

Towards a Sustainable Rural Development Initiative: Good Practices and Learning of Local Governance Support Project (LGSP)

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Abstract

This study is a product of the experiences gained from the rural development project known as Local Governance Support Project (LGSP), jointly funded by The World Bank and the Government of Bangladesh. This project has already completed its first two phases (2006-2011 & 2011-2016) and is now in its third phase (2017-2021) with a one-year extension. Each phase of the project has a duration of 5 years. The LGSP-1 was first initiated in 2006 with the aim of financing all Union Parishads (UP) of Bangladesh. The Ups are the lowest tiers of Local Government Institutes in rural Bangladesh. The Ups originated during British rule in the Indian subcontinent. The country currently has 4571 UPs where financial support from the project is provided on specific formula base policies. The study aims to discuss the project's initiatives to strengthen rural local government institutes as well as how the project has developed a mechanism to implement different schemes adequately. For this, the study is based on the review of information collected from secondary sources—published books, articles, research reports, journal information, and newspapers.

Keywords: Local Government; Local Governance; Project Funds; Participation; Decentralisation; Bangladesh

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Introduction

In Bangladesh, two types of Local Government Institutes (LGIs) exist— Rural and Urban. The rural local government institutes are 1. Union Parishads (UPs), 2. *Upazila Parishads*¹ (UZPs) and 3. *Zila Parishads* (ZP).² The semi-urban or urban LGIs are —Pauroshavas and City Corporations.³ The UPs are the lowest tier of the administrative unit in Bangladesh. In other words, the UPs or the rural councils are the lowest administrative tier among Local Government Institutions (LGIs) in Bangladesh. The undivided Indian sub-continent was under British colonial rule for more than two hundred years. Therefore, most of the local government bodies in Bangladesh owe their origin to British rule, which ultimately passed through the Pakistan period to independent Bangladesh on 16 December 1971 (for details, see the latest publication, Das et al., 2020). In the context of the study, Khan and Ara (2006, p. 79) argued that '[t]he origin of Union Parishad can be traced back to the Village Panchayats introduced in the 1870s by the British to maintain law and order in the rural areas with the help of local people'.

The UPs, also known as Rural Council in many countries across the world, are the rural administrative and local government units in Bangladesh. Each UP is made up of Nine Wards (Areas). Usually, two or more villages are designated as a Ward. The existing law of country demarcates the boundary of each UP. There are 4,571 UPs currently functioning in Bangladesh. Every UP has an elected Chairperson, Nine Members elected from Nine Wards and Three Women Members elected from three reserved seats out these Nine Wards. The tenure of an elected UP is five years. The appointed government employees help the

Parishad members to run the office. The Union Parishads are regulated by the Local Government (Union Parishads) Act, 2009, amended in 2016. The UPs are primarily responsible for agricultural, industrial and community development within the local limits of the union. As Lewis and Hossain (2017, p. 21) have mentioned:

Union Parishad (UP) is the most important tier of local government, UP is responsible for the administration of government departmental activities at the local level, the maintenance of public order, the provision of public welfare services, and the implementation of economic and social development programs.

It can be said that UP is the oldest democratic institution in the history of Bangladesh. In 2000, the Government of Bangladesh and different development partners' that is United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) & European Union (EU) decided to implement a sustainable rural development project based on good governance, transparency and accountability. The thinking led to initiating the Sirajganj model of the rural development project, and implemented successfully in the Sirajganj district of Bangladesh. The Sirajganj Local Governance Development Fund Project (SLGDFFP) was a five-year (2000-2006) rural development project. The project aimed to create community participation, a higher level of accountability, improved quality of service delivery & low level of fund leakage in the lowest tier of the local government system in Bangladesh that is via the UPs.

The Sirajgunj Local Governance Development Fund Project (SLGDFFP) was among the first series

¹ An *Upazila Parishad* (UZPs), formerly called Thana, is an administrative structure of Bangladesh. It is more or less similar to the county or borough of Western countries. It is the second lowest tier of local government institutions in Bangladesh. Currently, there are 492 UZPs.

² The *Zila Parishad* (ZP) or District council is a local government system as introduced in the sub-continent in 1885 by the British. There are 64 ZPs functioning in Bangladesh.

