UP officials are less qualified, mostly uneducated, less capable, unskilled and incompetent. On the other hand, local bureaucrats are highly qualified, well trained and competent. The empirical findings show that among the thirteen UP officials, only four of them have passed grade ten, and the rest are functionally illiterate. At the same time, the educational background of the local government officials shows that the minimum is a Bachelor degree and the maximum is a PhD degree. Most of the participants categorically claimed that capitalizing such uneven distinction, the local bureaucrats are successfully playing a dominating role over the UP officials.

Elite Control

The participants of PRA-1 said that UP officials are also influenced by the local elite. Like other actors, the UP development programmes are also controlled by the local elite. Traditionally, the rural elite are known as landlords, and they hold strong power on the local level. Land is the only means of their power. It is learned that although the local elite do not possess any political affiliation, they always favour the ruling party. They also maintain a good relationship with the local government officials by dint of their social position.

According to the participants, the local elite are popularly known as the vote bank. As a result, the UP officials always favour them and provide undue services and facilities to get their support, especially during the national and local election periods. This kind of dilemma, according to the participants, finally leads to massive corruption, misuse of power and mismanagement of local development resources.

Centre of Mismanagement

It is observed that the local people are generally least interested in visiting the UP and its officials, because the UP has turned into a centre of mismanagement and corruption, rather than being a centre of local development and people's participation (PRA-1, PRA-2, PRA-3, PRA-4 and PRA-7). Therefore, the people hardly meet with the UP officials, unless, and until they require their help for some legal purposes (birth certificates, citizenship certificates etc.). The female participants also expressed similar opinion. However, they agreed that sometimes they visit the UP, particularly during the flood or any natural disasters, to collect relief goods, as during the flood of 2004 when some of them got 18kg of rice. They further claimed that the UP officials distributed VGF (Vulnerable Group Fund) or VGD (Vulnerable Group Development) cards to their relatives and friends during the natural disaster. One interesting fact which learned from the participants is that although they distributed cards to their relatives, many times they take money from the recipients.

Soft Democracy vs. Hard Democracy

The participants identified the nature of local democracy in Bangladesh in two different categories: soft democracy and hard democracy. Soft democracy starts six to seven months prior to the local and national election. They termed this as 'Vototontro' (vote oriented democracy). During this period, the prospective candidates try to be closer to the local people, maintain very good relationship, show their loyalty and frequently visit their homes. Nicola Banks (2006) found a similar picture in the urban government of Bangladesh. She shows that voting is a hugely important process for the poor, as this is the only time in which poor people feel that they hold social and political power (2006:15). Dhaka city Slum dwellers highlighted this situation in this manner: "Without this vote, we have no importance to them (political

leaders). Only during election times do they come to us seeking votes, and in this time we feel ourselves stronger than them” (Banks 2006:15). Hard democracy starts soon after the election has ended. This is termed ‘Dolotontro’ (party oriented democracy). The elected officials change their minds and attitudes immediately after taking over their position, and try to be closer to the visible and invisible powerful actors of the locality²⁸. According to the participants, this scenario doesn’t surprise them at all, as they are accustomed to this sort of behaviour since the country gained independence. The participants (PRA-3 and PRA-4) explained the situation in the following manner;

We elect our leaders to make good policies, to make the UP and the Upazila effective and participatory local government units, to prioritize local needs and demands, to resolve local conflicts and disputes, to establish the rule of law, and to create employment opportunities. But soon after winning the election, the leaders rapidly change their attitudes and positions and start to serve the benefits of party men, local elite and local bureaucrats. The leaders also promise many things, however, forget everything immediately after assuming their positions.

Visible Role of Invisible Actors

It has been learned from the participants that the invisible actors (under ground bosses) indirectly influence the functions and activities of the UP. The participants termed it as ‘visible rule of invisible actors’. It is found that although these actors are not affiliated to any politics, they serve the interest of all major political parties. The invisible actors are not known to the local people. It is revealed that this group uses the UP and the local administration as their secured channel of corruption and extortion. Thus, the role of invisible actors is, to a certain extent, responsible for making the UP a defunct and ineffective.

Despite the criticisms, the local people are still optimistic about the prospect of the UP as a decentralized local governance institution. Most of the participants considered the UP as the heart of local government and a significant unit of people’s participation. People’s participation in various local development activities, according to the participants, can be predominantly ensured through the UP since it is run by the people’s representatives and

²⁸ In her research on Dhaka City, Banks (2006) highlighted similar experiences. The key participants of her research claimed that *candidates bestow their heads and hands to us during the election, but the same candidates kick us after the election* (2006:17).

located at the bottom of the state and opens its doors to the local people. It is also learned from the grassroots reality that the problems of UP is more operational and functional rather than institutional and structural.

6.4.2.2 Role of Public Institutions: Upazila Administration

Like the UP, the local people also highlighted the significance of the Upazial parishad in general, and the system of an elected Upazila Chairman, in particular. It is found that the provision of an elected Upazila Chairman was a remarkable landmark in the political history of Bangladesh. The existence of a people's representative at this level, as they argued, not only reduced the gap between the grassroots people and government officials, but it also increased the scope of access to the local administration and people's participation in the local development programmes. The dissolution of the Upazila system did not simply disappoint them, in their words, it was a big mistake of the then ruling party. However, the participants have expressed their painful experiences regarding the role of the Upazila officials and their allies. The empirical findings are presented in the following texts.

Politics of Access²⁹ and Dalal³⁰ Chokra (Circle of Dalals/Mediators)

From the empirical investigation it is found that local people cannot access to the Upazila administration unless they are able to manage a third party as a mediator. The third party, in their words *Dalal Chokra (circle of broker)*, is very powerful and has a good connection with the Upazila officials. The members of the third party normally belong to the ruling party, UP officials, local elite or the lower level government officials. They are divided into three categories: *top level dalals, mid-level dalals and lower level dalals* (see Table 15). The top level dalals are the leaders of the ruling party, local elite, and UP Chairmen; while local

²⁹ According to Schaffer and Lamb (1974) 'access' is the relation between administrative allocation of goods and services and the people who need them or for whom they are intended (in Rahman 1997:518). Most of the decentralization policies advocate that access entitlement should go to the poorer sections of society and bureaucracy should ensure easy access for grassroots people into administration. But it is said that reliance on bureaucracy results in mistreatment and a problem of access for people of developing countries (see for details Rahman 1997:518-519). The empirical evidence of this research has proven this.

³⁰ Kochanek (2000:549) defined dalas as middlemen who, for a fee, are able to manipulate policies, rules, and procedures to obtain individual benefits. He shows from the macro perspective that each dalal focuses on a number of specialities: customs issues, police problems, rickshaw and auto licenses, manpower export, marriage, passports, or establishing a business.

contractors, trade union leaders, and UP members are recognized as the mid-level dalals. Lower rank employees: office assistants, clerks, and peons of different offices are identified as the third category. In addition, servants of the high officials are also part of the lower level dalals.

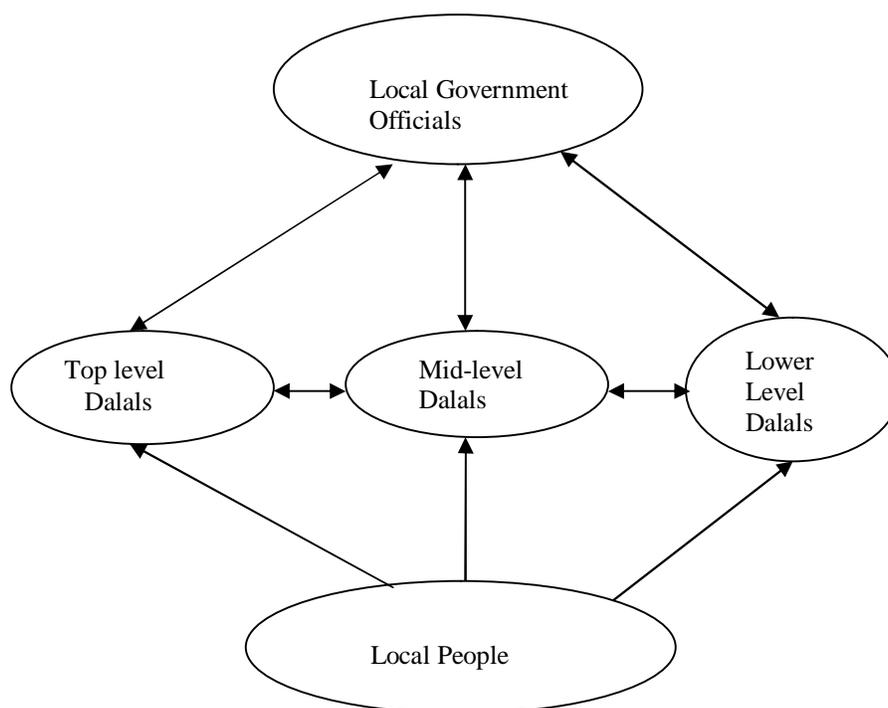
Table 15: Categories of Dalals and their Social Identity

