

Role of Local Government in Localizing SDG in Bangladesh

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Abstract

This study is unearthing the localizing process of SDG in Bangladesh in meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) targets. Though nations bear the main responsibility for the SDGs, these goals specifically call for involvement from local authorities. Around 12 of the 17 SDGs require comprehensive strategies at the grassroots level to tackle interconnected issues like poverty, poor health, social challenges, and environmental degradation, with exceptions being Goals 9, 12, 13, 14, and 17. Bangladesh's constitution wisely allocates significant responsibilities for social and economic development, including the formulation and execution of plans concerning public services and economic progress, to the local government bodies, particularly the union parishad (UP), which serves as the primary interface with the community [Article 59(2)(c)(Constitution, 2004)]. Local Government Institutions in Bangladesh are positioned to have a significant influence on the localization of the SDGs, given their proximity to the most marginalized and frequently vulnerable rural communities, allowing for direct impact. Despite this potential, they have yet to make a substantial contribution to SDG localization, and with the deadline approaching, there is a pressing need to address this issue. This paper seeks to examine the obstacles encountered by local government in Bangladesh in their efforts to localize the SDGs, aiming to gain insight into the challenges hindering effective policy implementation.

Keywords: Localization, SDG, Local Government

1. INTRODUCTION

On September 25, 2015, world leaders convened at the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit to endorse the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which outlines 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These goals aim to eradicate poverty, combat inequality and injustice, and address climate change by the year 2030. As Bangladesh achieved most of the goals in MDG now it's eye to achieve the SDGs. To achieve those goals, all the stakeholder's participation must me needed. From those local government and rural part is a major stakeholder implementing SDGs. "Localization" involves considering subnational circumstances in realizing the 2030 Agenda, encompassing tasks such as establishing goals and targets, determining implementation strategies, and utilizing indicators for progress tracking [2]. This concept pertains to the support local and regional governments can provide for SDG achievement through grassroots

action, as well as how the SDGs can serve as a blueprint for local development policies.

The SDGs are global in scope, meaning they are relevant to all nations worldwide. Local and regional governments have significantly impacted the formulation of the SDGs [3], advocating effectively for the inclusion of a dedicated goal on Sustainable Cities and Human Settlements and for acknowledging the crucial role of local and regional governments in fostering sustainable development on an international level. However, there are challenges in this process, including a lack of capacity, resources and funding, as well as a need for decentralization and empowerment of the local government [4]. Our research paper aims to explore the process of localizing the SDGs in Bangladesh and identify the associated challenges. No previous research has been conducted on this topic. Local government institutions and local administration have proven to be beneficial for development at the local level. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), an all-encompassing development strategy created by the United Nations, aim to be realized by 2030[5].

Despite these challenges, there is a strong desire among local government representatives to gain more knowledge and participate in the SDGs [4], [6]. A practical framework has been proposed to link the SDGs with local government activities in Bangladesh [2]. The empowerment of Bangladeshi women is also a crucial aspect of achieving the SDGs [7]. The role of local and regional governments in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is crucial, as they are responsible for implementing and monitoring strategies at the local level [8]). However, this task is not without its challenges, particularly in countries like Bangladesh, where the goals are interconnected and require a whole-of-society approach [9]. Despite these challenges, Bangladesh has made significant progress in poverty reduction, gender equality, and access to sanitation and electricity, demonstrating the potential for successful SDG implementation through partnerships and engagement with various stakeholders.

2. METHODS

This study employs an exploratory approach. Primary data was collected from two Union parishad of Dhaka districts of Savar Upazilla. Primary sources are the most authentic and reliable for gathering information, these primary data sources are essential for the data collection process [10]. Secondary data was gathered from various sources including books, articles, websites, and newspapers. Existing literature pertaining to issues surrounding SDG implementation, institutional deficiencies. The data collected for this study includes both qualitative and quantitative information, allowing for a more holistic analysis of the research topic [11]. The study primarily focuses on localizing the SDG through local government specially Union Parishad, the lowest tier of government (UP). To ensure optimal

results, a progressive and methodical research technique was employed. This roadmap for localizing the SDGs has been drawn up by the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments, UNDP and UN Habitat to support cities and regions to deliver the 2030 Agenda.

