
Reforms in Local Government: Experiences from Bangladesh

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Abstract: *Modern concept recognizes local government as an ancient institution and it is said to be good for national democracy, development and good governance. Local government has many roles including welfare of local people and development of rural areas and a general expectation is that it tends to provide the best services to the local people. The prime trend of emerging developing countries is to strengthen its local government and create economic impetus locally through effective local administrations. However, democratic decentralization helps to create social harmony, community spirit and political stability. Thus, many countries prefer to reform at the local level. The history of local government in Bangladesh shows that it has been established through reforms at different periods at different times.*

The study focuses on some objectives. How local government has developed through the forty years in Bangladesh; how governments have treated it in different periods; and whether the developments or reforms done were for the benefit of the mass people or political leaders? The paper also attempts to identify the problems to implement the reforms at local level. The current study seeks to provide basic information related to reforms in local government during the tenure of different governments at the rural level. Through an extensive review of literatures, this article attempts to shed light on the reforms of local government with a view to explore the linkages between all central government and their political attitudes. The paper would help to understand the transformation of local government in Bangladesh and take initiatives to strengthen it in future.

Key words: *local government, political government, reforms*

1. Introduction

In recent years, the need for decentralized local government system has been boldly articulated. With the

growing demand on good governance, it is apparent that appropriate structures, policies and laws of reforms for establishing democracy and good governance at the local level are instituted from time to time as required. The current local government system of Bangladesh has originated from the British colonial and Pakistan period. However, the constitution of Bangladesh has recognized local government institutions as integral part of overall governance. Since independence, local government structures have changed periodically with different political regimes. Changes or reforms have not lasted for a long enough time to become rooted and be consolidated as effective institution of service delivery.

2. Local Government in Bangladesh

According to Rahman and Islam (2002), the over hundred years old local government in Bangladesh has been more of an area of policy experimentation than a stable institutional development. Although the constitution provides for an autonomous local government system, these provisions have not been implemented resulting in a local government system that is not functioning properly. All the successive governments attempted to develop institutions at the local level to have a political power base at the grass roots. But none of the attempts could bring about any significant and positive change in the quality of local life and local structures.

3. Reforms in different Periods

3.1. 1971 – 1975: Sheikh Mujibur Rahman

Institutional development for an effective local government structure has always been a ‘top most priority’ for the government since its independence in 1971 (Ahmed, 1996). But at that time, the government faced several problems including inhuman sufferings and massive destruction of the physical infrastructure, restoration of law and order situation and setting up administration. It had to do a lot of work for reconstructing the war torn economy. However, the government stressed the need for an effective

and decentralized local government system. The Bangladesh Local Councils and Municipal Committees (Dissolution and Administration) (Amendment) Order, 1972 was promulgated to dissolve the existing local government structure (the system of Basic Democracy). According to the order, the Union Council was renamed as Union Panchayet, Thana Council to the Thana-Development Committee and District Council to Zila Board. This arrangement continued up to 1973 (Siddiqui, 1994). The union parishad was placed under the control of the Circle Officer (Development) while Thana Development Committee and Zila Board were placed under the control of sub-divisional officer and deputy commissioner respectively. The nature of functions of Thana Development Committee and Zila Board were the same as they were under the Basic Democracy Order. There was no provision for the local government at Thana level and also no provision for composition of Zila Board in the PO-22. Administrative and Services Reorganization Committee (ASRC) was appointed to suggest required recommendations for streamlining the administrative structure. The one of the recommendations of the committee was to increase devolution of authority to the elected local government. The name of Union Panchayet was changed to Union Parishad by the Bangladesh Local Government (Union Parishad and Pourashava) Order 1973. Under this order, each union was divided into three wards and nine members. The term of parishad was five years.

A position of Vice-Chairman was created along with the Chairman in each of the union parishad (Faizullah, 1987). They were directly elected by voters of the entire union. The major difference, with the Basic Democracy Order 1959, was that the chairman of the union parishad was no longer elected by members of the parishad (Hasan, 2007). Under the new arrangement, union parishad elections were held in 1973 throughout the country and newly elected office bearers took charge of the union parishad. In 1975, after the amendment of the constitution, the government by a President Order announced a system of District Governorship which was to take over district administration from September 1, 1975. According to District Administration Act 1975, District Governors were appointed by the President and they were the chief officer in-charge of

the general administration of the district. The act provided reorganization of the system of administration of Thana and formation of administrative council for each Thana. Another reform was to introduce the compulsory multi-purpose cooperative society at the village level. It was announced that it would be constituted in all 65,000 villages under co-operatives within five-year plan on March 1975. It was expected that these co-operatives would become the basic economic and administrative units of the country and the union parishad would be abolished. Due to the political change in August 1975 this program was abandoned