³ *Pourashava* (Municipalities) and City Corporations are two categories of urban local government in Bangladesh. The Pourashavas provide municipal services to towns and City corporations provide municipal services to the megacities. At present, there are 327 *Pourashavas* and 12 City Corporations in the country.

of local government funds that UNCDF initiated in the late 1990s across Uganda, Bangladesh, Cambodia and Nepal. This first generation pilot project, which commenced operations in 2000, focused on just 1 among the 64 districts of Bangladesh, and targeted the lowest tier of Local Government Institute, that is, UP. There were 81 UPs in Sirajganj district, with populations ranging from 20,000 and 50,000 in each UP. The UNCDF report (2021, P. 16) delineates that 'the pilot project was derived from UNCDF's international strategy to support participatory, decentralised planning and financing of development activities through area-based local development funds'. In a similar context, in 2009, Rahman and Kabir (p. 19) argued that 'the SLGDP project is an eye opener for policymakers, local government actors and the community. SLGDP project proves that local government bodies have the inherent capacity, which needs to be explored through proper nursing. The project also shows how the community can be empowered, and the UPs are made accountable. The project revealed that transparency and access to information could curb corruption and prevent misuse of resources. The project also revealed that community participation in planning, implementation,[and] monitoring is a must for local development'. The success of the Sirajganj pilot project has created a broader space to initiate more people-oriented rural development projects through empowering the UPs; hence, the idea of the Local Governance Support Project (LGSP)⁴ model was generated.

The study begins with the outlining of the objectives of the study. This follows the discussion about the local governance support project (LGSP) and its objectives. Then it goes on to discuss the sectors where LGSP Funds can be utilised. The final sections discuss the good practices and the learning from LGSP.

The objectives of the study can be described as follows:

To provide detailed information on the Local Governance Support Project (LGSP-3) components.

To discuss the fund transfer system of the project and how the rural local government institutes, that is, the UPs, engage different stakeholders, including the women, in selecting development schemes.

To discuss the different aspects of the project & analyse how far these rural development initiatives have contributed to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

To discuss the process of participation of local people, capacity development initiatives & other good practices of the project.

Local Governance Support Project (LGSP)

The Government of Bangladesh has agreed with the World Bank (WB) that strengthening the decentralisation process in the rural Local Government Institutes can be achieved through the improvement of governance and taking the service delivery system to the grassroots level. The two Local Governance Support Projects (LGSP 1 & 2).⁵ jointly financed by the World Bank and the Government of Bangladesh, have so far provided a robust foundation for more profound decentralisation of reforms of the Local Government Institutions, particularly the UPs. A number of systematic issues, that is, community participation, engagement of women, and direct fund transfer mechanism, have been introduced through these two phases. With few backdrops, LGSP-3 has been addressing those issues through graduating and institutionalising the system. The primary purpose of the project is to ensure good governance by establishing transparency and accountability in the UPs. In addition, to provide financial support, the project has also taken various initiatives for the capacity development of elected representatives, government officials and other stakeholders around the year. The project's main aim is to enhance inclusive and accountable local governance, empowering communities to make

⁴ LGSP is a jointly financed project of the Government of Bangladesh and the World Bank under the Local Government Division, Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives (LGRD&C).

⁵ LGSP is a five-year term project. LGSP-1 (2006-2011) & LGSP-2 (2011-2016). The Third phase (2017-2021) with one year extension will be completed in December 2022.

choices of their development priorities and engage themselves in the implementation process.

The fund utilisation of the project emphasises the welfare of rural people and the improvement of their living standards through community development. The project has established the idea of peoples' participation in development activities by forming different committees and various mechanisms. The obligation of women's participation in different stages of development activities has also been ensured.

Project Objectives

The overall objective of this project is to institutionalise the formula-based Union Parishad Fiscal Transfer System and introduce Block Grants to all UPs across the country. The specific objectives of the project are to:

- Provide Basic Block Grants (BBG) based on a formula (considering the area and the population of a Union) to all UPs.
- Provide Performance Based Grants (PBG) to selected UPs on the basis of the number of performance indicators and yearly Audit reports.
- Provide capacity-building training to UP functionaries.
- Develop and institutionalise a web-based Monitoring Information System (MIS) for all UPs.
- Carry out Audit and performance assessments of all UPs
- Introduce Expanded Block Grants (EBG) to selected pilot Pourashavas (semi-urban LGIs).

