

The Role of Alternative Media in Promoting Good Local Governance : An Exploratory Case Study¹

Mamtaj Uddin Ahmed*
Niaz Ahmed Khan, Ph.D.**

Abstract : *There has been very limited systematic effort by way of awareness raising among the general citizen regarding the key issues and challenges of local government in Bangladesh. The general level of understanding and comprehension about local government issues amongst the common citizen in Bangladesh is believed to be low and superficial. In this context, this article reports on the experiences and observations drawn from an experimental programme exploring the current status and future potential of using alternative media (theatre, folk song, kabigan etc) as a tool for promoting and popularizing local government issues among the citizen. The general objective of the study was to explore the prospects of the cultural campaign and alternative media based outreach approach towards public awareness raising on key local government issues, and also to evaluate the effectiveness of the various alternative media tools for reaching out to the people on local government. The findings reveal that majority of the respondents, representing various walks of life, felt that notwithstanding their cogent legal footing; UPs in actuality are weak institutions in terms of power, scope of work and financial resources. There was also a broad realization amongst the respondents about the need and urgency of strengthening, mobilizing and upholding the image of UPs. This can be done through two broad approaches: creating awareness among common people about UP activities; and making the local government/UP representatives more conscious of their roles and responsibilities. The study also reveals that alternative media has a major role to play in promoting the cause of the good local governance in general and UPs in particular. Among the various tools, theatre was preferred by many because of the fact that messages can be transmitted to a wide range of people visually, directly, and in a more entertaining fashion.*

Prologue

Notwithstanding the general interests of the common people about local government operations, there has been very limited systematic effort of awareness raising among the general citizens regarding the key issues and challenges of local government in Bangladesh. As a result, quite a few recent studies (for example, Siddiqui, 2000; Bangladesh Institute of Theatre Arts (BITA), 2005; Ahmed, 2002) have concluded that the general level of understanding and comprehension about local government issues amongst the common citizen in Bangladesh is believed to be low and superficial. In this context, this article looks at the

¹ This paper draws on the insights and experiences of the authors gained through their engagements in the "Study on the Usefulness of Alternative Media Campaign in Popularizing Local Government Issues" sponsored by Bangladesh Institute of Theatre Arts (BITA) with support from USAID/ARD-LGI. The first and second authors acted as the Researcher and Empirical Research Advisor, respectively, in the Study Team. The use of information from the project and the support of the concerned staff are gratefully acknowledged.

* Lecturer, Department of Public Administration, University of Chittagong, Chittagong.

** Professor, Department of Development Studies, University of Dhaka, Dhaka.

experiences and observations drawn from an experimental programme exploring the current status and future potential of using alternative media as a tool for promoting and popularizing local government issues among the citizens.

The paper examines the activities of an innovative programme titled "Promoting Awareness of Local Government Issue (PALGI)" administered by a local development NGO, called BITA, operating in different locations of the greater Chittagong Division. The general objective of the PALGI programme was to explore the prospects of the cultural campaign and alternative media based outreach approach towards public awareness raising on key local government issues, and also to evaluate the effectiveness of the various alternative media tools (Theatre, folk song, kabigan², etc.) tools for making the people more aware on local government. In more specific terms, the objectives of the programme were: (i) to assess the acceptability of the cultural approach as an effective method for campaigning on the local government issues; and (ii) to elicit public opinion and suggestions about possible ways of improving the effectiveness of the use of cultural approaches in creating mass awareness on the local government.

A Selected Review of Literature

Although there exists a sizable literature on the functioning of local government in Bangladesh, research on the role of media and more particularly media's role in improving local governance is strikingly limited.

Some dominant characteristics and trends of local governments, especially of Union Parishads (UPs), have contributed towards a negative perception and image of the local government among the public. According to Siddiqui (1992:317) such characteristics of local government system in Bangladesh include: domination by and complete dependence on national government; highly inadequate mobilisation of local resources; total exclusion of rural poor and their lack of participation in local government bodies; and marginal commitment to devolution/decentralisation in practice (also see, Ahmed 1993, 1999).