3.2. 1975 – 1981: General Ziaur Rahman

The new Local Government Ordinance 1976 was approved by General Zia. The ordinance also established three tier systems of local government - Union parishad (UP), Thana parishad (TP) and Zila parishad. There was expectation that elected local councils would be established except Thana. The District Governorship system was banned. According to the ordinance, Union Parishad consisted of fourteen members including two women and two peasant members. The Vice-Chairman post was dropped and chairman was vested with all executive power. The term of Union Parishad was five years. According to ordinance, the government could exercise supervision and control over the Union Parishads to ensure that their activities conformed to the purposes stated in the order.

The Ziaur Rahman led government attempted to restructure the member component but kept the role of the prescribed authority equally stringent. Thana Parishad and Zila Parishad were controlled by the central government. There was no system of election in the two levels. Thana Parishad consisted of chairman of Union Parishads as representative members and official members of concerned Thana parishad. The function of TP was to coordinate all development activities of UPs. The rules and regulations of TP were not mentioned in the Local Government Ordinance 1976. President Zia took initiative to introduce District Development Coordinator (DDC) at district level in 1980. One Member of Parliament in each district was appointed as

DDC. The DDC was responsible for coordinating and implementing development activities in respective district. The system was discarded after the military coup in 1982. Pandey writes that the reforms initiated by Gen. Zia were different from the earlier policies of decentralization. It became evident that Zia had to have a power base outside the armed forces to establish the legitimacy of his regime.¹

The Local Government (Amendment) Act of 1980 envisaged for a new administrative structure named Swanirvor Gram Sarker at village level. Gram Sarker consisted of gram pradhan (village executive) and 11 elected members. Members came from different classes of the villages. Chowdhury (1987) referred to it as mini-government. It was responsible for taking planning and promotional planning. However, this organization of Gram Sarker did not get required time for consolidation and further evolution because of the change in the government again 1982.²

3.3. 1982 – 1990: Lieutenant General H.M. Ershad

Lieutenant General Ershad seized power in March, 1982. He appointed a Committee for Administrative Reorganization/Reform (CARR) in April, 1982 to introduce effective, sound and system based administration. The Naval Chief and Deputy Chief Martial Law Administrator (DCMLA) Rear Admiral M. A. Khan was the leader of the committee. The committee identified some weakness in the existing local government and recommended elected local government at the district, thana and union level with effective authority. According to CARR, three tier local government systems were introduced at the local level. As per the recommendation of CARR reports, the government constituted the national Implementing Committee for Administrative Reorganization/Reform (NICARR) which changed Thana to Upazila and sub-division to districts.³ Some ordinances were also passed during this period.

¹ Hasan (2007)

² Ali (2002)

³ Mallick (2004)

The Local Government (Thana Parishad and Thana Administration Reorganization) Ordinance 1982 provided the framework to implement its decentralization policies. Thana Parishad was renewed as Upazila Parishad (UPZ). The focus of attention shifted from the villages to the Upazila Parishad. According to the report of CARR, the objective of the plan was to “create a new kind of local government system that would bring about greater efficiency and productivity in the state machinery through the involvement of the people”. All development activities at the local level were transferred to the Upazila Parishad. It was considered as a representative body. It comprised a directly elected Chairman; all elected Chairman of UP within UPZ, four nominated members including three women, chairman of the UPZ Central Cooperative Association and government official at the UPZ. It was only an administrative unit, but afterwards became UPZ. There were substantial fund for development including the responsibility for preparation of a five year plan and an annual development plan. A central factor guiding the reorganization of the local government system was the separation between all development activities of local level and national/regional development activities.¹ It is a fact that at the UPZ, people’s representatives and government officials worked together to implement local development programs. Swanirvor Gram Sarker was abolished by a Martial Law Order in July 1982. According to Local Government (Union Parishad) Ordinance 1983, three women members were nominated by UPZ from the entire union parishad. After an amendment in 1988 they were nominated by Deputy Commissioner. A special type of Local Government was introduced through three Hill Districts Acts 1989 in the three hill districts: Bandarban, Rangamati and Khagrachari. According to Local Government (Zila Parishad) Ordinance 1988, Zila Parishad acts as a nominated body and public officials will coordinate development activities in UPZ. A member of parliament was to be appointed by government as the chairman of Zila Parishad.

