
SERVICE DELIVERY PERFORMANCE OF URBAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN BANGLADESH

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Abstract

Urban local government is critical to the delivery of essential services to residents. Paurashava is one of the tiers of local governments in Bangladesh. But, Paurashava is faced with increasing financial problems. Due to financial restrictions, city governments seem unable to expand much-needed infrastructure and utility services, as well as maintain current facilities at a sufficient level. To enhance urban living standards and alleviate constraints on the national budget, these governments' financial positions must be strengthened. The present study is aimed at exploring the performance management of Paurashava service delivery through utilizing mixed methods. Three Paurashavas were sampled for an in-depth study. The findings of the study reveal that resource mobilization opportunities in Bangladesh's urban areas are limited. A percentage of government grants that are paid based on performance can also be utilized to generate local resources. The major problems are inadequate assessment, inelasticity of revenue, employee training, and poor administration. This paper shows the performance evaluation of the Paurashava by its clients. Thus, this research is helpful to local government policymakers, municipal authorities as policy implementers and service providers, academicians, and those interested in local government and decentralized service delivery systems.

Keywords: Citizen; Services; the Urban Governance; Performance; Paurashava.

INTRODUCTION

The delivery of services to citizens relies heavily on the urban municipal government. Paurashava is one of Bangladesh's layers of local administration. Paurashava in Bangladesh is facing mounting financial difficulties. Due to a lack of financial resources, city administrations have been unable to invest in much-needed infrastructure and utility services and maintain existing ones at a sufficient level. To improve urban living standards and relieve constraints on the national budget, these governments' financial positions must be strengthened.

This study aims to look into how Paurashava service delivery is managed in terms of performance. Three Paurashavas were chosen for further investigation. According to the study's findings, there is a slight possibility for resource mobilization from Bangladesh's metropolitan areas. If a portion of the government funding is distributed based on performance, it can be used to assist produce local resources. Bad evaluation, revenue inelasticity, lack of personnel training, and poor administration are the key issues.

Its users in this study evaluated Paurashava's performance. As a result, this study is considered helpful to local government policymakers, municipal authorities as policy implementers and

service providers, academics, and anybody interested in local government and localized service delivery systems.

The local government in Bangladesh plays a vital role in initiating and implementing development projects, resolving conflicts, and giving judicial redress to people at the grassroots level through village courts. However, since the system's foundation, local bodies have been susceptible to the dominance of bureaucrats and national-level politicians. According to Ahmed et al. (2014), the organization of Bangladesh's urban local self-governments has evolved due to growing urbanization, and different issues have plagued these institutions since their inception.

The functions of Paurashavas were created to ensure civic amenities and excellent municipal management. However, they are unable to deliver high-quality civic amenities to city dwellers. As a result, all of these services must be appropriately delivered for Bangladesh's metropolitan areas to be managed effectively. Union Parishad, Upazila Parishad, Zilla Parishad, City Corporation, and Paurashava are the local government entities discussed by Siddiqui (2005) at both the rural and urban levels. Bangladesh's current local government structure evolved over a lengthy period. In addition, after Bangladesh's independence,

reforms were made to these institutions. The central government heavily influences these institutions. These institutions have management flaws, which is why they are unable to provide good services (Curristine et al., 2008). It has recently been demonstrated that effective leadership is required to achieve positive performance outcomes (Andrews & Boyne, 2010).

Bangladesh has a significant population overgrowing and is on track to surpass 230-250 million by 2050 (Haider, 2018). Bangladesh has had a democratic system akin to the west for the previous two decades, both in national and municipal urban governance (Islam, 2013). The democratic municipal government has a considerably longer history (Nour & Ahamed, 2017). However, much work remains to be done in terms of enhancing the quality of governance. Local urban governments lack sufficient authority, autonomy, and financial capacity. Additionally, the level of citizen participation is insufficient (Chowdhury & Aktaruzzaman, 2016). However, urban development and governance now involve a more significant number of stakeholders than ever before.

Coordination among agencies operating in metropolitan areas remains a significant challenge (Rahman, 2015; Panday & Jamil, 2011). International experience reveals that a critical

component of sustainable urban development is effective governance, mainly through municipal administrations. As a result, actions should be taken to devolve authority and power from the central government to the City Corporation and Pourashava levels and develop these local organizations' competence and capability for effective interaction with citizens and meeting their needs.