Components of the Project

- **Component 1:** Institutionalisation of Union Parishad Fiscal Transfers:

- Basic Block Grants (BBGs)
- Performance-Based Grants (PBGs)
- **Component 2:** Audits & Performance Assessments & Management Information System
- **Component 3:** Expanded Block Grants (EBGs) to pilot Pourashavas
- **Component 4:** Capacity Development & Project Implementation Support.

The Local Governance Support Project (LGSP) started its journey to ensure good governance by practicing transparency and accountability in all its activities. In addition to providing direct allocation⁶ to more than 4500 UPs by the project, initiatives have also been taken to enhance the skills and capacity of UPs functionaries.

The Basic Block Grant (BBG)⁷ and Performance Base Grant (PBG)⁸ allocations are being transferred directly to the UPs special accounts. The project has introduced Performance Base Grants (PBG) for good performer UPs that improvements can be visible in key governance and financial management areas. The key areas where local government institutes face significant challenges can be identified as tax revenue enhancement, proper participation of local people in activities, documentation for appropriate planning, budget forecast and budget formulation, reporting and preservation of documents etc. The Performance Base Grants are intended to reward the better-performing UPs with additional fiscal resources. As mentioned in the UNCDF (2021, p. 17) report, 'this additional funding system in the form of performance base grant was first introduced in SLGDFP in Sirajganj district with a view to increa[sing] financial transparency, community

⁶ Total funding for LGSP-3 is 697 US\$ (Million) in five years for 4500+ UPs (Rural Councils). Proportion of GOB is 57% and WB 47%.

⁷ Basic Block Grant (BBG) is a basic minimum condition for allocation in all UPs (Rural Councils) across the country. 25% of BBG was allocated as equal shares to all UPs, and the remaining 75% was allocated to UPs on the basis of their population size with weights of 90% and their area with weights of 10%.

⁸ Top scoring 65% of UPs in each district will be awarded PBG as a top-up to their BBG allocations. Indicatively, the top 20% (A Grade) of the best performing 65% of UPs will receive PBG increments estimated at 40% of the amount of their BBG. The next 30% (B grade) will receive a 30% increment on the amount of their BBG. The remaining 50% (C grade) will receive a 20% top-up to their BBGs. The Grade is determined according to the Audit report of the UPs.

participation and monitoring, financial management and efficient project management. The project has made it mandatory to hold ward-level meetings for the selection of development schemes (Figure 1). This process has ensured the participation of local people in planning and selection schemes. The number of beneficiaries of the schemes, the benefits to women, children,

and other backward groups, the favourable social and environmental impacts, and technical and other issues are also considered when selecting the schemes. The ward-level meeting (Figure 1) may form one or more sub-committees to carry out any general or special functions. The number of members of the sub-committee shall not exceed ten persons, and at least three of them shall be women.



Figure 1: Ward level meeting for selecting schemes of LGSP-3 in a Union Parishad within Dhaka division

Source: Author



Figure 2: Bicycle distribution among girl students in Surma Union, Sunamganj district, financed by LGSP-3

Source: Author



Figure 3: Girls' facilities room in a school in Sylhet district financed by LGSP-3
Source: Author

To ensure the participation and empowerment of women, 30% of the allocated fund of the project has to be spent on the priority schemes selected by women (for example, see Figures 2 and 3) . The provision has made that women members will act as Chairperson of at least three ward meetings out of nine ward meetings of a UP. A maximum of 10% of the Basic Block Grant (BBG) allocation can be spent on capacity building of the Union Parishads for different training purposes.

Sectors where LGSP Funds can be utilised

In LGSP, there are eight major sectors with a number of sub-sectors for scheme implementation (Table 1).

The LGSP has developed well established Monitoring Information System (MIS) for documentation, monitoring, and evaluation of UP activities across the country. On the basis of the information updated into MIS, the year-wise statistics of schemes taken under the project can be monitored and counted easily.

The major initiatives that have been taken under the project can be identified as:

- Creation of a large number of trained manpower at the grassroots level through training.
- Creation and maintenance of resource registers in all UPs.
- Regular disclosure of information of various development activities by the UPs through Bill Board / Notice Board.
- Effective practice of procurement process / procedure by UPs in the scheme implementation.
- Follow environmental and social protection policies in the implementation of schemes under the project.
- Empowerment of women by ensuring their participation in selection and implementation of 30% schemes.
- Strengthening of Deputy Director Local Government (DDLG) Offices in all Districts by necessary support from the project.
- Regular field visits and monitoring of project staff and district administration officials to ensure smooth implementation of the schemes taken by UPs.