<i>Category</i>	<i>Social identity of dalals</i>
A- Top level dalals	Leaders of the ruling party, UP Chairmen, Local Elite
B- Mid-level dalals	Local Contractors, Trade Union Leaders, UP members
C- Lower level dalals	Office Assistants, Clerks, Peons, Servants

Source: PRA-1, 2 and 3,

The ground reality shows that the main function of dalals is to introduce villagers/victims with the government officials. For this, they charged a certain amount of fee as bribes; however, the total fee depends on the nature of the problems or purposes and volume of the work. The findings reveal that the fees of the dalals vary from category to category. Participants claimed that it is very important to choose and approach the right person (dalals) at the right time. Many expressed that whenever they tried to meet the Upazila officials without dalals, they failed. It is also observed that the Upazila officials maintain a good relationship with the different categories of dalals for two reasons. First, to keep them away from the unnecessary political harassment, and secondly, the Upazila officials utilize dalals as the safe and secured source of the transaction of bribes. The networks of dalals are shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Local Level Dalal Networks in Bangladesh



Bureaucratic Elitism: Master Instead of Friends

The empirical findings confirmed that the local people contain very unpleasant experiences regarding the behaviour and attitude of the local government officials. The local government officials are characterized as non-friendly and non-cooperative. It is discovered that the local government officials always keep a considerable distance from the local people and expose their exclusiveness through attitudes and activities. As a result, a good, friendly or even working relationship has not been established between the grassroots people and the local government officials. One of the participants who was a freedom fighter in 1971 (presently a Rickshaw driver) furiously expressed his view, and said that the local public institutions should be handed over to national and international NGOs, because they are doing well.

Corruption Ranking of Upazila Offices: Green Zone for the Corrupt

The Upazila administration is well known to the villagers as a well-protected and good meeting place for corrupt people of different sectors of the society. The findings revealed that the Upazila administration is run by the corrupt officials and their allies. It is claimed that

corruption is an open secret and it has been expanding rapidly at every stage of local administration. Depending on the nature and level of corruption, the Upazila offices are divided into three categories. Category A, most corrupt, Category B corrupt, and Category C, less corrupt. Table 16 shows the corruption ranking of Upazila offices.

Table 16: Corruption ranking of the Upazila offices

<i>Category</i>	<i>Name of the offices</i>
<i>A</i>	<i>Police Department, UNO Office, Local Government Engineering Department, Upazila Land Office</i>
<i>B</i>	<i>Health, Agriculture, Social Welfare, Youth, Krishi Bank</i>
<i>C</i>	<i>Women's Affairs, Statistics, Education and Fishery</i>

Source: PRA-1, 2, 3, and 6

Police: Rival and the Most Unfaithful to the Local People

The local police department is identified as the most corrupt unit in the Upazila administration. Participants claimed that the police are the best friend of corrupt people. It has found that the local people always avoid visiting the local police office until they face a serious quandary. To the participants, the police always favour the persecutors rather than victims. During the field study it is learned that the Upazila police office is the only office where the local victims need to pay an entry fee. As a result, the local victims or the innocent people are more interested in visiting the local traditional institutions rather than the police department to resolve the locally created disputes and conflicts.

Agriculture Office and Krishi Bank: Service Provider of Rich People

The Upazila agriculture office and Krishi Bank are also identified as corrupt local public institutions. Like other Bangladeshi villages, agriculture is still the principal occupation of the people in the study area. More than 70% of the study area's population is directly or indirectly involved with agriculture. Although the Agriculture office and the Krishi bank are responsible to provide and support necessary services (training, seasonal bank loan, agriculture inputs) to the local farmers, they serve the interest of landlords of the local area. The Agriculture Office

and the Krishi Bank are identified as the good friends of rich people; and the Grameen Bank and other local NGOs are identified as the best friends of local poor people. From the ground reality it is learned that the activities and performance of 'NGOs are mounting because the performance of the public institutions are decreasing.

Upazila Health Centre: A Place of Private Practice

According to the national health policy, the public health centres must provide free treatment to the local people. However, the finding shows that the local people often pay the doctor's fee in the health complex. In addition, the participants claimed that the doctors of the health centre are less interested to visit the patients in the hospital, rather they encourages people to visit their private chambers for better treatment.

Educational Institutions: Good Example in a Dire Situation

The local mohila (women's) college, government primary schools, secondary schools and madrashas (religious academic institutions) are identified as the important public institutions of the study area. From the empirical findings, it is discovered that the local people posses some different opinion regarding the performance of the educational institutions. The participants believe that these institutions are playing a vital role in educating their children. They also paid high tribute to the government policies of compulsory primary education, the primary stipend programme for poor children and secondary stipend programme for female students. Therefore, the local people are encouraged and interested in sending their children to the school. The participants were asked to identify the reasons why the performance of the educational institutions is good, while the other public institutions have comparatively failed to provide services to the local people. They have identified the following factors:

1. the school teachers are responsible and respected by the local people;
2. local people have good relationship with the school teachers;
3. most of the school teachers are from their own community and they know each other well;
4. the school environment is non-bureaucratic; and
5. good management and monitoring system.

6.4.3 Role of Non-Profit Institutions of the Study Unit

During the field study, many national and local NGOs are found in this Upazila. They are: the Grameen Bank, Association for Social Advancement (ASA), Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), PROSHIKA and the Agroforestry Seed Production and Development Association (ASPADA). The word ‘NGOs’ is very popular among the local people and it has become an integral part of their daily life. The local people identified NGOs as their good friend and characterized NGOs as non-bureaucratic, non-corrupted, non-political, friendly and cooperative and service provider. It is claimed that the local people get more benefits and services from the NGOs rather than the public institutions. The empirical findings show that the NGOs have successfully established and developed a trustworthy relationship among the grassroots by dint of their sincerity and friendly attitudes. Therefore, local people are much more interested in visiting the NGOs’ officials than the UP or Upazila officials. According to the participants of PRA-1 and 2, the local women not only get the credit support from the NGOs, but in many cases they receive even legal aid services when they are deprived of justice from the public institutions.

NGOs: Gift of Nature

The empirical findings revealed that the gap between the local poor people and the public institutions that has been created over the years is now filled by the NGOs. The participants explained the matter as “the emergence of NGOs in their area is the best gift of nature for the poor and helpless people and they could not even think of its alternative at this moment.” Although initially the local people were less interested about the NGOs, now they are very positive and hopeful for its contribution in their lives. It is found that a good number of local people is now self employed with the help of Grameen Bank and other local NGOs. Most of the female participants clearly expressed that it is far better to be a member of an NGO than to run behind the local government institutions.

NGOs: Not a Panacea, but Preventive

The empirical evidence clearly demonstrates that the local people get more benefits and services from the NGOs than the public institutions. The female participants said that they came to know many unknown things after becoming members of Grameen Bank. From the NGOs' officials, they have learned many important issues of their daily lives: education, health, nutrition, small farming and vegetable gardening. Now, they can share and participate in family matters since they contribute to their family. Most of the female participants can write their names, though they do not have any formal education, and it is very encouraging to them. Thus, NGOs have changed their lifestyles and thinking power. The local people cannot even think of an alternative of NGOs at this moment. Capital is important to earn, they said, and the Grameen Bank is the only source of capital for the local poor. They repeatedly expressed that if the Grameen Bank and the other local NGOs stop their activities or leave their areas, the local people will fall in a great trouble.

