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A Qualitative Study on: Role of Media in Disseminating Local Government Policy Reform Agenda in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

Local government is responsible for the management of local affairs by locally elected officials. Local government influences economic development and planning which include: public welfare, maintenance of law and order, revenue collection, development and adjudication of government grants etc. It also provides people and businesses with essential services in defined areas like social care, schools, housing, waste collection, licensing of local vehicles, registrar services (births and deaths), and pest control. Like any other sector of government in the case of local governance, the media can play a vital role in publicizing changes to policies, recruiting government workers and volunteers, promoting events, and directly corresponding with citizens about important local issues. Media plays a crucial role in publicizing policies, recruiting government workers, and promoting events. The aim of this study is to explore the public perception about the role that Bangladeshi media plays towards Local Government institutions specifically to the union parishad. It also focus on the fact whether media significantly contribute to strengthening the LG. For this study data have been collected through interviews with LG representatives, journalists, media experts, LG experts and policy makers (N=30). The study suggests, for strengthening local government systems, ensuring people's participation, and providing adequate training on LG reporting are necessary. It is possible to inform both LG and the media about practical realities through joint training and capacity-building initiatives. This study may inspire influential stakeholders, such as journalists, researchers, policymakers, and MPs, to initiate policy dialogues and formulate better policies for local government.

INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh has a long tradition of local government, with *Union Parishads* (UPs) being the first tier of the local government structure. At present there are 4562 UPs in Bangladesh. UPs are active in local level development activities, such as tax collection, dispute resolution, service delivery, water sanitation, birth and death registration, and public health. Unfortunately, their positive initiatives and images are rarely highlighted in the media. According to Siddiqui (1984), Bangladeshi print media often use sensationalism to overshadow mobilization and sometimes lead to blackmail. It is assumed that the media represents local government in a negative light due to a communication gap between them and stakeholders. Evidence shows that the *'Amader Sthaniyo Sarkar'* (Our Local Government) television program and *Amader Sarker* (Our Government) Radio Magazine Program have effectively promoted citizen rights to information and services, promoting responsiveness and accountability in local governance. Media advocacy through these programs has set a milestone, leading to changes in strengthening local government institutions in Bangladesh by creating a reliable stream of publicity for *Union Parishods* of different localities, encouraging viewers and policymakers

to get involved in discussions, creating a positive public perception of UPs, and encouraging those who engage in irregularities to correct their ways. The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine how local government representatives, journalists, LG experts, and policymakers perceive the existing relationship between media and local government in Bangladesh, and how media helps strengthen local governance processes and structures. The research uses semi-structured interviews to explore the nuances of media engagement with local government institutions. The study takes into account the unique socio-cultural and political milieu of Bangladesh, where media freedom and government accountability coexist with challenges. The study aims to provide valuable insights that can inform academic discourse and guide policymakers and media practitioners towards fostering a more constructive and participatory relationship between media and local government in Bangladesh.

Local Governments and the Role of Media

Media serves as a bridge connecting local authorities and citizens, facilitating transparency, accountability, and citizen participation. It acts as an information disseminator, watchdog, agenda-setter, and platform for civic engagement within the realm of local governance (Kramp et al., 2016). Transparency and accountability, foundational elements of effective local governance, are fostered through media by disseminating information related to government activities, budgets, and decisions (Besley & Burgess, 2002). Media's watchdog function comes to the forefront as it investigates and exposes instances of corruption, mismanagement, and malfeasance, effectively holding local government officials accountable (Mansell, 2012). Furthermore, media can influence the local government's agenda by highlighting specific issues, thereby guiding policy priorities and decisions (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Additionally, by providing citizens with information and platforms for discourse, media encourages active citizen participation in local governance (Coleman, 2012).

