

Strategy on Local government strengthening

Background paper for 7th Five Year Plan

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List of Contents

1	Local governance: quest for a grass-root institutional strategy
2	Overview of the local government system and its evolution
2.1	Local government system in Bangladesh
2.2	Evolution of local governance at various levels
2.2.1	<i>Union</i>
2.2.2	<i>Upazila</i>
2.2.3	<i>District</i>
2.2.4	<i>Urban local governments</i>
2.2.5	<i>Non-state actors at local level</i>
2.3	Time-line on local government reforms
3	Local governance in Bangladesh: Challenges and opportunities
3.1	Two policy dilemmas
3.1.1	<i>Accountability versus development administration</i>
3.1.2	<i>MP's constituency role vis-a-vis local governments</i>
3.2	Local governance for local economic development: Investing in a new strategic focus
3.2.1	<i>Emergence of a new strategic focus</i>
3.2.2	<i>Economic transformations at the local level</i>
3.2.3	<i>What is a local economy perspective?</i>
3.2.4	<i>Re-thinking the question of agency</i>
3.2.5	<i>Technology: A new window of opportunity</i>
3.3	A three-track strategy
4	Priorities for intervention and investment in local government system under 7 th Five Year Plan
4.1	Legal, administrative and structural priorities
4.1.1	<i>Unified framework law for local governments</i>
4.1.2	<i>Reforms in field administration</i>
4.1.3	<i>Electoral reforms</i>
4.1.4	<i>Rationalizing LGI functions</i>
4.1.5	<i>Strengthening constitutional protection of local government system</i>
4.2	LG finance and inter-governmental transfers
4.2.1	<i>Local resource mobilization</i>
4.2.2	<i>Grants from central government</i>
4.2.3	<i>Project finance</i>
4.3	Planning for local economic development
4.4	Staffing
4.5	Capacity development
4.6	Gender mainstreaming
5	9 priority recommendations
	<i>Bibliography</i>
	<i>Annex 1 Recommendation matrix</i>
	<i>Annex 2 Local governance in Vision 2021 and past plan documents</i>

I Local Governance: Quest for a Grass-Root Institutional Strategy

The quest for a grass-root institutional strategy that combines the dual goals of strengthening participatory development at the local level and building local governments as key vehicles of local democracy and service-delivery has been a recurring theme in the development philosophies of Bangladesh. The constitution of Bangladesh underscores the importance of local governance¹ and there has been a rich body of reform initiatives that has kept the issue in continual focus even if gaps and weaknesses remain significant. There is a general agreement today that a devolved and effective local government system is crucial for making development agenda pro-poor, widening participation in decision making and ensuring that resources are directed to where they are most needed through increased allocative efficiency.²

From a long-term perspective, local government in Bangladesh has been more an area of policy experimentation than one of stable institutional development. The Bengal Local Government Act of 1885 provided the first framework with provisions for local governments at three levels: union, thana (upazila) and district. Policy discourse over the next hundred and odd years have essentially oscillated within this framework. Two seemingly contradictory trends stand out. On one hand, local governments have seen a steady and incremental elaboration of their organizational and institutional presence over time. On the other, notwithstanding this robust institutional presence, local governments continue to be plagued with a variety of perceived weaknesses in their role, capacity and authority to deliver services and governance. Arguably, such contradictory trends are an outcome of both the indispensability of local governments for grass-root development and continuing policy ambivalence about the 'right' role and authority to be invested in such institutions.

It is worth noting that notwithstanding widely-shared perceptions on weaknesses of the local government system, Bangladesh has made remarkable strides in a host of areas including food production, safety net programs, rural infrastructure, credit provision, primary education, child immunization, family planning, sanitation, drinking water provision etc. How useful then is it to base the focus on strengthening local governments merely on a substitution argument, i.e. have local governments do what central agencies like LGED on rural infrastructure and NGOs on primary schooling and health-care are perhaps already doing well? Clearly, a narrow zero-sum discourse on re-distribution of power does not offer the best arguments for advancing on the local government agenda.

There are also newer realities that demand to be factored into the local government discussion.³ The dramatic expansion of all-weather rural infrastructure which began from the late 1980s has brought about a qualitatively new degree of connectedness between the rural and urban. Bangladesh is witnessing a process of rapid urbanization that is transforming the erstwhile rural-urban divide into a rural-urban continuum. Not only are rural-urban linkage issues increasingly relevant for local governments but there is also an independent challenge of prioritizing issues of urban local governance.

Other contextually relevant factors have brought additional complexities and challenges for the decentralization and local governance agenda. The Bangladesh economy is undergoing far-reaching structural changes that are as fundamental at the national level as at grass-root levels. Aspirational frontiers too have travelled upwards with new ambitions such as Middle Income Status that are as resonant at the grass-root level as at national level. Consequent to such changes, new agendas such as local economic development are entering the purview of the local government mission. This requires major re-thinking on services to be delivered and approaches for effective delivery.

¹ Articles 11, 59 and 60 of Bangladesh Constitution provide direction on Local Government.

² Rahman, H.Z. & Robinson M. (2006) *Governance and State Effectiveness in Asia*, IDS Working Paper.

³ PPRC/Local Government Division, Ministry of LG&RD, 2002, *Local Government Issues and Way Forward: Report of International Workshop*, Dhaka.

A different category of challenge, one more political in nature, is the increasing penetration of national political processes into the local level. While some rightly despair over perceived zero-sum power dynamics between parliamentarians at national level and elected representatives at local level underlying such penetration, the strategic insight to build on is that local governments are no longer isolated islands but enmeshed within increasingly complex horizontal and vertical networks. How such interfacing is best pursued, how the decentralization agenda takes on the advocacy task of optimal demarcation of jurisdictional boundaries and what new capacity development challenges these entail have to become part of the local government discussion.

The 7th Five Year Plan offers a unique opportunity to build a fresh approach to the decentralization and local governance agenda for Bangladesh. At one level, there will have to be a large and obvious element of continuity of priorities from earlier planning documents. At another level, however, there is an opportunity for re-thinking that lies in factoring in the new realities and challenges and thereby engage all relevant stakeholders in a compelling process of re-thinking on why and how decentralization and local governance is critical to ensuring Bangladesh's ambitions of inclusive prosperity.

2 Overview of the local government system and its evolution

2.1 Local government system in Bangladesh

The local government system in Bangladesh has evolved within a three-tier framework - union, upazila (thana) and district - first envisioned in the colonial-era Bengal Local Government Act of 1885. This has not meant, however, that an effective three-tier local government system is actually operational. The institution at the primary tier i.e. the Union Parishad (UP), has had the most robust presence by virtue of institutional continuity as an elected body. The body at the secondary level i.e. the Upazila Parishad (UZP) has a much smaller history as an elected body while an elected body at the apex level i.e. district, is yet to appear.

At present, there are 5428 elected local government institutions (LGI) with around 60,000 elected councilors. These include 4542 Union Parishads (UP), 487 Upazila Parishads (UZP), 324 pourashavas (municipalities) and 11 city corporations. Union and Upazila parishads, usually seen as rural local governments, are independent tiers. Pourashavas and city corporations, seen as urban local governments, are not independent tiers but represent urban centres of smaller and larger sizes respectively.

In addition to the above, there are 64 Zila Parishads at district level that have no elected representation and are functionally quite limited. These are currently overseen by officials nominated from the central bureaucracy and a political nominee. There is also an additional system in force for the Chittagong Hill Tracts (Bandarban, Rangamati and Khagrachari districts) where alongside the statutory LGIs, there are District Councils legally empowered to exercise customary laws as well as a Regional Council. However, these are currently being run by nominated persons rather than elected representatives.

An important objective of the local government system has been to bring elected representatives, executive functionaries and service departments of the government under a uniform functional umbrella. To this end, laws were enacted to 'transfer' selected central government departments to the jurisdiction of the LGI at the relevant tier. The Local Government (Upazila Parishad) Act 1998 and subsequent amendment in 2011 placed 17 government departments under the UZP and clear provision was made for compulsory reporting of activities by other departments not categorically transferred. Similarly, the Local Government (Union Parishad) Act 2009 made 13 field level extension officials of 7 ministries transferable to the UPs. However, despite these initiatives, functional integration is yet to be achieved as desired and directed in the legal framework.

2.2 Evolution of local government system

The evolution of local governments at the three administrative levels of Union, Upazila and District as well as of urban local governments is briefly sketched below:

2.2.1 Union

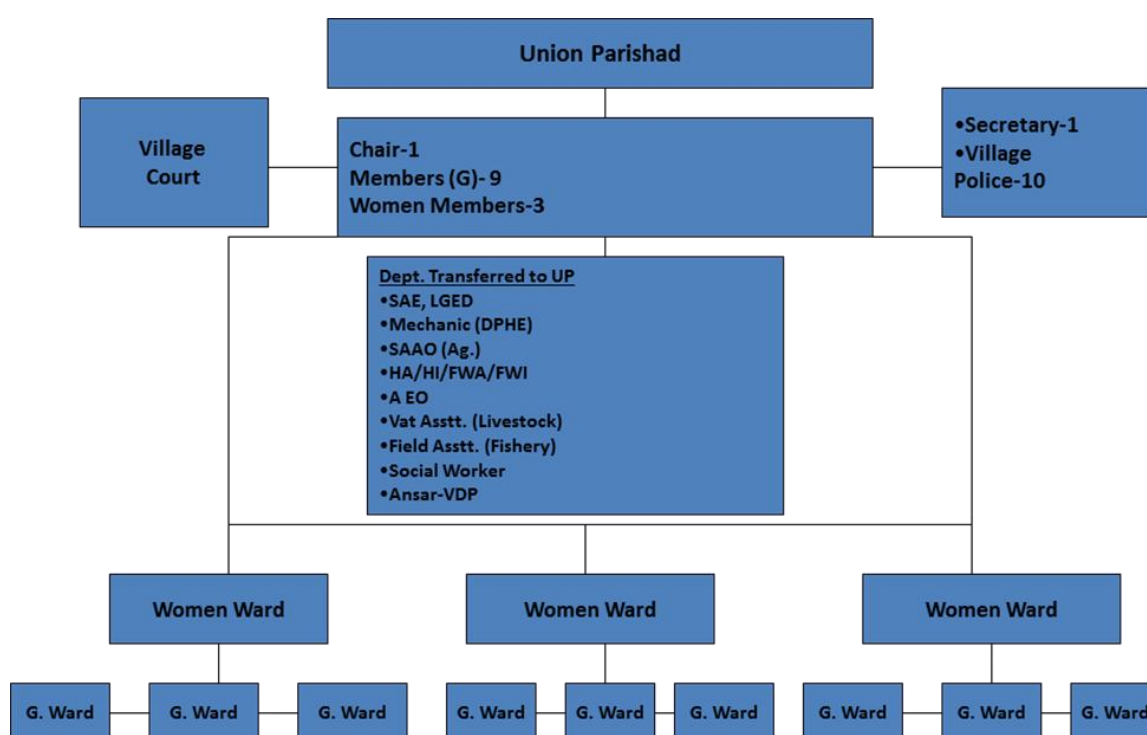
This is the lowest tier of local government currently covering an average population of 25,000. The union-level body has undergone many changes in nomenclature and is currently called union parishad. These became fully elected bodies in 1962. Among the various tiers of local government, Union Parishads have the longest institutional history dating back to 1870. This continuity in institutional life, however, is built on a very narrow functional and financial jurisdiction as well as administrative subservience to executive functionaries at upazila and district levels.

Notwithstanding these limitations, union parishads have been the focal point in the local government system except for a period in the 1980s when the upazila became the focal point. Four important policy

changes in the preceding decades have put the spotlight further on this body, namely i) a streamlining of the representational base of the parishad by demarcating a union into nine wards (electoral units) instead of the previous three and having a member from each ward; this provision first suggested in 1993 became operational through the union election of 1997; ii) a strengthening of female representation within the parishads by the 1997 provision for election to three reserved female seats, and iii) financial strengthening through the provision of direct fund transfer – ‘block grants’ – introduced in early 2000s and iv) creation of an upgraded physical ‘home’ for the UP in the form of the Union Parishad Complexes that have been constructed in phases for all UPs starting from late 1990s.