- Ensuring transparency and accountability at the local level, including the development of financial management of UPs through a regular audit by private firms.
- Preparation of semi-annual report by the UPs and sending it regularly to the concerned authorities.
- Facilitate to increase of Own Source Revenues (OSR) of the UPs through tax collections and other methods.
- Arrangements have been made for digital inspections through the central Monitoring Information System (MIS), Geo-tagged pictures of the schemes, Mobile Apps, and online grievance redresses the system.

Table 1: Sectors to Utilise LGSP Funds

No.	Sectors	Sub- sectors
1.	Communication:	Construction of dirt road, construction of paved road, repair of dirt road, repair of paved road, culvert/box culvert, bridge/foot over bridge, passenger canopy
2.	Health:	Health centre renovation, sanitation campaign, medical supplies
3.	Water Supply:	Installation of tube wells, installation of water supply pipes, construction of water reservoirs
4.	Education:	Reform /construction of educational institutions, supply of school furniture /equipment, supply of educational materials, and educational programs
5.	Natural Resource Management:	Tree Planting /Social Forestry, Protection Dam /Construction of Guard Wall
6.	Agriculture and Market:	Construction of irrigation drains, market development, treatment of cattle.
7.	Sewerage and Waste Management:	Construction of sewerage system /drain, purchase of waste management equipment, setting up of biogas plant.
8.	Capacity Building (Human Resource Development):	Training on women's development, income-generating training and support for the poor, skill development training, support for union information centres, development of information and technology, training/learning, security measures, accounting /data entry.

Source: Created by the Author

Good Practices and Learning of LGSP

During three consecutive phases of LGSP, a series of initiatives have been taken to improve the governance in UPs with a view to good institutionalising practices, sound learning, and innovations. With a systematic approach over the period, UPs have undergone significant improvement in managing their business in terms of preparing the periodic plan, annual budget, selection, implementation and monitoring of development schemes through citizen engagement. Formula-based fund transfers have become an established system for

the UPs. Annual financial audits in UPs on a regular basis by deploying recognised audit firms have also contributed to checking and verifying resource utilisations. The UPs are accountable to people for their performance and also become better respond to people's needs through compliance with the in-built mechanism of the project. In a nutshell, the following procedural issues and mechanisms can be identified as good practices and innovations of LGSP:

Formula-based Fiscal Transfers

The project for the Union Parishads has established a well-recognised formula-based fiscal transfer system. The LGSP has followed a formula-based intergovernmental fiscal transfer system since FY 2008, which has been well recognised by the development partners, including the World Bank. The UNDP's consolidated report (2013, p. 16) on LGSP-2 has rightly mentioned that:

[P]erformance-based grants are highly appreciated by all local stakeholders because they are predictable, directly accessible (without transiting by Upazila (another local government tier) reducing the risk of delay and leakage as well as transaction costs), enabled Union Parishads to deliver more than 10,000 basic infrastructure schemes, and motivating them to improve their performance in applying good governance practices in the management of public resources and responding to people's needs – contributing to enhance Union Parishad legitimacy as a local governance institution.

This long-practiced formula-based intergovernmental fiscal transfer system can be replicated in other local government tiers of the country. The formula-based fiscal transfers system is now under the process of institutionalisation and mainstreaming through the Local Government Division.

Citizen Engagement through Ward Shava (Ward Meeting) and Open Budget Meeting:

It is a fact that development project implementation needs local people's participation to enhance accountability. In many cases, people are unaware of the development activities of UPs. The proper participation requires the engagement of people in planning as well as in implementation stages. As Pandeya (2015, p. 18) observed:

Importance of participation towards making participatory and democratic local decisions, increasing public deliberation on community matters, enriching local planning and budgeting

system, strengthening local accountability system through improving transparency, responsiveness, legitimacy and trust, and empowering citizens by developing civic skills and virtues.

This can be ensured by the active participation of people in both the scheme selection and implementation phases. To ensure the involvement of local people in local planning, the project has made it mandatory that all the selected schemes should be discussed and approved in the *ward shava* (ward meeting) where people from different sections of the locality will be invited to get engaged. The people's voice should be counted, and their unanimous decision on scheme selection should be given top priority. The *ward shava* has become mandatory for the UPs, and concerned officers of the LGSP ensure uploading the ward shava pictures in the central Monitoring Information System of the project.