The participants have also criticised the credit operational system of NGOs and identified two major shortcomings. Firstly, the weekly instalment system is identified as a major problem which is maintained strictly by the NGOs. The ground reality shows that sometimes the NGOs member take money from the local money lenders with high interest rates to pay the instalment. Secondly, although the members pay high interest (15%) for their loans, get low interest for their savings (5%). The villagers claimed that it is a clear discrimination and contradictory too, and there should be a fair and equal interest rate for both cases. However, from the grassroots reality it can be said that despite the above limitations, the non-profit organizations are still playing a better role in the development of the local people than the public institutions.

6.4.4 Role of Local Private Institutions

The rice mill, saw (wood) mill, haat-bazaar (local market), rural doctors, and mohila (women's) market are identified as the private institutions of the study unit. During the field visit, many rice mills were found in the study area and most of those are located in the local markets. However, few were seen beside the roads. Three saw mills and one Mohila market are found in the Birunia bazaar. Shops are located in the local markets. Two large and one

small local market were found around the studied villages. The local markets are open twice a week, while some shops are open throughout the week. The local people come to these markets to buy their necessities and sell their products. Thus, these local institutions operate the financial matters of the local people. It is learned from the ground reality that although the motives of the private institutions are profit making, the local people are still satisfied with their services.

The participants of PRA-1, 2 and 6 have highly praised the role of the Mohila market in the Birunia bazaar. During the field study it was seen that the local women were unhesitant in visiting the Mohila market to buy their necessary items, since the women entrepreneurs run it. In addition, rural doctors and dispensaries also play important role in the local health sector of the local people said the participants. The people prefer to visit the local doctors than the doctors of public health centre for their normal sickness, because local doctors are less expensive.

Thus, the private institutions of the study unit are identified as friendly, cooperative and easy accessible. From the above experiences it can be said that as a service provider, the performance of the private institutions is better than the public institutions.

Table 17: Comparative Scenario of Local Governance Institutions: Grassroots Perspectives

Local Governance Institutions		Parameters					
		Degree of decentralization	Scope of People's participation	Degree of Access	Corruption	Relationship with people	Physical structure
Public Institutions	Upazila	Deconcentration (dominated by local bureaucrats)	Very limited	Access by bribery/political affiliation	Mostly corrupted	Master-Servant	Very Strong
	Union Parishad	Devolution (partly)	Not significant	Access by kinship/political affiliation	Less corrupted for limited scope	Unfriendly	Strong
Non-profit Institutions		Independent	Frequent	Frequent	Least corrupted	Friendly	Comparatively strong
Private Institutions		Independent	Market oriented	Market oriented	Less corrupted	Commercial	Less strong

6.5 Conclusions

In this chapter, the empirical facts and evidence of the study are extensively analyzed and presented from three viewpoints using three different methods: the questionnaire, case study and PRA, to uncover the answers of the stated research questions and objectives. 'A lot about a little' and 'different things to different people'; these two characteristics of qualitative research are followed comprehensively in analyzing the empirical evidence. The summary of the chapter six is presented in the table-17. The findings clearly shows that compare to public institutions, NGOs and private institutions have emerged as important sectors in the local development in Bangladesh. It is crystal clear that the poor performance of the public institutions has paved the way for NGOs and private institutions to play an important role in rural society (Sarker2003:534).

A number of studies claimed that development activities run by NGOs are flexible, innovative, participatory, cost effective, and directed to the poor (Anheier 1990, Korten 1991, Hulme 1994, Tvedt 1995 in Hossain 2001:15). According to a World Bank appraisal team NGOs are more effective than the public institutions in reaching the rural poor (World bank

1995 in Ahmad 2000:21). NGOs are not only reaching out to the poor more effectively but also can deliver services and implement programs more efficiently. They can both mobilize the poor as well as ensure their participation in the program formulation and implementation than the public institutions (Sarker and Rahman 2007). International Aid Agencies and contemporary scholars (World Bank 1996, ADB 993, Sarker 2001 in Sarker 2003:534-535) have categorically identified some factors for relative success of NGOs, which can be substantiated by the evidences of the present research: 1) NGOs have been able to organize effectively the rural poor and made them conscious of their own potential; 2) NGOs deals creatively with situation; 3) NGOs have shown that poor people are bankable; 4) NGOs have inculcated market perspective and entrepreneurial spirit among the poor et cetra. Most of the participants of PRA sessions (female groups) of this research claimed that they have gained new life for the NGOs contributions working in their areas. Similarly, more than a decade ago, UNDP (1993) recognized the role of NGOs in the following manner;

..many people judge NGOs primarily by their success in improving the living standards of the poor, and there are plenty of individual success stories; the landless have obtained land, farmers are growing more food, wells and boreholes have been sunk, children have been immunized against killer diseases. In these and countless other ways, NGOs have transformed the lives of millions of people all over the world (in Ahmad 2000:23).

Like NGOs, the empirical findings demonstrate the fact that the local private institutions also play an important role in local development. The grassroots people claimed that they get more services and benefits from the local private institutions, although they are profit-making oriented. According to the Asian Development Bank (1999), the public sector of Bangladesh is incurring an annual loss of \$300 million, equivalent to the amount of public expenditure for health, while private firms account for over 90% of employment and output (in Islam and Farazmand 2008:41). It is claimed that private sector employment norms are more transparent to the central authorities and the general public, as well as to the international financial agencies (Bhaskar and others in *ibid*). Thus, NGOs and the private institutions are now unanimously recognized for their exceptional ability to reach to the poor people and to provide goods and services to them effectively and efficiently. However, the major findings and conclusions of this research are presented in the following and final chapter.

Chapter Seven: Major Findings and Conclusions

7. Introduction

At the end of the entire process, it is now necessary to reflect on the main research questions and objectives once again. The research questions of this study were ‘What are the challenges of a decentralization policy and people’s participation? How has the policy of decentralization been initiated? What were the objectives and how do the local governance institutions perform? Following the research questions, the main objective of this study was to examine and analyze the degree of local government decentralization initiatives undertaken by the successive regimes in Bangladesh. In addition, this study also endeavoured to observe the scope and nature of people’s participation in the local development programmes, as well as to analyze the performance of local governance institutions. To find answers to the research questions formulated and to attain the research objectives, this study extensively interpreted and reinterpreted both primary and secondary information using different qualitative research methods. This chapter attempts to analyze and summarize the major findings of this research.

7.1 Major Findings

The historical process of decentralization policies in Bangladesh leads us to believe that the successive regimes’ central governments, from the colonial era to the present day, are unenthusiastic and reluctant to transfer authority to the local governance institutions. As a result, an independent, empowered devolutionary form of local government body is yet to emerge in the political and administrative landscape of Bangladesh, despite its regular reform initiatives.

Decentralized local governance institutions are regarded as the best ground in which people can learn the art of governance through their own experiences (Rahman 2000:2). As Wraith states, “the people only become educated in the true sense by learning from their own experience and their own mistakes, they do not become educated by being told what to do or what is good for them” (ibid :2). It is believed that decentralized local governance can provide space for local people to participate in local development; it can ensure a more efficient

allocation of resources, enhance local resource mobilization and improve local governance (Jong, Loquai and Soiri 1999:1). Both from the theoretical and grassroots reality of this study, it has been demonstrated that decentralized local governance promotes education, training, a sense of ownership and patriotism, and builds relationships of trust between government officials and local people. It is also understood that the local development projects can only be successfully implemented through the effective participation of local people in the decision-making and planning process. However, unfortunately, due to the unwillingness of central government, the local public institutions are turned into the meeting point of the rich strata of society, rather than of the local people. The essence of people's participation in local development remains on paper as an elusive phenomenon of good governance. The historical evaluation of decentralization in Bangladesh shows that the successive regimes purposely used the decentralization policy to continue their rule and create party-based support in the localities. Many centuries ago, Plato explains this situation in a different way, which is still quite relevant. To him,

In every case the laws are made by the ruling party in its own interest; a democracy makes democratic laws, a despot autocratic ones, and so on. By making these laws they define as "just" for their subjects whatever is for their own interest, and they call anyone who breaks them a "wrongdoer" and punish him accordingly (in Reiman 1998:149).