The UP is thus currently made up of 13 members – 1 Chairman, 9 general members – 1 from each of the 9 wards, and 3 women members elected to reserved seats each covering 3 wards. Current organogram of UP is described in Figure 1.

Figure 1

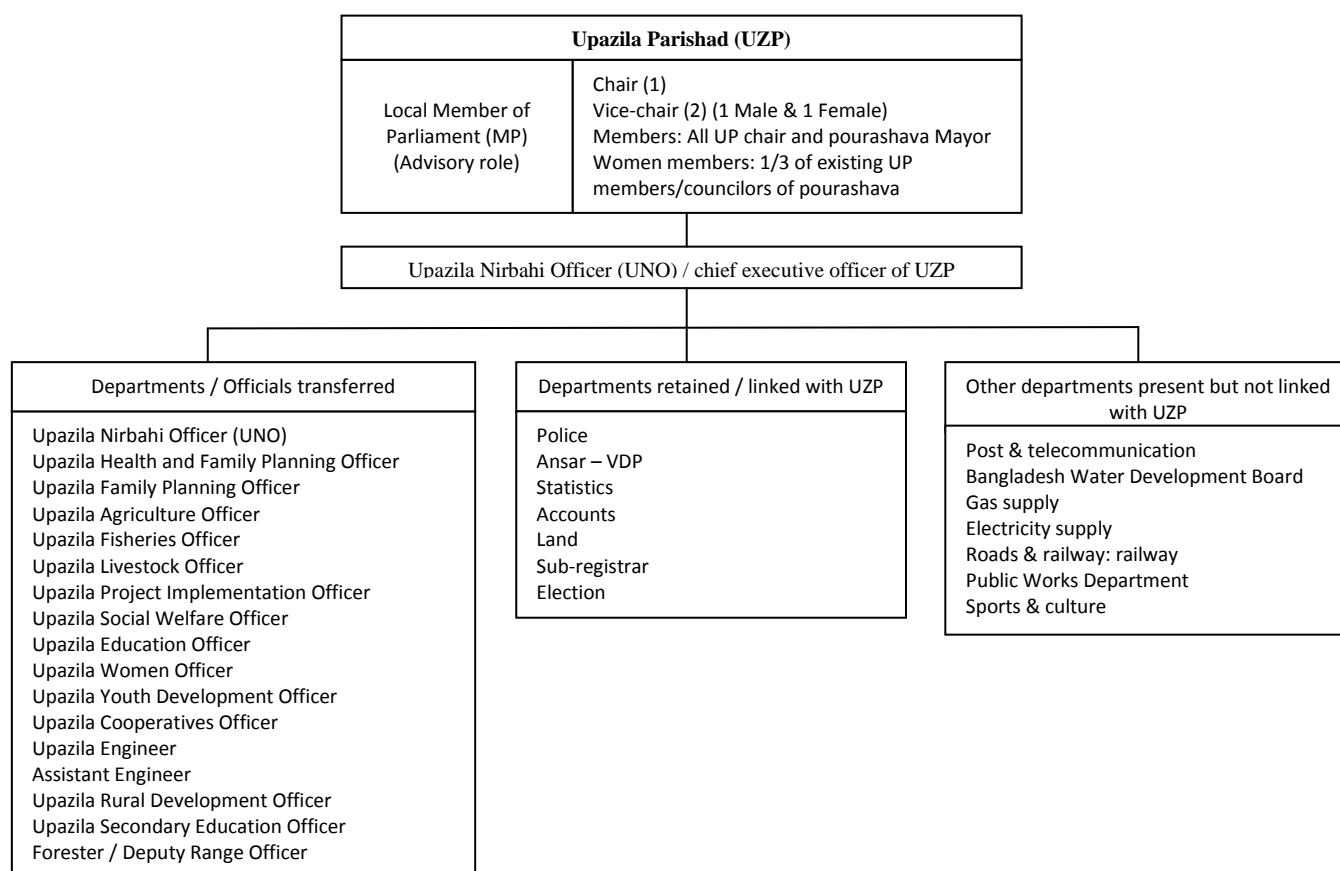


2.2.2 Upazila

Upazila (previously termed Thana) is the lowest tier of central administration dating back to 1793. It currently averages a population size of a quarter million. Though suggested as a tier of local government by the Act of 1885, there was no attempt to develop an elected body at this level. Instead, policy attention took the form of building up a co-ordination function and institutionalize this through a Council which brought together union parishad chairmen and central functionaries located at this level. The Thana Council was presided over by the chief executive officer at this level, currently known as the Nirbahi Officer. The institutional development of the thana council got an important impetus from the Comilla Model of 1960s which significantly expanded rural development functions at this level. A major change was brought about in the status of the thana-level body, now renamed the Upazila Parishad, when provision was made for a directly elected chairman in 1980s. The basic structure of the previous thana council was unaltered but now it was placed under the control of a directly elected chairman. Associated with the change of 1984 was a major increase in the flow of central government funds through the instrument of the Annual Upazila Development Plan (AUDP) mirroring the Annual Development Plans

(ADP) of the central bureaucracy. The provision for a directly elected chairman was suspended in the 1990s but was restored in 2008 with electoral positions increased to include two vice-chairman including one reserved for women. Current organogram of UZP is described in Figure 2.

Figure 2



2.2.3 District

Within the institutional history of Bangladesh, the district has been the crucial building block of central government. The development of local government at this level was constrained from the outset by the institutional pre-eminence of executive functionaries. Not surprisingly, development of local government at this level has taken the form of supervised bodies under the control of the chief executive officer i.e. the Deputy Commissioner, with a narrow functional and financial jurisdiction. Institutional attention to the district-level body has been marked by great ambiguity in policy objectives reflected in long periods of inactivity. There was an attempt to strengthen the district-level body, now called Zila Parishad, in 1976 by an ordinance which provided for a certain proportion of elected members. However, no elections were actually held before another change in 1982 abolished the provision for elected members. In 1988, there was an attempt to revive these bodies by nominating ruling party members as Chairman but the change of government in 1991 put an end to this initiative. The revival of this body was again mooted in the Local Government Commission reports of both the post-1991 BNP government and the post-1996 AL government but no action on this has as yet been taken. Zila Parishads currently exist without any elected representation and on a very limited jurisdiction. However, the presence of central bureaucrats has been increased in this body together with a political appointee.

2.2.4 Urban local governments

History of urban local government in this region is older than rural local government. First law regarding Municipal Administration was formulated in 1793 to create three presidency towns: Calcutta, Madras and Bombay. Later, Bengal Municipal Act of 1884 consolidated the foundation of municipality in Bengal. The 1932 Bengal Municipal Act provided for greater participation of elected representatives in the municipal bodies and also in widening their powers and functions.⁴ After independence, the Act of 1974 (Act 56), designated Dhaka as the Dhaka Municipal Corporation. In 1983, its status was raised to that of a city corporation. In 1977, Pourashava Ordinance was promulgated without substantively changing the provisions relating to functions. Chittagong Municipality was established in 1928. Its elevation to the status of city corporation came in 1982. Four other cities -Khulna, Rajshahi, Sylhet and Barisal- were also given city corporation status between 1984 and 2001. More recently, Narayanganj, Gazipur, Comilla and Rangpur have also been elevated from municipality to the status of city corporations. With the bifurcation of Dhaka City Corporation into two, total number of city corporations now stands at 11. Prior to 1994, City Corporations were managed by Mayors appointed by the government. Provision for elected mayors has since been introduced.

Local governments for smaller cities and towns are known as Pourashavas (municipalities). Total number of municipalities currently stands at 310. Basic electoral unit for both city corporations and pourashavas is the ward for which there is provision for an elected member called Commissioner. In 2008, all Pourashava Chairmen came to be termed as Mayors like City Corporation Mayors and Ward Commissioners as Councilors. There has also been some change in the structure of Pourashavas as incorporated in the Pourashava Act of 2009 (GOB, 2009). This has allowed for the formation of the Ward Committees each comprising 10 members of which 40 percent are to be women. The committee would be chaired by the Councilor of the Ward. This has created a potential for greater participation of citizens in municipal management though such potential is yet to be substantively realized.

2.2.5 Non-state actors at the local level

In spite of the heavy physical presence of both central government agencies and elected LGIs, non-state actors such as NGOs, community-based organizations (CBOs), development partners, civil society groups as well as private sector service providers have gradually made significant inroads into the sphere of local governance in both rural and urban contexts. The resources they bring to bear on addressing local needs in terms of human, technical, financial and need based assistance are not negligible. The historic monopoly of the public sector in governance, development and services has been in a process of decline and the scenario is increasingly polycentric. No single agency has total control and command over any particular service. For example, education is not totally managed by education department and ministry alone. There are many state and non-state agencies active in education sector. The same is equally applicable about health, hygiene, population and several other departmental domains that extend up to the upazila level. The social safety net programme (SSNP) is a classic case of such polycentric engagement with about 35 ministries and many national and local-level NGOs and CBOs implementing over 100 odd programmes and projects of different types and nature that annually utilize upward of Taka 15,000 crores.⁵

2.3 Time-line on local government reforms

To review and strengthen the local government system, recent years has seen the institution of high-level policy committee/commissions in 1993, 1997 and 1999 respectively. However, recommendations of

⁴ Nazrul Islam, 2013, *Urban governance in Bangladesh: The post-independence scenario*, Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh (Hum.), Vol. 58(2), 2013, pp. 289-301

⁵ PPRC & UNDP, 2011, *Social Safety Nets in Bangladesh: Volumes 1 & 2*, Dhaka, Bangladesh

these bodies have seen only partial implementation leaving many substantive issues unaddressed.⁶ Table 1 below lists the reform time-line.

Table 1
Time-line on recent local government reforms

<i>Key Targets/ Concerns</i>	<i>Actions taken/Underway</i>
Effective strengthening of Union Parishads and Pourashavas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job description for women members developed • Considerable number of Union Parishad complexes built • Orientation training for all UP functionaries implemented • Position of UP secretary upgraded • New tax schedule for UPs issued • Pilot projects on strengthening different aspects of UPs ongoing
Ensuring women's participation in local government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Act 20 of 1997 provided for exclusive reservation of three seats for women to be elected directly on the basis of adult franchise. • The 1998 Act relating to Upazilas provided for one-third of the total members to be women members • The Zila Parishad Act 2000 reserved five seats for women • Upazila Parishad Ordinance of 2008 introduced a new position of women vice-chairman • For each of the Hill District Councils, including the Regional Council, reservation for women members were made.
Strengthen resource position of Union Parishads and Pourashavas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pourashavas are getting direct ADP allocation • UPs are getting direct block allocation from FY 2004-05 • Guideline for use of Block fund has been implemented
Strengthen urban local governments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Municipality of 10 major cities upgraded to status of city corporations (controversial bifurcation of Dhaka city corporations into two separate bodies covering north and south of the city)
Establish all constitutionally mandated LG bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of Upazila Parishads (elected representatives now in place but these yet to emerge as strong LGIs) • Establishment of Zila parishads (No elected representatives)
Activate dormant capacities such as UP standing committees, SMCs, upazila health review council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot projects ongoing for activating UP standing committees • Gram Sarkars established but later abolished • SMCs for secondary schools revived
Innovate and expand performance-based budgetary support to Union Parishads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eligibility criteria developed • Several pilot project experiences have accumulated • ADP supplementation for selected UPs

⁶ Ahmed, Tofail (2002) 'Issues in Implementation and Sequencing of Reform: Local Government and Field Administration in Bangladesh' in *Local Government Issues and Way Forward*, Report of an International Workshop on Decentralisation in Bangladesh 9-10 March 2002, Ministry of Local Government and PPRC.

	being reviewed
Strengthen independent oversight of the local government sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision for Local Government Commission as a formal oversight and supervisory body introduced and implemented in 2008 (the body was abolished in 2009)
Strengthen participatory space for non-state actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot projects for inclusive Union coordination meetings • Good practices on open budget sessions • SMCs and PTAs exist but are yet to be effective
Broader participation and autonomy for the tribal people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of the Hill District Councils and the Regional Council in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, which ended the sense of isolation and deprivation of the tribal people and enabled them to decide matters relating to their general welfare locally.

