

TRAJECTORY OF E- GOVERNANCE IN THE UNION PARISHAD OF BANGLADESH

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Abstract: The praxis of e-governance has become imminent in contemporary global scenario. Both developed and developing countries are engrossed in the thought of enhancing the credibility of administration through the mechanism of e-governance. Bangladesh, with its flamboyant culture and extraordinary historical antecedents is now concentrating on developing the nation-state on the foundation of good administration and development agenda. The emergence of e-governance in the administration of Bangladesh is of recent origin. The concept attained importance in the vision 2021 of the present government. The process of digitalization has gained an impressive momentum that convincingly is creating a platform for the general masses to participate in the development process. Union Parishad is the last tier of Local Government in Bangladesh that has great number of direct people's participation. At present more than 4,501 Union Parishads are brought under ICT communication and e-governance procedures. We have scarcity of resources and lack of well trained personnel. The education system and literacy rate of the country is not satisfactory. Creating awareness among the people is not possible overnight. The main constraint is that UP authorities are sometimes not well informed about this new concept and unwilling to accept the unknown. Any kind of change from documentation to the digitalization is resisted without knowing its benefit. Familiarization of the concept is of utmost priority. It's a fact that transparency and accountability can be ensured through e governance in Union Parishad that involves the participation of well educated youth who are closely involved in governance process of the country.

Keywords: Accountability, E-Governance, Local Government, Participation.

Introduction: "E-governance" one of the latest jargons in the contemporary intellectual discourse has brought about a paradigm shift in the field of public administration. By virtue of electronic technology, the scope and functions of governments, the nature of its operations and its delivery of services have come under a new direction. It also opens the gate of high efficiency and effectiveness. Electronic government simply means the delivery of government services and information to the public using electronic methods. The World Bank refers to e-governance as the use of information technologies (such as wide Area Networks, the Internet and mobile computing) by the government agencies. These technologies enable the government to transform its relations with its other wings, citizens, businesses such as exercise that leads to better

delivery of government services to citizens, improved interaction with business and industry, citizen's empowerment through access to information and more efficient government management.

The resulting benefits can be enhanced govt. policy implementation, transparency, lesser corruption, greater convenience, revenue growth and cost reductions. Many governments have undertaken transformation process that maximized the utilization of information and communication technologies through e-government initiatives Bangladesh is also not lagging behind.

Union Parishad: Union Parishad started at first in 1870 by the Village Chakidari Act. In 1983 by the Local government Union Parishad ordinance the present structure came into being.

Year	Act/Ordinance	Name
1870	Village Chakidari Act	Chakidari Panchayat
1919	Bengal Local Self Government Act	Union Board
1949	Fundamental Democratic Act	Union Council
1972	President Order No.- 7	Union Panchayat
1973	President Order No.- 22	Union Parishad
1983	Local Government Union Parishad Ordinance	Union Parishad

E-Governance: As governments in developing countries make choices to pursue public administration reforms, many are using ICTs to offer e-Government services. E-Government utilizes the Internet and the World Wide Web for both service delivery and information dissemination.

For this report, e-Government is defined as: the use of information and communication technologies in government to provide public services to improve managerial effectiveness and to promote democratic values and mechanisms; as well as a regulatory framework that facilitates information intensive initiatives and fosters the knowledge society (Gil-Garcia and Luna-Reyes 2003). By using ICTs in this way, governments expect to improve the quality of services and reduce the costs of delivering services. Other e-Government goals are to improve the utilization of scarce resources, enhance accountability and transparency, expand the role of markets, and restore citizen trust and faith in government.

Rationale For E-Government: The flow of information is essential for effective governance and managing the day-to-day business of government services. Every aspect of a person's public life generates information. Each tax payment, license renewal, birth, death, marriage, land purchase, and so on generates data that is collected, processed, stored, communicated and analyzed by governments. All these information is the basic ingredient for governments to govern, manage its resources, provide services, and account for its performance (Heeks 1999). Information "is a valuable national resource. It provides the public with knowledge of the government, society, and economy – past, present, and future. It is a means to ensure the accountability of government, to manage the government's operations, to maintain the healthy performance of the economy... The free flow of information between the government and the public is essential to a democratic society" (OMB 2000).

Because of this, many such administrative reforms as transparency, accountability, and openness focus on improving information management practices. Government activities require information to support internal management, public administration and regulation, and public services, as well as to make information publicly available (Heeks 1999). Information quality means putting management systems and controls in place to ensure that information is accurate, relevant, complete, economical, verifiable, accessible, simple, and secure. To comply, governments seek to minimize the cost of managing information and maximize the usefulness of government information (OMB 2000). ICTs are the most cost effective means for capturing data from the internal operation of government organizations and

for serving citizens. As part of the e-Government approach, ICTs create opportunities to reduce the costs of providing information and services to the public.