A fundamental aspect of the media's role in strengthening local government is its ability to enhance transparency and accountability. Transparency in local government is achieved when media acts as a conduit for the dissemination of information related to government activities, budgets, and decision-making processes (Besley & Burgess, 2002). Media outlets serve as information intermediaries between local authorities and the public, ensuring that citizens are well-informed about government actions, policies, and initiatives (Gandy, 1982). This dissemination of information empowers citizens by providing them with the knowledge needed to engage with local government processes effectively (Kramp et al., 2016). In this way, the media acts as a key driver in reducing information asymmetry between the government and its constituents, thereby fostering transparency (Olken, 2007).

In addition to transparency, accountability is a pivotal aspect of effective local governance, and media plays a critical role in its enforcement. The media acts as a watchdog, scrutinizing local government activities and exposing instances of corruption, nepotism, and other forms of malfeasance (Mansell, 2012). Investigative journalism, in particular, plays a vital role in uncovering mismanagement, embezzlement of funds, and unethical practices within local government, leading to legal actions and improved financial oversight (Powers & Vera-Bedolla, 2012). The mere presence of a vigilant media serves as a deterrent against unethical behavior among government officials, as the fear of negative media coverage can influence their decision-making (Besley & Burgess, 2002). Thus, media acts as a crucial accountability mechanism that holds local governments to a higher standard of ethical conduct (Olken, 2007).

Media's role in setting the local government's agenda is another dimension of its impact on strengthening governance. Through editorial decisions, news coverage, and the framing of stories, media outlets can influence public discourse and shape the priorities of local govern-

ments (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). By highlighting specific issues or concerns, the media can steer public attention toward matters that require immediate attention or policy action (Borah, 2011). For instance, investigative reports on environmental hazards or infrastructure deficiencies can prompt local authorities to take corrective measures (Vivian, 2013). In this way, media serves as a bridge between the government and citizens, ensuring that the concerns of the public are addressed by local authorities, thus enhancing governance responsiveness (Coleman, 2012).

Moreover, media's role in fostering citizen participation in local governance is pivotal for ensuring that government policies and decisions align with the needs and aspirations of the community. Through its role as an information provider, media offers citizens access to crucial information about local government activities, policies, and initiatives (Kramp et al., 2016). This information access is essential for empowering citizens to engage actively in the governance process by participating in public meetings, voicing concerns, and providing feedback (Coleman, 2012). Media outlets also create public forums through editorials, opinion pieces, and talk shows where citizens can discuss local issues, share their perspectives, and interact with government officials, thereby promoting civic engagement (Besley & Burgess, 2002). Media can also serve as a platform for mobilizing citizens around specific causes or initiatives, fostering community activism and collaboration (Powers & Vera-Bedolla, 2012). However, it is important to acknowledge that media's influence on public discourse and engagement is not without challenges, as issues of bias, sensationalism, and misinformation can hinder the quality of public discourse and engagement (Vivian, 2013).

The effectiveness of media in strengthening local government is closely intertwined with the state of the local media landscape. The ownership and control of local media outlets can significantly impact their editorial independence and their ability to scrutinize local government actions objectively (McChesney, 1999). Media ownership patterns can either enhance or undermine the media's role as a watchdog and promoter of accountability (Powers & Vera-Bedolla, 2012). Besides, financial constraints and political interference influence the vibrant and independent local media environment (Carpini& Keeter, 1996; Hallin & Mancini, 2004). In the 21st century, the synergy between media and local government remains vital for building resilient and responsive communities.

A Synthesis of Studies on Local Government in Bangladesh

Local government in Bangladesh has been a subject of extensive research and study due to its significance in the country's governance structure and development. These studies collectively shed light on various aspects of local government, its challenges, and the role it plays in shaping the nation's socio-political landscape. This synthesis provides a concise overview of key findings and insights from these studies:

1. **Local Government Structure and Functionality**: Researchers such as Rahman (2012) and Ahmed (2017) have examined the structure and functionality of local government in Bangladesh. They highlight the importance of Union Parishads, Upazila Parishads, and City Corporations as key local governance bodies. These studies reveal that while these institutions have the potential to enhance local development and service delivery, their effectiveness is often hampered by issues such as resource constraints, bureaucratic red tape, and political interference.