Hartman and Boyce (1983:244) also illustrate the above situation in their scholarly work 'Quiet Violence: View from a Bangladeshi Village' in the following manner:

Bangladesh's *Borolok* (Rich people) include landlords, merchants, businessmen, middle class professionals, government officials and military officers. Some are rich by any standard, while others live quite modestly, but in the eyes of the villagers they all 'sit' and 'eat'. Taken together, the *borolok* form the country's ruling class. The balance of power may shift from one faction to another, from rural to urban interests or from a civilian coalition to a military dictatorship, but each government shares a common aim: to maintain the *borolok's* political dominance by distributing the prerogatives and privileges of power among its constituent elements. And as ever, in this political process it is the *chotolok* (poor people), the little people, who are consistently cut out.

The history of public administration in Bangladesh confirms that it has always had strong central and weak local governance. This type of central-local relationship creates severe problems in implementing a decentralization policy in order to strengthen local governance institutions and promote people's participation. This has been clearly illustrated in Chapter Four. The British colonial regime was quite reluctant to create people-oriented, empowered and decentralized local governance institutions. The experiences of the colonial rule show that local institutions had very little operational autonomy. The colonial ruler had introduced local government for administrative convenience rather than meeting the demands of the locality. It is claimed that the British intervention paved the way for local people's dissociation from the local governance system and for engaging bureaucrats in local body supervising (Rahman 1987 in Sarker 2003:531). Later, during the Pakistan period, the Pakistani rulers followed the previous experiences, although some initiatives were taken under the military government to establish a devolutionary local governance system. It is found that the basic democracy of the Ayub regime on the one hand provided an opportunity for the local elite to be involved in the local development programmes, and on the other, central bureaucratic control extended to local government.

The experiences of the independence period are not satisfactory. Following independence, each successive regime initiated a decentralization policy to establish strong and independent local governance to promote people's participation in local development. However, findings show that all these initiatives were politically motivated. The political party officials, civil and military bureaucrats and the new entrepreneurial class used the public management system to make their fortune instead of establishing decentralized local governance in Bangladesh (Samaratunge, Alam and Teicher 2008:39). The first government of Bangladesh led by the Awami League (AL) did not take any major initiatives to transfer authority from the centre to the local level. During this period, the local institutions, except the UP, were under direct control of central and local bureaucracy. Huque clearly portrayed the picture of decentralization of this period saying;

Over four years following independence, then, virtually no attempt was made to revive or reconstruct local government in Bangladesh. The AL which was, prior to independence, the party of the deprived East Pakistani bourgeoisie demanding an equal share of the capitalist pie, could hardly meet the political expectations of a nation comprised mostly of landless labourers

and small farmers living in the rural areas. Political activities were concentrated in the capital and participation was monopolized by urban residents who had easy access to the centre of power. (Huque 1988:49)

Ziaur Rahman (1975-1980), the first military government leader of Bangladesh, initiated a major decentralization policy in 1980, and introduced the Gram Sarker on the village level. It is claimed that Zia was more ambitious to capitalize and mobilize local power in favour of his political party since he was a military leader. By introducing the Gram Sarker policy he was trying to build a broad party structure and gain easy access to the rural voters. General Ershad (1981-1990), the second military government ruler, dissolved the Gram Sarker policy and introduced the Upazila system. An elected chairman headed the Upazila Parishad. Two successive Upazila elections were held during his regime. Although the Upazila was considered as a democratic institution and its primary motives were improving access and promoting people's participation, it is said that the regime exploited every possible opportunity to weaken the democratic force in the system and strengthen the old master of society, the bureaucrats (Rahman and Khan 1997).

After the return to the democratic atmosphere in 1991, three successive regimes ruled the country and have all thus far notably failed to implement any elected governmental tiers outside the UPs already in place. They did very little to establish decentralized local institutions, except for dissolving and reinstituting the decentralization policy in a competitive manner. The Khaleda government (1991-1996) dissolved the Upazila system on the plea of gross mismanagement and corruption, without any rational administrative or economic reason, but by political factors (Zafarullah and Khan 1994). Evidence reveals that it was a great victory for bureaucrats who were not content with the existing system. Although the Hasina government (1996-2001) reinstated the Upazila policy, the Upazila Chairman election was not held during this period. This was another victory for the bureaucrats. Khaleda Zia came to power again in 2001 and just followed the decentralization policy recommended by the previous government. Moreover, during this period the Gram Sarker policy was reintroduced in 2003, but it was later dissolved. Therefore, it can be said that during the last three regimes, none of them were able to implement a decentralization policy recommended by the reform commissions. Scholars state that each successive regime unhesitatingly discarded the policy of

its predecessor without reviewing its rationale, extraneous and endogenous factors relating to its success or failure, or its immediate or potential long term impact on the target population, on the one hand, and the national economy, on the other (Zafarullah and Khan 1994:643). The decentralization policy has been followed in one or another form in the history of Bangladesh. Unfortunately, experience shows that none has been successful in accomplishing the ends of decentralization and people's participation (Huque 1986).

From the empirical findings, it is apparent that political reluctance and bureaucratic resistance are the major challenges to decentralization and people's participation in Bangladesh. As a result, no independent, decentralized local governance institution has emerged in Bangladesh. As Kochen and Deutsch (1980:21) state,

Decentralization is not likely to happen unless key political leaders and elites agree that it should and will occur. Nor it happen unless it is acceptable, at least not objectionable, in a major way to the rank and file of those affected and to their concerned opinion leaders. It must also be logically, technically, and economically feasible.

Local people have a very limited scope for participation in the local development programmes and local public institutions. The ruling party in power, local and central bureaucrats and their allies, dominate local governance institutions. Consequently, corruption, both political and administrative, has spread like a fatal disease in Bangladesh. Corruption has now turned into an inseparable part of the country's cultural moorings. The basic reality shows that the local people routinely fall prey to corruption in different shapes and forms. Khan¹ (n.d.) states that "though corruption has been a part of our politico-administrative heritage, there is little denying the fact that after independence the tentacles of corruption have engulfed the entire society." The private secretary to the former Prime Minister said four classes of people close to the government were directly involved with the corruption of the past five years: a) decision-making ministers and government officials; b) the ministers' sons and relatives who illegally influenced the decision-making ministers and government officials (socially influential); c) members of parliament (politically influential); and d) professional lobbyists, beneficiaries and agents (financially influential) (Samaratunge, Alam and Teicher 2008:39).

¹ see for details www.ti-bangladesh.org/index.php?page_id=373, Political and Administrative Corruption: Concepts, Comparative Experiences and Bangladesh Case, accessed on 19.2.2008

Subsequently, Bangladesh has been recognized by Transparency International as the most corrupt country in the world five consecutive times (TI 2005 in Rahman 2006:33). The changeover from an authoritarian to a democratic system of government in the 1990s has not had any effect on the nature and dimensions of corruption. The Washington Post estimated that by October 2007, some 170 members of the ruling elite, and perhaps 15,000 political under bosses, local government officials and businessmen had been incarcerated on corruption and tax-evasion charges (Hagerty 2007:178). Transparency International of Bangladesh (TIB 1999:2)² states that

Corruption in Bangladesh originates from both politics and administration. In most of the cases it takes place in the form of bribery. Besides, misuse of power, nepotism, fraud and patron-client relationship also give rise to corruption. If the political process becomes corrupt, then naturally, administrative corruption also rises.

It is recognized that bureaucratic accountability is not possible unless and until political accountability is in place (Ara and Rahman 2006:93). This study's findings clearly demonstrate that the bureaucrats rely and depend on the political parties for promoting their own interests. The empirical evidence of this research supplements these statements. Besides these, some other factors, such as weak institutional frameworks, lack of resources, and lack of necessary knowledge, are also identified as the constraints on people's participation in local development projects. The nature of the corruption in the local level development programmes and local governance institutions is clearly identified and analyzed in Section Two and Three of Chapter Six. However, from the theoretical analysis of the research issues (governance, decentralization and people's participation), this study strongly suggests that these factors are less significant, while political reluctance and bureaucratic resistance are the major threats to the discourse of decentralization and people's participation in Bangladesh. Therefore, in light of the theoretical and empirical evidence, this study has revealed two different factors that are existing threats and challenges to decentralization and people's participation in Bangladesh. They are classified as independent factors and dependent factors.