3 Local governance in Bangladesh: challenges and opportunities

3.1 Two policy dilemmas

3.1.1 Accountability versus development administration

Policy attention to local government in Bangladesh has always found it necessary to balance the demands of the accountability principle with those of effective development administration. The precise nature of such balancing has not necessarily been conducive to consolidating a process of institutional and political growth of the local government sector. However, notwithstanding the outcomes, there is a certain durability in what may be seen as the official “approach” to reform ideas. The overriding principle at work is to ensure a close supervision of local governments by central administration and a pre-eminent central jurisdiction on local development while at the same time allowing the space for a local political process. The “approach” born of this principle moves on an implicit bifurcation whereby accountability issues are emphasized for the lower tier and development administration issues for the upper tiers. Interestingly, the civil society discourse on local governance has not succeeded in generating a compelling counter policy narrative instead pursuing feel-good normative solutions that are often innocent of the policy dilemma of balancing accountability and effective development administration. The real-life consequence has usually been to cede the solution discourse to the central bureaucracy. A case in point is how powers and responsibilities of local government have come to be legally defined. Typically, powers and responsibilities of local governments are defined in general and vague terms while the powers of the central government agencies are enshrined in specific and precise terms. For example, the general power of the Union Parishad is to maintain law and order but the specific powers in this context lie with the magistracy and the police in terms of powers of arrest, bail and so forth. At the ground level, it is always the specific power which has the teeth while the general power cannot graduate beyond being a declaration of intent. This invariably results in local government bodies relegated to a secondary status in the actual governance and implementation process. The irony for the civil society discourse is that it has been less successful and indeed less engaged with the politically more important agenda of strengthening specific powers and jurisdictions but easily prone to exulting when more general, if relatively non-consequential, responsibilities come within the purview of local government bodies. As has been noted already, a perennial weakness of the local governance discourse in Bangladesh has been its excessively normative orientation. The challenge first and foremost, therefore, is to engineer a shift in the discourse towards greater political intelligence. There are five core components to such a discourse shift.

The critical insight to build on today is that development administration is a key component of a durable ‘official’ discourse on local governments but it has been effectively left to be a discourse of the bureaucrats. This has only ensured that it is the bureaucratic rather than local governance perspectives which have come to shape the directions for change in development administration at the local level. Engaging on the specifics of development administration policy will be one of the key entry points for a discourse shift on local governance.

Macro actors, in particular the central bureaucracy is inherently resistant to jurisdictional concessions to local governments. Agenda formulations which accord jurisdictional demands an upfront place thus routinely fall foul of such entrenched bureaucratic resistance. The critical insight to note here, however, is that while the central power centres are rigid on jurisdictional concessions, it is not necessarily so when it comes to the development of functional spaces at the local level. There is in other words a clear contrast between jurisdictional rigidity and functional openness which mark macro attitudes to the local governance agenda. From an agenda-building perspective, the key operational message here is about sequencing i.e. the political wisdom of placing the development of functional spaces ahead of pure jurisdictional demands. The clearest example of the ‘success’ of this approach is provided by the well-known ‘Comilla initiative’ of the 60s which served to achieve a wholly new functional space at the local

level as embodied in the TTDCs (Thana Training and Development Centre) without any major upfront jurisdictional victories. Functional openness thus has to be seen as a critical opportunity window to energize the local government agenda.

3.1.2 MP's constituency role and local government

A major new development over the preceding decade has been the increasing oversight by members of parliament (MP) over local government bodies. Advisory roles for MPs in LGIs down to the union level have been formalized and strengthened. Not surprisingly, this has generated great deal of tension with the elected representatives of LGIs. Independent observers too have assessed the perceived sway of MPs over local governments as detrimental to the strengthening of these bodies. This is a policy dilemma that requires upfront and intelligent attention if the local governance is not be pushed further into a policy dead-end. Clearly a developmental role of the MP is a political reality. The issue is how effectively and how rationally the jurisdictional boundaries are set and adhered to for such a role.

There are three dimensions to MP's role vis-à-vis the issue of local governance: i) lobbyist for the constituency to central government ii) development agent for the constituency, and iii) grievance redressal channel for local conflicts and tensions. While the first and the third are easily expected and acceptable roles for the MP at the local level, it is in the second role of being a development agent where tensions have arisen with LGIs. Recent policy tilt has been towards a politically over-bearing jurisdiction of the MP over LGIs, a tilt that has understandably drawn much justified criticism. A development role of the MP at the local level clearly has a political rationale but the issue is how such jurisdictions are politically defined so as not to enfeeble LGIs. In developed countries, this role has been phased out over a long historical process. In developing countries, this role is still very much present but the institutional mechanisms vary. The optimal developmental role of the MP at the local level has the following components i) no formal selection or approval role over local government projects but informal roles of suggestion and monitoring ii) control over a formally specified sum of central government funds for local development for purposes of emergency schemes as well as innovative schemes, but iii) the MP's right here is to select and monitor but technical screening and implementation will be through regular LGI channels. Variants of this model run in most developing countries. Philippines appears to have the worst variant in that the money is given to the MP without much screening leading to widespread corruption. Thailand has recently done away with the system. India follows a more structured system under the title Local Area Development Schemes. Bangladesh needs to learn the appropriate lessons from such international experiences to establish a healthy and politically reinforcing interface between MP and LGI on the issue of local development.

3.2 Local governance for local economic development: Investing in a new strategic focus

3.2.1 Emergence of a new strategic focus

If accountability and development administration have thus far defined the two constants within which the discourse on local governance and decentralization has proceeded in Bangladesh, a new strategic focus whose time may have come is the focus on a local economy-promoting local governance agenda.⁷ In many ways, such a focus is a novel one for Bangladesh but the issue has emerged as a strategic new focus in the global discourse too. The Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) is one the prominent local government forums promoting the concept of local economic development (LED).⁸ The CLGF Summit in Aberdeen, Scotland held in 2011 elaborated the concept and reaffirmed the agenda the following year (2012) at the Cardiff Conference. The Local Government Minister's Summit held at Perth, Australia the same year formally adopted the agenda of local economic development. Bangladesh is one of

⁷ Rahman, H.Z., 2001, *Re-thinking local governance towards a livelihood focus*, PPRC Policy Papers, Dhaka.

⁸CLGF Web page: www.clgf.org.uk

the signatories to the document. It may be is worthwhile to highlight the contextual factors that make the LED agenda so relevant to bringing new strategic momentum to today's local governance agenda. Among many, South Africa (SA) may be considered a model worth reviewing. The municipalities in the SA enjoy a clear mandate to prepare and implement LED with well laid-out functional and financial guidelines.⁹ For Bangladesh, this is an area of strategic promise agenda and it may be is worthwhile to highlight some contextual factors that make the LED agenda to bringing new strategic momentum to today's local governance agenda.

It may be is worthwhile to highlight some contextual factors that make the LED agenda so relevant to bringing new momentum to today's local governance agenda.

3.2.2 *Economic transformations at the local level*

Bangladesh has witnessed far-reaching changes in livelihood systems at the local level. Critical features of such changes include i) declining centrality of land ii) an emerging rural-urban continuum and iii) labour market transformations. Land used to be the source both of wealth and income and of power and status in rural Bangladesh. This centrality has undergone drastic changes. Land is no longer the principal basis of power and status; neither does it serve to limit the livelihood opportunities for the rural population. The subsistence orientation of production too has given way to a more complex and fluid livelihood strategy that underscores the need to adopt a more holistic view of the local economy. Migration and remittances have emerged as dominant factors in household dynamics and the pattern of migration too is multi rather than uni-directional.

Labour market transformations too has seen a trend towards an occupational hierarchy for the poor in which casual daily labour is the least preferred employment. The competition is for piece-rate labour contracts and fixed-rent tenancies in the farm sector and for non-farm employment in rural construction activities, transport operations and in the lower end of trade and service activities. Within such an occupational hierarchy, the 'capacity to shift' becomes the key livelihood concern for the poor. Correspondingly, there is a great emphasis on access to finance, social networking and human capital factors which generate this 'capacity' at the level of the individual household. The 'capacity to shift' is increasingly becoming a new dividing line within the ranks of the poor with those unable to negotiate such shifts emerging as new categories of poor.

3.2.3 *What is a local economy perspective?*

A local economy perspective is to be distinguished from prevalent sectoral or micro household perspectives as also from traditional notions of village economy. The perspective being argued is more accurately a meso economy perspective.¹⁰ What imparts the novelty to such a perspective is the changing ground realities such as the growing rural urban continuum which now define the 'local'. In an earlier era, the programmatic understanding of such a focus would have been captured by terms such as 'integrated rural development' or 'local-level planning'. The current emphasis on a local economy perspective, however, marks a radical departure on such earlier meanings. The concern is less about sectoral programmatic focus per se underscored by bureaucratic notions of co-ordination. It is more about positing a new action goal, namely, that of a promotion of the local economy by which the pursuit of multiple livelihoods by the local population poor is best empowered and local growth potentials best harnessed. Whatever nomenclature finds currency – meso-economy or local economic development – a point to emphasize is that such a perspective is less a self-evident one but rather one for which significant conceptual engagement will be necessary.

⁹ En.wikipedia.org/wiki/local_economic_development ; BNPP(2000); DPLG (2000)

¹⁰ GOB, 2005, *Unlocking the Potential: National strategy for accelerated poverty reduction*, General Economics Division, Planning Commission

3.2.4 Re-thinking the question of agency

What of the vehicles by which the LED goal is to be achieved? This is where a focus on local governance becomes of critical relevance. The cast of actors who matter here extend well beyond the traditional focus on local governments as they also cut across traditional sectoral or rural-urban boundaries. Some seminal research at PPRC – Rahman and Islam (2002), Rahman and Robinson(2006); Rahman(2007)and PPRC /Fur DIE FREIHEIT(2013)¹¹ – provide a promising framework for addressing this question of agency.

The critical insight is to move beyond a hegemonic state-centric or NGO-centric model. Because of these conceptual hegemonies, other actors, both legitimate and socially real, have found it hard going to find a place in the conceptual universe on the question of agency. Yet, empirical analysis point towards a multi-agent reality at the local level in which no single agent, be it government agencies, LGIs, NGOs or community capacities singly hold the key to the question of agency (Table 2).¹²

Table 2
Local governance: A multi-agent reality

<i>Agent type</i>	<i>Role</i>
Government agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infrastructure • Service-provision • Security • Monitoring
Local governments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political representation • Justice • Protection • Service delivery • Catalyst for local economy promotion
NGOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service-delivery • Mobilisation of the poor • Advocacy
Community capacities/CBOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voluntarism • Dispute resolution • Power issues • Value creation
Political parties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demand articulation • Protection • Social mobilization • Power issues
Private sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service-delivery • Economic growth
Support institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity-building • Catalyst for local economic development
Think-tanks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agenda formulation • Progress monitoring

Source: Hossain Zillur Rahman, 2002

The presence of many actors, however, need not simply imply duplication and confusion since ideally there is a certain matching of agent type and roles. Thus, NGOs are not deemed relevant to the ‘dispute resolution’ or ‘law and order’ types of governance needs. At the same time, traditional elders are not seen as the relevant agent category in the field of development. Such actor-role matching is not primarily a matter of functional specialisation; today’s actor could very well graduate to a new role tomorrow. The actor-role matching in the first instance is better understood as an expression of social legitimacy. A multi-agent analytical framework thus is not intended to imply any ready-made operational model to

¹¹ Rahman H.Z. & S. Aminul Islam, 2002, *Local governance and community capacities*, UPL; Rahman and Robinson, 2006 *ibid*; Rahman, H.Z., 2007, *Unbundling Governance*, PPRC; PPRC/Fur Die Freiheit, 2013, *Governance trends and perceptions*, PPRC, Dhaka.