Furthermore, a number of major problems also thwart the role and potential of local government bodies. These problems, as identified by Siddiqui (1995: 133, 228-234); Ahmed (2002, 1999, 1993); Ahmed and Kader (1993), among many others, include inadequate finance; exploitation and use of local bodies by central political regimes for own vested interests; intrusion of forces of globalisation in the local economy; non-formal relations with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and

² A traditional folk programme where contesting singers present songs in form of poems on issues in front of rural audiences. Their presentation is accompanied by lively music.

undue and negative interference of Members of Parliament (MPs) in local level development activities.

Some scholars have explored means of mitigating the above problems. For example, Ahmed's (1998: 73-88, 2002: 76-97) recommendations include: a clear cut and explicit constitutional provision regarding local government; elimination of overlapping and ambiguities among many Acts and public circulars; preparation of local government 'plan books'; ensuring participation of citizens in general and especially the ethnic and religious minority in local government activities ;

Some scholars have explored means of mitigating the above problems. For example, Ahmed's (1998: 73-88, 2002: 76-97) recommendations include: a clear cut and explicit constitutional provision regarding local government; elimination of overlapping and ambiguities among many Acts and public circulars; preparation of local government 'plan books'; ensuring participation of citizens in general and especially the ethnic and religious minority in local government activities ; streamlining the roles and responsibilities of various local government bodies; central budgetary support; coordination with NGO activities at the local level..

The importance of ensuring public participation in formulation and implementation of local government developmental programmes has been emphasised by nearly all major studies on Bangladesh local government (Ahmed 1979:219; Choudhury 1987:79; Muttalib and Khan 1983:30). These studies note that there exists superficial and inadequate degree and nature of public participation in local government operations.

While pressing home the urgency of ensuring public participation, some scholars have categorically recommended the role of NGOs in promoting public awareness about local government at the local level [see, for example Siddiqui (1992:141-189), Siddiqui (1995:24-124,212-313), Ahmed, 1979:110-143)], Siddiqui (1995:231), to cite an example among others, opined in favour of "creating mass awareness, organising the disadvantaged and developing leaders from among themselves so that they can deal with the existing local government leadership, act as "watch dogs" during elections and against corruption and wrong policies and practices by the local government organisations" Towards this end, in recent years, a few experimental programmes have specifically attempted to use alternative media and cultural practices as tools of promoting public participation and awareness about local government issues. One such experiment is the Local Democracy Education Programme (LDEP) funded by United States Agency for International Development (USAID), which was started in 1996 by several NGOs notably BRAC, RDRS, Proshika, Uttaran etc.. The programme components include such activities as development and dissemination of voter education materials,

such as posters, flip charts, handbills, leaflets, booklets, etc.; use of cultural media; and holding of rallies, seminars, workshops and public meetings in order to make the people, in general, and the poor and women in particular, aware of their voting rights and ways of applying them effectively (see for details, Siddiqui, 2000:107). The PALGI programme studied in this paper follows those initiatives.

The Case and the Methodology

The case study on BITA was selected purposely, and the selection was based on the following rationale and reasons:

- (i) This experimental programme is unique in the sense that virtually no other organisation has a similar or comparable activity;
- (ii) As noted earlier, the programme has an innovative nature -- calling for documentation of its results and early observations which may be of interest to other organisations and persons engaged in promoting good local governance;
- (iii) There has been virtually no research done on this subject in the region; and
- (iv) The organisations follows a 'rights based approach to development' wherein participation in local government activities is also seen as a vital 'citizen's right'.

The study covered the whole 'implementation area' of BITA - spanning over the following fourteen Upazilas situated in 5 districts of Chittagong, Cox's Bazar, Noakhali, Feni and Laxmipur under Chittagong Division..

