

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT SYSTEM IN

BANGLADESH



1 INTRODUCTION

The People's Republic of Bangladesh has a population of 150,448,339 and covers a land area of 148,393 sq km.¹

Bangladesh is a unitary state with a unicameral parliament called Jatiya Sangsad. Members of parliament are directly elected.

Members of the Jatiya Sangsad elect a president, who is the head of state. The president appoints the prime minister, who is the head of government and, on the advice of the prime minister, other members of a cabinet which is collectively responsible to parliament.

Bangladesh has 64 administrative districts and below this a tiered system of local government comprising rural councils, or parishads, and urban municipalities. The capital is Dhaka.

Local government contributes a negligible amount to GDP.

2 POLITICAL AND ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF BANGLADESH

2.1 Position of local government in the state

In the 1980s, plans to decentralise and give greater responsibility to local government were developed. However, there were problems both in the implementation and in the politics.

As part of a more recent move towards greater democracy and encouraging public involvement in policy-making, Bangladesh has recently been strengthening the institutional capacity of local government and reforming its plans to create effective local government. However, local government is still not independent of central government and the overall administrative system of the country.

Another current trend is for the outsourcing of services for both central and local government, to increase the efficiency of services.

In the most recent national election, held in November 2001, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and Alliance won a majority of 199 seats, the Awami League won 62, Jamate Islam 17, the Jatiyo Party (Ershad) 14, the Jatiyo Party (Manju) one, and Krishak Sramik Janata League also won one seat. Independents won six seats. Elections were scheduled to be held in January 2007, however; a state of emergency was declared and the elections have been suspended until further notice.

Bangladesh has six administrative divisions, each with a government office headed by a divisional commissioner, who is a senior civil servant. These divisions deal with central government initiatives in their areas.

The Minister of Local Government, Rural Development (LGRD) and Cooperatives is the cabinet member with overall responsibility for local government, local government finance and inspection.

The Local Government Division within the Ministry of LGRD and Cooperatives deals with administration and legal issues relating to local government institutions.

3 LEGAL BASIS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

3.1 Constitutional provisions

Local government is enshrined in the constitution of Bangladesh:

'Local government in every administrative unit of the republic shall be entrusted to bodies, composed of persons elected in accordance with law.

Parliament shall, by law, confer powers on the local government bodies to impose taxes for local purposes, to prepare their budgets and to maintain funds.'

3.2 Main legislative texts

The main legislation on local government is:

- The Pourashava Ordinance 1977
- The Local Government (Union Parishad) Ordinance 1983
- The Upazila Parishad Act 1998
- The Zila Parishad Act 2000
- The Hill District Local Government Parishad Act 1989
- The City Corporation Ordinances/Acts, (issued for various city corporations at various times).

These are amended from time to time. The minister and the Local Government Division deal with the development and implementation of these Acts, with the exception of the Hill District Local Government Parishad Act, which is administered by the Ministry of Hill Tract Affairs.

4 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

4.1 Main divisions

Local government is divided into rural and urban. Rural local government has four tiers:

- Zila (district) parishads
- Upazila (sub-district) parishads
- Union parishads
- Gram sarkar (village government).

Urban and rural local governments have more or less similar functions. All local governments have the power to levy taxes and rates except the gram sarkar.

4.2 Distribution of local governments and population

There are six city corporations. They are: Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna, Barisal and Sylhet. Other towns are governed by pourashavas, which provide services to towns with populations of at least 15,000.

The zila parishads are the largest rural authorities with average populations of 1,997,150. The largest zila parishad is Dhaka district with a population of 8.57 million, and the smallest is Meherpur with a population of 579,531.

Upazila parishads and union parishads are intermediate levels with average populations

Table 1. Distribution of population among tiers of rural local government in Bangladesh

Type of authority	Number	Population of largest	Population of smallest	Average population
Zila parishad	61	8,575,535	579,531	1,997,150
Hill district parishad	3	524,961	292,900	441,680
Upazila parishad	469	676,168	11,621	264,841
Union parishad	4,484	134,438	1,122	27,463

of 264,841 and 27,463 respectively.

23% of the population live in urban areas.

5 DEMOCRATIC AND POLITICAL STRUCTURES IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

5.1 Structures of urban councils

The heads of city corporations are called mayors and for pourashava they are called chairmen. Members are called commissioners, mayors and chairmen, and all commissioners are directly elected every five years.

There are particular numbers of reserved seats for women who are elected directly.

5.2 Structure of zila parishads

According to the existing legal provision there shall be a council for each district except three hill districts. A zila parishad will consist of a chairman, 15 members and five members of reserved seats for women. The chairman and the members are to be elected by an electoral college.

5.3 Structure of upazila and union parishads

The chairman and all the members – including members of reserved seats for women – are directly elected. The chairmen and members work full-time and receive an honorarium, which is fixed by the government.