¹² Rahman & Islam, *ibid*

institutional strategy. Rather it is more appropriately read as pointing towards an opportunity map which makes explicit the cast of actual and potential actors relevant to the governance discourse and the potential for synergies indicated in their respective role specializations.

From a strategic reformulation of the local governance agenda, the key lesson to build on is how best LGIs are manoeuvred into a lead catalytic role on the local economy promotion agenda. Inherent to such a goal is the need for a mind-set shift towards a coalition approach to institutional strategy. Not only is no actor including LGIs is singly up to the challenge of realising the challenge of strong and viable local governance, the sum of many actors acting individually may also not suffice. The need really is to get a sum which is greater than its parts. A new approach is thus called for, one built around the idea of coalitions i.e. understood both as process and as working arrangements in which the energies of the government, local governments, NGOs, civil society and entrepreneurs find a virtuous fusion. Such a transition is, of course, unlikely to happen overnight since a coalition approach is far from being the 'natural' tendency of our key development actors. 'Thinking coalitions' has thus to be the first step towards the new approach; within the prevailing institutional culture, it is a step that will require an active process of propagation.

A clarification may be useful here on the type of coalition which is being hinted at. It is not the case that the idea of coalitions is totally absent in the prevailing institutional milieu. However, what tends to go by the idea of coalitions currently is a coming together of the same type of actors, i.e. coalitions among NGOs etc. What is being emphasised in the present context is coalitions across boundaries i.e. local governments and NGOs, local governments and private sector, local government, NGOs, private sector and support institutions and so on. It is also important to emphasise that the issue is not about an inflexible notion of coalition built around a fixed focal point but rather about context-specific coalitions built around specific goals.

3.2.5 Technology: a new window of opportunity

The arrival of technology, in particular information and communication technologies, has also opened new windows of opportunity to energize the local governance agenda. Not only do such technologies hold promise of opening new service frontiers and more effective service-delivery but also of improving the interface of LGIs with their constituencies. Some steps have been taken in this regard but to ensure optimal outcomes, the commensurate capacity-building and advocacy requirements have also to be addressed effectively.

3.3 A three-track strategy

A politically intelligent reformulation of the local governance agenda indicates that the strategic road-map ahead has of necessity to be built around a three-track strategy. In the *first*, the focus is on consolidating local democracy through effective resolution of jurisdictional boundaries amongst LGIs as well as vis-à-vis central actors, in particular members of parliament. This puts the spotlight on a rational legislative agenda bearing on local governments as well as promoting a political discourse that takes local and central representatives out of a zero-sum policy dead-end. The *second* strategic track is one of a robust engagement on the specifics of the agenda of development administration at the local level. The goal is to ensure that this agenda is not shaped by the concerns of bureaucrats alone. The *third* track focuses on the challenge of developing new functional spaces at the local level in particular around the goal of local economy development. A coalition approach to institutional strategy building on identified actor-role matrices both formal and informal becomes central here.

4 Strengthening the local government system: priorities for intervention and investment under 7th Five Year Plan

4.1 Legal, administrative and structural priorities

4.1.1 Unified framework law for local governments

The existing legal framework on which the LGI system in Bangladesh stands needs a thorough review. A key problem is the absence of a common legal framework for local governments. All units and tiers – UP, UZP, ZP, CC, pourashava - are organized under separate laws resulted in asymmetric organizational structure, jurisdictional and functional overlap, confusing central-local and local-local relationship, confrontational relationship with local bureaucracy as the laws deliberately retained bureaucratic pre-dominance over the elected bodies and allow for single person's dominance over the whole council or parishad. The 'Rules' for each of the LG unit and tiers are prepared and passed by respective executive ministry with vetting from law ministry. Many distortions of constitutional provisions and acts of parliament are made at the levels of 'rule' making process. There are too many rules with too many petty issues. In some cases, power and authority given by laws were taken back through the rules.

This legal complexity is compounded through the issuance of executive orders, circulars and memos from different ministries and departments. Many of those circulars supersede constitution, laws made by parliament and 'rules' prepared by the executive ministries but ultimately executive orders prevail over everything. For example, the way the 'removal' of elected chairs, mayors and councilors are initiated and executed may be cited as a glaring instance of such kind of executive excesses and contradiction of the existing law. There are seven separate laws and few hundred 'rules' that decide the destiny of LGIs.¹³ Within the territorial jurisdiction of a district, at least one CC, few pourashavas, UZPs and UPs function with overlapping functions and territorial jurisdictions. Similarly within Upazila boundary, UZP, Pourashava and UPs also function with similarly conflictual overlaps. As all laws are separate and independent, the relevant institutions do not seek any common string to bind them in a defined relationship. The organizational structure is also different and asymmetric. Tensions abound in the role and authority of elected and appointed functionaries as well as in the increasingly overpowering sway of MPs over LGI activities. The elections for reserved seats for women at Upazila had not been possible, during the last six years (2009-2014) of the UZP due to the misunderstanding of the relevant clauses of the UZP Act 1998. The UZPs are still incomplete as far as women representation is concerned. The ZPs, CCs, pourashavas, and UPs are legally entitled to have a designated 'Secretary', the Upazila does not officially have any position of secretary under the prevailing law (after the amendment of UZP Act in 2011). The first three institutions have a provision for a 'Chief Executive Officer' in addition to the secretary. The UZP and UP do not have such positions, even no single official/staff is there to look after accounts, audit and budget.

There are countries that are having a composite legal framework for local governments and one single legal instrument covers all the LGIs irrespective of units and tiers. It provides all laws within a single cover as well as creates a defined relationship between and amongst the LGIs as well as national and state level government offices within their respective vicinity. Examples of such 'framework laws' in operation include India, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Indonesia in Asia and South Africa and Uganda in Africa.

The 7th Plan provides an appropriate planning platform to initiate a move towards a comprehensive and unified framework law and related administrative steps to cover all local governments, their mutual

¹³ Laws are listed in footnote 2, 3 and 5 and also see the UP and Upazila matrixes. A Compendium of Sharique on UP and Related Laws may be seen (Sharique: 2007).

relationships as well their interface with the central government entities. The key legal step to consider here is a *Local Government Framework Law (LGFL)*. This may be operationalized through the following:

- The existing LGFL in different neighboring countries may be studied carefully and a LGFL for Bangladesh may be drafted. The single legal instrument will cover all units and tiers, in respect of their formation, function, jurisdiction, taxation, finance, budget account, electoral process, and central-local and local-local relationship.
- The Law drafting process should be guided by a forward looking 'decentralization Policy' which will definitely incorporate the vision of the government and citizens of the country.
- A LGC (Local Government Commission) may be formed to accelerate the process. The proposed LGC and the 'Law Commission' both or in the absence of LGC, the existing 'Law Commission' may initiate the process.

4.1.2 Reforms in field administration

A key priority for the 7th Five Year Plan will be an objective review and a determined reform initiative that aims to rationalize field administration and ensure better utilization of available human resources. There are four different streams of governmental setup at each level and unit of administration. The general purpose administration of Divisional commissioners, Deputy Commissioners and UNOs; the regulatory departments like Land, Police, Drug Control and Narcotics, Forest and Environment, , Election Commission , Anti-corruption, Registration etc.; the development, promotional and special purpose service and technical departments like Agriculture, Fisheries, Livestock, Health , Education, Engineering(R&H, T&T,DPHE,B WDB, PWD,BPDB,LGED etc.), all have to work at four of the field administrative units such as Division, District, Upazila and Union. There is pronounced lack of a comprehensive vision, clear lines of vertical and horizontal accountability and coordination among these bureaucratic streams even while the societal reality has undergone massive changes in terms of the role of common citizens and private sector in driving economic and social transformation of the country.

The DC in the district still poses to be the prime actor with an all-encompassing jurisdiction that is largely a colonial legacy. The ToR of the DC currently lists 62 broad areas with 502 specific functions.¹⁴ The anomalous nature of such jurisdiction can be seen, for example, in the education sector wherein DC has oversight over 15 activities in primary and mass education, 19 in secondary education and 17 in higher education. In the area of local government, DC is empowered to perform 26 functions related to UP, UZP and Pourshava. CCs and ZPs are not included in the ToR of Deputy Commissioner. There are two other officers, one posted in Divisional Commissioner's office designated as Director, Local Government (DLG) and another posted in the DC's office, namely, Deputy Director, Local Government (DDLG). These two officers are usually Joint and Deputy Secretaries of the government and both of them are also given long list of duties and functions over LGIs. Similar overlap and controlling jurisdictions are also evident in many other sectors. In the upazila too, the UNO's ToR includes a similarly comprehensive jurisdiction. However, within current political realities, the extension and contraction of UNO's jurisdiction, duties and functions depends on the place of posting, the demand of Deputy Commissioner of the district, the demand of the local MP, UZP chair and last but not the least circulars issued by different ministries from time to time.

An important reform issue is the rationalization of field administration in the light of political, administrative and developmental priorities of today. While some of the departments are a continuation from the colonial period, others have come into existence as out-growth of recent initiatives. Compared to less than 10 in 1972, there are currently 30-35 offices and outposts of different ministries and directorates at the Upazila level with total staff strength of 600 including Union level staff of respective departments. The government incurs about minimum Tk.35-40 crore as revenue expenditure in each

¹⁴ The list of DC's duties and responsibilities is available in the website of the Cabinet Division.

upazila from national exchequer to maintain these offices.¹⁵ Arguably, many of these offices have overlapping jurisdictions and some may have outlived their utility. For example, there are two engineering setup at upazila (the DPHE and LGED) under the same ministry. The DPHE is the continuation of the old legacy and the LGED is created more recently out of Rural Works Programme (RWP). The Cooperative Department and BRDB also share the same history. The former was created in 1904 with the introduction of cooperatives in the sub-continent and later BRDB came into being out of 'Two-tier experimental cooperative' project -IRDP of Comilla, (BARD) in the 1960s. In reality in all upazilas of Bangladesh, the two departments for cooperatives have very little works to perform. Similarly, newly created departments like Youth, Women Affairs, sports and culture created bifurcating the traditional functions used to perform by the old and traditional department of Social welfare. It may be questioned whether all these four separate departments have sufficient work to justify their existences. The department of *Ansar and VDP* and recently created *Community Police* have received much resources and attention but the legally established 'Village police' system and Municipal police system suffer pronounced policy neglect.

4.1.3 Electoral reforms

While a comprehensive legal framework and reforms in field administration represent a more immediate priority, certain electoral reforms for LGIs can also be considered as a long-term agenda. Specifically, the following reforms may be considered:

- Voter based constituency for all LGIs: A general formula may be adopted to create distinct constituencies and wards for LGI units considering the total size of population and voter. All UPs, UZPs and ZPs would have their own wards and constituencies.
- Number of Wards and constituencies to vary according to population size: The bigger and populous the districts, Upazilas and Union will have more wards compared to the smaller ones. The number of Wards should not be uniform and same irrespective of size and population as of now.
- The population and voter based wards and constituency may follow a simple formula as underlined: a) For UP: 1500 population and 500 voters with 10% adjustment for matching contiguity, territorial integrity and convenience of drawing reasonable boundary may form one WARD. Considering the present size of population and voter in the Union on average, the number of wards may range from 15 to 40. b) For UZP: 8-10 thousand population and 2.5-3 thousand voters with 10% adjustment for matching contiguity, territorial integrity and convenience of drawing reasonable boundary may compose a ward for UZP. The average number of Wards may range from 30-45. c) Zila Parishad: 20,000 population and 5000 voters with 10% adjustment for matching contiguity, compactness, territorial integrity and convenience of drawing reasonable boundary may form one ZP Ward. The average number of Ward may range from 35 to 50. d) Pourashava and City Corporations: There are provisions for increasing the number of wards on the basis of voter and population in the current Pourashava and CC laws, only it has to be readjusted with voter and population ratio, the ratio may be 1:3.
- Special women's reserve seats still will be kept intact but with changed system of rotational electoral method as followed in many of the Indian states including our neighboring West Bengal and Tripura. One third of the wards will be kept reserved for women in which the male candidates will not contest but same wards will remain open for all in next two elections.
- The election in UP, UZP, pourashava and ZP would be held on the same day. Every voter will cast three votes for three different units. Only CC electorates will cast two votes (CC and ZP) as in some CC areas, there are no UZPs.
- Election could be contested with party nominations; scope for independent candidates would still remain open.