Formation of Ward Committee and Scheme Supervision Committee:

Another remarkable achievement of the project is the formation of Ward Committee (WC) and Scheme Supervision Committee (SSC), covering all Unions of the country. This is a remarkable success in the institution building process required for the effective implementation and monitoring of the local level schemes under LGSP.

Regular audits of Union Parishad by Private Audit Firms:

A mandatory annual financial audit of all UPs by deploying private audit firms (CA firms) was introduced under the Local Government Division to ensure transparent financial transactions in compliance with existing financial rules and regulations. This has contributed staggeringly to strengthening the UPs as transparent and accountable local government institutions. The UPs have become familiar with the yearly auditing culture, and try to keep all necessary documents and records properly. The Local Government Division has also introduced performance assessment procedures for UPs based on set indicators for providing

Performance Based Grants (PBG) to good-performing selective UPs.

Maintenance of Asset Registers:

In the past, maintenance of Asset Register was hardly practised by the UPs. But this has been set as one of the performance indicators for receiving a Performance Based Grant (PBG). This is also being followed up during the audit of the UPs. As a result, UPs are coming around to maintaining the asset register, which would significantly impact reducing the manipulation of the schemes in terms of duplication/overlapping.

The Practice of Information Disclosure by Union Parishads:

The disclosure of information on UPs' activities at the office premises, scheme sites and other locations is being practised by the majority of the UPs. Clear guidance regarding disclosing information to the public has been specified under LGSP, which is being followed up regularly.

The Practice of Procurement Process by Union Parishads:

The LGSP has successfully introduced procurement methods for all the UPs. The UPs are following procurement methods as per the UP Operation Manual to implement their respective development schemes.

Environmental and Social Safeguard Compliance

The selection of schemes in compliance with the environment and social safeguards is necessary to protect the environment and social safety. Previously, the UPs tended to avoid environmental and social security problems concerning scheme selection and implementation. However, because of the vital guidance, the UPs are now taking extra care in avoiding those schemes that are likely to negatively impact the environment and human lives or biodiversity.

Empowerment of Women

The LGSP has taken initiatives to empower women through its in-built implementation

strategy. The 30% of the funds that are transferred to the UP must be spent on the schemes that women propose during the ward planning process. The Women Development Forums (WDF) must promote the effective participation of women in local affairs. The inclusion of Union Parishad Women Members in different committees as Chairperson and involvement of women in all related committees and institutional bodies is mandatory. The LGSP has been an effective mechanism in supporting the empowerment of women.

Share of Six-Monthly Report

Before the introduction of LGSP, the Union Parishads were not habituated to share any regular information in the form of reports. As a matter of fact, there was a lack of information gap in the absence of proper reporting also. This has been ensured under the project, and reporting skills of UPs have also undergone a qualitative change.

Monitoring of Union Parishad activities through MIS

A well-established MIS system exists under LGSP-3. This management information system was not available in LGSP-1 and LGSP-11. During the second half of the LGSP-3, a solid field base MIS has been developed. During LGSP-3, a skilled MIS team started the need analysis of the UPs to simplify the process. The team started working on the system up gradation (www.mislgsp.org) and developed a mobile base application (LGSP-GO). This mobile base MIS is now fully functional at the UP level and the concerned UP officials are uploading detailed information on schemes and other issues in the central MIS. The Project Monitoring Unit (PMU) has also engaged a firm to enhance and maintain the MIS.

The features of the developed MIS of LGSP-3 can be described in the following ways:

Home

Statistical information about the Scheme, Number of Inspections by Officers, Annual Financial Statement (AFS), Number of Users, Number of UPs, information about large schemes, information about projects selected by

local women, information on the implementation of 10 latest schemes, information of latest 10 inspection reports, sector-wise graphical views etc.

Scheme: The UP user can add, edit, and delete scheme information and view all the information under its jurisdiction. The user also provides information about the environmental and social safeguard issues which is required for selected schemes.

Meeting tracker: The Union Parishads Annual Budget Meeting and all ward meeting information are placed here with a picture and geo-tag location.

AFS: The user can insert the Annual Financial Report (AFS), attach receipts, and consolidate Annual Financial Statements. The user can also view the AFS information.

Union Parishad Assets and Resources: The User can add, edit and delete the information about the permanent assets resources and can view the assets/resources information.