Corruption, weak institutional framework, and lack of resources, coordination and adequate knowledge are identified as the dependent factors. The findings of this study suggest

² see for details 'Corruption in Public Administration' TIB, www.ti-bangladesh.org/index.php?page_id=373, accessed on 19.2.2008

that the dependent factors are the consequences of independent factors and it is believed that the dependent factors cannot be eliminated unless and until the independent factors are effectively removed. Currently, the Anticorruption Commission Chairman categorically states that abuse of power is the main problem in Bangladesh, not bribery (www.bdnews24.com/details.php?cid=2&id=27110, accessed on 1.11.07). According to Werlin (2003), governance rather than natural resources is the primary reason for the wealth and poverty of nations (in Jreisat 2004). James Scott (1972) observed of Southeast Asia over 36 years before, “nominally modern institutions such as bureaucracies and political parties...are often thoroughly penetrated by informal patron-client networks that undermine the formal structure of authority” (in Hutchcroft 2001:27). As a consequence, a local government system has not been established in Bangladesh. Instead, factional cliques and parochial group interests determine the foundation and behaviour of the local government system of Bangladesh (Ara and Khan 2006:95). Therefore, given the theoretical and empirical experiences of this study, political intervention and bureaucratic resistance are identified as the independent factors. These two factors are discussed in detail below.

Political Intervention

Political commitment and willingness are vital in establishing decentralized and democratic local institutions in any country. The success of democracy in developing countries which suffered from a parochial culture depended critically on the flowering of political culture in these societies (Islam 2006). The political culture of a country is the most important factor in the success or failure of decentralization policy and people’s participation. However, it is very disappointing that democratic political culture, either within, or among the political parties has not so far developed since the independence of Bangladesh. Although in 1991, the country began its transition to democracy through great popular uprisings and hopes, it has not been able to consolidate its democracy even after three general elections (1991-2001). Despite regular elections under the caretaker non-party government, democracy has become largely ineffective in the country due to contentious politics between two major parties – the Awami League (AL) and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) (ibid). According to Time Magazine (2006, April 10:16)

Democracy is strangled by a poisonous political war between Zia's right-of-centre BNP and the left-leaning AL. Rejecting any notion of bipartisanship, both parties seem to keep the nation perpetually on the verge of chaos alternating between state repressions or crippling national strikes aimed at toppling the government, depending on who is in power. With politics often reduced to little more than a big brawl, violence infects much of daily life. Gangs armed with barbers' razors roam city streets, extortion is widespread, beatings are routine (in Islam 2006:13).

Thus, the confrontational politics, between the political parties, have been identified as a significant source of potential instability and political uncertainty (Du 2007) that has adversely affected the emergence of decentralized local governance in Bangladesh. The empirical evidence shows that the major political parties are dominated and controlled by corrupt politicians, retired civil and military bureaucrats and black money holders, etc and these people are scarcely interested regarding decentralized local governance and people's participation. It is found that political intolerance, confrontational politics and 'winner-takes-all' attitudes acutely jeopardize enhancing and exercising decentralized local governance in Bangladesh.

The findings show that although the political parties of Bangladesh speak about democracy, it has not been practised within the parties themselves since independence. Excessive political influence is seen in all aspects of the state of Bangladesh. As a result, the political parties did not agree to, and were even least interested in the major national issues, such as establishing democratic local governance in Bangladesh. This study shows that all successive governments have extensively used the local governance institutions as a vehicle to create party-based support on the local level rather than creating a sustainable, democratic and participatory institution. It is claimed that the various governments have failed to achieve their objectives of decentralization to promote development and people's participation (Rahman and Sarker 1997).

The empirical findings of this research reveal that excessive political intervention and partisanship have made the local public institutions defunct and unable to promote people's participation or provide the benefits of decentralization to the people at grassroots level. The political leaders of the power party and their allies are the main beneficiaries of the decentralization policy. The poor segments of society are still far from the benefits of local

institutions. According to this study, the local government institutions such as the UP and the Upazila system are designed to serve the interests of the upper strata of society in the name of decentralization and people's participation. It is found that the UP and the Upazila are directed to encourage the participation of the opportunist group of the locality. The mediators (*dalals*), invisible actors, UP officials, local members of the ruling party and the local elite can be regarded as the opportunist group.

The evidence shows that historically, the UP has always been dominated by the rich strata of society. The First Five Year Plan of the Government of Bangladesh firmly acknowledged that "these local bodies were never truly representative because the richer influential classes manage to win the elections. The election system failed to recognize the authoritarian nature of the traditional power structure and no provision was made to protect the politically weak, depressed and exploited classes" (cited from Aminuzzaman 1993:264). The rich strata historically have good relations with the political parties in general, and the ruling party in particular. The empirical findings of this study confirmed that although the rich local people do not have any particular political identity or affiliation, they always serve the interest of the ruling party. Scholars have termed this situation the 'patron-client relationship'. Clientelism is one of the major drawbacks in the governance landscape of Bangladesh and it has wide implications for local institutional reforms and people's participation. Clientelism is a direct product of the undemocratic political culture of Bangladesh. The empirical findings of this study have also clearly demonstrated the fact that the clientelist relationship is a major threat to people's participation in the local development programmes. However, the local people of the study area acknowledged that their participation in the local development activities through the local institutions is in two forms: as manual workers and as voters. They have very little opportunity for participation in the decision-making and planning process of local development programmes.

Thus, it is crystal clear that lack of political commitment or political reluctance is a major threat to the establishment of truly decentralized participatory local governance in Bangladesh. As a result, the issue of political reform (political parties) has come to the frontline as a buzzword in the current political discourse in Bangladesh. Akhter Ali's statement may be very relevant in this context:

What this country needs is a true leader. A man who would put the people's well-being above his own. A man who would say, 'I don't want riches for myself. I want peace and prosperity for our people.' An honest man, who would relentlessly punish the corrupt. A man who would say, 'if any one finds me taking so much as a 25 *poisha* (cent) bribe, let him lead me to a field and shoot me before the public.' But our leaders today are all thieves. They think only of themselves. They only know 'all is *taka* (money) and *taka* is all that matters.' (Hartmen and Boyce 1983:244)

One contemporary statement of a Dhaka City Ward Commissioner can also be a very useful example in this regard. He said that "people think it is a lack of resources that Bangladesh suffers from, but this is not the case. We have the resources required to alleviate poverty, but we lack unity and cohesion. Bangladesh's political context has held back the country's development process, and continues to do so" (Bank 2006:1).

Bureaucratic Resistance

Although Bangladesh emerged as an independent nation, the impact of its colonial past continues to affect the whole nation in varying ways, particularly in their political and administrative systems (Huque 1997:16). Bangladesh inherited a colonial type of administration from British and also from Pakistani rule. The present bureaucracy of Bangladesh is a legacy of colonial administration. The colonial mentality still prevails in the landscape of public administration in Bangladesh, which poses a major threat to the implementing of a decentralization policy and in ensuring people's participation in development. It is claimed that despite numerous reform attempts, the bureaucracy in Bangladesh has remained elitist in composition, narrow in outlook, isolated from the mass of people and unresponsive to their needs and desires, as well as corrupt, antiquated, high-handed, and obsessed with the preservation of its status and privileges (Zafarullah, Khan and Rahman 1998 in Siddiquee 1999:89, Zafarullah 1987:459).

The centralized colonial administration has established absolute authority over all aspects of the state from policy formulation to programme implementation. Therefore, administration has become a bastion of corruption in the absence of strong decentralized local governance. The TIB argues that the existing "centralized administration is responsible for

excessive bureaucracy, delaying in decision-making and lack of benefit for the people. The more the centralization of administration there is, the more pervasiveness of corruption there will be and the lack of powerful local government is one of the major causes of increasing corruption in the country” (TIB 1999:4).