Table-1: The coverage of the empirical research

| Districts | Sl. No. | Name of Upazila |
|--------------------|----------------|------------------------|
| Chittagong | 1 | Anwara |
| | 2 | Patiya |
| | 3 | Rangunia |
| | 4 | Mirsharai |
| | 5 | Sitakunda |
| | 6 | Hathazari |
| | 7 | Chandanaish |
| Cox's Bazar | 1 | Sadar |
| | 2 | Ramu |
| Noakhali | 1 | Sadar |
| Feni | 1 | Sadar |
| | 2 | Parshuram |
| Laxmipur | 1 | Ramgati |
| | 2 | Raipur |

Based on initial consultations with the key stakeholders (e.g. relevant

local government institutions, BITA staff, and cultural groups), a total of 200 persons from the following 6 (six) categories and professions were selected as respondents: Chairmen and members (including female members) of the Union Parishads (UPs); Government and non-government service holders; teachers; viewers and audience of the cultural activities; actors and actresses of theatre groups; selected chiefs/senior staff of the partner non-government organisations; businessmen, doctors; folksingers (including local Kabial); related staff of the partner non-government organisations. The following table presents the Upazila-wise selection and distribution of respondents:

Table-2: Upazila-wise number of-respondents

| District | Upazila | Type of Respondents | | | | | | | |
|-------------|-------------|---------------------|---------------------|-----------------|-------------|---------|--------|-------|-----|
| | | Chairman | Member/Woman member | Service holders | Businessman | Teacher | Others | Total | % |
| Chittagong | Rangunia | 1 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 8 | 21 | 1 |
| | Anwara | 1 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 16 | 8 |
| | Patiya | 1 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 2 | 5 | 22 | 11 |
| | Chandanaish | - | 3 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 13 | 7 |
| | Hathazari | 1 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 16 | 8 |
| | Mirsharai | 1 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 5 | 14 | 7 |
| | Sitakunda | - | 3 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 12 | 6 |
| Cox's Bazar | Sadar | 2 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 17 | 9 |
| | Ramu | 1 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 13 | 7 |
| Feni | Sadar | - | 2 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 11 | 6 |
| | Parsuram | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 12 | 6 |
| Noakhali | Sadar | - | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 10 | 5 |
| Laxmipur | Ramgati | 1 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 4 | 13 | 7 |
| | Raipur | - | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 10 | 5 |
| | Total | - | 10 | 38 | 46 | 25 | 19 | 62 | 200 |

The principle tools and processes of data collection on the programme included:

Inception workshop: At the initial stage of the research, the research team met in a workshop with programme staff of BITA, where on the basis of detailed consultations, the following aspects of the study were finalised: design of the research; objectives, scope, categorisation of respondents, sample area; design and test schedule of the questionnaire; and distribution of workload and responsibilities of the members of the research team.

Questionnaire Survey: The questionnaire included 24 questions (with both open and closed ended queries), and was designed to elicit opinions of a wide range of respondents including elected representatives of Union Parishads, government and non-government employees, teachers, businessmen and doctors, viewers-audience of cultural activities, actors-actress and others.

Discussion with direct beneficiaries (Theatre group): Discussions were held with representatives (2 persons - one male and one female member - from each group) of the twenty active theatre groups working under the auspices of the Programme. The discussions focused on such issues as qualitative standards of the theatre, key issues, problems and prospects of theatre as a tool for public awareness raising, opinions and feedback of audiences and viewers including the reactions of local government leaders.

Discussion with the project staff and secondary review the project documents: Throughout the course of the study, the research team kept the concerned Programme staff fully informed and updated on the progress of the research in the form of briefing, meetings and joint field visits. Besides, the relevant office documentation, records, files, publications etc. were collected, reviewed and referred to.

