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DEVELOPMENT ORIENTATION OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN BANGLADESH: THE CASE OF UNION PARISAD

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ABSTRACT

In a planned development process, the role of local government is important for both planning and implementation of development projects. Bangladesh has experienced more than 25 years of development planning and local government institutions have also been created during that period. Yet those institutions have contributed very little to the development process. In this article, development orientation, both in theory and in practice, of a rural local government is examined by using two criteria: degree of autonomy as reflected through the powers and functions to be performed and the sources of funds to execute those powers and functions; characteristics of leadership. Analysis has revealed that local government could not play a positive role because of the differences between 'official' and 'operative' objectives of the successive national governments and this difference has its roots in the existing power structure and class bases of the society.

I- INTRODUCTION

The importance of local government for national progress and general welfare of the people has been recognized on its own merits. In a planned development process, the role of local government is doubly important for both planning and implementation of development projects. Bottom up planning is essential for success of planned development and that success again depends on the existence of strong local government institutions.

Effectiveness of local government depends on the degree of political and economic powers in respect of planning and implementation of local projects and the leadership characteristics in these institutions. Subservience of local government to the national government for finances needed for development projects will decline the spirit of popular participation. This becomes even more true when the leadership comes from the minority upper class of vested interests. In a class based society, each class will use its powers and opportunities to protect its own interests. If rural development programmers are to benefit the mass of poor rural people, then the leadership must also come from them so they can formulate and implement projects for their benefits.

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Bangladesh has a long history of local government institutions but such institutions have contributed very little to the development process. Decentralization of development administration continues to get importance in public utterances but very little is practiced in reality. Currently, Union Parisad is the lowest local government in Bangladesh. The development orientation of this parisad is examined in this paper by using two criteria: (1) degree of autonomy as reflected through the powers and functions to be performed and the sources of funds to execute those powers and functions, (2) the characteristics of leadership.

In section II, the evolution of Union Parisad is reviewed and the local government ordinances of 1959 and 1976 are examined in detail to find out the degree of autonomy allowed in theory and in practice. In section III, leadership characteristics of respective parisads as available from various sources are examined and its implication discussed. Conclusions are presented in section IV.

II- AUTONOMY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Village Panchayet and Union Board

The concept of local self-government is an old one in Bangladesh, tracing back the mythical Village Panchayet which was romantically called 'Little Republic'. The Village Panchayet was an elected council with both executive and judicial powers. Taxes were collected by it and a percentage would be paid to the Central Government. It evolved a complex but workable and indigenous system of agriculture, commerce, crafts, land-use and family relation. In view of lacking of modern concept of 'state' and 'development', all sections of people of the entire country-side were not economically benefited by the democratic structure of Panchayet (Blair 1973).

In modern times, local government was traced from the Village Chowkidari Act of 1870 and the Bengal Local Self-Government Bill of 1883. More important was the Bengal Village Self-Government Act of 1919, which set up the system of Union Board at village level and that lasted with some modifications down to Ayub Khan's imposition of Basic Democracies in 1959 (Blair 1973). During this entire period, the leadership in the countryside had been given by landed aristocracy – the landlords and petty land-lords created by the Permanent Settlement Act of 1793. This class itself being absentees were not interested in the development of rural areas. The Boards were charged with rural administration including schools, public health, police and roads but did not have enough funds to perform these duties. They had some taxing power on the basis of land ownership but they themselves were the land owners. Therefore, one should not expect them to tax themselves for the benefit of rural masses whom they ruled. As a result, Union Board could not make any substantial contribution to rural development during the British rule.

After the partition of India in 1947, majority of the Zamindars (landed aristocrats) left for India. Land based power was also cut to size as a result of the abolition of the Zamindari system in 1950. The local leadership was then taken over by lower strata of the former landed aristocrats. At that time a system of parliamentary democracy was in force in the country, and by 1955 the First Five Year Development Plan was introduced. Therefore, it was expected that the local government organizations would be given more autonomy and that the process of planning and development through mass participation would be started. In reality, it was not done mainly because of the extreme instability of national politics. In the absence of political guidance, civil bureaucracy was mainly responsible for managing the affairs of the state and in one decade of political instability, the civil bureaucracy had already consolidated its position. The chaotic situation was ended with the imposition of Martial Law in 1958. As to why the political situation was unstable and why Martial Law had to be imposed is altogether a different question, beyond the scope of this paper.