2. **Relationship between Media and Local Governance**: in their studies of Zafarullah and Howlader (2008) and Islam (2016) argue that media acts as a vital bridge between local governments and citizens. Media outlets play a significant role in disseminating information, holding local officials accountable, and fostering citizen participation. However,

challenges such as financial constraints and threats to journalists' safety (Kabir, 2017) can impede the media's effectiveness in promoting transparency and accountability.

3. **Corruption and Accountability**: Corruption within local government institutions has been a recurring concern in studies conducted by Hussain (2017) and Alam (2019). These studies uncover instances of corruption, embezzlement, and mismanagement within local governments. They underscore the importance of investigative journalism and media exposure in curbing corrupt practices and promoting accountability.

4. **Citizen Engagement and Participation**: Ahmed (2020) and Islam & Biswas (2014) delve into the concept of citizen engagement and participation in local governance. They argue that citizen participation is essential for local governments to be responsive and representative. Media, through various platforms and forums, plays a pivotal role in mobilizing citizens, fostering discussion, and encouraging active participation in local decision-making processes.

5. **Digitalization and Access to Information**: The role of digital media in enhancing local governance is explored by Rahman (2016). This study highlights the impact of digitalization on expanding the reach and accessibility of local news in Bangladesh. The availability of information through online platforms has empowered citizens to engage with government information more conveniently, contributing to greater transparency and awareness.

6. **Challenges and Threats to Local Governance**: Challenges such as political interference, bureaucratic hurdles, and financial constraints are recurrent themes in studies by Hasan (2018) and Chowdhury (2019). These challenges hinder the efficient functioning of local government institutions and can erode public trust. Political influence, in particular, poses a significant threat to the independence and effectiveness of local governments.

7. **Decentralization and Governance**: Research indicates that decentralization efforts in Bangladesh have aimed to bring government closer to the people, enhance local autonomy, and improve service delivery (Bashar et al., 2012; Choudhury et al., 2015). However, challenges persist in translating decentralization policies into effective local governance. Administrative capacity, political interference, and a lack of resources often hinder the ability of local governments to fulfill their mandates (Hossain, 2016).

8. **Service Delivery and Development**: Studies consistently emphasize the importance of local government in service delivery, particularly in rural areas where access to basic services remains a challenge (Begum & Choudhury, 2019; Hasan & Mahmood, 2017). Local governments are responsible for key sectors such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure. Ensuring the equitable distribution of resources and services across regions remains a priority.

In conclusion, studies on local government in Bangladesh reveal a complex landscape marked by opportunities and challenges. While local government structures hold the potential for promoting development and service delivery at the grassroots level, issues like corruption, political interference, and resource constraints continue to pose significant hurdles. Therefore, more studies are needed addressing these challenges and fostering a robust partnership between media and local government for building responsive and resilient communities in Bangladesh.

The objectives of the current research are: i) to reveal the stakeholders' perception of current practicing role of the local media towards the local government institutions and ii) to deter-

mine what changes in common practices of media can improve the perceptions of local government institutions specifically *the union parishads* among citizens, donors, and policy makers

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative approach to reveal the answer research questions like how do media collect and publicize news about LG ?; What is the level of satisfaction and dissatisfaction by local authorities with the coverage of their activities by media?; What could be done to improve the relationship between media and LG?, and to strengthen the local government institution e.g. *Union Parishads*, what steps could be taken by local media?