Effective urban governance requires the elected representatives of City Corporations and Pourashavas to lead effectively, with municipal officials, central government agencies operating at the local level, the private sector, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society, and, finally, the people. In simple terms, local government can be characterized as an integral aspect of central government constituted through locally elected representatives to facilitate legitimately assigned welfare operations. It acts as a link between residents and the central government, which provides services and grants. It is intended to be used by locally elected officials to manage local matters. It places a premium on the effective engagement of residents, which can be accomplished in part by organizing elections to select a local government. Additionally, Duane Locked defines local government as a public institution empowered to make and implement a

restricted number of public policies within a minimal geographic area subdivided into a regional or national government (Siddiqui, 2005). Thus, it is apparent that local governments in a region exercise certain vested rights of central government solely for the benefit of grassroots people.

The central government gives local governments limited authority, functions, and sovereignty, but it retains a large amount of overall supervision in local and urban areas (Sharmin et al., 2012). Local government entities had never been genuinely self-governing in independent Bangladesh (Uddin, 2019). They might be described as an extension of the central government with residents' direct and limited participation. As a result, municipal governments have historically been weak institutionally and fiscally, mismanaged, and lacking social and political confidence.

Absence of True Autonomy A significant restraint on rural and urban local governance relies on the federal government. It has been said by one authority that there is a "clear patron-client relationship" between the national and local governments (Siddiqui, 2005). Financial control over Local Government Entities Bangladesh's local government entities has historically been resource-scarce. Local government entities must borrow money or receive grants from the

federal government (De Vera & Kim, 2003). Local self-government bodies in Bangladesh are perpetually cash-strapped. Their primary source of revenue is through tariffs, rates, charges, and charges collected by the local body, as well as rents and profits generated by the municipal body's assets and sums collected through its services (Islam, 2015). Other sources of revenue include contributions from individuals and institutions, government grants, investment gains, receipts from trusts deposited with local bodies, loans raised by the local body, and proceeds from such services. Through its administration, the central government has exercised control over financial aspects such as taxation, budgetary production, and the allocation of funds and projects (ADB, 2018). Although local government organizations are authorized by law to collect taxes, executive orders prevent them from doing so.

Budgetary allocations are limited inadequate funding for local government organizations contributes to rural poverty, expanding the economic divide between rural and urban communities (United Nations, 2021). Underscoring the need for local government openness and accountability, it is suggested that a vigorous movement should be launched to compel the government to grant local government institutions the necessary

authority to ensure democracy (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011). The potential of local government is apparent. Throughout history, local government units have played a key role in promoting democracy and the involvement of women at the national level. It alleviates the central government's workload (European Commission, 2016).

The success of a country's socioeconomic and political development is contingent upon the effectiveness and efficiency of the central government and the effectiveness and efficiency of local government. However, due to a lack of human resources, ineffective employees, insufficient funding, uncertainty over the tiers of local government, and a lack of public engagement and accountability, the local government system is now incapable of providing adequate service to the people (Suwanda, & Suryana, 2020). These flaws should be addressed immediately; else, they will cause misery to the populace.

Currently, rural local government in Bangladesh is divided into three tiers (Maniruzzaman & Haque, 2020), whereas metropolitan regions have a two-tiered unique set of local governments, omitting the Cantonment Board (Talukdar, 2009). Table 1 illustrates the current structures in urban areas.

Citizen satisfaction with service delivery is now a significant aspect of the governance process since it measures citizens' trust in local government entities (Mahmud, 2021). Chowdhury & Deb (2012) examine how the urban local government contributes significantly to the provision of services to the public. In addition to its other tasks, Bangladesh's urban local government is also in charge of environmental management. The goal of this research is to determine the function of Paurashavas (administrative entities made up of elected members in every municipality) in maintaining a clean and healthy environment.