Since independence, the bureaucracy has not only been deeply rooted in the administrative system, but also plays a dominant role in the political system of Bangladesh (Zafarullah 1987). Alavi expressed the same view that the bureaucrats in Bangladesh are a dominant social sector and have been playing a relatively autonomous role (Alavi 1973 in Ahmed 1980:15). The bureaucrats in Bangladesh have been playing a vital role not only in formulating public policies and their implementation, but are also important political actors (Siddiquee 1999:98). In the early 1960s, F.W Riggs (1963) presented a clear picture of bureaucracy in developing countries. He states that the extent of bureaucratic involvement in politics in developing countries is exceptionally high, not because the bureaucracy is fully developed in the Weberian sense, but because of the weakness of the extra-bureaucratic political institutions and ineffectiveness of the parliamentary bodies (in Ahmed 1980:14).

Historically, bureaucrats, both civil and military, hold very strong positions in both the local and central governance of Bangladesh. More importantly, two military governments ruled the country for 15 years. It is widely known that every successive regime, including the two military governments, incorporated public bureaucracy into the political system to continue their authoritarian rule (Khan 2003). The political history of Bangladesh evidently shows that the rulers have deliberately sown the seeds of politicisation in the bureaucracy (Siddiquee 1999:98). Consequently, a typical non-friendly bureaucratic culture has developed over the years and created a serious obstacle to local government reform. The analysis of the reform initiatives of successive regimes clearly indicates that bureaucratic resistance along with political resistance is equally responsible for making the reform measures unsuccessful. It is obvious that the civil servants are always reluctant to introduce decentralized local governance that might cause them to lose their control and authority over the local governance institutions. Therefore, they hold themselves aloof from the public and maintain the status quo, resisting any reform or change that goes against them (Islam and Farazmand 2008).

The history of reform in the local governance of Bangladesh demonstrates that the UP is the only long-lasting local government institution that has a democratic nature and is

governed by the people's representatives. Other institutions such as the Upazila Parishad, the Zila Parishad and the Gram Sarker are created and then abolished, or often the reform committee's recommendations were not implemented, especially in the case of the Zila Parishad and the Upazila Parishad. This makes one wonder why the UP is still alive with a democratic nature and regular elections, while other institutions are frequently established, modified and abolished. The empirical findings demonstrate that although the UP is an elected body, it is functionally and financially dependent on local and central governments. On the other hand, it is located at the grassroots level and functions with less qualified and unskilled leaders. Therefore, the civil servants never considered the UP as a threat to exercise their power and control over the local administration and development programmes.

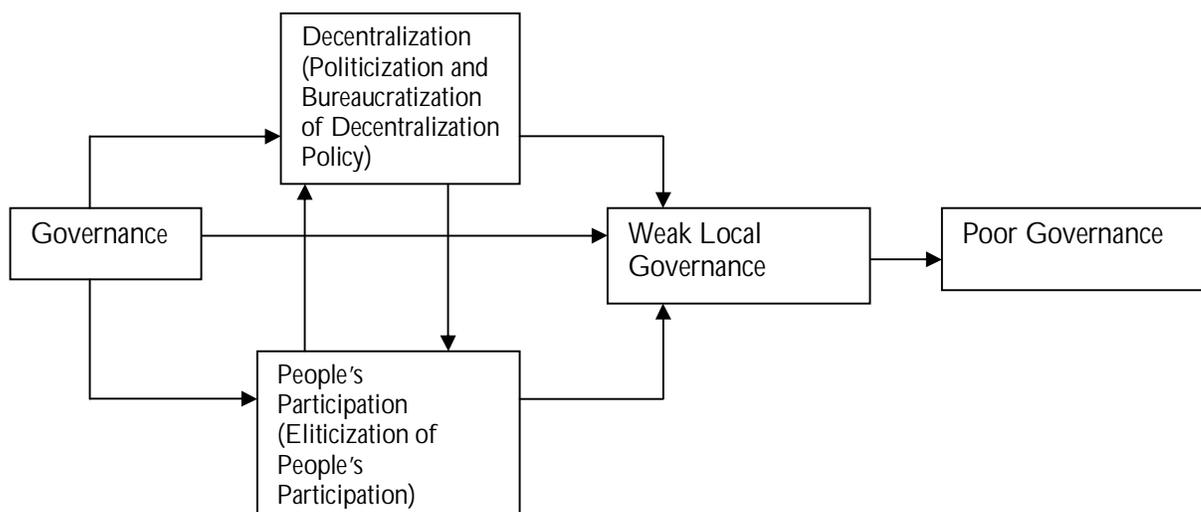
On the other hand, two other major institutions, the Upazila Parishad and the Zila Parishad, have not assumed a proper shape as democratic institutions due to bureaucratic resistance. The Zila Parishad as a local governance institution gained immense significance in all of the regimes. In practice, however, this body is totally dominated by the bureaucrats. From the empirical findings, it can be said that the bureaucrats are reluctant to make the Zila Parishad an elected body as they are afraid of losing their power over the district. The history of the Upazila Parishad is slightly different and disappointing. As was already mentioned, the Upazila Parishad was created in 1982 and dissolved in 1991 without the necessary evaluation and assessment. It was found that the abolition of the Upazila Parishad was a victory for the bureaucrats, whose plan during this crucial period was to exploit the changed political situation for their own benefit. However, although the Upazila system was reintroduced by the last two successive regimes, the election of the Upazila Chairman was not held during the entire period. In fact, it was found that the civil servants have successfully created resistance and diplomatically manipulated the law makers of the country not to hold the Upazila election in time. Like the Zila Parishad, they consider the Upazila system as threat to them, since the Upazila was headed by an elected chairman.

The decentralization policy's theoretical application and people's participation in local development is therefore very difficult under the above circumstances. Haque has named this situation the contextless nature of governance in post-colonial countries, and Bangladesh might be the best example. According to him (Haque 1996: 323)

The modern administrative systems in post colonial countries are relatively incompatible with their economic, political, and cultural contexts. In terms of economic context, the expansive, interventionist and elitist bureaucracies have been inconsistent with the third world's economic needs to develop private capital and entrepreneurship, active economic self-reliance, and resolve poverty and inequality. With regard to the political context in these countries, there has been inconsistency between the existence of the western bureaucratic model and the absence of its politico-ideological context, between bureaucratic power and the power of political institutions, between the rhetoric of political neutrality and the reality of politicization, and between bureaucratic overdevelopment and political underdevelopment. Similarly, in terms of cultural context, in most Third World countries, due to the exogenous origins of administrative systems, there is disharmony between the interpretations of top bureaucrats and the understanding of the common masses, between the formal official norms and the actual administrative actions, and between administrative values and indigenous cultural values.

Caiden's statement may be more relevant and important in the contemporary situation of Bangladesh. He states that "laws are changed, structure reorganized, people moved around, manuals altered, and instructions revised, but the same behaviour patterns are continued. The administrative culture, its beliefs, values, priorities, norms are hardly touched" (Caiden 1991:152). The policy of decentralization and people's participation in local development has been experimented with through the above political and administrative contexts of Bangladesh. Decentralization issue has been affected by politics and bureaucracy, while issues regarding people's participation have been influenced by elitism. Consequently, instead of good governance, features of poor governance are more visible in Bangladesh (see Figure 7). Decentralization of local government is a very significant strategy to uphold the philosophical and theoretical foundations of democracy or good governance. However, it is obvious that a decentralization policy will never be able to bring any hope for the nation if it creates a new opportunist group instead of facilitating and creating the scope of people's participation in local development. The performance of the decentralized local governance should not be measured in terms of structural changes alone, but by the people's participation that the country promotes in its organs (Hossain and Helao 2008:208). Uphoff (n.d.) categorically claims that alongside the structural changes, there a need for various attitudinal and cultural shifts that might facilitate results in decentralization and people's participation.