Summary of the Key Findings and Observations

Perception of the Respondents about the Current Status and General State of Affairs of Union Parishads (UPs)

The respondents' perception about the present status and general state of affairs of the concerned Union Parishads was explored. Some 97 percent (i.e. 195 persons) reported to have some degree of knowledge of the activities and functions of their respective UPs, while the rest (3%) said that they simply had no idea of the UPs role and functions.. So it can be said that majority of the sampled respondents have more or less some idea

Table-3: Respondents' views about the present status Union Parishad (UP) of Bangladesh

| S I | Respondents' views | Type of Respondents | | | | | | |
|--------|--|-----------------------|--------------------|-------------|----------|--------|-------|-----|
| | | UP Representatives | Service holders | Businessmen | Teachers | Others | Total | % |
| 1 | Strong in sense of having a legal basis | 6 | 15 | 5 | 3 | 15 | 34 | 13 |
| 2 | Strong is sense of having Administrative Power | 4 | 7 | 8 | 4 | 11 | 34 | 13 |
| 3 | Strong in Legal basis, but in reality weak in terms of power, work & finance | 46 | 44 | 18 | 18 | 42 | 168 | 62 |
| 4 | Comprehensively strong | - | 4 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 13 | 5 |
| 5 | Lack adequate transparency and accountability in operations | 2 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 13 | 5 |
| 6 | Cannot function freely from political & Illegal external influence | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 6 | 2 |
| Total | | 59 | 64 | 38 | 30 | 77 | 268 | 100 |

Notes: Multiple responses were allowed; percentage calculated on the basis of total responses.

about the Union Parishad. Upon further probe, the respondents came out with a number of qualifying remarks about the role of UPs. These are summarised in the following table:

As evident from the above, a majority of 168 respondents (62%) opined that the status of the Union Parishad is strong in the sense that these bodies have a 'legal basis', but they are in reality 'weak in power, work and finance'. Most other comments reflected a generally negative perception of the respondents on the functioning of the UPs.

Respondents' Views and Ideas about Improving the Performance of the Union Parishads

An overwhelming majority of the respondents (197 persons or 98%) unequivocally recognised and emphasised the importance of strengthening the Union Parishads. They explored and discussed various ideas regarding possible ways of improvement of the situation - as summarised in the following table:

Table-5: Steps to promote awareness on local government issues
(as recommended by the respondents)

| S I | Recommended Steps | Type of Respondents | | | | | | |
|--------|--|--------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|----------|--------|-------|-----|
| | | UP represent tives | Service holders | Busines sman | Teachers | Others | Total | % |
| 1 | Use of Alternative Media (theatre, folksong, kabigan etc.) | 45 | 40 | 16 | 13 | 47 | 161 | 60 |
| 2 | Provision of training for the UP representatives | 35 | 27 | 7 | 15 | 5 | 89 | 33 |
| 3 | Organising promotional dialogue, discussions, Meeting, Seminar, Workshop, etc. at various levels (Centre through grassroots) | 4 | 6 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 13 | 5 |
| 4 | Organising popular social events like processions, movements, national occasions (e.g. 'local government day') | 1 | 1 | 2 | - | 1 | 5 | 2 |
| Total | | 85 | 71 | 27 | 29 | 56 | 268 | 100 |

Notes: Multiple responses were allowed; percentage calculated on the basis of total responses.

The most notable ideas and suggestions included: conscientisation and awareness raising amongst the general public on key local government issues and more effective collaboration and partnerships between local government institutions and NGOs for better local governance and upholding the image of the UPs.

Elaborating on the point of 'awareness raising', the respondents were then asked to give further thoughts on possible means of promoting better awareness on local governance issues. The following specific means and steps were suggested by them:

Table-5: Steps to promote awareness on local government issues
(as recommended by the respondents)

| S I | Recommended Steps | Type of Respondents | | | | | | |
|--------|--|-----------------------|--------------------|-------------|----------|--------|-------|-----|
| | | UP representatives | Service holders | Businessmen | Teachers | Others | Total | % |
| 1 | Use of Alternative Media (theatre, folksong, kabigan etc.) | 45 | 40 | 16 | 13 | 47 | 161 | 60 |
| 2 | Provision of training for the UP representatives | 35 | 27 | 7 | 15 | 5 | 89 | 33 |
| 3 | Organising promotional dialogue, discussions, Meeting, Seminar, Workshop, etc. at various levels (Centre through grassroots) | 4 | 6 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 13 | 5 |
| 4 | Organising popular social events like processions, movements, national occasions (e.g. 'local government day') | 1 | 1 | 2 | - | 1 | 5 | 2 |
| Total | | 85 | 71 | 27 | 29 | 56 | 268 | 100 |

Notes: Multiple responses were allowed; percentage calculated on the basis of total responses.

A majority of the respondents (60%) showed a clear preference to the use and adoption of alternative media campaigns (e.g. Theatre, Folksong, Kabigan, etc.) as a very promising means of promoting local governance issues among the general public...

Alternative Media and Cultural Tools for Promoting Awareness on Local Government Issues

The Programme used and engaged a variety of alternative media and cultural tools --notably theatres, posters, flip charts, TV Spots and documentaries, and Audio Cassettes of folk-song and Kabigan for creating awareness on Local Government Issues. Some 2,400 shows of 2

theatres namely 'Janma-Kathan' and 'Jagaran' on sanitation and birth-death registration have been performed so far. Sizeable number (10,000) posters have been developed and distributed among people from different walks of life in the study areas. The poster themes included the following: 'What can a Union Parishad Do' ('Ki Korte Pare Union Parishad') and 'Brothers and sister! How do we want to see our Union Parishads' ('Bhai O bonera- amra amader Union Parishad ka kemon dekthe chai') etc. The other milestones in use and coverage of media tools were publication of 4,000 copies of a 12 pages Flip-charts on the roles and responsibilities of the elected representatives of the Union Parishads; development of 2 TV Spots namely 'Responsibility' ('Daitta') and 'Trust' ('Astha'), and broadcasting those some 50 times in such popular satellite TV channels as NTV, ATN Bangla and Channel I; production and circulation of 2,000 copies of the two audio-cassettes on Folk-song and Kabigan on the theme of roles and responsibilities of the elected representatives of the Union Parishad vis-à-vis the local people.

Theatre: When respondents were asked about observing the BITA's theatre on Local Government Issues- 180 (90%) gave positive answers and only 20 (10%) gave negative answers.

Table-6: Usefulness of theatre as a tool for creating awareness on local government issues

| Answer | Type of respondents | | | | | Total | % |
|------------------|---------------------|-----------------|-------------|----------|--------|-------|-----|
| | UP representatives | Service holders | Businessmen | Teachers | Others | | |
| 100% Appropriate | 30 | 26 | 7 | 12 | 56 | 141 | 71 |
| 50% Appropriate | 17 | 19 | 8 | 5 | 4 | 53 | 26 |
| Meaningless | 1 | 1 | - | 2 | 2 | 6 | 3 |
| Total | 48 | 46 | 25 | 19 | 62 | 200 | 100 |

It was found that 141 (71%) respondents found theatre as a useful tool for creating awareness on local government issues among general people. The particular rationale and advantages for the use of theatre, as mentioned by the respondents, are as follows:

- Directly contributes to creation of consciousness- 80³ (33%),
- Easily understandable contents and approach - 39 (16%),
- Learning through enjoyment and happiness- 40 (16%),
- Can reach people straight - wide appeal - 25 (10%),
- Learning through visualization and watching- 20(8%),
- Message can circulate quickly to people- 13 (5%),
- Effective publicity medium- 9(4%) and
- Build relations between UP and society- 5(2%).

³ Number of responding participants and the figure in the parenthesis represent the percentage

Poster/Flip-Chart: When asked whether they have seen the BITA published Posters/Flip-chart on the roles and responsibilities of the representatives of UP and peoples expectation on UP- 177 (89%) respondents opined positively and 23 (11%) opined negatively.