Table 1. Present Urban Local Government Structure in Bangladesh

Level/ Unit	Name	Headed by	Election method	Revenue authority
Mega-City	City Corporation	Elected Mayor	Direct Election	Yes
Small City/ Town	Paurashava	Elected Mayor	Direct Election	Yes
Cantonment Area	Cantonment Board	Government Nominated Chairman	Not Applicable	No

Source: Talukdar (2009)

The study indicates that Paurashavas play a vital role in sustainable development, including waste disposal, sewage disposal, drainage construction, urban park protection, etc when it looks at Paurashava. However, many deficiencies, such as infrastructure, logistic support, skilled labor, and funding, as well as people's participation, obstruct the provision of these services. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) also focus on strong institutional performance. The study discusses several recommendations for resolving these issues.

METHODS

The study attempted to measure municipal service delivery. There are numerous studies on the services provided by municipal governments (Afroj et al.,

2021; Mahmud, 2021; Schoute et al., 2021; Masiya et al., 2019; Shin, 1977). However, only a few studies have used citizen opinion to assess urban government performance. The qualitative information gathered from various groups linked with local government makes up the field experiences.

The author evaluated the critical factors of timeliness maintenance, local influence, service quality, opportunities and facilities, infrastructural condition, level of adequate services, proficiency and awareness, equality in treatment, reliability in service delivery, and financial capacity based on the key literature (Khan, et. al., 2021; Mahmud, 2021; Hall, 2017). As a result, these criteria were employed to develop the study's analytical framework (see Figure 1)

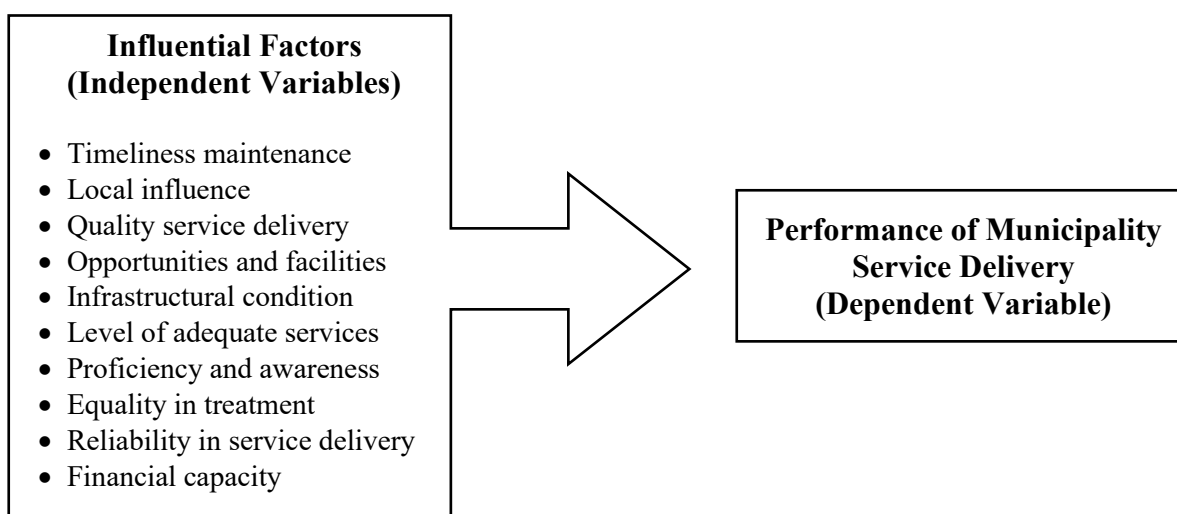


Figure 1. Analytical framework of the study

Source: Developed by the author based on Khan et al. 2021; Mahmud, 2021; Hall, 2017.

Table 2. Study Area and Criteria of Respondents

Study Area (Paurashava)	District	Criteria of Respondents	Type of research methods used	Number of Respondents
Laksam	Cumilla	Mayor, Elected representatives and designated government officials	Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)	5*3= 15
Barura Narsingdi	Narsingdi	General Citizens	Questionnaire survey	5*20=100

A field survey of selected Paurashava gathered the information. The survey sought qualitative data from all groups that contact LG institutions. The study was organized such that different levels of groups engaging in a similar location may explain their views and experiences, allowing researchers to cross-check information. This study used a descriptive research design. This study included both qualitative and quantitative research approaches. A mixed-methods study of service seekers (qualitative and quantitative both). Given the nature of the research, analytic research methods were used to finish it.