Basic Democracy and Union Council

Imposition of Martial law was effected through connivance between (West) Pakistani civil and military bureaucracy, with military playing the upper hand. This new regime blamed politicians for not giving enough attention toward economic development of the country and declared development as its major task and demanded that this task be achieved by the civil bureaucracy who had no experience or even attitude to perform developmental task though they were credited for managing the affairs of the state. And of course, the elite civil bureaucracy could not bring about development without the support and participation of the people. In the absence of political channels of communication, a channel had to be created to bridge the elite-mass gap. The outcome of this thought was the promulgation of the Basic Democracies Ordinance, 1959. One of the declared objectives of this scheme was to effect democratic decentralization by bringing the will of the people closer to the government and the personnel of government closer to the people. The bureaucrats and the elected representatives of the people were expected to cooperate closely and to maintain reciprocal feedback in the Basic Democracies Councils. It was thought that by increased contact with the people's representatives the officials would develop a less elitist attitude towards the people (Jahan 1973, p. 94). However, democratic decentralization was not to be a unidirectional process; it was to fit the strong centralization policy at the national level (Khan 1967, pp. 204-5). While stressing centralization, the need for people's participation in the system was recognized but the participation was to be controlled and guided primarily by the civil bureaucracy. This will be evident if we examine the Basic Democracies Ordinance, 1959. We will also see how this bureaucratic guardianship later helped to use the local government organizations as political agencies of the regime rather than as institutions for assembling popular demands and desires to be channeled upwards as serious input to governmental decision making.

The 1959 ordinance replaced Union Board with Union Council, the lowest level of the four-tiered Basic Democracies system. At the upper levels were the Thana,

District and Divisional Councils. For each council, there was a Controlling Authority: Sub-divisional Officer for Union Council, Collector (later designated Deputy Commissioner) for Thana Council, Commissioner for District Council and Provincial Government for Divisional Council (Article 3(10)). The name of the UC would be assigned by the relevant CA and the names of other councils would be represented by the names of the respective administrative units (Art. 9(2)). A Union Council would consist of certain number of members elected by the people and certain number of members nominated by the Controlling Authority. The elected and nominated members would elect a Chairman and a Vice-Chairman from among themselves¹. A Thana Council would consist of representative members and official members. The Chairman of the UCs within the jurisdiction of the Thana would be representative members and official members would be specified by the government and nominated by the CA, the number of such members would not exceed the number of representative members. The Circle Officer (Development) would be an ex-officio member and the Vice-Chairman of the TC. A District Council would consist of some Official members (in the manner of TC) and some elected members, the number of elected members being not less than official members. The elected members would be elected by the chairmen of the UCs, Town Committees and Union Committees within the district. The Collector would be ex-officio member and chairman of the DC. The Divisional Council would be constituted in the same manner and the Commissioner would be ex-officio member and chairman of the council.

The formation of the various councils shows clearly that mass participation was allowed only at the Union level; such participation was restricted at upper levels through the granting of electoral rights only to the Basic Democrats and more so by giving political and administrative powers to the bureaucracy². The Basic Democracies were dominated by the government officials and the council chairmen. In all but the lowest tier, government officials and nominated members outnumbered the elected members. The system of indirect elections and nominations allowed the bureaucrats to hand pick their hench men in the councils. This, instead of closing the elite-mass gap has helped to foster a rural elite-urban elite connection as evidenced by frequent complaints by Union Councilors that during their visits and in their letters, government officials recognized only the chairmen (Rahman 1962, p. 72) and that council chairmen did not at all consult their colleagues in making decisions or consult only the faction they represented (Rashiduzzaman 1968a; Rashiduzzaman 1968b).

Union level mass participation was allowed through the expansion of the Union Council's functions; the functions entrusted to UC under the Basic Democracies scheme (See Appendix A) as compared to its predecessor Union Board and Village Panchayat, included a greater role in development activities (see, Tepper 1966 and Mahmood 1964 for comparison). But there was no provision in the ordinance explaining the mechanism of mass participation in council activities other than electing the councilors. One of the major tasks in performing activities is to prepare a budget. Since the council has developmental functions, this should be reflected in the budget and the activities/schemes to be included in the budget must have the concurrence of the people, hence they should know about its finalization. Article 52(1) of the ordinance provides for consideration and

passing of a budget, showing estimated revenue and expenditure, in a special meeting of the Union Council and sending the budget for approval to the Controlling Authority by 1st June (Mahmood 1964, pp. 164-7). The word consideration might imply that the people have been consulted by the Councillors before placing the draft budget in the special budget meeting. In fact, there is no provision or indication in the ordinance that such practice might be followed. On the contrary, Article 52(2) provides that in case of failure on the part of a local council to submit the budget in time, “The CA may have the necessary statement prepared and certify it and such certified statement shall be deemed to be the sanctioned budget of the local council”.