Figure 6: Decentralization and People's Participation: Experiences from Bangladesh



7.2 Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, the entire analysis leads to the statement that governance practices in Bangladesh, with special reference to decentralization and people's participation in local development, are not satisfactory. In the discourse of governance and good governance in Bangladesh, 'Decentralization' and 'People's Participation,' is still an 'elusive golden deer' (Khan 2000:107) that the nation sought persistently but could not find during the last three decades or more. Historical evaluation and empirical evidence reveal that local governance institutions such as the UP and the Upazila are under the control of public bureaucracy on the one hand, and under extreme political influence on the other. On the contrary, the empirical findings of the study clearly show that non-profit organizations and private institutions have been working effectively and efficiently in providing services to the local inhabitants. The major findings of this research regarding the present scenario of decentralization and people's participation in Bangladesh can be summarized in the following manner;

- First, despite frequent reform measures, the policy of decentralization in Bangladesh is still entrapped around the discourse of governance as a mere illusionary vision, due to strong political and bureaucratic interventions;
- Second, formal, informal and background (invisible actors) actors seriously jeopardize even the theoretical application of people's participation in local development;
- Third, as a result, corruption has burgeoned and pervaded every sector of the country and has become an inevitable part of the daily life in Bangladesh;
- Fourth, public institutions are structurally stronger than the private and non-profit institutions but functionally weak; while the private and non-profit institutions are functionally stronger but institutionally and structurally weak; and
- Fifth, referring to Turner and Hulme (1997) on good theory and bad practice and the experiences of this study, it can be said that good institutional structure (public institutions) cannot work properly given its various malfunctioning practices whereas weak institutional structure (NGOs) can work effectively with their good practices.

In order to overcome the above situation, Bangladesh needs a long-term policy framework for decentralized local governance and people's participation in local development on the basis of national consensus. The policy has to be implemented in different phases by periodically evaluating its performance. Concurrently, the local people must be carefully prepared to respond to the challenges of decentralization (Huque 1988:176). In so doing, NGOs, civil society and aid agencies should work together as partners with the government in establishing decentralized local governance and ensuring people's participation in local development. Visionary and good political leadership can facilitate and ensure a partnership based network both at the local and national level in Bangladesh. It is widely believed that good political leadership has always been, and probably always will be an important factor in human affairs (Kotter 1990:5). According to Kotter (1996), the successful implementation of any reform depends 70% on efficient and good leadership and 30% on management. He further argues that "good leadership moves people in a direction that is genuinely in the real long-term interests. It does not march people off a cliff. It does not waste their scarce resources. It does not build up the dark side of their human nature" (Kotter 1988:17-18).

Singapore and Malaysia have successfully implemented administrative reform policies with less resistance from the opportunists group due to visionary and strong political leadership (see for details Samaratunge, Alam and Teicher 2008). As a result, they have emerged as leading economies in Asia. On the other hand, the findings of this study clearly demonstrate that since independence, no major initiative has been taken to introduce rule-based government and to ensure people oriented administration to support the decentralized local governance and people's participation in local development of Bangladesh. In addition, it was found that all successive regimes have emphasized the theoretical and structural aspects of decentralization and people's participation for narrow partisan politics which acted as a strong force against comprehensive reforms. Thus, it can be said that unless and until the political parties, civil servants, NGOs, civil society and the private sector work together to strengthen the local governance institutions on the basis of a long term plan, decentralized local governance and people's participation will probably never get a proper voice in the political and administrative discourse of Bangladesh. Referring to the reality, this study suggests that a 'partnership based form' of local governance system would work effectively for the future decentralization and people's participation in Bangladesh. Therefore, how a partnership form of local governance system can be established in the developing countries like Bangladesh should be the immediate policy concern and research agenda of the international aid agencies, national policy makers and researchers.

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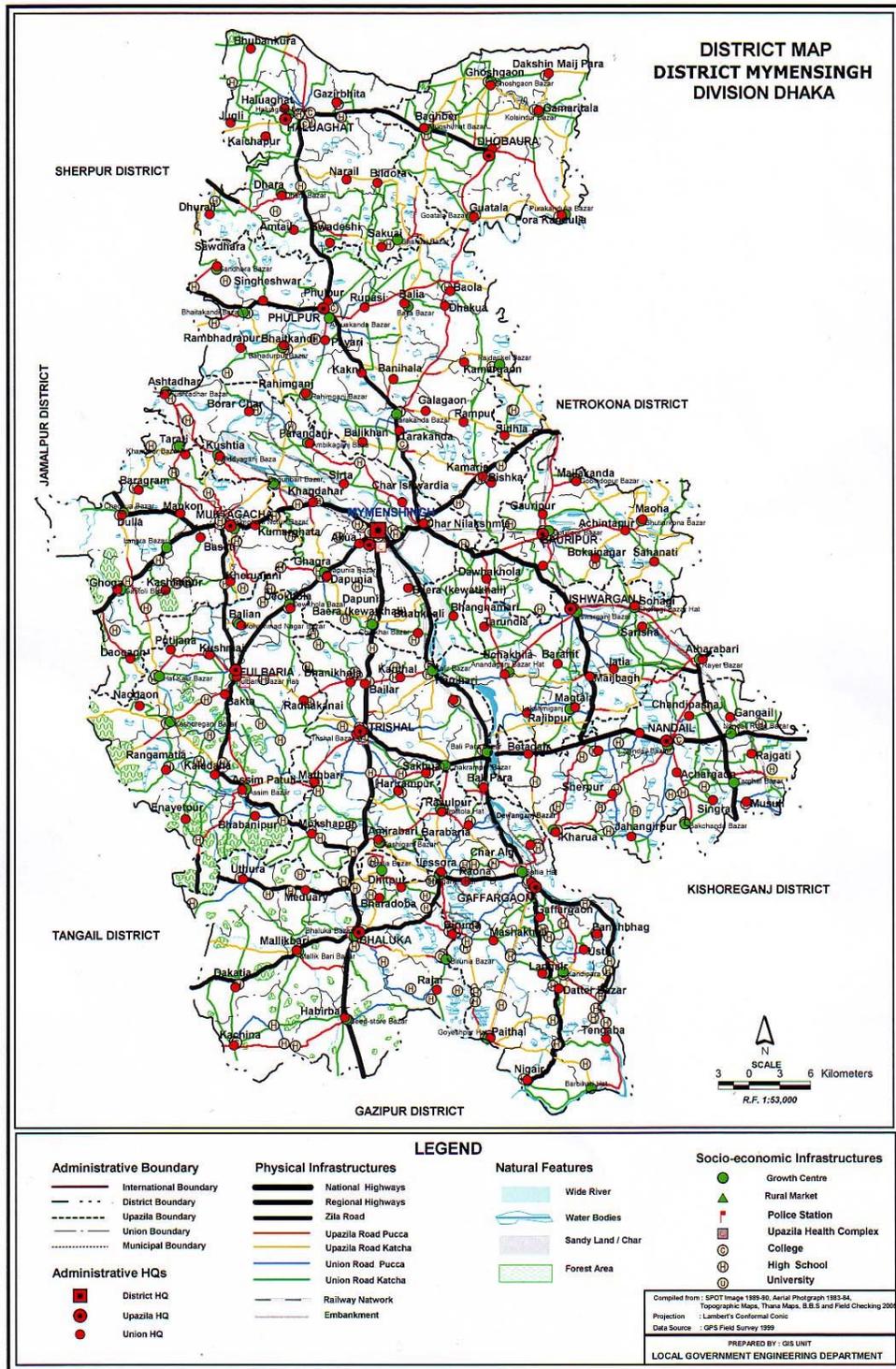
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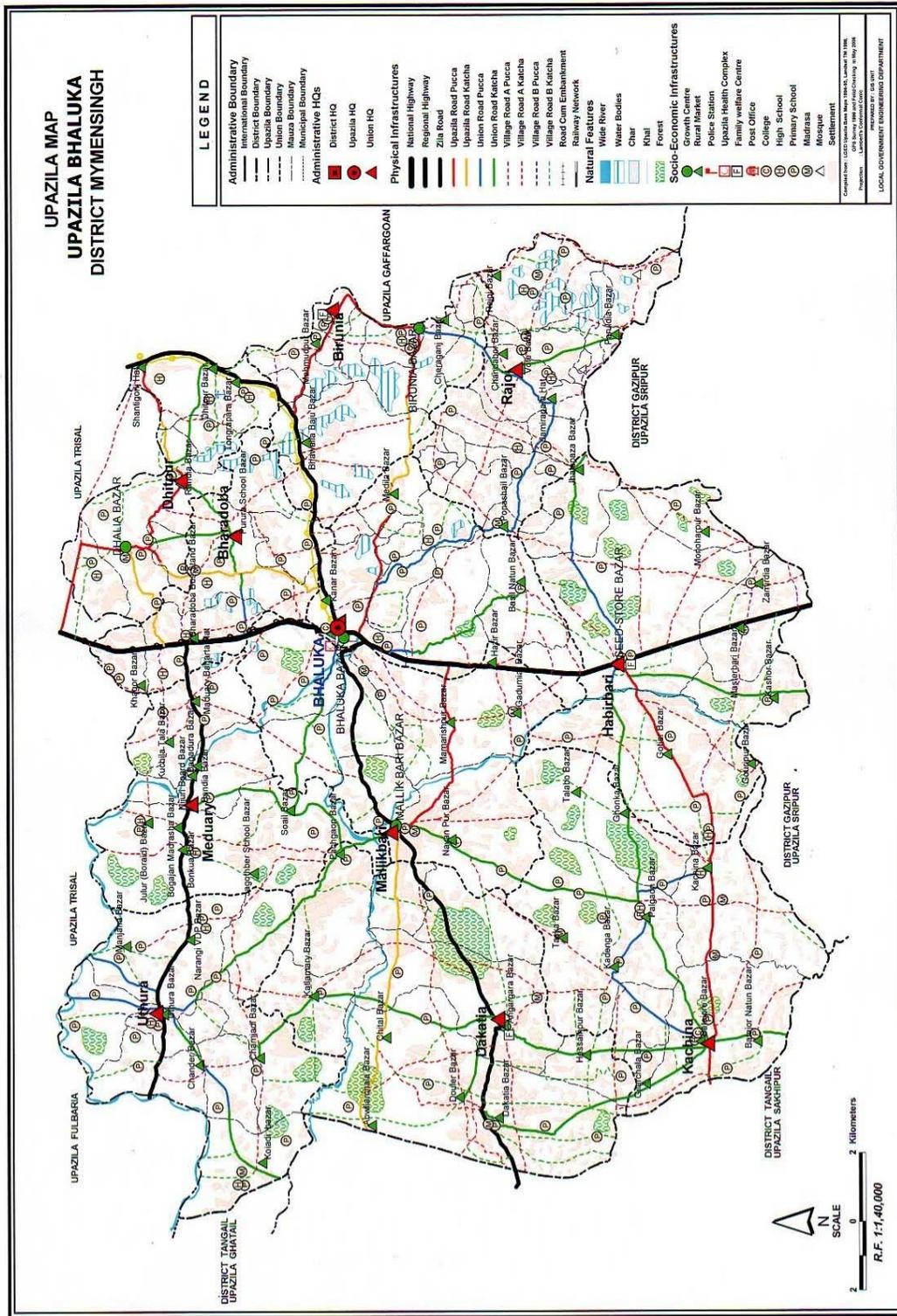
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Appendix-1 Map of Mymensingh District