Goals Of E-Government: The goals of e-Government vary considerably among governments worldwide. Rightfully, the goals of e-Government are determined locally based on the political leadership of each government. However, key institutional stakeholders influence these goals among many countries. The World Summit for the Information Society Plan of Action recommends for governments to develop national e-Government initiatives and services, at all levels, adapted to the needs of citizens and business, to achieve a more efficient allocation of resources and public goods" (WSIS 2005). Furthermore, governments should "support international cooperation initiatives in the field of e-Government, in order to enhance transparency, accountability and efficiency at all levels of government" (WSIS 2005). As such, these approaches reorient governments to treat citizens as customers of government services and improve the day-to-day management of financial and budgetary systems. Through e-Government, governments are expected to improve performance and outcomes. Governments expect to achieve such gains as (OECD 2003):

- Online data collection to reduce data entry costs and automate error checking;
- Reduce the communication costs with citizens;
- Greater sharing of data within government and between governments and other such stakeholders as NGO's, international agencies, and private sector firms;
- Greater re-use of data;
- Reduce government publication and distribution costs through online publication.

Objective Of E-Government: The objective of e-Government is not only to computerize government offices but also to transform the way the government operates. According to the World Bank E-government refers to the use by government agencies of information technologies that have the ability to transform relations with citizens businesses, and other arms of government. But the process will take time and significant amount of re-engineering of processes. Hence e-Government is not just another way of doing existing activities; it is a transformation on a scale that will fundamentally alter the way public services are delivered. It does not have a timeline; rather it is evolutionary. The relationship is no longer just a one-way, Government versus them citizens proposition; rather it is about building a partnership between governments and their citizens. However, e-Government may have following key objectives:

The strategic objective of e-governance is to support and simplify governance for all parties' e-government, citizens and businesses. The use of ICTs can connect all three parties and support processes and activities. In other words, in e-governance uses electronic means to support and stimulate good governance. Therefore the objectives of e-governance are similar to the objectives of good governance. Good governance can be seen as an exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to better manage affairs of a country at all levels, national and local.

Facilitate the government operations In the back-office, the objective of e-government in government operations is to facilitate a speedy, transparent, accountable, efficient and effective process for performing government administration activities. Significant cost savings (per transaction) in government operations can be the result.

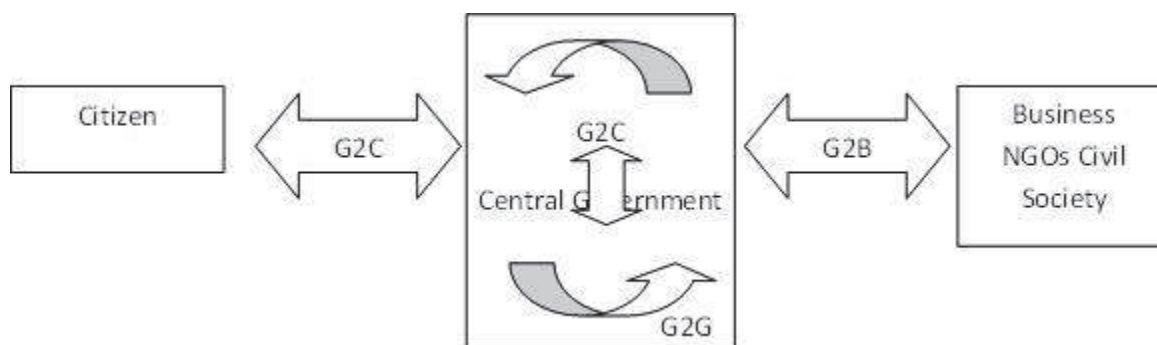
Components Of E-Government: There are four major components of e-government i.e. Government- to- Citizen, Government-to-Business, Government-to-Government and Government-to-Employee.

- **Government-to-Citizen (G2C)** involves interaction of individual with the government. E-government has the potential to involve citizens in the governance process by engaging them in interaction' with policymakers throughout the policy cycle and at all levels of government. Strengthening civic

engagement contributes to building public trust in government.