Primary and secondary sources of information were considered. The references come from books, journal articles, research reports, newspapers, and the internet. The researchers did a questionnaire survey to understand the demand side perspective better. The researchers also performed multiple key

informant interviews (KIIs) with local government authorities to gather qualitative data. The study involved three Paurashava in Bangladesh (Laksam, Barura & Narsingdi Paurashava). A total of 100 people were polled, and 15 Paurashava key informants were interrogated. Regarding gender, 60% of survey respondents are men, 40% are women, whereas 10% of key informants are men, and 5% are women. The following sections detail the study area and respondent selection criteria.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research aims to evaluate the performance of local government institutions and their service delivery in Bangladesh, with a focus on municipal government. Its analyzes information obtained through in-depth interviews with administrative officers (service providers) in the Paurashavas chosen. This part is separated into two sub-sections (demand

and supply sides), each of which outlines the study's most important findings.

Table 3. Response from the Field Survey: Views of Common People

Criteria	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Average	Little	Very Little
Timeliness Maintenance	5%	10%	20%	25%	30%	10%
Local Influence	5%	17%	14%	28%	11%	25%
Service Quality	5%	10%	20%	40%	15%	5%
Opportunities and Facilities	5%	10%	25%	40%	15%	5%
Infrastructural Condition	5%	3%	20%	17%	40%	15%
Level of Adequate Services	8%	13%	5%	24%	34%	16%
Proficiency and Awareness	12%	15%	18%	20%	28%	7%
Financial Capacity	8%	10%	6%	35%	29%	12%
Reliability in Service Delivery	6%	13%	20%	35%	11%	15%

Source: Field Survey 2019

The questionnaire survey results are discussed in the first sub-section, while the insights gathered through interviews with key informants are discussed in the second section.

Findings from the Survey

In this Paurashava, service is supplied in both traditional and digital modes, but e-service is not provided fruitfully owing to server troubles, according to 40% of respondents. When the Paurashava is supplied with services, a variety of issues arise. One of the most serious issues is that lower-level staff are insufficiently skilled (Biswas & Rahman, 2018), resulting in services not reaching citizens on time. According to 28% of the respondents, there was minimal proficiency and awareness. Insufficient funding is observed (Hossain & Sheikh,

2018) in these Paurashava locations, according to 35% of respondents.

It is also a major concern causing Paurashava to fumble in supplying old, widowed, and autism rations on time. The municipal services, according to 34% of respondents, are insufficient. Ration food is inadequate in a month, and as a result, all the poor people are unable to live comfortably (Badhan et al., 2019). Another issue with this Paurashava is this. Other problems include a lack of street lighting, a lack of trash cans, a lack of staff (Islam & Yeasmin, 2015), a lack of reconstruction operations, adequate elements for providing services, and a lack of a digitalization system (Alam, 2012). According to 40% of respondents, the infrastructure situation is not improving. However, some locals believe that this Paurashava provides poor service. Some

services are conventional, which entails a lengthy process.

Since the Paurashava have traditionally provided services, they are unable to get benefits promptly. Local people affect service delivery for various causes, including political engagement, staff nepotism, elite class influence, etc. Another form of hindrance to Paurashava service delivery, according to 28% of respondents, is local influence. The accompanying graph shows that Paurashava's level of opportunities and facilities is not entirely favorable. We can see that the activities of various types of Paurashava towards individuals are not in better positions. They are unconcerned about the public. Despite a shortage of human resources, they are unable to complete their tasks (Islam & Yeasmin, 2015).

Findings from the Interviews

The growing population of Bangladesh poses a severe threat to both the natural and physical environments. It is a source of concern that residents of communities should have access to civic amenities. The Paurashava authority's services are supposed to ensure certain municipal conveniences. However, poor supervision of such services results in a poor quality of life and an effect on the environment. Local governments in cities

are on the front lines of dealing with a wide range of social, political, economic, and environmental issues (Sharmin et al., 2012). For that purpose, increasing the managerial capacity of each Paurashava is essential. The Paurashavas' flaws and limits must be identified. The Paurashavas is currently under strain as a result of this.

Furthermore, Paurashavas encounter political, economic, and cultural obstacles in providing services (Sowdagar, 2013). "The potentiality of the Paurashavas also requires competent management," one of the employees observed. Along with creating the features of Paurashava management, it is necessary to secure the use of local resources, people-oriented leadership, and public engagement. Most Ward commissioners stated that they lack the administrative and financial resources essential for good service management.