Source: LGED 2007

Appendix-2 Map of Bhaluka Upazila



Source: LGED 2007

Appendix-3 Bhaluka Upazila at a Glance

(Sourec: Upazila Statistical Office, Upazila Land Office, Upazila Education Office, Upazila Agriculture Office, Bhaluka)

1. Total population:	308600
Male:	159540
Female:	149060
Density	697 (per sq.km)
Population growth rate	1.54
2. Total Union Council	11 (Bhaluka, Bharadoba, Birunia, Dakatia, Dhitpur, Habirbari, Kachina, Mallikbari, Meduary, Rajai and Uthura)
3. Total Village	110
4. Communication System	
Pacca Road	97 km
Semi Pacca	23km
Mud road	1055km
Rail	-----
Eleectricity	REB-45km, PDB-145km
Deep Tubewel	330
5. Educational	
Degree College	01
School+ college	02
Secondary school	43
Govt. Primary school	94
Non Govt. Registered Primary School	33
Madrasha	38
Literacy rate	57%
6. Land	
Total Area	109430 Acres
Mouza	87
Total cultivable land	78010 acres
Aus Peddy	20600
Aman desi	16807
Aman ufsi	14227
Boro desi	1478
Boro ufsi	30230
Whet	582
Jute	710
Sugarcane	5320
Non cultivable land	11234 acres

7. Fruits.
 Jack fruits
 Guava
 Banana
8. Transport and communication
 Direct bus transportation from capital city and district town.
9. Environment
10. Health and treatment facilities
- | | |
|-------------------------|----|
| Upazila health complex | 01 |
| Health sub-centre | 03 |
| UP health and FP centre | 06 |
| Family planning office | 01 |
| Family planning clinic | 01 |
| Community health center | 09 |
| Private hospital | 02 |
| Private clinic | 03 |
| Trauma centre | 01 |
11. Vocational Institution facilities
 There are no vocational training institutions. But there is a vocational centre attached with the secondary school.
12. Public health
- | | |
|-------------------------------|------|
| Tubewel | 3030 |
| Sanitary latrine sales centre | 12 |
13. Gender proportion 107 male against for 100 female
14. Trade and industry
- | | |
|---------------------|-----|
| Textiles | 08 |
| Steel | 01 |
| Hardware | 01 |
| Spinning | 01 |
| Fish food industry | 02 |
| Press and printing | 01 |
| Rice mill | 233 |
| Wood mill | 10 |
| Hat bazar (markets) | 42 |

Appendix-4 Birunia Union Parishad at a glance

(Source: Birunia Union Land Office)

Total Area 33.85 sq. Km

Total population	21350
	Male- 12200
	Female –
Total Cultivable Land-	6018.05 acres
Literacy rate	55%
Total Village	9
Educational institution	
	College- 01
	Secondary school- 05
	Madasha- 06
	Primary school- 70
	Non-govt. Registered primary school-03
Health Center	01
Hat-Bazar (local market)	07
River	01
Bridge/culvert	10
Communication:	Good communication from the Upazila administrative unit to Union Parishad by bus, rickshaw, and van.
Main crops	Paddy
Main Business	Fisheries
Main fruit	Jack-fruit
Rice mill	18
Wood mill	03
Electricity	PDB-11km
Deep Tubewell	29
Land Office-	01

Appendix -5 Formal questionnaire

Dear Sir/Madam,

I the undersigned Assistant Professor of the Department of Politics and Public Administration, Islamic University of Kushtia Bangladesh, have been pursuing my PhD research at the University of Tampere, Finland. The title of my study is **Governance in Practice: Decentralization and People's Participation in Bangladesh**. Currently, I am visiting Bangladesh to carry out my field study for my research. In order to know the practical situation from the field and to collect data and information for my research, I have made the following questionnaire. I strongly believe that your kind cooperation and valuable suggestions regarding my research will play a crucial role in effectively finalizing my research. I assure you that the information and inputs given by you will only be used for this research and maintained confidentially. As a researcher, I request you to participate by answering this questionnaire.

Your kind cooperation will not only be considered as an important part of this research, but will also play a vital role in the discourse of public administration of developing countries.

Sincerely yours

Mohammed Asaduzzaman

Assistant professor, Department of Politics and Public Administration

Islamic University of Kushtia, Bangladesh

And

PhD researcher, Department of Management Studies

University of Tampere, Finland

Formal Questionnaire

1. (a) Name and address (optional)

(b) Age

(c) Educational qualification

(d) Marital status

(e) Profession

(f) Yearly income (optional)

2. In your opinion, what are the main problems of decentralization in Bangladesh? Please specify

a) Administrative

b) Political

- c) Economic
- d) Social
- e) Others

3. Do you think that the existing Upazila structure is suitable to ensure people's participation in development?

- a) Yes
- b) No

Please mention some reasons (at least 3 or 4) in support of your answer

4. What are the main problems of people's participation at the local level development activities in Bangladesh?

5. In your opinion, what are the reasons for local level corruption in Bangladesh? Explain
Social Political Economic Administrative Others

6. Please explain why grassroots level development activities are not implementing effectively? Please explain the causes responsible for this.

7. Do you think that the present Union Parishad structure should reform to ensure people's participation in development?

- Yes
- No

Please mention 3 or 4 reasons in support of your answer

9. Each and every government has initiated a reform programme for decentralization. Do you support this?

- Yes
- No

Please mention 3 or 4 reasons in support of your answer.

10. Do you think that the position of the Upazilla Chairman as a people's representative is needed at the Upazilla level?

11. The Upazilla Chairman election has not been held in the past 15 years. What causes are responsible for this?