- **Government-to-Business (G2B)** involves interaction of business entities with the government. It facilitates corporate tax filing and involvement of business communities in government procurement process through the internet.
- **Government-to-Government (G2G)** involves interaction among government offices as well as governments of other countries. It ensures internal efficiency and effectiveness that includes making good use of modern technology to reduce costs and improve quality of the government ministries and departments. It includes using e-mail for internal government communication or customized software for tracking progress of government projects.
- **Government-to-Employee (G2E)** involves interaction between the government and its employees for services such as salary, pension, holiday etc. It includes database-driven personnel data sheet software for each government employee that keeps records of all kinds of personnel information, which can be looked up with ease and convenience when required.

stages of e-government: With regards to internal government process automation, the stages of e-government 5-e following, we can see these components through a model-



1st Stage: Within individual offices in this stage, automation takes place within individual government offices. Customized software are created but used only by officials within that office.

2nd Stage: Among different offices, in this stage, interactions and information exchange among different government offices take place through ICT-based systems. Users in different offices have access to each other's databases. Some common formats of communication and data-storage are developed in this stage.

3rd Stage: Operations and responsibilities integrated through ICT systems. In this stage, operations and

responsibilities of different are re-organized and integrated on the basis of ICT systems. A database getting updated in one office has impact on the function of another office.

E-Governance In Union Parishad: E-Governance has now become a static point of performance delivery. Today's world is shaped by availability of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Because global economy is powered by technology, fueled by information and driven by knowledge. This rapid change demands a dynamic renovation in Bangladesh also. Government of Bangladesh is committed to foster the development activities

through the appropriate use of ICTs, and declared a vision of 'Digital Bangladesh' by 2021 to ensure services at peoples' doorsteps. Information and Services Centre (UISC) is ICT enabled one-stop service outlet located at Parishads at (the lowest tier of the local government) level. Similar to the 'telecentre' concept by different private organizations, the UISC model, however, is unique in the sense that it builds on the concept of Public Private Partnership (PPP) instead of donation dependant models, and brings govt. services within reach of every citizen in terms of proximity and cost. A total number of 4,501 UISCs have been established at all Parishads, all of them inaugurated simultaneously on 11th November, 2010 by Hon'ble Prime Minister of Bangladesh and UNDP's administrator and former Prime Minister of New Zealand Ms Helen Clark in order to translate the dream of 'Digital Bangladesh' into reality.

Historical Background: UISC emerged from its earlier version known as CeC (Community e- Centre) is a Public Service Delivery Channel. In 2007, two Community e-Centre (CeC) was established as pilot under Democratic Government Thematic Trust Fund (DGTTF) of UNDP. In early 2008, CeC has been included as a driver project of UNDP supported Access to Information (azi) Programme of Prime Minister's Office. In 2008, Local Government Division (LGD) started 30 CeCs in Parishad. In line with that, LGD established UISCs in all Parishads of Bangladesh. UNDP supported Access to Information (azi) Programme of Prime Minister's Office plays a catalytic role in this regard. Each UISC is operated by two local entrepreneurs – one female and one male local youth - who have invested in the centre, and is supervised by the associated Parishad which provides space and utilities.

Objectives And Services Of E-Governance In Union Parishad: To ensure easy access of common people to government and commercial and social information and services

- To create ICT infrastructure at all Parishads and to increase efficiency of Parishads through prompt delivery of information and other day to day services.
- To provide a supportive environment for creation of local entrepreneurs.
- To ensure free flow of information for empowering rural community.
- To create a vibrant, knowledge-based Parishad.

Services of Union Parishad through e-governance

Popular Government Services: Public examination results; Online university admission; Government forms; Birth and death registration; Citizenship certificate; VGD/VGF list Government circulars and notices; Agriculture and health consultancy; Govt. life insurance; Services of DC office (35+); Development

(VGD, VGF, TR, minority welfare, Kabikha, sports and cultural activities, development of educational institutions); Revenue (Porcha, khas land distribution, Ashrayon, Non-agricultural land purchase, land acquisition money, requisition, certificate suit, hat and bazaar, vested property, exchange property, stamp vendor license, land survey); License (C.I Sheet, Cement, Poison, Food grain); Complain and remedy (pension, land, family affairs, law and orders); Relief and rehabilitation (Donation, grant, GR); Certification (marriage, NGO); Miscellaneous (Different committee approval, different appointments, dramatical performance, expatriate welfare, examination matters).