The name of Swanirvor Gram Sarker was changed by Palli (village) Parishad Act 1989 and it consisted of nine members.

¹ Rahman (2000)

Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) controlled all the development activities of Palli Parishad. Union Parishad at the grass roots level, i.e., lower level local government unit and the Zila Parishad at the top were totally ignored in the decentralization and development process.¹ The political history of Bangladesh was repeated in the 1980s as the Upazila was politicized in favor of the ruling military regime the way Pakistan's dictator Ayub Khan used the system of Basic Democracies in the 1960s, and the Gram Sarker of the 1970s (Rahman and Khan, 1997).

3.4.1991 - Care Taker Government

The care taker government concept was established. The then Chief Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed was the leader of the care taker government. During that time, the functions of the Zila Parishads were suspended and the incumbent chairman was removed.²

3.4. 1991 – 1996: Begum Khaleda Zia

Begum Khaleda Zia abolished Upazila Parishad through the Local Government (Upazila Parishad and Upazila Administration Reorganization) (Repeal) Ordinance 1991, and the reasons included: failure of mobilize resources at the local (upazila) level to achieve self reliance and ensure peoples participation in planning and implementation of development activities, increased dependency on national government grants, drastic deviations from laws, rules and guide lines and huge expenditure in the nonproductive sectors. The main problem with the UPZ system was however, that the chairmen were the products of farcical and brutalized elections.³ Zafarullah and Khan (1994) noted that the then government was unwilling to let the system continue even with modifications, indeed, they were keen to replace it by a system of their own making. However, the abolition of the UPZ is seen as a victory of the bureaucrats whose plan during this crucial period was to exploit the

¹ Ahmed (1996)

² Mallick (2004)

³ Siddiqui (1995)

changed political situation to their own benefit.¹ In November, 1991, the government constituted a fourteen member committee under the chairmanship of Barrister Nazmul Huda. The main objective was to reorganize local government institutions in a manner so that local people can take part in the development process and democracy be institutionalized from the grass-root levels. The commission submitted its report in July, 1992, and recommended a two-tier local government system. Not surprisingly, none of the recommendations were implemented. However, two major structural changes could be discerned from the 1991 and 1994 reform.² These were abolition of UPZ and the establishment of two-tier local government system comprising UP and Zila Parishad. UPZ was replaced by Thana Development Coordination Committee (TDCC). It consisted of all UP chairpersons with the local member of the Parliament. The report of the commission also recommended the rules and provisions for other local bodies like Gram Sabha, Gram Unnayan Committee, Union Parishad, and Zila Parishad. Begum Zia failed to provide new form of local government during 1990-1996 in the country.

3.5. 1996 – 2001: Sheikh Hasina

The Awami League government appointed a Local Government Commission in September 1996. The purpose of the commission was to suggest the framework and measures for a decentralized and powerful local government system. The commission was headed by Advocate Rahmat Ali and consisted of 8 members. It was asked to act under the Article 9, 11, 59 and 60 of the constitution of Bangladesh.³ It submitted its report in May 1997 and suggested a four-tier rural local government structure. The government accepted the recommendations on the whole. But implementation process was slow and there was lack of commitment from the government. The proposed tiers were the gram Parishad at the ward level, the UP at the union level, the UPZ at the upazila level and ZP at the district level. All local government

¹ Pandey, from: <http://www.southasianmedia.net/magazine/journal/9>

² Ahmed (1996)

³ Hasan (2007)

bodies would be under the Local Government Division of the Ministry of Local Government. The three hill districts local government bodies would be under the Special Affairs Division of the Prime Minister office.

Several acts were passed during this time including the Local government Gram parishad Act 1997, the Local government Union parishad (Second Amendment) Act 1997, the Upazila Parishad bill in 1998 and the Zila Parishad Amendment Act 2000. According to the Local government Union parishad (Second Amendment) Act 1997, the composition of union parishad was divided into nine wards and women members were able to elect directly in reserved seats. Thana was renamed to Upazila through the Upazila Parishad bill in 1998 and was considered as an administrative unit. It was expected to work as the focal point of all administrative, development and nation-building activities. According to the Local government Gram parishad Act 1997, it was declared as an administrative unit. However, the then government could not fulfill the recommendation of the Local government Commission. They introduced Upazila system, but no election was held. No Gram Parishad was formed during this period.