In reality, few Union Councils prepared its own budgets or even initiated activities in their respective localities. An early study on Basic Democracies found that “85 percent of the items on the agenda for discussion at the Union Council meetings were initiated by letters and visits from government officials” and that most of the council resolutions were taken as “face saving device to show compliance with the government directive” (Rahman 1962, p. 59 & 95) and very few of them were carried out. Councilor participation, let alone mass participation, remained a myth. Two reasons might be traced for such a situation. First, a sub-clause of the Union Council Budget Rules says, “the provincial government may place funds at the disposal of Union Councils for expenditure on a specified scheme and may direct that the expenditure shall be included in the budget of the Union Council ...” (Mahmood 1964, p. 187). Since such special schemes were neither prepared by the Union Councilors not in consultation with them and since the direction for inclusion of such schemes in council budget was channeled through the bureaucracy, it was natural for the CA to prepare budget for Union Council or for Union Council to discuss agenda originating at higher official levels. The total amount of funds coming through such schemes was not very substantial, however. The second important reason for poor council activities and mass participation was the lack of funds to perform the development functions assigned to the UCs. The UCs had three major sources of revenue: local rate, taxes on some specified items and government grant. Local rate was levied on all lands assessable to levy rent or land revenue. In East Pakistan, this rate was equivalent to 12.5 percent of the rent or land revenue and it would be collected by the revenue officials along with land revenue and sent to the District Treasury under the control of the Collector of the District. The Collector would communicate by the 1st of February each year the estimated income from local rate payable to the Union Councils. On receipt of the estimate of the income of the local rate, the Union Council would proceed to prepare an estimate of Council income including other sources and then prepare budget for the next year (notes to Article 52, Mahmood 1964, p. 167). Notice here that the Union Councils neither collected nor physically got hold of the local rate for expenditure. One of the administrative functions of UC was to help revenue officials to collect land revenue (Art. 29(1)). Union Council also had agricultural development activities to perform, yet had no share in land revenue. According to article 60, the UCs with the previous sanction of the Commissioner, might levy taxes on certain items (see Appendix B). Of these items, only tolls and fees on local markets and rate for the remuneration of village police were permitted to be levied by the UCs, other items remained on paper.

The total revenue from local rate and taxes was then probably enough to meet administrative expenses. Therefore, the only source of fund for development activity was the meager scheme specific grant from the provincial government (discussed earlier) and hence the lack of mass participation, lack of councilor participation and dominance of bureaucracy. A system launched with high hopes and amidst unprecedented publicity (for details see, Williams 1962, pp. 202-6), thus failed to stir enthusiasm in the first three years (until 1962) of its functioning, mainly because of shortage of funds (Jahan 1973, p. 113).

Soon a new avenue was found in the rural public works programme launched in 1962-63. A year before, a pilot project in Comilla indicated the tremendous potentiality of this programme in economic as well as political terms; some of the political benefits of this programme foreseen are:

1. Frustration, bitterness, cynicism will disappear as millions of low income rural people go to work in the slack farm season.
2. The protective works..... will be omnipresent symbols of a good government as well as of a busy and constructively organized people.
3. Local institutions will be vitalized, for institutions are nourished by resources and programmes. The public works programme will make Basic Democracies pulsate with life and energy, and
4. Under the stress of constructive efforts, local leadership and managerial ability will grow.... With the growth of responsible leadership will come political stability and popular support (Khan 1963).

And so, works programme was to be one of the important political instruments to legitimize power of Ayub regime during the next seven years or so until the regime was compelled to step down as a result of the 1969 mass upsurge. "It was hoped, then, that the works programme would bolster the Basic Democracies and help East Pakistan's rural people to participate in a constructive and meaningful manner in the administration and development of their local area. Under the scheme, the local councils, called Union Councils were entrusted with both planning and implementation of local projects (Jahan 1973, p. 115). The manual for the rural works programme called for each member of the Union Council, in consultation with the people of his ward³, to plan different projects, which would later be consolidated into a single plan for the whole union. The manual also called for publicity of the plan and public discussion on it in a village meeting. The implementation of the projects was entrusted to project committees consisting of leading villagers and headed by a member of the Union Council (Pakistan 1962).

In the first year, the programme created some enthusiasm among the people but soon mass participation was restricted:

...Officers and Union Councilors agreed to dispense with the villagers and to take the total burdens of the works programme on their own

shoulders.... In most cases no village meetings were held to select Union Council schemes... Project Committees were seldom elected in meetings at the project site... Most of the project committees did not hold any regular meetings... and the office of the secretary as well as chairman tended to be monopolized by Union Councilors. In many Unions no meetings were held in the project areas to discuss the audit report.... Printed booklets publicizing the audit reports were published in insufficient number (Rahman 1964, pp. 16-19; for a contrary view on participation see, Thomas 1968).

Mass participation again was reduced to electing councilors and working in the works programme projects; decision making being done by councilors and the bureaucracy. Even when the masses were allowed to participate initially, they were not told anything about the budget of the decided projects. Funds for rural works came from local sale of food grains received as aid from USA under PL480 programme. The huge works programme fund was channeled through the bureaucracy. As soon as councilors and the bureaucracy came to an understanding of the mechanism of using (later proved to be misappropriating) these funds, the masses were dispensed with from decision making. The Union Councils were to be audited by the Controlling Authority but CA was involved in disbursing funds and obviously he could not audit himself. So auditing was also dispensed with.

The misappropriation of rural works funds have been well documented (see Sobhan 1968; Thomas 1971). The height of rural works programme also coincided with the height of power and prestige of the civil service which even claimed to be playing the role of administrators as well as politician (Muhith 1968). A new class of rural people acquired this rural works fund who also came to power a little later and used that power not only to enjoy the benefits of rural works but also of other development inputs distributed through them in the rural areas (more on this issue in section III).