¹⁵ The estimate were made in almost 70 Upazilas under UZGP project and incorporated data in the "Information, Plan and Budget Book" of 70 UZPs of 9 different districts.

The recommendations made above for electoral reform is expected to regenerate new wave of constitutional politics at the localities and bring quality leadership in LG institutions with defined role. The current conflict at different levels with different political leadership may also get settled. The tensions between and amongst the MP, UZP Chairs, Vice –Chairs and general members and chairs will drastically be reduced. Election Expenses will also substantially be reduced and election management will also become less complex and simple.

4.1.4 Rationalizing LGI functions

LGIs suffer from four major problems vis-à-vis their functional assignment: i) assignment overlap and multiplicity ii) unfunded mandates iii) general rather than specific assignments and iv) de facto reality significantly at variance from de jure role. These are complex and difficult issues and cannot be addressed effectively without bringing legal and constitutional changes into the discussion. Table 3 describes what functions are formally prescribed in law for LGIs and what functions they exercise in practice:

Table 3
LGI functions: De jure and de facto

Sl. no.	LG units	Basic sources	De jure functions	de facto functions
1	Union Parishad/ UP	The LG (UP) Act. 2009	<p>Clause 47 listed four basic functions and the Same clause elaborated basic functions in schedule-2 with 39 more functions.</p> <p>Schedule 4 listed 13 functions of resource mobilization</p> <p>Schedule 5 listed 54 functions of crime preventions</p> <p>Total listed functions= 110</p>	<p>In real situation UPs perform four basic functions</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. traditional community driven functions 2. the functions for which they receive resources 3. the functions different project implements in the UPs 4. traditional dispute resolution of formal and informal nature
2	Upazila Parishad (UZP)	The LG(UZP) Act 1998 & the LG (UZP) Act (amendment) in 2011	<p>Clause 23 and 24 provide a guidance so that government can allocate new function from time to time</p> <p>Schedule 2 –listed 18</p> <p>Schedule 4 listed 9</p> <p>Schedule 5 listed 4</p> <p>Total 31</p>	In fact the UZPs are confined in implementing few schemes with ADP grant.
3	Zila Parishad (ZP)	The LG(ZP) Act 2000	<p>Schedule 1</p> <p>Obligatory 12 and</p> <p>Optional 7</p> <p>Schedule 2(8)</p> <p>Schedule 3(46)</p> <p>Total 12+51=63</p>	ZPs function are not visible except in recent time after the appointment of “Administrator”. The 61 ZPs of plain districts implement schemes with ADP grants.
4	Pourashava	LG(Pourashava) Act 2009	<p>Under clause 50 and 5 sub-clauses include 16 basic functions</p> <p>Under 2nd schedule 68</p> <p>Under 3rd schedule-29</p> <p>Under 4th schedule 61</p> <p>Under 5th schedule 14</p> <p>Total 172</p>	Municipal functions are to some extent specific in respect of waste disposal, street lighting and repair and construction of roads and drainages, but other activates listed in schedules are not carried out.
5	City corporation	LG (city corporation) Act 2009	3 rd schedule listed 28 basic long detail listed of total 160	City corporation is visible in 5/6 limited functions

			activities 4 th schedule 26 5 th schedule 62 Grand total=248	Such as wastage disposal, street lightening, repair of road and open drains, issuing birth and death certificates, trade licenses, etc.
6	Hill District Council	Three separate laws for three CHT districts, Rangamati, Khagrachori and Bandarban		Only visible institution with money and manpower, lack political legitimacy for real participation.
7	Customary LG of CHT circle Chief Head man-Karbari system	Hill tract Manual 1900		With the presence of elected UP in the area, they are not as effective in old days during British time.

While the legal limitations on the functional assignments of LGIs is a well-understood issue, what is often less in focus is that LGIs have fairly wide scope to take initiatives in the functional domains so long as these are not projected as demand for jurisdictional power. This issue has been elaborated in an earlier section but merits re-iteration. The reality of jurisdictional rigidity and functional openness is both a limitation and an opportunity for LGIs within prevailing political milieu. Thus local government leaders who are pro-active and are innovative in utilization of opportunities often create new realities of progress despite functional ambiguities and overlaps. This is a crucial insight to build on even while the rationalization agenda is being pursued.

4.1.5 *Strengthening Constitutional protection of local government system*

Though the Bangladesh Constitution provides for a local governments at various administrative tiers, it provides little definitive directions on the distribution of roles and functions between local government institutions(LGIs) and field administration neither does it offer guarantee clauses that would constitutionally empower the local government system. Constitutional amendment to rationalize LGI functions and provide guarantee clauses vis-à-vis central authorities, however, is a long-term goal. The short-term priority here is the enactment of a framework law discussed in the previous section. On the long-term goal, the 7th Five Year Plan can initiate a policy discourse that can review other relevant country experiences and build a policy consensus towards an appropriate and effective amendment.

4.2 **Local government finance and inter-governmental transfers**

The LG finance discourse in Bangladesh has been dealt with through three different perspectives: i) local resources mobilization (LRM) perspective ii) national government's grant perspective iii) transfer through projects and project financing.

4.2.1 *Local resource mobilization*

There is a school of thought in Bangladesh that believes that local governments are weak because they cannot mobilize their local resources. In this perspective, as long as the LGs remain dependent on national government resources, they will remain weak. However, the objective situation in this area needs further analysis. The legal position of LGs on local taxation, service fees and charges is highly ambiguous and full of overlaps. The central government agencies such as the national board of revenue (NBR) collect the taxes from all 'lucrative' sources such as income tax, VAT, custom and excise, corporate and business tax, land tax, etc.¹⁶ There are also huge non-tax revenues kept reserved for central government such as land transfer revenues, bills, various fees, stamps and service fees. The National Tax Policy never prioritizes

¹⁶ Amm Nasiruddin(2014) (UNDP)

the issue of local government taxation system including the distribution of tax revenue among the national exchequer and the local level spenders. The sources of tax items and areas allocated to LGs are very general in nature except the 'household level property tax' at UP and Municipal level. Levy of taxes on the value of land and houses by UP and pourashava is also very complex. The UP and municipalities lack the assessment capacity in one hand, and the rate suggested in the rule is also not affordable by the individual in majority cases and scope for evasion is also there on the other. The tax rate on other items as specified in the "Model Tax Schedule (MTS)" of UP and pourashava is also found very arbitrary from the government. The levying responsibility is taken away from the respective LG and the central government already decided the rate for all the LGs. The Zila Parishad and Upazila Parishad do not have such MTS yet.

Three reform ideas that merit attention here are:

- Instead of separate tax schedule for each tier and unit, a comprehensive 'tax list' for all LGs should be prepared with clear indication for each of the tier and units so that they can collect the tax on specific item without the risk of double taxation on a particular item.
- The National Tax policy should also consider the LGI taxation and a tax sharing formula between national and local governments has to be devised.
- The tax return format every year submitted by individual needs to be changed and it should also reflect the LGI taxes in the return.

4.2.2 Grant from central government

In each year's national budget, central government allocates a small amount of money as 'block grant' for LGIs. There is no budgetary principle or policy that determines this amount and how this will be distributed for a specific unit or category of LGI. For many years, direct transfer from national government to LGIs did not exceed 2% of the Annual Development Plan (ADP) outlay. An analysis of last year's budget shows that out of government's Taka 196,000 crore income from tax and non-tax sources, only 1260 crore was allocated to all LGIs as block grant.¹⁷

There is a need to re-conceptualize central grants to LGIs as inter-governmental transfer and allocation should be increased significantly with immediate effect perhaps to 15% of total tax and non-tax revenue. The proportion may be increased gradually commensurate with capacity development and assessment of results.

4.2.3 Project finance

A large number of local development activities are financed through different projects undertaken by central government agencies. Most of these are decided centrally but implemented locally. The cumulative resource allocation against projects exceeds the grant money received from central government. A snapshot of the fiscal reality of local governments can be seen from a PPRC study of UPs in 2004-05 (Table 4).¹⁸

Table 4
UP Fiscal Reality: 2004-05

<i>LG finance</i>	<i>Average Amount per UP (Tk.)</i>
Fiscal Transfers:	632,700
Grants (ADP+BG)	463,978
Share in central tax	168,722
Development expenditures	879,103 + 99 tons foodgrain
Own Revenues	160,108

Source: PPRC Survey on UP Block Grant Assessment, 2006: Information on 11 UPs

¹⁷ Income and expenditure heads of national budget documents may be consulted

¹⁸ PPRC, 2005, *Assessing Union Block Grants as a Strategic Entry Point*, Dhaka.

Project funds are an inevitable aspect of LG finance but there is an issue about rationalization and integration of such funds with the priorities and plans of the LGIs. Participation of LGIs in local components of national projects should be ensured during the formulation of the projects.

4.3 Planning for local economic development

Effective local planning based on a strategic aim of promoting the local economy needs to emerge as a key priority for the 7th Five Year Plan. An earlier section has elaborated the rationale for such a priority. There has been some programmatic experience on the ground which can be reviewed here and built upon. About seventy UZPs attempted “Annual Development Plan” under a five year vision and projection with the support from a UNDP supported project called “Upazila Governance Project”(UZGP). The main challenges those UZPs faced were to make the transferred departments of the respective upazila to agree to share the departmental information for creation of a sector vision. The departments at upazila do not have any sector vision and plan of their own. When UZP initiated such an exercise of making sectoral data base, vision, plan and budget, necessary cooperation were not extended to the parishad.¹⁹ Still about 70 such plan books were published. These and the process through which they were produced can be reviewed for useful insights in developing the concept of planning for local economic development. Pourashavas and City Corporations can also undertake such initiatives and indeed innovate further.

4.4 Staffing

Human resource deficits are one of the major problems hindering the efficacy of LGIs. In terms of short-term measures, an immediate priority is to ensure that the staff and departments transferred to UP and UZP are complied with. There are 17 departments to UZP and 13 offices at UPs that have been legally transferred but not implemented. If properly implemented, this will help these two LGIs to overcome their staffing deficits significantly. Besides transferred departments, there is also a need to enhance full-time staff - two more full time staff along with the Secretary for UPs and fulfilling the legal provision for ‘Secretary’ and Assistant Accounts officer in the upazila law.

The LGIs from the UPs to the CCs desperately need professionally committed manpower for efficient discharge their assigned duties. It is an accepted fact that the LGIs from CCs to UPs suffer from lack of adequate and efficient staff support for carrying out their technical, financial, service management and administrative responsibilities. To address the issue with renewed commitment, a long pending proposal to create a ‘Local Government Service’ may be reviewed afresh with a long-term vision of sustained professionalism at the LGI levels. The members of LG Service will have mobility within all the LGI units such as UP, UZP, ZP Municipality and CCs. Bangladesh Public Service Commission may be assigned the responsibility for formulating the details of a new LG service cadre.²⁰

4.5 Capacity Development

There are about 70,000 local government representatives and their associated staff as well other local-level actors with whom LGIs are linked in horizontal and vertical networks. Effective and updated capacity development for this large pool is a strategic priority. LGI trainings tend to be done on an ad hoc basis as isolated project activity and typically suffer from not being reflective of the needs of changing ground realities. There are only a few training institutions and those that exist such as the National Institute of Local Government (NILG) suffer significant gaps in specialization, vision, mission and professional manpower. The NGOs and different donor driven projects provide few supply driven training

¹⁹ Seventy UZPs from ten districts (Joypurhat, comilla, Bogra, Rangpur, Sirajgong, Kishoregong, Brahmanbaria, Barguna, Khulna and Sunamgonj) printed their “*Information, Plan and Budget Books*” which are available from the financial year 2012- 2014.

²⁰ For detail see Ahmed(2000 &2012)

in the form of stereotype lectures and a large sum of money is shown 'burnt' in their respective project accounts.