3.6. 2001 – 2006: Begum Khaleda Zia

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia during this period announced that all local government bodies would be empowered. Gram/Palli Parishad was renamed as Gram Sarker. Gram Sarker Act 2003 was passed on February, 2003. It was aimed at supporting the organization of the Union Parishad and would work at the ward levels where Gram Sarker comprised about 3,000 people living in one or two villages. The structure of Gram Sarker consisted of 15 members in the following manner:

- One chairman (elected member of the respected ward would be the chairman);
- One advisor (elected women member of the respected ward would be the advisor);
- 10 male members; and
- 3 female members.

The government however, failed to take decision about UPZ and ZP.

3.7. 2008 – present: Sheikh Hasina

The government was committed to implement its election manifesto in which decentralizing the power and strengthening local government were prominent. Local Government Commission was eliminated in February, 2009. Some reforms were done during this period. These are the following¹:

- a) Local Government (Union Parishad) Act 2009;
- b) Abolished Gram Sarker;
- c) Local Government (Paurosova) Act 2009;
- d) Local Government (City Corporation) Act 2009;
- e) Upazila Act 2009;
- f) Organization, structure and activities of Upazila were revised and specified focusing on Upazila act 1998;
- g) Creating two positions of Upazila vice chairman (one reserved for woman);
- h) Regulations of the responsibilities, power and facilities of the Upazila Chairman and Vice- Chairman;
- i) Regulation on budget process (preparation and approval) of Upazila;
- j) Charter of duties of Upazila public officials;
- k) Regulation for using revenue of Upazila (August, 2009); and
- l) Regulation for using development fund of Upazila (October, 2009).

UPZ Parishad started its work from March, 2009. In a roundtable meeting held on March 2011, *Shujan* secretary Badiul Alam Majumder said that the government curbed power of local government representatives by making the lawmakers adviser to the *Upazila Parishad*. There were some conflicts of authority between the local government representatives and the MP. But MP always gets preference

¹ <http://www.lgd.gov.bd/html/download.html>

and exercise power over local government. It is encouraging that government has taken initiatives of training program for UNO, chairmen and vice-chairmen of UPZ Parishad. It is fact that Upazila Parishad Act (24th Act of 1998) and other necessary laws were enacted to establish UPZ, but in practice it was not satisfactory. Though recently elections were completed in the Union parishad and Upazila Parishad, the two levels are still ineffective. The Government officials, representative of local government and local government bodies were not performing their duties properly during the last two years. Jahangir Kabir, Local Government Minister told that the government was interested to strengthen the power of UP.¹ He also added that the government has plans to introduce Gram Parishad at village level and it would be a mini-parliament. Recently, after eleven years, according to the Zila Parishad Amendment Act 2000 the structure of Zila Parishad is formulated. Gram Adatat(Court) Act (Amendment) has been passed in the cabinet.

4. Discussions and Conclusion

Changes in local government have been made from time to time, but almost nothing was done to strengthen local government. As part of the decentralized development process in Bangladesh, local government needs further strengthening. Though successive governments promised devolution of authority to various layers of local government, nothing substantial has materialized in practice (Khan, 2009). The initiatives during various periods were sometimes conflicting and sometimes confusing.² The lack of clarity in the power of and functions of the chairman and the vice-chairman created much confusion leading to partisan power relation in the union parishad. All attempts to change local government aimed at serving the interest of the rulers rather than the ruled. Most of the governments used it to create their support base at the local levels.

During the Mujib period, the compulsory multi-purpose cooperative society at the village level was designed as village

¹ The Prothom Alo,01.10.10

² Hasan (2007)

government. Apparently, this was a step towards decentralized administration. But by tying this entity with the one-party rule of BAKSAL, the purpose was clearly to use the local government bodies at the lowest level for the perpetuation of the rule of the national government. One party's political governance at District Governorship created controversy. There was a substantial lack of political and behavioral support among Awami League leaders for democratizing the system of governance.¹Pandy writes that Mujib paid more attention to national than local issues.² The union parishad (council) was designed as a decentralized body of local government and the election in 1973 was to ensure grass root democracy, the Awami League did not hold elections to the higher level councils, nor did they take any measures to devolve authority to any of them. Another problem was in the initial phase (1973-75) that the development of local self government institutions in the country was hampered primarily due to the inherent conflict of the western type of local government institutions with the ideals of socialism (Ali, 2002). The functions and sources of income remained more or less unchanged as under the Basic Democracy system. It was felt that only the name of local institutions changed.