Local Government Ordinance 1976

After independence in 1971, the Basic Democracies set up was abolished and various Relief Committees were formed mainly to help the reconstruction works. These committees were in most cases dominated by Awami League supporters. This temporary arrangement lasted until the 1973 local council elections were held. Now the Chairman and the Vice-chairman were both directly elected by the people. Most of the Relief Committee members returned. But by that time many of them already earned bad reputation for misappropriating relief funds. In this new scheme District and Divisional Councils were abolished. The Thana and Union Councils remained as before including the rural works programme which later was renamed Food For Works.

In 1975, within the framework of a drastic administrative reform programme, all Sub-divisions were to be converted into Districts, and Union, Thana and District Councils were to be composed of elected members of the people⁴. The bureaucracy would be subordinate to the elected bodies instead of controlling them. At Union level, multi-farious organizations would be done away with and all cooperatives would be integrated and subordinated to the Union Councils. Various classes of people would have representation in the cooperatives and also in the council. But the government was toppled in a military coup before this scheme was put into effect. As to how this scheme would work remains altogether a theoretical question.

In 1976, a new local government ordinance was promulgated which provides for a Union Parisad (instead of council) for a Union, a Thana Parisad for a Thana and a Zilla Parisad for a District. The UP shall consist of a Chairman and 9 members elected by the people, and 2 nominated women members. The composition of Thana Parisad is the same as the former Thana Council. The Zilla Parisad shall consist of elected, official and women members; elected members shall be elected by direct election and the Parisad will elect one of the elected members or women members as Chairman, and another as Vice-Chairman. Most of the other provisions of the ordinance including powers, functions and sources of funds are all replica of the Basic Democracies Ordinance, 1959.

The 1977 Union Parisad election was held under this new ordinance. The Zilla Parisad election is yet to be held. Food for works, bureaucratic control and the concomitant corruption is continuing unabated (see, Brundin 1978; McHenry and Bird 1977; news reports appearing almost daily in national dailies should also be noted). Reemphasis by the government of the need for giving more autonomy and powers to Union Parisads remains in theory and has become a rhetoric.

In a November 1978 survey of 30 randomly selected Union Parisads in 8 districts, 27 (90%) supplied information. Of the 27, 17 (63%) could provide income-expenditure statements from their accounts kept in more or less proper form. The remaining Parisads did not maintain proper accounts.

Financial statements of the 17 Parisads for 3 years (coinciding the rule of the present regime) are summarized in Table 1. The following features emerge: (1) Revenue and expenditure have doubled during this period. (2) The proportion of government grant in total revenue has increased 2.5 times and that of tax has decreased to that extent. In money terms, government grant has increased 5 times. (3) Tax includes mainly tax for village police. Local rate collected with land revenue under the Basic Democracies scheme has now been integrated with land development tax, and the UPs do not have any share in that. Powers to levy taxes on local markets etc. were also withdrawn in 1972. This was later given to the District authority and only been returned to the UP very recently (Gazetted on 9 May 1979). (4) Salary and related administrative costs

Table 1: Sources of revenue and heads of expenditure of selected Union Parisads by revenue classes, 1975/76 to 1977/78.

| Revenue class Taka | Number of Unions | Average revenue by sources, Tk. | | | | Average expenditure by heads, Tk. | | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|--------------|----------------|-----------------------------------|---------------|------------|--------------------|
| | | Tax | Govt. grants | Others | Total | Roads canals etc. | Salary ect. | Education | Total ^a |
| 1975/1976 | | | | | | | | | |
| Upto 15000 | 5 | 8135 (78) | 1989 (19) | 312 (3) | 10436 (100) | 1210 (13) | 8142 (87) | --- | 9352 (100) |
| 15-25000 | 8 | 13445 (68) | 3415 (17) | 2830 (15) | 19690 (100) | 2697 (14) | 5857 (85) | 44 (1) | 18598 (100) |
| 25-35000 | 3 | 22195 (75) | 5043 (17) | 2462 (8) | 29700 (100) | 4300 (16) | 23230 (84) | 33 (+) | 27563 (100) |
| Over 35000 | 1 | 33421 (89) | 4328 (11) | -- | 37749 (100) | 8025 (23) | 27445 (77) | -- | 35470 (100) |
| All classes | 17 | 14602 (74) | 3337 (19) | 1858 (9) | 19797 (100) | 2856 (15) | 15570 (85) | 26 (+) | 18452 (100) |
| 1976/1977 | | | | | | | | | |
| Upto 15000 | 2 | 7699 (79) | 1280 (13) | 786 (8) | 9765 (100) | 1100 (11) | 8227 (87) | 225 (2) | 9552 (100) |
| 15-25000 | 6 | 12835 (65) | 5105 (26) | 1682 (9) | 19622 (100) | 2294 (13) | 15358 (87) | 69 (+) | 17721 (100) |
| 25-35000 | 6 | 16010 (53) | 6756 (23) | 7109 (24) | 29875 (100) | 6134 (22) | 21869 (78) | 5 (+) | 28008 (100) |
| Over 35000 | 3 | 35850 (78) | 8292 (18) | 1639 (4) | 45781 (100) | 6766 (17) | 32511 (83) | 200 (+) | 39477 (100) |
| All classes | 17 | 17413 (65) | 5800 (22) | 3485 (13) | 26698 (100) | 4298 (18) | 19845 (82) | 88 (+) | 24231 (100) |
| 1977/78 | | | | | | | | | |
| Upto 1500 | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| 15-25000 | 2 | 10896 (61) | 6786 (38) | 234 (1) | 17916 (100) | 4313 (15) | 24370 (85) | | 28683 (100) |
| 25-35--- | 8 | 10881 (37) | 15426 (53) | 3035 (10) | 29342 (100) | 4753 (18) | 21939 (82) | 108 (+) | 26890 (100) |
| Over 35000 | 7 | 30808 (51) | 21870 (36) | 8064 (13) | 60742 (100) | 10221 (20) | 39887 (79) | 652 (1) | 50761 (100) |
| All classes | 17 | 19088 (46) | 17063 (42) | 4776 (12) | 40927 (100) | 6954 (19) | 29615 (80) | 320 (1) | 36889 (100) |

