

Abstract

The local government in Bangladesh as an institution though old is not strong enough specially in the rural areas. Administrative controls, lack of participation of the people in the decision making process, lack of human resources, training and experience, absence of transparency & accountability mechanisms, undue interference of local elites, *mastans* and politicians are few of the problems which are responsible for weak and ineffective local government institutions. From the year 2006, the Ministry of Local Government of Bangladesh took an initiative for strengthening local government at the union level i.e. Union Parishads (UPs) by introducing Local Government Support Project (LGSP). The broad objective of the LGSP is strengthening Union Parishad through different mechanism like transferring block grants directly to the UPs to overcome process barriers, facilitating peoples' involvement in the development planning process as well as project implementation process through mechanisms like open budget meeting, revealing of progress reports to the people about ongoing projects, auditing of UPs activities, frequent inspection of project area by district facilitator, DDLG and UNO etc. As achieving objective of LGSP program is very important for strengthening Union Parishads, this study has tried to evaluate how far the LGSP program has achieved its immediate objectives and how far it has succeeded in adding values to its beneficiaries.

From data analysis it is observed that fifty percent (50.54%) respondents of the study area have no idea about LGSP and specially the women are quite unaware about it. The rest fifty percent respondents, who aware about it, expressed their opinion differently; among them, 60 percent believe that block grant allocated under LGSP is used appropriately for the local development activities but the rest 40 percent do not know anything about the amount of block grant under LGSP. A great majority i.e. 72 percent opined that peoples' participation rate in the functions of Union Parishad has increased in comparison to the past but the participation rate is still far from the desirable standard and 89 percent think that people can give their opinion independently in the development planning program. Among the informed respondents about LGSP, 56 percent believe that peoples' participation in the implementation process is not satisfactory, while 95 percent told that demand of the

local people has been given priority for the implemented projects and overwhelming 90 percent respondents perceive that accountability of Union Parishad to the people has increased after the intervention of LGSP.

All respondents reported that UPs do not produce any progress report about the ongoing project under LGSP before the ward people and also opined that block grants amount is too small and reach the UPs 8-10 months late. About 65 percent respondents believe that after the intervention of LGSP it has created temporary employment opportunities for the poor women and unemployed people and almost all respondent said that the projects which have been implemented under LGSP did not create any negative impact on individual lives or the society.

From the study it appears that LGSP has succeeded moderately in achieving its objectives. However, the fact remains that about 50 percent of the respondents have no knowledge about LGSP and raises a validity question about its operational process and achievement even after three years of operations. From the overall data analysis and observations it can be concluded that the LGSP has initiated a positive start towards strengthening Union Parishad in terms of accountability, transparency and popular participation and need further consolidation and improvement.