According to existing legislation the upazila parishad councils are to consist of a directly elected chairman, representative members, women members of the reserved seats, and official members. The representative members are the upazila parishad chairmen and pourashava chairmen (if any) of each upazila. All heads of government departments working in the upazila are *ex officio* members without voting rights.

5.4 Local government staffing

In the upper tiers of local government the respective local government recruits senior staff. The government recruits the staff in lower tiers of local government. Powers of disciplining and dismissal remain with the original recruiting authority. From time to time central government staff are seconded to local government to fill senior positions such

as the chief executive.

The larger authorities are required to have a chief executive, secretary and chief finance officer. The districts must also have an engineer. The head of the paid service is normally referred to as the chief executive officer.

Local authorities may propose their own internal organisation but the ministry must give approval. Municipal councils are typically organised as follows: the chief executive is at the head of the administrative service, with the secretary serving him/her. Beneath them there will typically be a number of officers, including the chief finance officer.

5.5 Independent scrutiny

There are a number of bodies that provide scrutiny including auditors and inspectors responsible for local government.

6 DISTRIBUTION OF SERVICE DELIVERY COMPETENCE

6.1 City corporations and pourashavas

The main functions of the city corporations and pourashavas are:

- Water, sanitation and drainage
- Refuse collection and disposal
- Births, deaths and marriages
- Public health, hospitals, health centres and medical aid
- Bathing and washing places, dhobi ghats
- Fisheries, milk and markets
- Slaughterhouses
- Animal husbandry, livestock, stray and dangerous animals, animal homes and farms
- Buildings control and regulation, development plans and community development projects
- Public streets
- Traffic control
- Civil defence, floods, famine and fire service
- Burial and burning places
- Arboriculture, gardens, open spaces and forests
- Education
- Culture
- Libraries
- Fairs and shows
- Social welfare.

The pourashavas are responsible for water, sanitation and drainage.

6.2 Zila parishads and hill district parishads

The main statutory functions of zila parishads are:

- Implementation of development projects
- Public libraries
- Roads, culverts and bridges not covered by upazila parishads, pourashavas or the central government
- Gardens, playgrounds, open places and trees in public areas
- Ferry ghats which are not maintained by upazila parishads, pourashavas or the central government
- Rest houses and inns
- Encouraging and assisting upazila parishads
- Implementing the development plan assigned by the central government.

Discretionary services include:

- Education and culture
- Social welfare
- Financial welfare
- Public health
- Public works.

6.3 Upazila and union parishads

The upazila and union parishads are responsible for:

- Developing agriculture, forests, fisheries, livestock, education, health, cottage industries, communication, irrigation and flood protection
- Family planning promotion
- Developing local resources
- Public property such as roads, bridges, canals, embankments, telephones and electricity lines
- Reviewing the development activities of other agencies
- Encouraging sanitation
- Registration of births, deaths, blind people, beggars and destitute people
- Census.

The union parishads also have responsibility for:

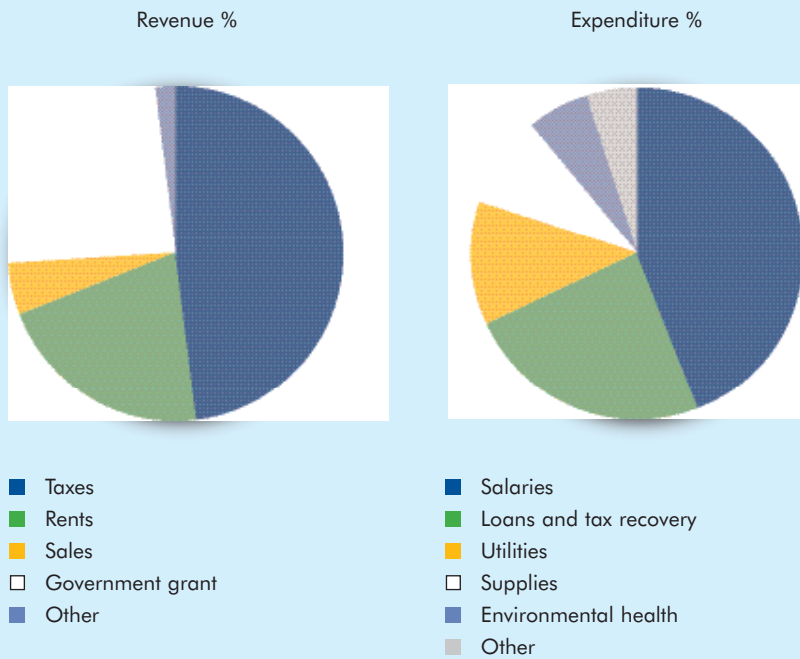
- Law and order
- Prevention of crime, disorder and smuggling
- Civil status register.