a. Total expenditure may not equal total revenue, the adjustments made in revised budgets of the respective Union Parisads were not considered.

-- None + Insignificant

Figures in the parentheses indicate percentage

Source: Field investigation.

accounted for over 80 percent of total expenditure in all the 3 years, and the tax revenue increasingly fell short of the administrative costs. (5) A mere 15-19 percent of total expenditure was available for repair and maintenance of roads and bridges etc. Food for works projects are not included in UP budgets and not much have been done under FFW programme. Between 1970 and 1978, only 2-3 miles of additional road (kacha) was constructed per union. (6) The long list of other functions remained on paper as ever.

The revenue-expenditure pattern do not indicate that UPs are going to be any important agents of rural development as reemphasized in almost every public utterances of the president and his ministers. So far it has been the political agency of the present regime in the manner of the Union Councils under the Basic Democracies. The 1961 UC election was followed by 1962 assembly election, 1964 UC election and 1965 presidential election. The 1977 UP election was followed by 1965 presidential election. The 1977 UP election was followed by presidential election and 1979 parliament election. Since Basic Democrats constituted the electoral college and since they benefited most from government policy particularly through works programme, they were subject to direct government pressure and manipulation (Jahan 1973, p. 119). Under the present system, the UP members are enjoying the same benefits and they are under pressure to mobilize masses in support of the regime. Background of present and past UP members, explained in section III, indicate such patron-client relationship. In short, 'official' and 'operative' objectives of successive governments have continued to differ⁵.

III- SOCIOECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF UNION PARISAD MEMBERS

In the beginning of this paper, it was argued that planned rural development will necessitate granting of adequate political and economic autonomy to local government institutions and mass participation in planning and implementation of development activities. Mass participation again would depend on the class bases of the leadership. In section II, it has been shown how autonomy to local government organizations has been denied through contradictory provisions of various ordinances, how opportunities for mass participation were dispensed with and how a new rural elite-urban elite connection was created instead of closing the urban elite-rural mass gap.

Compared to the predecessor Union Board (lasting up to 1958) and the Union Council election of 1961, the 1964 election returned more members of the higher income groups (Table 2). They were also of younger age and of higher literacy level. This new rural elite was different from past elite in that the old elite had been the landed aristocracy – the Zaminars (landlords) and talukders (petty landlords), the basic democrats were generally from nontraditional, new

rich families – they were rich farmers. A new moneyed class businessmen and contractors – also made their way into the council while representation of old elite – teachers, doctors etc., had declined (Table 3). The regime was thus partially successful in fostering the growth of a new rural elite who not only used their newly acquired power to amass the works programme funds but also of other agricultural development inputs distributed through them in the rural areas. As a result this new rural elite was not in a position to recruit mass support for the regime although they helped the regime to survive one presidential and two assembly elections.

Table 2: Distribution of Union Board and Union Council members according to annual income

| Income (Taka) | Union Board 1957 | Union Council 1961 | | Union Council 1964 |
|---------------|------------------|--------------------|----------|--------------------|
| | | Member | Chairman | |
| Below 1000 | 3.7 | 89.2 | 76.0 | 10.1 |
| 1000 – 2000 | 15.7 | 7.0 | 12.1 | 21.2 |
| 2000 – 3000 | 26.6 | 3.8 | 7.3 | 21.3 |
| 3000 – 4000 | - | - | 1.2 | 16.7 |
| 4000 & above | 34.8 | - | 2.4 | 30.4 |
| All | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

a. The figures for 1961 are doubtful (see Sobhan 1968).

Source: Jahan 1973, p.121.