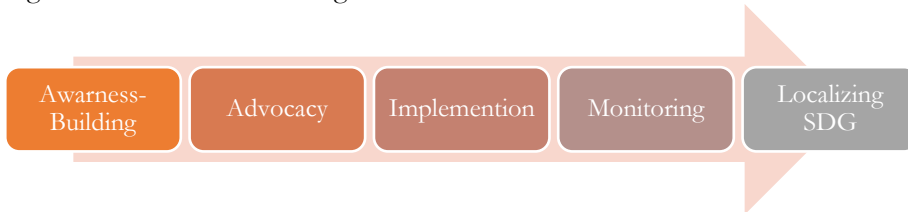


Figure 1. Roadmap of Localizing the SDG

Source: Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments, UNDP and UN Habitat, 2016

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Role of Local Government in localizing SDG in Bangladesh

Local governments serve as administrative entities responsible for conducting operations on behalf of their respective communities. In their role as representatives of the public sector, local governments execute administrative endeavors aimed at benefiting residents, while also striving to engage with the private sector to generate beneficial outcomes whenever feasible [12]. Bangladesh has embraced 39+1 National Priority Targets for localizing SDGs. Initiatives to ensure Leave No One Behind (LNOB) should commence at the grassroots level. Engaging local public representatives and NGOs at the Union/Paurashava level can expedite progress towards SDGs by involving community members directly. Effective planning by local governments should be grounded in evidence, utilizing disaggregated data to inform decision-making processes [13].

In rural Bangladesh, strengthening local government is crucial for enhancing access to essential services and facilitating the involvement of marginalized groups like the poor, peasants, workers, and women in decision-making processes and development initiatives tailored to their needs. Local government plays a pivotal role in implementing policies and programs geared towards improved service delivery, poverty alleviation, inequality reduction, climate resilience, and gender equality, aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) [14]. Active engagement and participation of peasants, workers, and women in local governance are essential for SDG attainment in rural Bangladesh, necessitating a redistribution of powers and resources to marginalized communities. Bangladesh's pioneering efforts in utilizing MDGs and localizing global agendas demonstrate its commitment to grassroots-level development. This article closely examines the symbiotic relationship between SDGs and rural local governance in Bangladesh

while pinpointing the challenges faced by Union Parishads in contributing to sustainable development [15].

Bangladesh has become developed day by day, driven by increasing export revenues from the information and communication technology (ICT) sector and through the help of IT, SDGs targets will be achieved within the time frame [16]. SDG 1 aims to combat poverty through comprehensive strategies, highlighting the critical role of local government (LG). SDG 2 emphasizes food security and sustainable agriculture, underscoring the significant contributions LG can make in managing natural resources and supporting agricultural production. SDG 5 focuses on gender equality, highlighting LG's potential to serve as a model for promoting non-discriminatory services and fair employment practices. SDG 6 addresses access to clean water and sanitation, recognizing LG's crucial role in improving water quality and sanitation. SDG 13 highlights LG's role in climate action and building community resilience. Lastly, SDG 16 calls for effective and accountable governance.

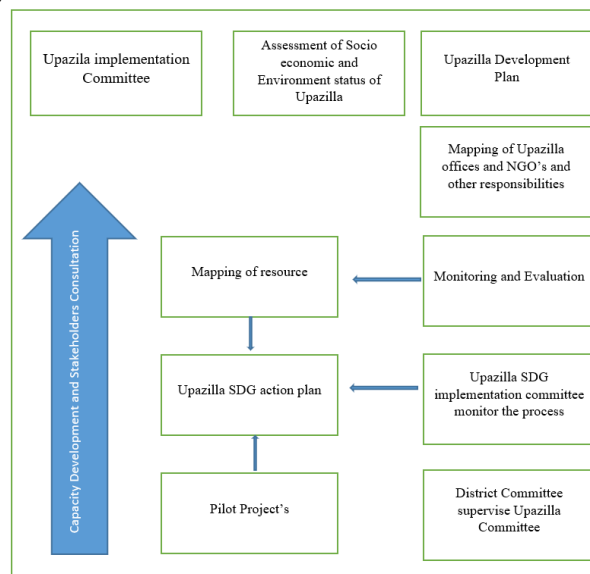


Figure 2. Proposed SDGs localisation framework in Bangladesh

Source: General Economic Division (GED), Bangladesh Planning Commission, Ministry of planning, 2018.

On May 16, 2019, the Cabinet Division established three committees: The Divisional Committee, chaired by the Divisional Commissioner; the District Committee, chaired by the Deputy Commissioner, with Members of Parliament (MPs) serving as advisors. The General Economics Division (GED) of the Government of Bangladesh proposed a framework for localization, which was deliberated in the SDGs Implementation and Review Committee. It was decided

that at the Upazila level, the Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) would coordinate the implementation of this localization model, engaging government agencies and local government bodies [17]. This initiative aims to enhance coordination among stakeholders to meet SDG targets and maximize investment while minimizing vulnerabilities and prioritizing marginalized communities.