Popular private services: Email; internet browsing; computer training; english learning of British council; m-banking (Dutch Bangla Bank, Mercantile Bank, Trust Bank; One Bank, Bkash Limited); photography; job information; passport processing; visa application and tracking; service camp; video conference; print; scan; lamination; compose; photocopy; mobile service; soil test; arsenic test height and weight measurement; deed writings

Public Private Partnership in Union Parishad: In order to UISCs to survive successfully in the long run, support from various govt. and private organizations is being mobilized through partnerships, these entities not only offer people oriented services through these centres, some of them also provides hardware maintenance and other technical support to keep these centres operational. In the forefront of such partnerships are public and private banks (e.g. Dutch Bangla, Mercantile Bank) – powered by the upcoming online banking facilities, Life Insurance agency (e.g. Jibonbima), telecommunications (e.g. Robi, Banglalink), non-govt. organizations (Dhaka Ahsania Mission, Practical Action) and govt. agencies and projects (e.g. Cabinet Division, Bangladesh Computer Council). A range of useful services (e.g. British Council's English learning) is available at the union level, and govt. agencies are benefitting by using the UISC infrastructure and resources for data collection, registration for various schemes, transparent beneficiary identification and disbursement of Social Safety Nets allowances, so on and so forth.

Telecom Industry: Banglalink, Robi.

Financial Institutions: Dutch Bangla Bank, Mercantile Bank, Trust Bank Limited, One Bank Limited, Bikash Ltd (BRAC Bank).

Education institutions: British Council, Ankur ICT Development Foundation.

Solar energy: IDCOL (Infrastructure Development Company Limited), Climate Change Unit (Ministry of Environment and Forest).

Insurance companies: Jiban Bima Corporation.

NGOs: Practical Action Bangladesh, Dhaka Ahsania

Mission, Swanirvor Bangladesh.

Technical trouble shooting: Bangladesh Computer Council (BCC), Bangladesh Computer Samity (BCS) Cyber Cafe Owners' Association of Bangladesh (CCOAB).

Challenges Of E-Governance In Up: At present the UISCs are facing the following challenges of Electricity problem like internet speed is very slow in rural level and there is coordination gap among the union parishad chairman and uisc entrepreneurs. Few officers of local administration are not pro-active as well. Entrepreneurs' dropout rate is high, all entrepreneurs' technical skills as well as accounting skills are not enough. Campaign, mobilization and marketing strategy are not enough.

Steps To Overcome Challenges: 'Digital Bangladesh' is the country's ultimate dream, and indispensable for country's national development. UISC is an important step to translate this dream into reality. So, various measures are taken to meet the current challenges -

- Solar panel has been set up in 1013 UISCs where there was no electricity at all; solar panel is also going to set up in heavy load shading UISCs soon
- Discussion is going on with different telecommunication companies for improving the speed of interaction connections at UISCs.
- Various workshops are going on in district and sub-district (Upazila) level with the presence of Union Parishad chairmen, Union Parishad secretaries, entrepreneurs and the officers of local administration to reduce the gaps among them.
- Strong monitoring and follow-up mechanism for local administration is going to establish from Cabinet Division, Local Government Division (LGD) as well as, Prime Minister's Office in order to make the UISC sustainable.
- Entrepreneurs' training from local district administration has been started whenever and wherever needed.
- Advance course on technical issue, accounting, mobilization, communication and marketing

strategy will be addressed soon for UISC entrepreneurs.

Problems Of Introducing E-Governance In Union Parishad:

Lack of skilled manpower and its salary; lack of adequate training programs; supply of electricity across the nation; high-cost; low-reliability of internet access; limitation of electronic devices; weak mentality; lack of awareness; corruption.

Conclusion: In Bangladesh, e-Governance is vital not only to establish a democratic and transparent government but also to fight poverty and act as a cross-cutting enabler for interventions geared towards attainment of all the millennium goals. It is also necessary for ensuring government accountability, decentralization and providing effective and efficient service delivery to citizens. Present government of our country has taken lots of measures for digitalizing governmental settings. Application of e-governance in Parishad is one of them. Government of Bangladesh declared a vision of Digital Bangladesh by 2021 to ensure services at peoples' doorsteps. A total number of 4,501 Information and Services Centres (UISCs) have been established at all Parishads, all of them inaugurated simultaneously on 11th November, 2010 by Hon'ble Prime Minister of Bangladesh and UNDP's administrator and former Prime Minister of New Zealand Ms Helen Clark in order to translate the dream of 'Digital Bangladesh' into reality. Similar to the 'telecentre' concept by different private organizations, the UISC model is unique in the sense that it is founded on the concept of Public Private Partnership (PPP) instead of donation dependant models. At present 9002 young entrepreneurs are working with 4,501 UISCs, and half of them are women. In the forefront of such partnerships are private banks. Hopefully Bangladesh, as one of the new nation-states will emerge as a paragon in the e-governance mechanism of digitalizing the administration in entirety fulfilling people's dreams and prospects.

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