Table 3: Occupation of Union Board and Union Council members

| Occupation | Union Board 1957 | Union Council 1961 | Union Council 1964 |
|-----------------------------|------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Farming | 77.3 | 82.4 | 77.7 |
| Business | 10.7 | 15.6 | 16.9 |
| Teaching and other services | 10.1 | 0.6 | 2.7 |
| Others | 1.8 | 1.2 | 2.4 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 |

After independence, relief committees were constituted mainly with Awami League supporters which might also have included some former Basic Democrats who change sides during the 1970 general election and 1971 war of independence. Most of these relief committee members got elected in the 1973 Union Council election. Naturally they enjoyed the benefits of the then government policies until 1975 when the Awami League government was

toppled. The 1975-76 period experienced a relative lull in UC activities comparable to the 1958-60 period. The 1977 election under the new 1976 ordinance provided opportunity for new members to be elected but information available from 218 members and 25 chairmen of 25 Union Parisads suggest to the contrary (Table 4).

Experience of elected members and chairmen indicate high degree of power concentration among the rural elite. Thirty eight percent of the members and 72 percent of the chairmen won at least one previous election. Another 26 percent members and 24 percent chairmen had a member of the family (probably of older generation) or a near relation previously elected and in that sense they may also be considered as continuing old family power. In that case 64 percent of members and 96 percent of chairmen are old.

Of the old members and chairmen, those winning 2 or more previous elections were definitely members of the Basic Democracies system; some of those winning one previous election and those having family member/near relation previously elected were also members of the Basic Democracies system. Another aspect of power concentration is reflected by the fact that 5.3 percent of the members and 16 percent of chairmen reported that a second member of the family or a near relation has also been elected to the present parisad.

Land ownership and occupation (defined by the major source of income) clearly indicate that power of rural leadership is still derived from land, more so in case of older representatives (members and chairmen) (Table 4). As of 1977, 43 percent of the rural people were landless (in the sense of having no cultivable land), only 1 percent families owned more than 10 acres of land and average size of holding (including landless) was below 2 acres (Jannuzi and Peach 1977). Yet in the same year only 11 percent of the sample representatives owned less than 2.50 acres and 28 percent owned more than 10 acres, although this proportion varied among districts (Table 5).

Representation of teachers, doctors and businessmen have declined and that of farmers (more particularly rich farmers) has increased compared to the Basic Democracies era. Most of the new businessmen representatives are relatively new entrant to the Union Parisad. This may imply that previous businessmen representatives have moved to the national level politics or have been voted out by the people because they might have misused their UP power to amass fortunes (this seems likely in view of the economic crisis of 1974-75) and that new business representatives are currently enjoying the blessings of the present government. Increased representation of farmers indicate that rich farmers consider UP power as an important vehicle to derive the benefits of government distributed agricultural inputs and services (see Blair 1973 for detailed analysis)⁶.

Table 4: Experience and occupational background of sample of members and chairmen elected in 1977.

| Member/Chairman | Number | Percent | Average land holding (acres) | % by occupation | | |
|--|-----------------|---------|------------------------------|-----------------|----------|--------|
| | | | | Farm- ing | Business | Others |
| Member: | | | | | | |
| Winning 1 previous election | 50 | 22.9 | 7.72 | 90 | 10 | - |
| “ 2 “ | 22 | 10.1 | 8.10 | 82 | 18 | - |
| “ 3 “ | 7 | 3.2 | 16.04 | 100 | - | - |
| “ 4-7 “ | 3 | 1.4 | 5.83 | 100 | - | - |
| Total old members | 82 | 37.6 | 8.46 | 89 | 11 | - |
| New but a family member/near relation was previously elected | 57 | 26.2 | 8.95 | 86 | 12 | 2 |
| Completely new | 79 | 36.2 | 8.14 | 78 | 19 | 3 |
| All members | 218 | 100.00 | 8.46 | 89 | 10 | 1 |
| Chairman: | | | | | | |
| Winning 1 Previous election | 6 | 24.0 | 13.54 | 83 | 17 | - |
| “ 2 “ | 6 | 24.0 | 18.16 | 83 | 17 | - |
| “ 3 “ | 3 | 12.0 | 19.33 | 100 | - | - |
| “ 4-7 “ | 3 | 12.0 | 46.06 | 100 | - | - |
| Total old chairmen | 18 ^a | 72.0 | 21.47 | 89 | 11 | - |
| New but a family member/near relation was previously elected | 6 | 24.0 | 23.67 | 100 | - | - |
| Completely new | 1 | 4.0 | 12.50 | 100 | - | - |
| All chairmen | 25 | 100.0 | 21.63 | 92 | 8 | - |

a. Fifteen of the 18 chairmen were previously chairmen and 3 were previously members.

Source: Field survey 1978.