3.2. Natore Model for localizing SDG

The local government administration in Natore District has devised an SDG District Action Plan, referred to as the Natore Model, aimed at aligning all government offices and stakeholders with the 2030 Agenda. This model is geared towards implementing SDGs at the district level to tackle local challenges, leverage opportunities, and enact action plans across all government agencies. Recognized by the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) as a replicable model, it holds promise for adoption in other government administrations. This model did not account for the structural obstacles present in Bangladesh's local government system. Additionally, the significant roles played by local government officials, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), NGOs, and other stakeholders in the implementation process were not distinctly outlined. Consequently, ensuring its proper and inclusive implementation remains a significant challenge.

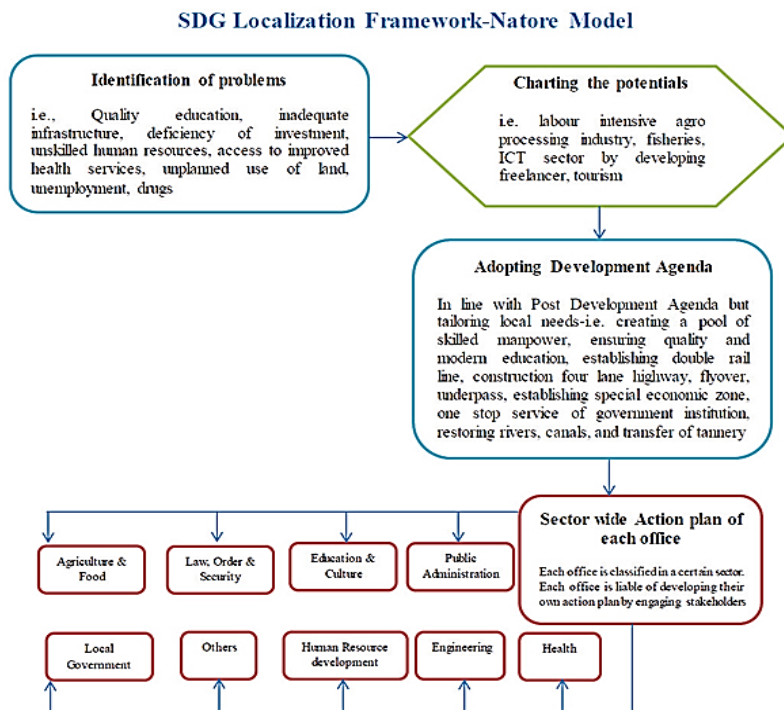


Figure 3. Natore Model for localizing SDG

Table 3. Major programs taken by the UP in Bangladesh

SDG	Types of Programmes by Local administration
SDG-1: No Poverty	1) Allowances for the Financially Insolvent Disabled 2) Old Age Allowance. 3) Income Support Program for the Poorest-Jawtno (ISPP). 4) "Gucchagram" (Climate Victims Rehabilitation).
SDG-2: Zero Hunger	1) Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF). 2) Vulnerable Group Development (VGD). 3) Food for Work (FFW). 4) School Feeding Programmes. 5) Open Market Sales (OMS).
SDG-3: Good Health	1) Primary Health Service. 2) Union Health and Family Welfare Center (UHFWC). 3) Satellite Clinic. 4) Community Based Health Care 5) providing child-care, controlling of 6) contaminated diseases, supporting oppressed women.
SDG-4: Education	1) Infrastructural development 2) Student service corners. 3) Primary and Secondary School Stipend. 4) Working as a member of the Upazila Education Standing Committee
SDG-6: Clean water and Sanitation	1) Develop water supply. 2) Sanitation and sewerage facilities in rural and urban areas.
SDG-9: Infrastructure Development	1) Road Construction. 2) Bridge Construction 3) Box culverts Construction
SDG-13: Climate action	1) Tree plantation 2) Clearance certificates for environment 3) Monitoring of local mills and factories. 4) Coastal Climate Resilient Infrastructure Improvement.