In this study,for collecting data total 30 samples were selected for interview. These samples were chosen by using purposive method keeping in mind some selective criterion like number of times elected as UP chairmen and members; journalists and media professionals who are experienced in reporting on local governance issues in different media for a substantive (at least five years) period of time. For keeping the reliability of the research, respondent were interviewed twice keeping at least six months gap between the interviews. The breakdown of the respondents' number is as follows:

Group of respondents	Type of respondent	Status of respondents	No. of respondents	Reasons for choosing the respondents
1	Local Government Representative	UP chairman	10	They are people's representative members of Union Parishads, chosen on the basis purposive sampling method
2	Local Government Experts	University professors, LG researchers, NGO professionals	5	They were selected in order to understand the research problem more comprehensively. This group of respondents comprises the group of specialists, researchers and university professors. Thus, they were considered relevant sources of information on research problem
3	National Journalist	Senior reporters and journalists of national dailies, weeklies, TV and radio stations	10	They were selected in order to understand what practical realities they face when they go for any reporting on LG issues when they decide about topics of LG reports and when they assign local reporters for collecting LG information. This group of population is also selected on the basis of purposive method.
4	Local Journalist	Correspondents of different newspapers and media, based at districts, UPZ and UP levels	5	They were selected in order to understand what practical realities local reports face during collecting reports from local levels, how local citizens react when journalists go to them for collecting LG data and also to know the relation between local journalists and local government representatives. This group of population is also selected on the basis of purposive method.

For this study, a Semi-structured interview questionnaire was prepared containing 10-12 questions focusing on Demographic, Knowledge, Opinion, Feeling questions In the interview question in particular, the following themes were referred:

i. the source that media use collecting and publicizing local government stories
ii. the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction by local authorities with the coverage of their activities by the media
iii. the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction by the news media with information provided by the local authorities
iv. How does the negative placement of LG in Media help in creating negative mindset of the policy makers?
v. Ways of improving the local government and media relationship suggested by the respondents

Information from interviews were collected on audiotapes that were edited, summarized and coded to come up with clear understandable statements and conclusions. Descriptive data and evidence relating to each research question were classified into distinctive classes based on their common qualitative characteristics. Later the results were discussed in a narrative manner.

Data Analyses

In order to get a clearer view about the research objectives the researcher interviewed the local government experts and policy makers, chief journalists, spokesperson from the LG representatives for getting their opinions on some specific questions. These responses helped the researcher to understand how media collect LG related news and how LG related news contribute in the policy reform process.

Responses from LG representatives

In this study, during the interviews LG representatives shared practical realities they face in UP areas in terms of communicating with journalists, mobilizing media for publishing any news etc.

During the interview the LG representatives were asked the following questions:

a. Do you know how media collect news about local government?
b. Do you think media properly publicize local government news?
c. When any new policy/agenda arrives, do the media help you to know details about it?
d. Do you have any success story that was publicized by media?
e. What is the level of your satisfaction / dissatisfaction with the coverage of their activities by media?
f. Do you have any recommendations about media?

In their response some participants (N=3) comments that the Local journalists are not communicative and generally the Journalists do not interact with the LG representatives. In response to the question whether media properly publicize local government news, the LG representatives (N= 8) said journalists are not interested about positive news on LG rather they are interested about political news especially news about elections and disbursing reliefs.In this regard few representatives made some interesting comments. Like a UP chairman (S=7) said, "Journalists are fond of making a sensation by publishing negative news on UP and UP chairmen". S=3 mentioned that, "Money talk at the local level – if we don't spend money no news will be published. It is a win-win game, if we make journalists happy, they will make us happy" and S=9 said, "LG – Media behaves in such a way that it seems they are stepbroth-

ers." Some of the respondents also mentioned that "Journalists like to highlight local administration and politicians rather than LG representatives as they get incentives from them so there is a 'give and take' business here".