Table 5: Proportion of Union Parisad representatives according to size of holding in selected districts 1978.

| Size of holding (acres) | % representatives by district | | | | | | | All districts |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|---------|-------|---------|--------------|----------------|----------|---------------|
| | Com-illa | Barisal | Dacca | Tangail | Mym-en-singh | Bogra Rang-pur | Rajshahi | |
| Below 1.00 | 5.2 | - | - | - | - | - | 5.0 | 1.6 |
| 1.00 - 2.50 | 10.3 | 5.0 | 6.9 | 22.7 | 6.8 | 9.5 | 10.0 | 9.5 |
| 2.51 - 5.00 | 46.5 | - | 24.1 | 31.8 | 39.8 | 19.0 | 10.0 | 31.3 |
| 5.01 - 7.50 | 25.9 | 20.0 | 27.6 | 9.1 | 12.3 | 9.5 | 5.0 | 16.9 |
| 7.51 - 10.00 | 5.2 | 20.0 | 10.4 | 18.2 | 15.1 | 14.4 | 15.0 | 12.8 |
| 10.01 - 15.00 | 5.2 | 10.0 | 17.2 | - | 16.4 | 19.0 | 25.0 | 12.7 |
| Above 15.00 | 1.7 | 45.0 | 13.8 | 18.2 | 9.6 | 28.6 | 30.0 | 15.2 |
| All sizes | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| Total No of representatives | 58 | 20 | 29 | 22 | 73 | 21 | 20 | 243 |

Source: Field Survey 1978

The present leadership characteristics amply show that neither the representation of lower income poor nor their participation in planning and implementation of development activities is ensured by the present system. Yet 91 percent of the representatives thought that the present system of election was proper and only 8 percent (19 representatives of which 11 old members, 7 new members and 1 old chairman) of the representatives considered the existing system of election as improper because it allows corrupt/influential people to be elected. One percent had no opinion on this.

Sixty five percent of the representatives were satisfied with their present powers to perform the duties vested in them but 32 percent of the representatives (taken separately 44 percent of the chairmen, mostly old chairmen, and 3.0 percent of the members) considered their present powers inadequate to perform the duties vested in them; 3 percent had no opinion. Asked whether they faced any problem in performing their duties, 60 percent said 'no', 38 percent said 'yes' and 2 percent had no opinion. Of those who said 'yes', 14 percent mentioned mass criticism for "alleged" corruption as the major problem, 12 percent mentioned shortage of agricultural inputs and drinking water, 5 percent mentioned lack of cooperation from government officials and 68 percent mentioned various other problems, e.g. lack of funds, lack of time, poor remuneration for UP members, illiteracy of the people, village factions etc. Low ranking given to agricultural input as a problem is not surprising because only 18 percent of the representatives reported that they sought election to the UP to help rural development (meaning agricultural development and construction of roads); 74 percent intended to serve the society and provide justice through the UP and 8 percent had various other objectives in mind including maintenance of family tradition. Asked whether they would content again for UP position, 91 percent said 'yes', 4 percent said 'no', 5 percent said they would decide at appropriate time. These various opinions of the UP representatives

indicate clearly that they are using the present system to Siphon off the public benefits and further enrich themselves at the cost of rural masses and that they want more power to the same end.

IV- CONCLUSIONS

We have experienced more than 25 years of development planning in this country yet the mechanism of planning has remained almost unchanged: plans are prepared by technocrats and bureaucrats sitting in the capital and planned projects are sent out as administrative orders for implementation. There has been no organizational apparatus to obtain mass participation in formulation and implementation of projects and plans. No doubt such an apparatus cannot but be predominantly political and full political control on the decision making process rarely existed. Decentralization of administration, both political and economic, and subservience of administrative machinery to political decision makers who are essentially representatives of the people, are essential conditions for obtaining mass participation in development activities. Analysis of the powers, functions and actual functioning of the local government institution, particularly the Union Parishad, have revealed that decentralization and politicization and mass participation are still very distant goals although governments, both past and present, have been promising such things in almost every day. Analysis also revealed that the local bodies have been used by various governments as agencies of their power and have used huge public funds to that end. The connivance between bureaucracy (both civil and military) and the rural elite has helped both these classes to amass power, prestige and financial fortunes. Public funds destined for poor rural masses have been siphoned by these people and they have been further enriching themselves. People pay taxes for development but the system of collection is such that they do not know how much they have paid. The same money along with aid funds received from other countries are channeled through the bureaucracy for development of rural areas. Even then, the mass of people have very little say in the way that money is spent. A situation has been created whereby the people have been made to believe that the development funds come from government grant or even from outside the country; the people contribute nothing. As a result, a large part of the money destined for rural masses never actually reach there; they find their way into the pockets of the bureaucracy who control central power and the rural elite who in connivance with the bureaucracy control local power.

Analysis has also revealed that the existing rural power structure, (and also central power structure because rural power is supported by central power) is satisfied, for obvious reasons, with the ongoing arrangement. Indications are also that they would not encourage the coveted decentralization and mass participation needed for bottom-up planning and for allowing masses to benefit from development activities. It seems, there is no alternative for the masses but to organize themselves politically to decide what they should get and get it through proper participation.