3.3. Knowledge about the Sustainable Development Goals

For practical examination, we had collected some data of Savar Upazilla Under Dhaka district for examined the knowledge level and perception of general people about SDG. Understanding sustainable development is crucial for local-level

progress. Among the 17 goals, Bangladesh proposed 15 goals, and achieving them relies on local-level project implementation aligned with SDGs. Therefore, having knowledge about sustainable development is essential for selecting projects that promote sustainability. However, our survey indicates to assess whether projects are selected in line with SDGs but found that this aspect is lacking due to limited SDG awareness among respondents.

Table 4. Knowledge about SDGs

UP Name	Know about SDG	%	Don't know	%
Pathalia	5	9.43	48	90.57
Birulia	7	12.28	50	87.72
Total	12	10.90	98	89.09

Table 4 show the Knowledge about the 17 goals of sustainable development. The survey results are highly unsatisfactory, revealing that most respondents, including chairmen, ward members, and secretaries of the UP, lack awareness of the sustainable development goals (SDGs), despite the critical importance of local areas in Bangladesh for achieving these goals. According to the survey, 89.09% of the total 110 respondents, amounting to 98 individuals, have no knowledge of the SDGs. Surprisingly, even some high school teachers are unaware of the SDGs, with only a small portion of respondents, 10.9% or 12 individuals, having vague knowledge about them. SDGs for local government is the representatives to raise awareness and consciousness about these goals, which are slated to be achieved by 2030. Without sufficient knowledge of the goals, it remains doubtful whether local representatives can effectively contribute to their attainment. The survey results are depicted in Figure 4 for clarity.

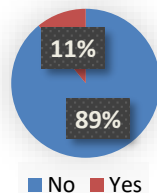


Figure 4. Knowledge about SDGs

3.4. The Selection Process of Major Development Projects

The primary aim is to investigate the factors driving the selection of development projects in local government. To achieve this, we explored various possible avenues of project selection and gathered opinions from all respondents. The survey data reveals the predominant process of project selection as shown in Table

5. While we outlined the project selection procedure in Union Parishads, it appears that none of the unions strictly adhere to this process. Several factors influence decision-making and project selection. The role of the word committee is crucial in determining development activities regularly. Additionally, according to one secretary of the Union Parishads speaking on condition of anonymity, there have been allegations of the chairman misusing their authority in the project selection process.

Table 5. Selection Process of Major Development Projects in UP

	No	%
Word committee	53	47.27
Representative decision	29	27.27
Political decision	21	20
No Comments	7	5.45
On Public demands	23	21.82

3.5. Challenges of localizing SDGs

A notable challenge in policy implementation and the localization of SDGs arises from conflicts between locally elected representatives and local administrative officials, one key factor contributing to this challenge is the lack of knowledge and awareness regarding the SDGs among elected representatives of Union Parishads. Consequently, there is a reluctance to pursue measures such as tax collection for enhancing local resource mobilization, which could significantly aid policy implementation. Additionally, the absence of clear planning and implementation guidance, coupled with a fear of uncertainty, further impedes SDG localization efforts. Both local government representatives and field administration officials acknowledge the challenge posed by long-term SDG objectives, which extend beyond the tenure of local representatives and may not align with their immediate priorities in planning [19].

Localizing the SDGs can help the Government achieve its goal of transforming the nation into a smart Bangladesh by 2041, as per its strategic decision [20]. Advancing SDG localization entails leveraging the collective strengths of all UN agencies and addressing transboundary challenges. Key areas of focus include enhancing local-level data and analytics capabilities, engaging in community consultations and participatory planning, mobilizing local resources, and ensuring implementation by local entities. Establishing a national-level observatory to identify best practices, adopting evidence-driven Annual Development Programme (ADP) budgeting, and prioritizing at least one underdeveloped district from each division to enhance performance across 39+1 indicators are vital steps. Coordination efforts will be led by the principal SDG coordination body, with the Ministry of Local Government. This initiative aims to enhance service delivery, focusing particularly on the needs of underserved groups [21].

4. CONCLUSION

Local governments serve as pivotal agencies in mobilizing local stakeholders and resources to facilitate inclusive sustainable development. Among these, Union Parishads are crucial local government bodies providing services at the village level in Bangladesh. Local action is paramount in devising and executing concrete strategies, methods, and tools to advance the SDGs, considering contextual factors and engaging relevant stakeholders. The pivotal role of local government in SDG achievement is widely recognized internationally, emphasizing their direct involvement in service delivery and community engagement. Therefore, the concept of localization must receive serious attention from the national governments and international community, ensuring adequate political, financial, managerial, and technical support, particularly in developing countries where basic service provision remains a priority on the development agenda.

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