The LGI capacity development needs an updated policy framework and an independent resource pool. There is also a need for specialized institutions to address the needs of urban local governments. Besides standard training modules, the updated capacity development approach should include new focus such as:

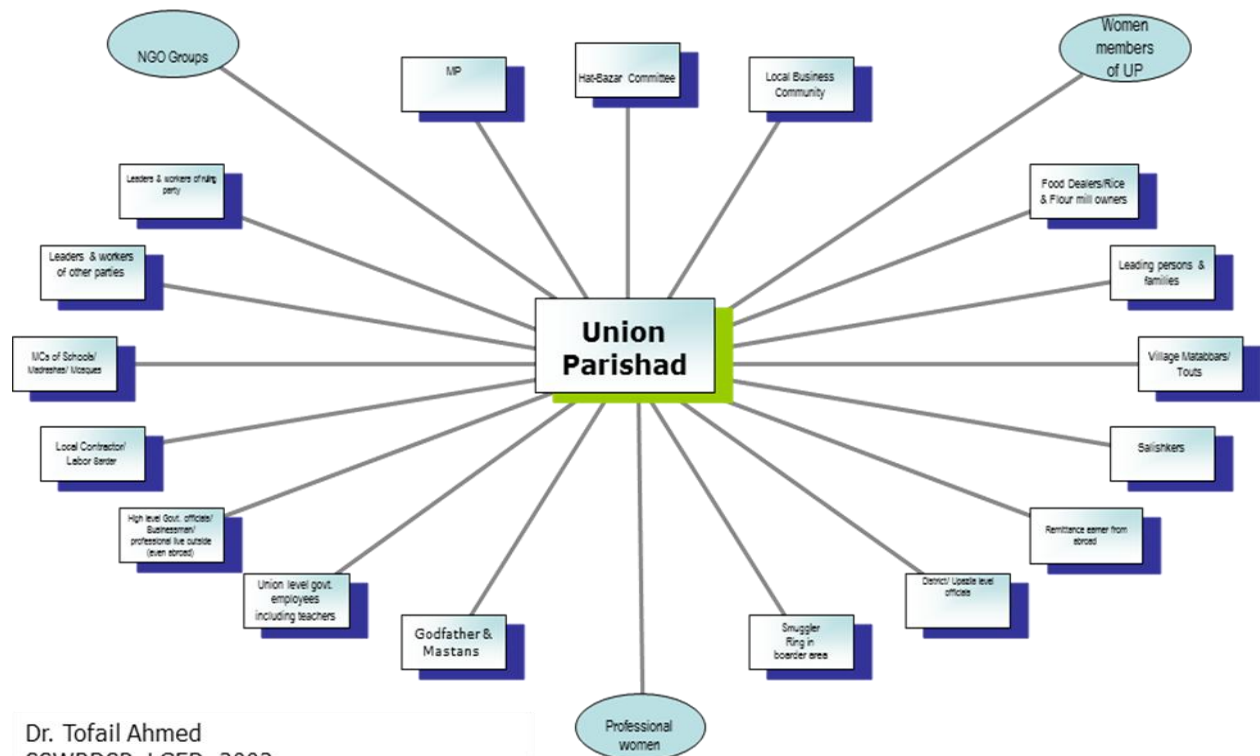
- Legal environment and inter-organizational cooperation framework with LGIs,
- Financial solvency of LGIs and legal and social provision for resources mobilization,
- Institutional and individual capacity and skills
- Incentive structure for LGI volunteers
- Interfacing and interrelations with local service providers.

4.6 Gender mainstreaming in LGIs

LGIs provide an important space for women's political and social empowerment and it has been effectively utilized for last two decades with limited successes. The 7th Five year plan may take gender mainstreaming in LGIs to a new level. So far, reserved seats for women in LGIs have provided an entry point for women to contribute and get involved in the mainstream politics and decision making. It has given local women some exposure and made them aware of the complexities of exercising local-level leadership. However, elected women representatives operate within power realities that are often inimical to a bigger role for them (Figure 3). Bearing in mind these limitations and building on the successes so far, newer initiatives need to be considered. These may include electoral reforms to make reserved seats for women more substantive, assignment of new functions to elected women members and independent capacity development programs.

Figure 3

Power Nexus Around Union Parishad: an effort towards finding places for women



Dr. Tofail Ahmed
SSWRDSP, LGED, 2003

5 Nine priority recommendations

Strengthening local governance is a key priority for the 7th Five Year Plan. While detailed recommendations are likely to be many (Annex 1), there are eight strategic priorities that merit highlighting. These are described in Box 1.

Box 1

Strengthening local governance: 9 Priority Recommendations.

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Comprehensive local government framework law (LGFL) to bring all LGIs under an unified legal umbrella
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promoting a politically intelligent LG discourse that prioritizes functional agendas over zero-sum power devolution agendas
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Investing in a new strategic focus of local governance for local economy promotion
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prioritizing urban management as a holistic and new capacity focus for urban local governments
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leveraging technology, particularly ICT, for improved service-delivery and citizen interface
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increasing share of LGIs in national revenue to 15%
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure effective completion of all transferred departments to the relevant LGIs
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Comprehensive and updated capacity development initiative for all LGIs and related stakeholder groups with particular focus on horizontal and vertical accountability, local economy promotion, performance-based access to finance
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Electoral reforms: voter-based constituencies for all LGIs

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Annexes

Annex 1

Recommendations matrix

Theme	Sub-theme	Recommendations
1. Creation of a Legal Framework of LGIs	1.1. Constitutional amendment	<p>1.1.1. The constitution is not clear about role and function of local government institutions (LGIs) and local/ field administration and how to overcome the ambiguity and overlap between the two.</p> <p>1.1.2. The constitution left entire law making process at the discretion of the parliament. Parliament at times cannot overrule the ‘executive excesses’ in real situation, for adequate safeguard and solving the conflict of interest, ‘guarantee’ clauses are needed in the constitution for protecting some basic tenants of local democracy and local government.</p>
	1.2. Local Government Framework Law (LGFL)	<p>1.2.1. There exist 9 different basic acts and few hundred rules for LGIs in Bangladesh. Under the current system, there exists no common and general legal framework to be qualify the term “LG system” except separate LGI laws. A LGFL has to be created if Bangladesh aspires to create a strong enough LGI system. The LGFL in different neighboring countries may be studied carefully and a LGFL for Bangladesh may be drafted. The single legal instrument (LGFL) will cover all units and tiers irrespective of urban and rural, regarding their formation, function, jurisdiction, taxation, finance, budget account, electoral process, and central-local and local-local relationship. People can get all laws required for any LGIs under single cover and overlaps among LGIs could be avoided.</p>

	<p>1.2.2. The Law drafting process should be guided by a forward looking 'decentralization Policy' which will definitely incorporate the vision of the government and citizens of the country.</p> <p>1.2.3. The LGC (Local Government Commission) may be formed to accelerate the process. The proposed LGC and the 'Law Commission' both or in the absence of LGC, the existing 'Law Commission' may initiate the process.</p>
2. Reform agenda in Local Government election	<p>2.1. Voter and population based Ward/constituency for all LGIs</p> <p>2.1.1. A general formula may be adopted to create distinct constituencies and wards for LGI units considering the total size of population and voter. All UPs, UZPs and ZPs would have their own wards and constituencies.</p> <p>2.1.2. The number of Wards and constituencies will vary between and amongst the units and tiers. The bigger and populous the districts, Upazilas and Union will have more wards compared to the smaller ones. The number of Wards should not be uniform and same irrespective of size and population as of now.</p>
	<p>2.2. How to create new Wards and Constituencies at all LGIs</p> <p>2.2.1. The population and voter based wards and constituency may follow a simple formula as underlined: Union Parishad- 1500 population and 500 voters with 10% adjustment for matching contiguity, territorial integrity and convenience of drawing reasonable boundary may form one WARD. Considering the present size of population and voter in the Union on average, the number of wards may range from 15 to 40.</p>

Upazila Parishad- 8-10 thousand population and 2.5 thousand voters with 10% adjustment for matching contiguity, territorial integrity and convenience of drawing reasonable boundary may compose a ward for UZP . The Average number of Wards may range from 30-45.

Zila Parishad- 20,000 population and 5000 voters with 10% adjustment for matching contiguity, compactness, territorial integrity and convenience of drawing reasonable boundary may form one ZP Ward. The Average number of Ward may range from 35 to 50.

Pourashava and City Corporations-

There are provisions for increasing the number of wards on the basis of voter and population in the current Pourashava and CC laws, only it has to be readjusted with voter and population ratio ,the ratio may be 1:3.

2.2.2. Voters of the each unit of LGI will exercise only one vote instead of three and they will cast the vote for ward member or councilor only. Chairman/ Mayor will be indirectly elected by the ward members and councilors from and amongst themselves. (See Table 3and fig-4).

2.2.3. Special women's reserve seats still will be kept intact but with changed system of rotational electoral method as followed in many of the Indian states including our neighboring West Bengal and Tripura. One third of the wards will be kept reserved for women in which the male candidates will not contest but same wards will remain open for all in next two elections. Please see the Table-4 for clear understanding.

		2.2.4. All LGI election from district to Union and Pourashava can be held under single election schedule.
3. Organizational Reforms at LGIs (see Figure 5)	3.1. Composition: Separation of responsibilities, role differentiation and session provisions (Fig-5)	<p>3.1.1. Mayors of CCs and Pourashavas and chairs UP, UZP and ZP will be elected through indirect elections. Ward members and councilors will elect Mayor/Chair from and amongst the Ward members/councilors.</p> <p>3.1.2. There should be separation of role and functions within the parishad/ council. The council/ parishad are primarily a legislative body with limited legislative functions to be specified in the law.</p> <p>3.1.3. The Chairs and Mayors will not function like single person executive as the system exist now. Mayors and Chairs will be the head of an Executive Council (EC) of their respective LGIs. It would the prerogative of the Mayor/ Chair to choose at least five other members of his/her executive council as the Prime Minister chooses the members of his/her cabinet for the national government. The system proposed here is known as 'Mayor in Council' system as exist in Kolkata and many other successful cities.</p> <p>3.1.4. The council in each case (UP, UZP, ZP, Pourashava and CC) will also elect one of the members/councilors as 'Speaker' to conduct the sessions of the Council/ Parishad. The Chair / Mayor will not preside over the council meetings. The mayors/ Chairs will preside over only EC Meetings. The system is practiced in Kolkata City Corporation and Burangays of the Philippines.</p>

3.1.5. There may be positions for 'leader of the house', 'deputy leader of the house' and 'leader of the opposition'. The Mayor/ Chairs will be the 'leader of the house', S/he will also designate one of the members of the EC as 'Deputy Leader' of the house.

3.1.6. The leader of the opposition will be declared in the same session in which leader of the house and Speaker is elected.

3.1.7. The general members of the council will chair the Standing Committees (SCs) of the house. The speaker will arrange the formation of SCs in a special meeting of the Parishad / Council.

3.1.8. The rank and status of the key persons within each tier and unit will be as follows: (1) Leader of the house and the Chair of the Executive Council (designated as Mayor/ Chair), (2) Speaker, (3) Deputy leader of the house and leader of the opposition and (4) Chairs of SCs.

3.1.9. The EC members will have specific portfolios such as Finance, Education, Health, Agriculture , etc. The standing committees will be formed against the corresponding portfolios of the EC.