Table-7: Usefulness of poster/flip-chart for creating awareness on Local government issues

| Answer | Type of respondents | | | | | Total | % |
|------------------|---------------------|-----------------|-------------|----------|--------|-------|-----|
| | UP representatives | Service holders | Businessmen | Teachers | Others | | |
| 100% Appropriate | 34 | 24 | 12 | 9 | 44 | 123 | 62 |
| 50% Appropriate | 13 | 21 | 12 | 9 | 12 | 67 | 33 |
| Meaningless | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6 | 10 | 5 |
| Total | 48 | 46 | 25 | 19 | 62 | 200 | 100 |

The study found that 177 (89%) respondents considered Posters/Flip-chart or similar visual tools as an appropriate tool, and they assigned the following reasons in support of their preference:

- ♦ Helps the educated people to realize their mistakes- 80(28%),
- ♦ An effective publicity medium- 70(24%),
- ♦ Helps create mass awareness- 67(23%).
- ♦ Messages can reach many people simultaneously at a given time- 25 (9%),
- ♦ Messages in a visual form have a longer impact on people's mind- 25(9%),
- ♦ Repeated viewing possible that can help people to remember the message more effectively- 20(7%),
- ♦ Practical, clear and attractive- 5(2%).

It was also found that: 148 (74%) respondents welcomed the use of TV documentaries as an appropriate tool based on the following logic:

Table-8: Usefulness of telecasting TV Spot for creating awareness on Local government issues

| Answer | Type of respondents | | | | | Total | % |
|------------------|---------------------|-----------------|-------------|----------|--------|-------|-----|
| | UP representatives | Service holders | Businessmen | Teachers | Others | | |
| 100% Appropriate | 33 | 28 | 16 | 13 | 46 | 136 | 68 |
| 50% Appropriate | 13 | 16 | 8 | 5 | 13 | 55 | 28 |
| Meaningless | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 9 | 4 |
| Total | 48 | 46 | 25 | 19 | 62 | 200 | 100 |

The respondents further commented that the TV programmes were:

- ♦ Popular and had widespread usage- 85 (55%),
- ♦ Commonly acceptable and attractive medium-73(30%),
- ♦ Contributes to direct awareness raising-56(23%),
- ♦ Clear evidence that mass-people are impressed-16(7%),
- ♦ Can watch and hear at a same time-12 (5%).

Audio Cassettes on Folksong/Kabigan:

In answer to the question about listening to BITA produced audio cassettes on Folk-song/Kabigan- 164 (82%) respondents gave positive and 36(18%) gave negative opinion..

Table-9: Usefulness of audio cassette for creating awareness on local government issues

| Answer | Type of respondents | | | | | Total | % |
|------------------|---------------------|-----------------|-------------|----------|--------|-------|-----|
| | UP representatives | Service holders | Businessmen | Teachers | Others | | |
| 100% Appropriate | 33 | 24 | 13 | 9 | 38 | 117 | 59 |
| 50% Appropriate | 13 | 20 | 10 | 8 | 21 | 72 | 36 |
| Meaningless | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 11 | 5 |
| Total | 48 | 46 | 25 | 19 | 62 | 200 | 100 |

In this regard the research found that:

- ♦ A sizeable number of respondents (117 or 59%) appreciated the use of audio cassettes of Folk-song/Kabigan
- ♦ Cultural affinity of people expressed by listening to their own cultural Folk-song/Kabigan- 70 (29%),
- ♦ Easy preservation for repeated use/listening - 65 (27%),
- ♦ Contributes directly to consciousness building- 60 (24%),
- ♦ People with lower income find it easier to collect- 30 (12%),
- ♦ Successful, time tested and practical medium- 10(4%),
- ♦ Learning by listening- 10(4%).

Impact of Alternative Media Intervention

The research eventually explored people's views and feedback regarding the extent and nature of impact of the alternative media campaign in promoting good local governance. It was found that 170 (85%) respondents noted some degree of positive change resulting from the use of various alternative media tools and approaches, while 21 (11%) respondents commented they 'did not know' or unaware of such impacts. The rest (9 respondents or 4%) opined in the negative (that there has not been any positive impact).