Nextrespondent (S= 8) commented by being a bit emotional. "Yes, LG is negatively represented in the media.For this reason LG is not trusted by the general public. Media covers mostly negative news and there are LG representatives who are engaged in corruption. However, there are cases where putting political colour and twisted representation of LG representatives which are intentional. Say, they make news about the theft of wheat by UP chairs, but for each UP chair only a small amount (20 tons) of wheat is allocated which costs only 20,000 taka . . .this is not a big news . . .they overwhelm the news. Besides, LG representatives do not have much power. A small amount of authority is given to the UP chairs. Most of the time, they remain busy with less challenging activities like birth registration, cleaning, sanitation, etc. Let me share my example, in my case, though I was the first UP chair to arrange ambulances for the people in my locality, the media did not cover what I did. It was not that journalists did not know about it. There were journalists who took advantage of the ambulance, and yet they did not cover the news. Other UP chairs might have taken the similar kinds of initiatives if the media had publicized this."

A number of recommendations came out from LG representatives in order to resolve the communication gap between LG representatives and journalists. In this regard S=2 suggested organizing LG – Media dialogue for building a better relationship. LG representatives do not access any database containing information about journalists and media professionals, according to S=9. But with a complaining tone S=10 mentioned, "Many newspapers and media don't have LG related assigned journalists, reporters". Nevertheless, LG representatives demanded combined training for journalists and LG representatives. In this regard S=4 said, "Journalists don't have adequate training on LG reporting. Adequate training should be provided for journalists." And S=7 said, "MoLGRD&C, NILG should arrange joint (LG and Media) training and capacity-building initiatives so that both sectors can be informed about the realities".

Opinions from LG experts, LG advocates and policy makers:
The researcher interviewed LG experts, advocates, and policymakers to understand media's role towards local government institutions of Bangladesh and suggest ways to enhance their effectiveness. LG experts, LG advocates policy makers were asked the following questions:
   a) What is your opinion about media's role in LG/UP?
   b) Do you think media frames LG/UP properly?
   c) As a policy maker, how do media influence you? Do you collect information from media and be biased as media reports or you use other sources to justify the information?
   d) In your opinion what role media should play in LG policy reform?
   e) Do you think, can media play agenda setting role? how?
   f) What could be the ways of improving the local government and media relationship?
   g) What could be the ways of improving the local government and media relationship?

In their responses, most of the interviewed experts, advocates and policy makers (N=5) responded that media actually can play a significant role in collecting and disseminating LG related news and information. In response to a question whether media frames LG issues properly or not, few respondents (N=4) mentioned that media frames LG negatively and moreinterested in disclosing publicly about LG representative's personal lives rather than LG

activities, good initiatives, positive news. Some of the respondents (N=4) told "UP is seen as a weak tier of LG, so media prefers to frame LG negatively and publicize negative news for getting readers' attention". For this type of negative framing of LG news, they also think there are some influences from local MPs and administration, which media counts significantly during framing any news related to LG. Another respondent said (S=12), "There is no negative news . . . what has got the news value that comes into the news. But news published in the Media helps in policy making. But the main thing is, there are restrictions and obstacles in the system that do not let the LG to perform properly." Some of the respondents (N=3) commented that "It is a nexus – MPs, Local administration, all want weak LG so that it can be governed easily". Some other respondents (N=3) commented that – "LG and UPs are dominated by MPs in such a way that they can't function properly" and "LG is not local and it is not a government as they don't have enough budget and autonomy".

When the LG experts and policymakers were asked questions like'how do media influence them? and do they collect information from media and be biased as media reports or do they use other sources to justify the information?' All respondents (N=5) told that LG experts, MPs, Donors and Policymakers are influenced by media reports and this reflectin planning, designing, and implementing any LG-related projects, programs and LG related policy works. In response to a question whether media can play agenda setting role, a number of respondents (N=5) mentioned positively that media can play agenda setting role by disseminating different success stories, case studies and also by sharing recommendations and way forwards on LG.

In response to the last question "What could be the ways of improving the local government and media relationship?" the respondents offered a number of recommendations. One respondent (S=14) commented, "LG representatives must stop activities that generate controversy. They must show the required accountability and transparency in their activities. They must identify the loopholes in their activities and try to minimize them. Besides they must try how to benefit the mass population. . . they have to practice more positive activities. They have to take proactive initiatives. Journalists must also ensure a positive image of LG by covering contractive news without bias. To make sure that the news they publish is beneficial to the country's population, they have to know how to prioritize it. They need to improve their skills."