3.1.10. The general sessions of the parishads /councils will normally be held at least end of every quarter and each session may conduct its business maximum for three days in a single sitting. There may also be special sessions such as plan and budget sessions and others as specified in the

	<p>law.</p> <p>3.1.11. The general Members and councilors and Chairs of SCs will not get fixed salaries, they would be entitled to have sitting allowances for meetings only. Salaries will only be applicable for (1) Leader of the House, Speaker, Deputy Leader of the House, Leader of the Opposition and Members of EC.</p> <p>3.1.12. Representation from the lower tier to the higher tiers may be retained with some obvious changes. The representatives in higher tier from the lower tiers will have limited votes in the higher tiers. They will not have the voting right during the election of the 'Leader of the House', 'Speaker, during no confidence motion against 'leader of the house', speaker and while annual budget is placed for approval by the house. These four issues should remain the absolute domain of the members elected for the respective LGI. The representative members can take part in all other activities such as, attending all normal sessions, even takeing part in the deliberations of all sessions including budget session, entitle to vote on different issues as and when needed, can play role in SCs as members and members of other committees from time to time.</p>
<p>3.2. Role of MP</p>	<p>3.2.1. The MP's involvement in the matters of UZP, ZP and CCs may arise; the accommodation has to be made without any executive role. A well defined "Advisory" role has to be found for the MPs. The role played by the <i>Bhidan Sobha, Lok sobha and Rajjya Sobha</i> members in India in their</p>

		respective ZPs and <i>Panchayat Somities</i> may be reviewed for drawing lessons.
4. Functional assignment of LG and issues of interfacing	4.1. Interface between LGIs and Field Administration	<p>4.1.1. Functional overlaps between and amongst the LGIs and field administration have to be assessed and removed by assigning specific function and mandate to each level and unit by following the principles of subsidiarity.</p> <p>4.1.2. Sector-wise unbundling exercises have to be completed to assign functions according to the ability, appropriateness, accountability and efficiency of service delivery (Table-5),</p> <p>4.1.3. Assignment of function should also be followed by appropriate amount of fund and right level of functionary.</p>
5. LG Finance, inter-governmental transfers and Tax sharing	5.1. Local Government Finance	<p>5.1.1. The allocation from national budget for LGIs under development and Non-development heads have to be formula based not to be done under thumb rule. In Annual as well as under multi-year budgetary framework, allocation has to be made on the basis of an acceptable general formula. The allocation need to be enhanced up to 10% minimum from both (Development and Non- Development) instead of current allocation of less than 2%. By the end of 7th five year plan it should reach to 30% of the total budget.</p> <p>5.1.2. The national allocation should not be termed as 'Block Grant'; the term may be replaced by the term 'Inter-governmental Transfer'.</p> <p>5.1.3. There may be a local government finance policy under which the allocation formula could be formulated and revised.</p>

5.2: National Taxation policy, LGI taxation and Tax sharing

5.2.1. The National Tax Policy and NBR in a comprehensive manner should consider the LGI taxation while calculating the total tax and non tax revenue of the country. Under the current system LGI Tax and revenue is not reflected in the national accounts and statistics of taxation.

5.2.2. It is expected that instead of separate tax schedule for each tier and unit a comprehensive 'tax list' for all LGIs should be prepared with clear indication for each of the tier and units so that they can collect the tax on specific item without the risk of double taxation on a particular item.

5.2.3. A comprehensive tax sharing formula has to be adopted in the National Tax Policy for sharing national tax revenue between national and local governments. It will enhance the direct accountability of government at both the levels to the tax payers.

5.2.4. Some of the tax and non-tax revenues as generated at the local level also justified to be shared with local authorities. For example, a certain percentage of electricity bills, telephone revenue, income taxes, road tax, corporate tax on industries ,etc., need sharing, because these tax and non-tax revenues are either paid locally or the local people share the burden of the environmental hazards due to those activities,

5.2.5. Total Taxes received at local levels by the LGIs have to be added in national accounts system while calculating per

		capita tax paid by the citizens in Bangladesh. The LGI tax paid by individuals and companies should also be reflected in the tax returns of those individual and companies.
6. Integration of national and local planning	6.1. N/A	<p>6.1.1. The 7th Five year plan should devote one full chapter on LGI level/ local level Plan and how the local plan should incorporate and reflect the goals, objectives and strategy of the 7th five year plan and vision at the LGI levels.</p> <p>6.1.2. The National Planning Commission should extend its arms up to districts for proper guidance and monitoring of plans at local levels, the Indian experience of DPC may be considered in this connection.</p> <p>6.1.3. The data and information collected through the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) should be shared at the local levels for planning purposes at Union, Upazila and Districts and all government departments (Irrespective of retain and transferred departments) should be instructed to share their departmental data with the corresponding LG units for planning purposes,</p> <p>6.1.4. Every department having offices at the local level should assist corresponding LGs to have annual plan and their respective departmental developmental, promotional and services should have to be delivered in coordination with local plan.</p> <p>6.1.5. The LGIs will not be allowed to spend resources without having annual and five year plans of their as aligned</p>

		<p>with the national planning goals and strategies.</p> <p>6.1.6. The National Planning Commission should be empowered to issue guidelines for local level plan and Cabinet Division may issue an order to all ministries and departments to comply the Planning Commission Guidelines.</p> <p>6.1.7. While calculating GNP-GDP, the segregated method should be deployed to show the share and contributions of LGIs in GDP.</p> <p>6.1.8. All national level socio- economic development Projects implemented locally have to be integrated with the local plan. Participation of LGIs in local components of the national projects should be ensured during the formulation of the projects at national level.</p>
7. Reform in the Field Administration	7.1. N/A	<p>7.1.1. The reform and strengthening of local government, promotion of LED and efficient and effective delivery of services create an urgent rationale and imperative for review and reform in field administration and interfacing and integration of field administration and local government institutions within the period of 7th Five Year Plan. Government may immediately form a high powered committee to frame and formulate recommendation for rationalization, harmonization and proper distribution of workload and manpower with specific functional and service mandates.</p>

Annex 2:

Extracts from Vision 2021, Election manifesto of Bangladesh Awami League, Perspective Plan and 6th Five Year Plan 2011-2015

Table 1: Local Government in the ‘Vision 2021’ and the Election Manifesto of AL (2008)

Instrument	Section/Head	Statement
Election Manifesto of Bangladesh Awami League 2008	Other Important Programs	6. Local Government: Union, Upazilla and District Councils will be strengthened through decentralization of power. District Councils will be transformed into centres for implementation of programmes on education and health and all other development plans, and programmes, and for maintenance of law and order. Every union will be made the headquarter for development and administration of the area and be developed as a planned rural township. And every Upazilla headquarter will be developed as an industrial growth centre and a planned township. The power and sphere of responsibility of City Corporation and municipalities will be enhanced; the standard and quality of civic facilities will be improved.
The vision of Awami League for resolution of crisis and a prosperous future (Vision 2021)	2. Political framework, Decentralization of Power & People’s Participation	*Local government will be given due importance with a view to effecting radical change of the political system. The local government institutions will play a critical role in development programmes. Self-reliant local self-government institutions will be established at upazila and zila levels to this end.

Table 2: Local Government in The Perspective Plan-2010-2020

Sector/Head/Chapter	Statement	Page no.
Agriculture and rural development	...the key strategies taken under the perspective plan are to <u>establish a powerful autonomous local government body for providing coordination among private and public rural development institutes and to consider reviving the local government commission.</u>	3
Local Governance	<u>According to Vision 2021, local government will be given due importance with a view to effecting radical change of the political system. Local government institutions will play a critical role in governance as well as in development programmes. Vision 2021 envisages devolution of power, function, and fiscal authority to local government in accordance with constitutional provision for elected bodies at each level of administration. However, in devolving fiscal authority due consideration will have to be made of the scope for resource mobilization at the local level as well as the capacity of local bodies to manage expenditures. Clearly, large national projects involving power generation, bridges, national highways, irrigation and water management, will have to be left with national level institutions.</u>	16-17
Health and Population Planning Coordination	The two wings of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare seem to lack coordination, although many services have to be delivered jointly. A number of measures are needed. First a coordination cell should be created and given sufficient authority to do so. <u>Second, the local level bodies (specially the Upazila and Union Parishads could be assigned with some tasks of supervision and monitoring of the activities of the service providers...</u>	21
Strategy for Rural Development	• <u>To establish a powerful autonomous local government body. This is imperative to initiate and provide coordination among private and public rural development institutes.</u>	32
Rural Non-Farm Activities (RNFA)	Government will need to create a framework conducive for the development of the rural non-farm sector through (a) business development; (b) escalating women’s participation; (c) improving market	32

	access and infrastructure; (d) standardization and quality assurance of marketable products; (e) targeting vulnerable rural populations and scaling up their activities; and (f) increasing budget allocation to rural areas, and <u>(g) implementation through a strong autonomous local government.</u>	
Urban Governance	<u>Policies and strategies in this area focus on institutional reforms and decentralization of responsibilities and resources to local governments;</u> participation of civil society including women in the design, implementation and monitoring of local priorities; building capacity of all actors (institutions, groups and individuals) to contribute fully to decision-making and urban development processes; and facilitating networking at all levels.	75
Addressing poverty through social protection	An important corollary of moving towards a comprehensive approach to social protection programs is the need to streamline the institutional strategy for implementation. <u>The potential of local government bodies, particularly the Union Parishad, to coordinate a streamlined institutional strategy needs to be actively explored.</u>	92
	...during the Perspective Plan period, there will be strong emphasis on monitoring and coordination of social protection programs. As such consideration would be given to (i) establishing a clearing and designing house for keeping track and coordinating optimal utilization of scarce resources by avoiding duplication and dovetailing programs so that the needs of the special groups may be catered to; (ii) minimizing the number and improving the accountability of intermediaries who are involved in administering social protection programs; (iii) establishing a standing arrangement for monitoring and overseeing the development and implementation of policies and programs; (iv) coordinating the views and activities of the government and non-government organizations involved in this area; <u>(v) assigning greater responsibility for implementing programs to the local government level;</u> (vi) introducing periodic evaluation of programs to throw light on what is working and what is not; and (vii) allowing for reform and consolidation of programs where needed.	93
CONCLUDING REMARKS	A number of key sectors will play a pivotal role in materializing the Vision 2021. It begins with a focus on explicit goals, challenges, and strategies for the agricultural and rural sectors which account for a significant proportion of the country's GDP and employment. The primary goal is to eliminate food deficiency by improving production that will enable citizens to meet their nutritional requirement. More specifically, for ensuring food security by 2021, strategic goals need to be addressed in the crop sector, fisheries, livestock and poultry, and forestry. In order to enhance employment generation and rural development, adequate policy attention must be given to rural-non-farm activities. <u>The government must also help farmers in marketing agricultural products and accessing rural credit by pursuing policies that establish powerful autonomous local government bodies for coordinating public and private development initiatives.</u>	98

Source: OUTLINE PERSPECTIVE PLAN OF BANGLADESH 2010-2021, General Economics Division Planning Commission, Government of The People's Republic of Bangladesh, June 2010

Table 3: Local Government in The Sixth Five Year Plan – 2011-2015

Sector/Head/Chapter	Statement	Page no.
Summary	The Sixth Plan's strategy for capacity development consists of four pillars: <u>strengthening the civil service; promoting devolution to local governments; strengthening public-private partnerships; and reforming planning and budgetary processes ... Regarding the local government, the strategy will be to institute strong elected local governments that are vested with adequate financial autonomy and accountability for results. The local governments will be strengthened and much of the responsibility for delivering basic services such as irrigation, district roads, education, health, population management, water and sanitation services will progressively be decentralized to local governments.</u>	9-10
SIXTH FIVE YEAR PLAN STRATEGY Improving governance	• <u>Emphasis will be placed in developing capacities of local governments to play their development role in terms of delivery of basic services.</u>	32
SIXTH FIVE YEAR PLAN STRATEGY Enhancing administrative capacity	The Government recognizes that administrative capacity is a serious constraint to the efficient delivery of basic services. Accordingly, several areas of intervention will be made to enhance capacity and bring efficiency, transparency and accountability in public service management. The Sixth Plan's strategy for public administration capacity development and efficiency improvement consists of four pillars: <u>strengthening the civil service; promoting devolution to local governments; strengthening public-private partnerships; and strengthening planning and budgetary processes.</u>	32
SIXTH FIVE YEAR PLAN STRATEGY Establishing strong local governments	<u>The strengthening of local governments is a key institutional development challenge for Bangladesh. International evidence suggests that properly instituted and accountable local governments can play a major role in spreading the benefits of development. While the lessons of experience from other countries can play an important role in helping the design and implementation of a proper system of local government, successful local governments must be based on the realities of the underlying political, social, administrative and economic realities of Bangladesh. The Government is committed to instituting an effective and accountable local government to help implement Vision 2021 and the programs of associated development plans.</u>	32-33
Strategies and policies for land management in the SFYP	<u>The conflict between the growers of shrimp and crops would be resolved by involving the Union Parishads, DOE, DOF, DAE and stakeholders' representative organizations including local NGOs...</u>	70
MANAGING THE SPATIAL DIMENSIONS OF GROWTH The urbanization challenge	<u>A strong multidisciplinary urban planning system to cover all levels of national and local government planning units will be introduced with planning, implementation and management functions so that well coordinated project planning and urban management can be ensured.</u>	72
SFYP Education Targets	<u>Other related targets pertinent to education are building Digital Bangladesh, empowering local government as the engine for delivering services and carrying out development activities, ensuring equal status for women in all spheres of society and state, and creating gainful employment for the labour force.</u>	117
Urban health	A priority objective for improving urban health services will be to facilitate access and effective use of available essential ESP delivery services by urban poor and slum dwellers. To this end, <u>an urban health strategy in collaboration with the local government ministry will be developed with a view to streamlining urban primary health care services</u>	133