Moreover, Paurashavas can organize political, economic, cultural, and other resources to improve performance. Even though they are loaded with obligations, all of the problems in Bangladesh's Paurashavas must be resolved. Only then will they be able to provide high-quality services and a livable city. Based on prior research, the following are some significant recommendations.

First, the financial crisis impacts negatively service quality (Huque &

Panday, 2018). Every Paurashava receives government subsidies for various projects in addition to its profits. In comparison to the demand, the quantity of multiple grants is almost insignificant. Furthermore, it is difficult for a new Paurashava to increase its income from local sources. It is necessary to improve both local income streams and government assistance. Second, it appears that developing a Paurashava's infrastructure with low financial resources is difficult. Due to a lack of infrastructure, waste management, sanitation, drainage, and water delivery deteriorate (Ashikuzzaman & Howlader, 2020). As a result, infrastructure facilities will need to be built. Finally, adequate staff and proper training are essential (Mpofu & Hlatywayo, 2015). Because the human resources of a new Paurashava are usually inexperienced, thorough training is required to help them develop their skills to handle problems quickly. Furthermore, technical assistance improves the effectiveness of Paurashava's management. Because of their low financial resources, not every Paurashava can begin to use technology. As a result, the government must step up to provide technical assistance.

Fourth, effective planning is essential to ensure that high-quality services and that money are not wasted. Furthermore, it includes coordination

across all services, which is also lacking in the Paurashava. Fifth, a faulty monitoring system prevents the improvement of service quality. Formal and informal monitoring systems must be established and strengthened, and management must respond to public demand. Lack of reactivity degrades service evaluation, and a flawed evaluation system cannot provide satisfaction while also complicating the detection of problems in many service areas (Khan et al., 2021). As a result, the assessment mechanism should be strengthened, and people's participation must be secured.

Sixth, people's awareness of the Paurashava's functions must be raised as soon as possible. Their spontaneous participation and cooperation greatly enhance Paurashava's well-being. It is nearly difficult for a Paurashava to perform all the services properly and efficiently without involvement and collaboration. Seventh, the chasm that exists between the Paurashava authority and the general public must be bridged. It causes misunderstanding, which leads to the Paurashava's improper performance.

Eighth, Paurashava's management is inefficient due to political connections (Chowdhury & Deb, 2012). It also promotes management corruption and disarray. To preserve the Paurashava free of political interference and political

commitment (Ehsan, 2020), certain steps must be adopted. Ninth, the members of the Paurashava have little or no accountability, which allows for corruption and nepotism. As a result, the government must implement procedures for the Paurashava members to be held accountable stringently and effectively. Finally, all of the Paurashava committees must be strengthened.

CONCLUSION

Local government institutions are an essential aspect of any country's governance process. Proper service delivery at the national level is heavily reliant on good governance at the local level. At the local level, the traits that define good governance are similar to those that define good governance at the national level. Various innovations in the shape of reforms and reorganizations have been explored in Bangladesh over more than a century of local government existence. However, qualitative changes in governance at these levels are still a long way off. Institutions of local administration have yet to form truly decentralized bodies. Furthermore, these bodies are unable to function as effective institutions due to institutional restrictions.

Bangladesh has been receiving aid from development partners, both bilateral and multilateral, since the country's

inception in 1971. However, help for strengthening or promoting good governance is a relatively new phenomenon, despite their respective policy frameworks being highly diverse. Nevertheless, questions of power are woven into their numerous intervention areas in some way. It has been noted that the development partners' help in the domain of local governance is currently focused on two areas: lobbying for legislative reform to establish fully decentralized local government institutions; and capacity building of local institutions for successful performance. However, the research shows that these attempts are insufficiently thorough.

The current development partner-assisted interventions do not effectively address all essential aspects and players involved in the governance process. Besides, the study's key results were disparity in municipal service accessibility and a lack of adequate distribution and administration mechanisms. The wards' financial allocation is relatively low, at around 2,000 BDT per month for ward office operations (Siddique, 2000). With proper planning, some initiatives can redress the distribution of service facilities in the study area. Investment and support from the government, non-governmental organizations, and the business sector can

help improve the quality of service facilities by redeveloping uneven terms.

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