By highlighting the needs of training for the journalists another respondent (S=15) commented, "in our country specialized reporting has not developed yet. For quality reporting both an academic background and training are needed. There is an overwhelming tendency for journalists to focus on corruption, personal details of the UP chairs, but they do not know how to make a news report on LG. Journalists need extensive training for this. In fact, there should be a change in the typical topics of discussion about LG. Again, there are projects that do not allow journalists to create news independently."

Some otherinsightful recommendations were also come out from the LG experts and policymakers on how to increase LG related news coverage in media, how to increase positive news on LG, how to communicate LG related news and information to LG experts, policymakers and how to influence them through policy related news of LG. (N=4) recommended that different newspapers and media houses can assign LG related reporters and journalists to cover interviews of LG experts and policymakers. For strengthening the relationship between LG and other stakeholders (N=5) suggested to organize LG – Media dialogue for obtaining advice and reform ideas from LG experts, policymakers. Besides (N=4) suggested that LG ex-

perts and policy makers can be invited to visit successful LG projects, model UPs and activities so that they can share their opinion in the policy formulation process. For bridging the gap, (N=2) suggested that LG representatives (UP chairmen) should interact with LG experts and policymakers and keep them updated about their good initiatives, so they can communicate that information in important forums. (N=2) emphasized the necessity of a database of policymakers, donors, MPs, and specialists in LG. Almost all respondents (N=5) recommended significantly that MoLGRD&C and NILG should arrange training programs for media and LG representatives where LG experts and policymakers can be invited as resource speakers, through this initiative capacity building will be done properly.

Opinions from Chief Journalists and Media Analysts

Chief journalists were asked the following questions:
  a) How do media collect LG/UP related news and prepare report on that?
  b) Do you think these kinds of reports could influence policymakers and donors? Why or why not?
  c) Do you think media needs training and capacity building support for performing their roles?

In response to the question, 'How do media collect LG/UP related news and prepare report on that?' , the respondents (N=7) said that recently every news and media production house gave importance to the news collected from remote areas than the news from the capital city. However, until now, no special incentives have not been offered to local journalists for collecting news about local government. In this regard one respondent (S=20) said, "Not only LG but in all sectors, news that can create public sensation is published. Human taste has changed a lot. Any news about corruption, irregularity, abnormal behaviour or happenings etc. gets viral now a days. People want to watch and listen to these and that's why we prioritize these kinds of news."

In response to the question "Do you think these kinds of reports could influence policymakers and donors?" The respondents shared some interesting and insightful information. For example, one respondent (S=26) shared, "the donors mainly collect news using two sources: i) from media specially from newspapers and ii) from local NGO who share news about the LG as a summary. Having screened this information, the donor group makes a decision. Thus, donors' groups are more or less influenced by LG compliance, good governance practices, and malpractice."