	<u>and establishing strong institutional linkage and ensuring primary health care, family planning, reproductive health and nutrition services for the urban poor.</u>	
Non-communicable diseases	Reduction of morbidity and premature mortality due to noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) will require appropriate actions at all levels from primary prevention to treatment and rehabilitation in an integrated manner. <u>The Government will, in partnership with local government administration and private sector create greater awareness of, and provide services for the control of unhealthy diet and lifestyle related major NCDs such as</u> <u>cardio-vascular diseases, cancer, diabetes, mental illness, etc.</u> It will also take steps to combat common NCDs, such as, hypertension, asthma, blindness, etc., which particularly afflict the poor. Existing preventive and curative measures with respect to all NCDs will further be expanded and strengthened to increase access to all for health care services.	133
Better governance	With the recent renewed commitment of strengthening the local government administration and institutions at different levels, opportunities have cropped up for exploring devolution of health programs and utilization of fund through different levels of local government institutions. <u>The SFYP recognizes the importance of such devolution and will take necessary administrative arrangements to devolve functions to Divisional and District levels.</u> <u>Adaptation of such approach will enable need based allocation of resources and close supervision through the locally elected representatives.</u>	137
STRATEGY FOR POVERTY REDUCTION IN THE SFYP	The availability of safe water and good sanitation is essential for improving living standards of the poor. There is a need for increasing investment in water and sanitation. The increased investment will seek to achieve the following objectives: <u>.... build capacity in local governments and communities to deal more effectively with problems relating to water supply and sanitation;</u>	152
Ethnic Communities	• Empowering ethnic communities: <u>The government will ensure participation of local governments in the management of natural resources and will recognize the traditional knowledge of ethnic peoples.</u> The government will ensure community involvement in the adoption of technologies without competing with their traditional food production system.	160
SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMS FOR THE POOR AND VULNERABLE The Importance of Social Protection	An important corollary of moving towards a comprehensive approach to social protection programs is the need to streamline the institutional strategy for implementation. <u>The potential of local government bodies, particularly the Union Parishad, to coordinate a streamlined institutional strategy needs to be actively explored.</u>	165
Social Protection Strategy in the SFYP	Consideration would be given to (i) establishing a clearing and designing house for keeping track and coordinating optimal utilization of scarce resources by avoiding duplication and dovetailing programs so that the needs of the special groups may be catered to; (ii) minimizing the number and improving the accountability of intermediaries who are involved in administering social protection programs; (iii) establishing a standing arrangement for monitoring and overseeing the development and implementation of policies and programs; (iv) coordinating the views and activities of the government and non-government organizations involved in this area; <u>(v) assigning greater responsibility for implementing programs to the local government level;</u> (vi) introducing periodic evaluation of programs to throw light on what is working and what is not; and (vii) allowing for reform and consolidation of programs where needed.	170
SFYP STRATEGIES AND POLICIES TO ADDRESS	• <u>Block allocation for local government institutions for infrastructure development in lagging regions, particularly in lagging districts, would be</u>	184

REGIONAL DISPARITIES	<u>enhanced.</u>	
Development of Infrastructure		
Development of Agriculture and Rural Economic Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Local government institutions such as Union Parishads would be strengthened to conduct rural development activities of the government through these institutions.</u> 	
The Bangladesh National Herbarium	<p>Environment and waste management and weak basic services including sanitation still remains as formidable challenges. <u>Limited capacity of local government institutions such as the municipalities is a matter of concern.</u> These institutions seriously lack capacities in managing household waste through effective participation from community people.</p> <p>The air pollution is another top ranking health concern that requires more attention. The DoE needs to be considerably strengthened, particularly to enable it to undertake environmental impact assessment as mandated by the Environment Conservation Rules promulgated under the Environment Conservation Act 1997. Enforcement of environmental standards is also a serious challenge. <u>The role of local government institutions also needs to be strengthened in managing urban waste and drainage.</u></p>	194-195
Capacity Building	Proper management of environmental degradation requires substantial capacity in the public sector as well as interaction and cooperation with the citizens. Accordingly, the Sixth Plan will take a number of initiatives to strengthen environmental capacities. <u>In the public sector efforts will continue to strengthen the Department of Environment and other ministries dealing with environment including Agriculture, Land, Water, Energy, Industry and Local government.</u>	197
Financial Management	Implementation of NEMAP, Forestry Master Plan, National Conservation Strategy and a number of development activities related to environment will require adequate financing. <u>The shared responsibility for improvement of the environment by all partners in development including various government organizations, local government bodies, NGOs, research and training institutes will be strongly emphasized.</u>	197
Forestry Sector Objectives under the SFYP	<p>Tissue culture, root trainer nursery development, vegetative propagation etc will receive due attention:...</p> <p>... • <u>Achieve meaningful participation of local people, local government bodies, NGOs and government agencies in forestry program;</u></p>	
Forestry Management Policies, Strategy and Programs	<p>In line with the above objectives, policies, strategies and programs for the forestry sub-sector...</p> <p>during the Sixth Five Year Plan will be as follows:</p> <p>.... h. <u>Social forestry has now become a social movement in Bangladesh. Social forestry program will continue for expansion and strengthening of thana nurseries, union level nurseries, expansion and strengthening of forest extension and nursery training centres. Local government bodies will co-ordinate the aforestation program at the grassroots level under this program.</u></p>	199
Sixth Plan Strategy for Addressing the Governance Challenges Governance Achievements to Date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Improving the ability of elected local government to contribute to local development and to be responsive to citizens' needs and priorities, including through an enhanced transfer system and reinstituting elected government at the upazila level.</u> 	219
THE GOVERNANCE CHALLENGE IN BANGLADESH	<p>b) Strengthening local governments</p> <p><u>The current local governance initiatives if well implemented could develop effective systems of public participation as well as accountability that will ensure that government servants are responsible to elected officials, and elected officials are in turn responsible to their constituency. The Government has already been taking steps to strengthen local governments. Efficient and dedicated local government bodies can deliver services and generate social and economic</u></p>	220

	<u>awareness to achieve the national goals.</u>	
Public Service Delivery Challenge	<p>Public administration in Bangladesh is heavily centralized. <u>Local governments are weak, with little administrative and financial authority.</u> Consequently, the setting of expenditure priorities, allocation of resources, procurement of goods and services, and the implementation of projects are largely centralized at the ministry level in the capital city of Dhaka.</p> <p><u>At both the central and local levels, day-to-day general administration is run by the civil servants.</u> Over time, though, the quality of civil service weakened. The pay and benefits also fell drastically in real terms. Currently, the civil service is facing serious challenges including low quality, poor remuneration, weak accountability and corruption.</p>	227-228
Sixth Plan Strategy for Public Administration Capacity Development	The Sixth Plan's strategy for capacity development consists of four key pillars: firstly, strengthening the civil service; <u>secondly, promoting devolution to local governments;</u> thirdly building partnerships with private sector and NGOs; and finally improving the planning and budgeting process.	228
Sixth Plan Strategy for Public Administration Capacity Development	<p>b) Devolution to local governments: <u>A strong local government that has well defined responsibilities and accountabilities can play a major positive role in delivering basic public services. Elected local government is often better positioned to respond to the needs and preference of the local population. Particularly at the lowest Union Parishad level, local government offers an opportunity for genuine popular participation in the public governance. The closeness to the people means that local government can serve as a key instrument to fulfil Government's goal of bringing services to the doorsteps of the people. As it is directly interacting with the people, local government also have an important role in delivering programs and building public awareness which in turn meet national objectives as well, such as poverty reduction, disaster management, delivery of social protection services, and support for local economic development.</u></p> <p><u>Harnessing the potential of local government to improve services for the people requires that it have a legal framework that provides a clear mandate for certain services and the human and financial resources to carry out that mandate. The Government has taken several steps to support local governments. It passed revised legislation providing for the functions and operations of Pourashavas, union parishads, and upazila parishads. It has equipped local governments with equipment, particularly in establishing Union Information Service Centres. Nonetheless, the roles of local government at all levels remain relatively small due to the concentration of resources and service delivery through line agencies accountable to central Government rather than locally elected councils and chairpersons. Local governments play a coordinating role and contribute to local development, but have few responsibilities for ongoing service delivery. Rigid guidelines which limit local discretion in determining staffing needs, particularly for Union Parishads, means that local governments lack flexibility to meet local needs.</u></p> <p><u>Empowering local government to play a more prominent role in local development requires the transfer of authority for some services with commensurate resources. However, this process should be gradual and allow for constant monitoring of the utility and appropriateness of such a transfer, building on the existing capacity of local governments to taken on new responsibility. This capacity will be dictated by both the skills and ability of the local government officials and the effectiveness of measures whereby the people can hold them accountable to ensure performance which meets most closely the public interest of a given locality.</u></p> <p><u>The vision for the Plan is to have local governments delivering greater volume and quality of public services to their respective communities. There will be differentiation in service responsibilities between urban and</u></p>	230-232

	<p><u>rural local government, between large city corporations and Pourashavas. Care will be given to avoid overlap between local governments at the primary level and at intermediate tiers upazilas and eventually zilas.</u></p> <p><u>The main elements of the strategy to achieve this vision for local governments are:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>• Enhancing the legal framework for the functioning of local governments at the union, Pourashava, city corporation, and upazila levels through establishing clear service responsibilities, ensuring discretion of local governments to carry out their service responsibilities within national standards, devolution of administrative control over ensuring service provision in the areas which are assigned to respective local governments, providing for a greater discretionary financial base including robust local revenues and a transparent, a predictable system of intergovernmental fiscal transfers with, and provision of greater discretion in staffing to meet the administrative responsibilities at the local level.</u> <u>• Increasing the transparency and improving the accountability of local governments by establishing indicators and standards for measuring performance in service delivery at local level, broadening the role of oversight institutions which would perform financial and service delivery audits, and investigating corruption and irregularities and make the reports available to public.</u> <u>• Building the capacity of local governments through assignment of proper officials, technical assistance and training programs.</u> <u>• Developing planning and budgeting capacities at the local level to help design and implement local level programs.</u> <u>• Expanding the role of citizen committees and strengthening participation of the citizens from different groups, including women and the poor, in prioritizing, implementing and monitoring of development program and other functions of the local government to ensure that local level development programs are appropriate and that these are well implemented.</u> <u>• Establishing E-governance at the local level through a well designed program of ICT hardware and software, technical assistance and training programs.</u> <p><u>The Local Government, Rural Development & Cooperatives Ministry will have primary responsibility for implementation of the strategy to strengthen local government. A standing Local Government Commission with representation from key ministries involved with local service provision as well as associations of local governments will design and monitor changes to the legal framework. Implementation of the Plan's elements will have to be coordinated with sectoral development strategies, particularly for social services. As in the case of civil service system, the local government system will need to be commensurate with the socio-political environment and the realities of Bangladesh.</u></p>	
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Source: SIXTH FIVE YEAR PLAN, FY2011-FY2015, General Economics Division, Planning Commission Ministry of Planning, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

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