7 FINANCE

7.1 Revenue

There are no aggregates available; however

Figure 1. Revenue and expenditure for Dhaka City Council



the main sources of local government revenue are:

- Income from taxes, rates, tolls, fees and other charges
- Rents and profits from property
- Grants made by the government
- Profits from investments.

The budget for Dhaka City Council in 2001/2002 provides an illustration of the revenue sources of the larger councils.² Its current revenue was Taka 2.05bn (US\$36m).

The main sources of revenue were:

1. Taxes	48%
2. Rents	21%
3. Sales	5%
4. Government grant	24%
5. Other	2%.

There was also substantial capital revenue from government and foreign aid and loans.

7.2 Revenue-sharing

There are government block grants.

7.3 Expenditure

No expenditure aggregates are available. The main items of expenditure are:

- General establishment expenditure
- Administration of taxes
- Road maintenance
- Development plans
- Markets
- Water and sanitation
- Rural maintenance programme

- Other miscellaneous expenses.

The Dhaka City Council budget again provides an illustration of the budget priorities in a large council. The revenue expenditure amounted to Taka 1.33bn (US\$23.4m) while capital expenditure accounted for Taka 2.62bn (US\$46m). The breakdown of recurrent expenditure was as follows:

1. Salaries	44%
2. Loans and tax recovery	24%
3. Utilities	12%
4. Supplies	9%
5. Environmental health	6%
6. Other	5%.

8 ORGANISATIONS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Association of Union Parishad Chairmen gives support to the chairmen of union parishads on their rights, privileges and welfare. Membership is voluntary.

Legislation does not provide for any formal establishment of associations.

9 INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

The Ministry of LGRD and Cooperatives promotes intergovernmental relations.

10 E-GOVERNMENT

The Bangladesh government has a well-developed website. It includes a link to the Dhaka City Council website. It primarily provides information on the structure and functions of the different departments of the cities, but also provides some key contacts.³ In 2005 there were an estimated 300,000

internet users in Bangladesh, or 0.2% of the population.⁴

11 ENVISAGED REFORMS

In the drive to develop good governance, greater accountability and transparency of public services, Bangladesh is set to strengthen its local government institutions and their resources.

12 SUMMARY

There is now an impetus to use local government to strengthen democracy and bring government closer to the people it serves. Reforms are ongoing and the effectiveness of the system cannot be ascertained until there has been further implementation and review. The government however still has a strong hold on plans for development, and local government is seen as a partner to assist these plans.

References

- 1 CIA World Factbook 2007
- 2 www.dhakacity.org
- 3 www.bangladesh.gov.bd
- 4 CIA World Factbook 2007.

Service	Delivering authority						Remarks
	Central government	Zila parishad	Upazila parishad	Union parishad	Gram sarkar	City corp pourashava	
GENERAL ADMINISTRATION							
Police	●			●			
Fire protection	●						
Civil protection	●						
Criminal justice	●			●			
Civil status register				●	●		
Statistical office	●						
Electoral register	●						
EDUCATION							
Pre-school		●	●	●		●	
Primary	●	●	●	●		●	
Secondary	●	●					
Vocational and technical	●						
Higher education	●						
Adult education	●	●	●	●	●	●	
SOCIAL WELFARE							
Kindergarten and nursery		●	●	●		●	
Family welfare services	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Welfare homes	●						
Social security	●						
PUBLIC HEALTH							
Primary care	●	●	●	●		●	
Hospitals	●	●				●	
Health protection		●	●	●		●	
HOUSING AND TOWN PLANNING							
Housing	●						
Town planning	●					●	
Regional planning	●						
TRANSPORT							
Roads	●	●	●	●		●	
Transport	●	●	●	●		●	
Urban roads	●						
Urban rail	●						
Ports	●						
Airports	●						
ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC SANITATION							
Water and sanitation	●	●	●	●		●	
Refuse collection and disposal		●	●	●		●	
Street management						●	
Slaughterhouses		●	●	●		●	
Cemeteries and crematoria						●	
Environmental protection	●	●	●	●		●	
Consumer protection	●	●					
CULTURE, LEISURE AND SPORTS							
Theatre and concerts	●	●	●	●		●	
Museums and libraries	●	●	●	●		●	
Parks and open spaces	●	●	●	●		●	
Sports and leisure	●	●	●	●		●	
Religious facilities	●	●	●	●		●	
UTILITIES							
Gas services	●						
District heating							
Water supply	●	●	●	●			
Electricity	●						
ECONOMIC							
Agriculture, forests and fisheries	●	●	●	●			
Economic promotion	●	●	●	●	●		
Trade and industry	●						
Tourism	●	●	●	●		●	
Other economic services	●	●	●	●		●	