However, by bringing an analogy a respondent (S=28) said, "in the present structure of Bangladesh ,the LG has a limited scope for work. But it is not impossible to reform the LG structure and remove corruption. For this purpose, effective planning is essential. For instance, a framework can be developed to distribute relief to the poor and marginalized. This framework should include high officials, local officers, journalists, and the UP chairs. In this framework journalists will play the role of a watchdog to minimize the chances of corruption at any stage of the procedure."
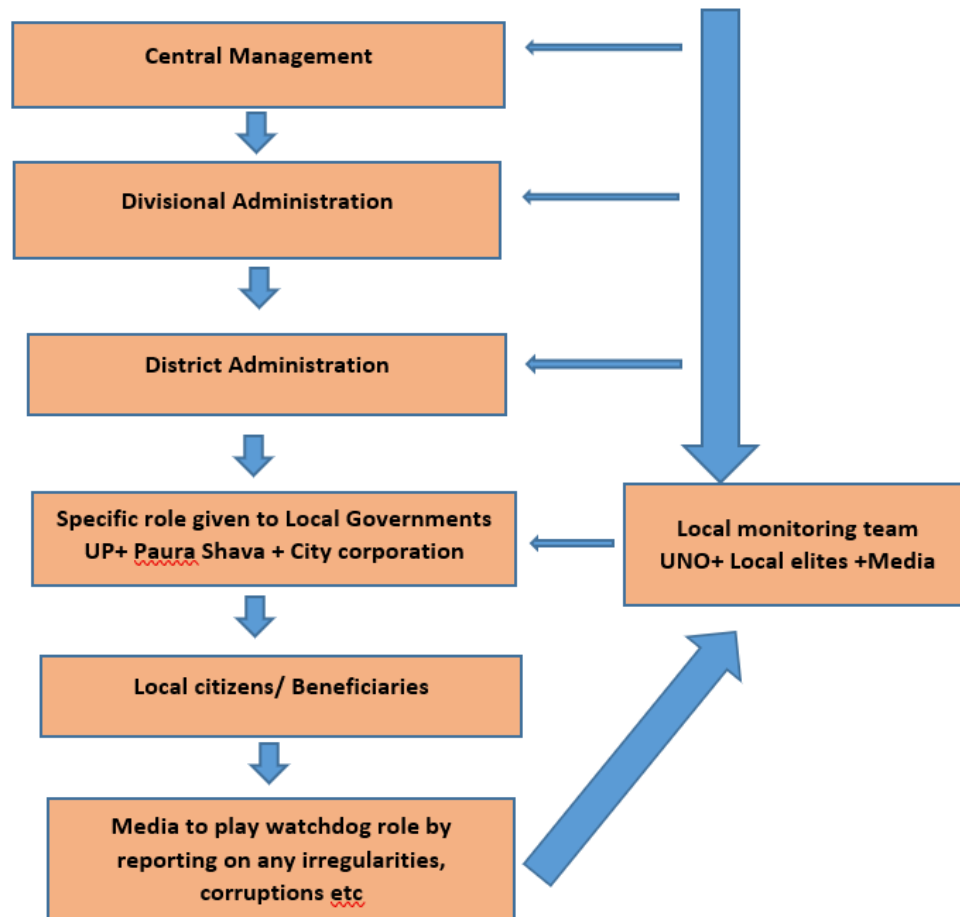
Figure: Model Framework

Findings

The following findings derived from the data presented in the analyses part. Through the findings of the study, answers to the research questions are addressed.

a) There is a communication gap among the journalists and the LG representatives. Media covers just about some specific news about the Local Government institutions and therefore, the real picture of *Union Parishods* remain hidden from the public eye.

b) LG's negative media coverage and **intentional twisted representation foster public distrust**and prevent local *Union Parishod* representatives from establishing credibility with the populace. Because of this, even worthwhile endeavors often fall flat with the public.

c) LG representatives recommended a dialogue between LG and journalists to address communication gaps. They emphasized the need for a database of information about journalists and media professionals, and demanded combined training for journalists and LG representatives. They also suggested joint training and capacity-building initiatives for both sectors. Similar suggestions have come from LG experts and policy makers. They emphasized the need for a database of LG policymakers, donors, MPs, and specialists. They recommended MoLGRD&C and NILG to organize training programs for the media and LG representatives.

d) Most experts, advocates, and policy makers believe media plays a crucial role in collecting and disseminating LG-related news and information. However, some respondents ar-

gue that media often frames LG negatively, focusing on personal lives of LG representatives rather than LG activities or initiatives. This negative framing is occasionally influenced by local MPs and administration. While media helps in policy making, there are restrictions and obstacles in the system that hinder LG's performance. Some respondents believe that the system is dominated by MPs, limiting LG's budget and autonomy.

e) Media reports influence LG experts, MPs, donors, and policymakers in planning, designing, and implementing projects and programs. Respondents positively suggest media can play an agenda setting role by disseminating success stories, case studies, and recommendations.