During Ziaur Rahman's period, Gram Sarkar was formed. As a concept, nothing could be more desirable. Swanirvar Gram Sarker at village level was a premature and unfinished work. However, in the manner it was operationalized, it was criticized as being used for extending the influence of the ruling party. All attempts at reforms in local government were ostensibly aimed at satisfying the aspirations of the people to participate in local affairs, and at improving conditions in the localities through rural development, they were primarily intended as a network of support for the central rulers.³ It was obvious that the main purpose of the reforms at local level was to gain direct political support for the military regime in its process of civilization.

¹ Pandy (<http://www.southasianmedia.net/magazine/journal/9>)

² <http://www.southasianmedia.net/magazine/journal/9>

³ Huque (1988)

The establishment of UPZ was truly decentralized administration by the Ershad government, since it was a representative body and all government development organizations at the level were accountable to UPZ. Unquestionably it was a good beginning (Khan, 2009). Like Zia, the Upazila Parishad concept, for its exploitation in the ruling party's interests and the widespread election malpractices, was quite a significant step towards a decentralized administration. It helped to strengthen and legitimize his rule.

When BNP came to the power 1991, the general expectation was that the government would be conscious about the establishment of democracy at all level. But, the government abolished UPZ with no rational basis. It was like throwing the baby out with the bath water.¹ It is interesting to note that all the governments emphasized on the local government as focal point. Acts, ordinances, policies and programs were taken to form local bodies at local levels. It is fact that all good things are written in the policy or planning, but nothing is done or implemented for the development of the people. It was hoped that as the new leader of AL would be very cautious about political initiatives, the people thought that the government would establish local government bodies in the light of constitutional provisions. The 1997 reform too has not made any attempt to address issues related to decentralization, devolution and autonomy of local governance. The reform has undoubtedly made some room for participation of the women and disadvantaged groups. But, there was no process or scope to build people's capacity for participation in the local government.

The local administrations were accused of misappropriation of money and malpractice in their activities. In this connection it could be mentioned that \$12 million was allocated for Gram Sarker as block allocation in the 2005-06 budget. It was distributed through party men of the then government keeping the next general election in mind. The way the Gram Sarker Act has been passed and its members selected in each ward, has been criticized by every

¹ Siddiqui (1996)

section of society.¹ It is obvious that this has been done for strengthening the power base of BNP in the rural areas.

It is true that all reforms have been done for political purposes, but there were some efforts to local development. The historical account of governments felt obliged to establish some kind of local government structure in order to mobilize support of the rural communities in their favor through providing a little bit of welfare measures. There are empirical evidences that show that changes in the local government in Bangladesh have not necessarily resulted in the improvement of socio-economic situation and wider participation of the local people in the development process. The colonial legacy may be a factor behind this attitude of the governments.² The major reasons behind the failure of local government's reforms are as follows:

a) Lack of consultation - there was no consultation process with stakeholders for the local government reform. When the decisions are top-down and people and key stakeholders are ignored, it is hard to accommodate social and cultural context consensus oriented decisions for the local government. The reforms have been taken without consultation of people. The result was that the local government system is controlled from the top and is weak both structurally and functionally as it lacks organized capacity and professional expertise and is dependent on the national government for financial resources.

b) Absence of stability – From Bangladesh period, local government structures have changed periodically with different political regimes. Changes or reforms have not lasted for a long enough time for political attitude. One political government does not like and continue past government's activities. Due to lack of stability of structure and functions the local government institutions remained less effective and

¹ Pandey (<http://www.southasianmedia.net/magazine/journal/9>)

² Huque (1988)

inefficient in performing assigned actions. Changes in levels of local bodies with the change of government have created confusion in the minds of people while making it difficult for local bodies concerned to play any effective role in the absence of stability (Hasan, 2007).

c) Lack of continuity of representation and knowledge about functions - we see that many local government tiers have no representatives, for example Zila parishad. Sometimes there is a lack of continuity of representatives, such as Dhaka City Corporation. However, chairman and members of local government do not have knowledge about their roles, responsibilities, mandatory or optional functions. The positions of elected female members are also considered as ornamental positions.

d) Lack of adequate resources - though local government has its own sources of revenue income for their activities, it however, is mainly reliant on various grants from the government. Income from taxes, rates and fees contribute to a small portion of its revenue. There is intension for not to increase tax as it would lead to a loss in its popularity.¹ For example, DCC did not increase any holding tax for the past 15/16 years. Capacity building efforts of local government did not take at the same time.