Notes:

1. In a 1962 amendment to the ordinance, the provision of nominated membership was abolished.
2. A member of the former Pakistan Civil Service argued that the Deputy Commissioner has combined the functions of political leader and those of an administrator (see, Muhith 1968, p. 292).
3. A Ward is the unit of a Union Council represented by one Union Councilor. Sometimes more than one Councilor may represent one Ward depending on the size of population.
4. This reform proposal was outlined earlier as part of the preparation of the First Five Year Plan (see, Bangladesh 1973b).
5. “The official goals are the statement of intent that are generally to be found in charters and constitutions, annual reports and other official publications and the public utterances of officials. ... Operative goals are uncovered by careful observation and enquiry into the criteria that actually have influence in the choice among alternative courses of action by those who carry out the work of the organization. Such criteria are more often found in the way things get done than explicitly recognized” (Eldridge and Crombie 1974, p. 65; also see, Perrow 1961).
6. See Blair (1973) for a detailed review of how these people have amassed the benefits of credit, fertilizer, irrigation distributed through cooperative, IRDP and Thana Irrigation Programme. He also explains how, Comilla cooperative, initially the preserve of small farmers was later taken over by large farmers.

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APPENDIX A

FUNCTIONS OF UNION COUNCILS AS PER BASIC DEMOCRACIES ORDER, 1959

1. Provision and maintenance of public ways and public streets.
2. Provisions and maintenance of public places. public open spaces, public gardens and public play-grounds.
3. Lighting of public ways, public streets and public places.
4. Plantation and preservation of trees in general, and plantation and preservation of trees on public ways, public streets and public places in particular.
5. Management and maintenance of shamlats, burning and burial grounds, common meeting places and other common property.
6. Provision and maintenance of accommodation for travelers.
7. Prevention and regulation of encroachments on public ways, public streets and public places,
8. Prevention and abatement of nuisances in public ways, public streets and public places.
9. Sanitation, conservancy, and the adoption of other measures for the cleanliness of the union.
10. Regulation of the collection, removal and disposal of manure and street sweeping.
11. Regulation of offensive and dangerous trades.
12. Regulation of the disposal of carcasses of dead animals.
13. Regulation of the slaughter of animals.
14. Regulation of the erection and re-erection of buildings in the union.
15. Regulation of dangerous buildings and structures.
16. Provision and maintenance of wells, water pumps, tanks, ponds and other works for the supply of water
17. Adoption of measures for preventing the contamination of the sources of watersupply for drinking.
18. Prohibition of the use of the water of wells, ponds and other sources of water supply suspected to be dangerous to public health.
19. Regulation or prohibition of the watering of cattle, bathing or washing at or near wells, ponds or other sources of water reserved for drinking purposes.
20. Regulation or prohibition of the streeping of hemp, jute or other plants in or near ponds or other sources of water supply.
21. Regulation or prohibition of dyeing or tanning of skins within residential areas.
22. Regulation or prohibition of the excavation of earth stones or other material within residential areas.
23. Regulation or prohibition of the establishment of brick kilns, potteries and other kilns within residential areas.
24. Registration of births and deaths, and the maintenance of such vital statistics as may be prescribed.

25. Voluntary registration of the sale of cattle and other animals.
26. Holding of fairs and shows.
27. Celebration of public festivals.
28. Provision of relief measures in the event of any fire, flood, hail-storm, earthquake or other natural calamity.
29. Relief for the widows and orphans and the poor, and persons in distress.
30. Promotion of public games and sports.
31. Agricultural, industrial and community development; promotion and development of co-operative movement, village industries, forests, livestock and fisheries.
32. Adoption of measures for increased food production.
33. Provision of first-aid centers.
34. Provision of libraries and reading rooms.
35. Co-operation with other organizations engaged in activities similar to those of the Union Council.
36. Aid in the promotion of education under the direction of the District Council.
37. Any other measures likely to promote the welfare, health, safety, comfort or convenience of the inhabitants of the union or of visitors.

APPENDIX B

TAXES, RATES, TOLLS AND FEES WHICH MAY BE LEVIED BY UNION COUNCILS

1. Tax on the annual value of buildings and lands.
2. Tax on hearths.
3. Tax on the import of goods for consumption, use or sale in a local area.
4. Tax on the export of goods from a local area.
5. Tax on professions, trades and cattings.
6. Tax on births, marriages and feasts.
7. Tax on cinemas, dramatic and theatrical shows and other entertainments and amusements.
8. Tax on animals.
9. Tax on vehicles (other than motor vehicles) including carts and bi-cycles and all kinds of boats.
10. Lighting rate.
11. Drainage rate.
12. Rate for the remuneration of village poice.
13. Rate for the execution of any works of public utility.
14. Conservancy rate.
15. Rate for the provision of water works or the supply of water.
16. Fees on applications for the erection and re-erection of buildings
17. Fees for the use of benefits derived from any works of public utility maintained by local councils.
18. Fees at fairs, agricultural shows, industrial exhibitions, tournaments and other public gatherings.

19. Fees for markets.
20. Fees for licenses, sanctions and permits granted by a local council.
21. Fees for specific services rendered by a local council.
22. Fees for the slaughtering of animals.
23. A special community tax on the adult males for the construction of any public works of general utility for the inhabitants of local area concerned, unless the local council concerned exempts any person in lieu of doing voluntary labour or having it done on his behalf.