At the grassroots level, the MIS has brought many visible changes that were unavailable earlier. Especially, the LGSP-3 has introduced the following technologies for monitoring and supervision of the project activities. These can be summarised as follows:

- Non-Technical user Based Geo-tagged Mobile Apps for UP functionaries.
- Uploading Union level scheme photographs (Geo-tagged) before, during & after implementation.
- Complete Union Parishad Database and Directory Apps.

How does the Local Governance Support Project (LGSP) contribute to achieving SDGs in rural areas?

As stated above, the LGSP, a rural development project, has already completed its two phases. Since the inception of LGSP-1 in 2006, it has been gradually contributing to rural development and providing support to enhance the effectiveness of UPs and promote gender-sensitive public services to achieve the SDGs (Table 2).

Table 2: Achievements in Rural Areas

The people (in 4571 UPs) benefit from rural communication systems as LGSP has constructed and developed different types of roads at the village level. As a result, the people are getting access to better village-level roads, and this sector has good coverage.
A significant number of people in rural areas are getting portable water (tube wells) and sanitation facilities (toilets/latrines) at their doorsteps from the funds of LGSP.
The UPs support rural schools with educational facilities like classroom development, construction of libraries, and supply of sitting materials (chairs, tables, bench, learning materials etc.) from LGSP funds.
It is mandatory for women to participate in the process of selection of schemes funded by LGSP. The 30% of the allocation being transferred from the project will have to be spent on implementing priority schemes selected by women. It has been made mandatory for the women members to be chairpersons of the ward committee in at least three wards.
The UPs provide skill development training (computer, sewing, agricultural development, youth development schemes, etc.) from LGSP funds and distribute sewing machines, computers etc. among the beneficiaries.
The UPs are now developing health sub-centres (patient's sitting room, bathroom, etc.) so that people can access better health services.
Source: Created by the Author

Conclusion

This study aimed at learning the good practices from the local government support project. This is because the issue of improving the local governance system in local government institutes is very pertinent. Excellent and effective development can be achieved through engaging local people to select their priority schemes and implement those for rural development. However, it cannot be said that ward meetings and other participatory processes are fully established or practised as desired, but to obtain sustainable development, LGSP has started the exercise of the bottom-up development approach.

The donor-funded development project has a more prominent role in accelerating the development process in developing countries. But, as Jansen and Rahman (2011) have mentioned, 'what role has aid played to promote development in the villages? There is little doubt about the role aid has helped in the field of education, health, agriculture and infrastructure development. However, the amount of aid has greatly reduced in recent decades. The shrinking

of development aid needs more income-generating activities by which rural base local government institutes like UPs can sustain and create their resource mobilisation. In the present reality, it can be admitted that this process has a long way to go and needs appropriate policies to enact.

The LGSP, in general, are based on the assumption that social capital can ensure accountability through practising different ways like regular *uthan boidhak* (meeting of villagers in open space), ward shava (village level Meeting) and other participatory processes. The existing legal frameworks fully support the participatory planning and budgetary process in LGIs. In the case of the UPs under LGSP-3, it is mandatory for UPs to practice participatory planning and budgetary process through ward meetings and Open Budget meetings. It is one of the minimum conditions to receive the Basic Block Grants (BBG) under LGSP-3.

All these can be considered modes of engagement and ownership of stakeholders in rural development planning. The issue can be raised as to what extent such interventions are

operationally effective or functional. As Ullah (2010, p. 3) has argued:

[F]lawed resource mobilisation in rural local governments has been a matter of continuing debate for the last three decades in Bangladesh, like many other developing countries. The debate basically centres on making sound fiscal health of local governments to serve citizens and aid in local development. Recently, donors and the central government's support have brought about some positive changes in UPs fiscal role, but much success yet to be achieved.

The three consecutive phases of implementation of the LGSP show that not only financing but the creation of demand sides like participatory process and transparency in activities can demonstrate good governance at the local level, alleviate poverty, promote public awareness and empower public representatives. Improving local government systems and local level planning has no alternatives to achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The experience of LGSP has generated the idea that without strengthening and empowering UPs, the goal of achieving sustainable rural development will be a difficult task.

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Conflict of Interest

The author has participated in: (a) conception and design, or analysis and interpretation of the data; (b) drafting the article or revising it critically for important intellectual content, and (c) approval of the final version. Besides, this manuscript has not been submitted to, nor is it under review at, another journal or other publishing venue. The author has no affiliation with any organisation with a direct or indirect

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