e) Increased dependence of local government on central government - local government is totally dependent on central government. The main reason is financial. Lack of adequate resources makes them dependent. Ali (2012) mentioned that it is surprising that UPs locally cannot even buy whistles for guards as per their own choice. In the name of

¹Ali (2012)

decentralization and local government reform, each successive government tightened its control over local bodies through various mechanisms of directing and influencing local process and perpetuating local financial dependency on the center.¹

f) Extensive control of central government over local government - Central government controls local government which is both politically and financially influenced. Local government cannot take any initiative for their locality without government permission.

g) Abused local government by central government to establish political legitimacy - After reforms, it is not considered as local strength as said before. Although all reforms were made to improve the local government system in the name of decentralization, the process was political. Almost all governments have used it as their power base and made changes in its structure to meet their own ends. From Gen. Zia's regime to the present government, most of the initiatives was politically motivated. Most of them failed to bring any positive change towards establishment of stable and decentralized local institutions. From the administrative and economic point of view, local government is the worst structure in this country. The reforms of local government have been totally depended on political perceptions and attitudes of the successive regimes. However, recently government appointed administrators for Zila parishad. It was also based on political interest. DCC has recently been divided into two city corporations, and there is controversy about their roles and responsibilities.

¹ Khan (1999)

h) Bureaucratic control over local administration - the history of local government in Bangladesh is characterized by heavy dependence on central government's grants and strong bureaucratic domination because of asymmetric growth of executive power compared to the local level representatives' institutions, despite some sporadic efforts to reorganize it in the spirit of devolution of authority.¹

i) Dual and lack of accountability of local government to central government and local constituency - lack of accountability, such as open budget hearings and meetings, disclosure of LG information is also responsible for corruption and weak administration at the local level. However, dual accountability of local government to central government and local constituency made them conflict for a successful local government system.

j) Conflict between Member of Parliaments and local government representatives - this was aggravated as many media reports indicate. According to Upazila parishad and Zila parishad law, MPs have been made adviser. Conflicts arise if the advice by the MPs is not accepted.²

k) Conflict and lack of commitment among governments regarding decentralized local government - lack of political commitment of government is also responsible for failure of the local government. Some criticized that all government are establishing partisan ruling system, rather than democracy. Siddiqui evaluates the evolution of local government that during postcolonial period, successive regimes added on further cosmetic changes to the inherited model in

¹ Kahn (2009)

² Ali (2012)

order to consolidate their narrow power base, and response to the prevailing political compulsions.¹

1) Dominance of local elite- The dominance and power of local elite has made an impediment for promoting good governance and institutionalization democracy at local level. It is said that such power would make avenues for them to create a favorable condition for accessing in the local government and participating in the local level decision-making process and thus, it makes a link with center power.

To date, power concentration in the center is common trend in Bangladesh. Power concentration will hinder the progress of democracy, so it should be decentralized through strengthening the local government institutions for good governance. There is no future and prospect for local government in Bangladesh. We can hope that the status of local bodies will be better soon. This is expected in the not too distant future. Local government has many roles and services to provide the local people. It is easier to solve most of the civic problems that turn difficult for the central government, as the local government representatives stay close to mass people. If democratization of local government is established, it can accelerate the drive for people's empowerment and breaking the dominance of power elite which may lead a new shift in the balance of power in the local government. So, it needs to be durable. There are sequences in every reforms of local government of every country. But, we lost it. The steps of reforms could not finally make any dimension. Governments took initiatives and Local Government Commission was set up, but indeed it resulted in nothing. One thing is important that the successive government will have to have respect for the past governments activities and reforms. If it is people-centered reform and people have scope to participate in the local level, the next government should continue the activities of the past government which is very common in the developed and developing countries, except Bangladesh. It is the key to establish an effective, empowered and decentralized local

¹ Siddiqui (2005)

government system. Both government and people have to have interest to promote good governance and institutionalize democracy at the grassroots level. It is the time to launch movement at the grass roots level to press the demands for strengthening the local government. A political consensus and policy commitment would be needed to ensure the representatives of all local bodies and establish the real autonomy and devolution of authority at the local government bodies. There is no need to introduce new law or act to strengthen the local government. The existing laws or acts are enough and if they are effectively implemented, local government bodies will bring changes in future. We do not want political reform; we need people-oriented and poor people-empowered reforms at the local level.

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