f) Both the LG representatives and the local journalists can contribute to the improvement of their relationship by taking a few initiatives. LG representatives are expected to reduce controversial activities, demonstrate accountability and transparency, identify loopholes, and benefit the mass population. Furthermore, journalists are encouraged to engage in positive activities, take proactive initiatives, and cover constructive news without bias. Prioritizing and improving skills is also suggested.

g) Journalists in the country need extensive training for quality reporting, as specialized reporting has not yet developed.

h) To strengthen the LG , increasing media coverage of LG-related news specially promoting positive news, covering interviews of the stakeholders of the LG, organizing media dialogues, inviting experts to visit successful projects, and keeping LG representatives updated about each other's initiatives and success stories are highly recommended by LG experts and policy makers.

i) No special incentives are offered to the journalist for collecting local government news. Therefore, a common tendency has grown up among local journalist to collect and publicize viral news about corruption, irregularities, and abnormal behavior.

Recommendations
The following recommendations are derived from the present study:
1) LG journalists & media professionals forum needs to be formed so that regular LG – Media dialogue could be organized for relationship building

2) Directory and database of LG representatives and contact information of media houses, LG journalists and media professionals needs to be developed

3) Adequate training on LG reporting should be provided to journalists and media representatives. MoLGRD&C, NILG can arrange joint (LG - Media) training and capacity-building initiatives so that both sectors be informed about the practical realities

4) Newspapers and media houses should assign LG related reporters and journalists to cover LG news. LG related success stories should be publicized in print and electronic media so that LG representatives are motivated to perform their duties
5) Journalists and media professionals should be invited to visit successful UPs for better understanding on LG functions, challenges and opportunities. LG representatives (UP chairmen) should interact with journalists on a regular basis and keep them updated about their good initiatives and challenges they face.

6) Authority should be given to LG representative to perform more activities so that they may increase their capacity to serve the people. Representatives of LG must cease practicing corruption, malpractices, and other allegations frequently raised against them. In their activities, they must demonstrate accountability and transparency. They must identify loopholes in their activities and try to minimize them. Moreover, they should strive to benefit the mass population and achieve trustworthiness.

7) Journalists must also ensure a positive image of LG by covering constructive news without bias. To make sure that the news they publish is beneficial to the country's population, they have to know how to prioritize it. They need to improve their skills.

8) Specialized news reporting needs to be developed. For quality reporting both an academic background and training are needed. That is why students with relevant academic background must be encouraged to work in this sector. Journalists tend to focus on corruption and personal details about UP chairs. Most of the local journalists do not know how to make a news report on LG. Journalists need extensive training on how to report and what to report on. Journalists must not focus on their popularity but on the real development of the country.

9) In order to strengthen local government, effective planning is essential. The inclusion of high officials, local officers, journalists, and UP chairs in the plan may create a positive vibe about LG among citizens, donors, and policymakers. Nevertheless, journalists must act as watchdogs in the planning to minimize corruption.

Conclusion

Media is seen as a vital tool to ensure local government accountability and efficacy by bridging the information gap between officials and representatives of regional areas. In Bangladesh, a strong and positive relationship between media and local government is essential for making local government more accountable, transparent, and enhancing public participation in local government issues. Through this study various stakeholders, including UP representatives, LG experts, journalists, and media professionals, have suggested various strategies for improving existing relationships between local government and media. These include joint exposure visits, creating databases of LG representatives, organizing training and capacity-building initiatives, publicizing success stories, assigning reporters, providing adequate training on LG reporting, organizing dialogues, inviting journalists to visit successful UPs, investing in journalists, and updating journalists regularly about good news and challenges faced by LG representatives. This study may play a significant role in bringing forth fresh ideas and insights about how a positive impression on local government in the media can inspire influential stakeholders, encouraging policy dialogues and formulating better policies for Bangladesh's local government.

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