Table-10: Changes in the relations or communications between people and their UP

| Answer | Type of respondents | | | | | Total | % |
|------------|---------------------|-----------------|-------------|----------|--------|-------|-----|
| | UP representatives | Service holders | Businessmen | Teachers | Others | | |
| Yes | 40 | 40 | 21 | 18 | 51 | 170 | 85 |
| No | 6 | 1 | 1 | - | 1 | 9 | 4 |
| Don't Know | 2 | 5 | 3 | 1 | 10 | 21 | 11 |
| Total | 48 | 46 | 25 | 19 | 62 | 200 | 100 |

The respondents further identified the following forms and manifestations of such changes:

Table-11: Nature of changes in relations or communications between people and their UP

| S I | Changes | Type of Respondents | | | | | Total | % |
|-------|--|---------------------|-----------------|-------------|----------|--------|-------|-----|
| | | UP Representatives | Service holders | Businessmen | Teachers | Others | | |
| 1 | Mass people indicate more interest in UP activities | 30 | 30 | 15 | 12 | 30 | 117 | 45 |
| 2 | UP representatives & people have better awareness about their roles & responsibilities | 25 | 27 | 12 | 10 | 16 | 90 | 35 |
| 3 | Peoples' participation has increased in UP activities | 11 | 16 | 7 | 4 | 12 | 50 | 19 |
| 4 | No substantial qualitative changes happened; most changes are cursory | - | - | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 |
| Total | | 66 | 73 | 35 | 27 | 59 | 260 | 100 |

Notes: Multiple responses were allowed; percentage calculated on the basis of total responses.

The respondents also suggested the following measures in order to improve and expand the impact of the alternative media campaign in the study areas :

Table-12: Suggested measures for improving the alternative media campaign

| Sl | Suggested improvement measures | Number of Respondents | % |
|-------|---|-----------------------|-----|
| 1 | Training (by using alternative media tools) particularly targeting UP Representatives, especially female members | 95 | 33 |
| 2 | Extend the duration of the project | 90 | 32 |
| 3 | New themes should be incorporated in the Theatre to avoid monotony, and theatre shows should be expanded to new areas | 55 | 20 |
| 4 | Participation of all level peoples, representing all walks of village life. | 5 | 2 |
| 5 | Engaging religious leaders in various media campaigns | 15 | 5 |
| 6 | Closer interaction peoples & UP in organizing and implementing media campaign | 30 | 10 |
| Total | | 285 | 100 |

Epilogue

The above discussions allude to the fact that the present status of the vital local government institution of Union Parishad in terms of their roles and performance is nominal and insignificant. Majority of the respondents of this study, representing various walks of life, felt that notwithstanding their cogent legal footing, UPs in actuality are weak institutions in terms of power, scope of work and financial resources. There was also a broad realisation amongst the respondents about the need and urgency of strengthening, mobilising and upholding the image of UPs. This could be done through two broad approaches: creating awareness among common people about UP activities; and making the local government/UP representatives more conscious of their roles and responsibilities. The study also reveals that alternative media (Theatre, folk song, Kabigan etc.) plays a major role in promoting the cause of the good local governance in general and UPs in particular. Among the various tools, theatre was preferred by many respondents because of the fact that messages may be transmitted to a wide range of people visually, directly and in a more entertaining fashion. As there has been very limited effort in usage of alternative media in promoting local governance, this experimental Programme of 'PALGI brings out some important observations and issues for policy makers and development practitioners and this interesting area of study calls for further attention from development researchers and practitioners alike.

References

- Ahmed, Tofail. (2002): Ekush Sataker Esthanyo Sarkar abong Math Proshason: Kotipai Sansker Prastab (in Bengali). Rupantar, Khulna.
- Ahmed, Ali. (1979): Administration of Local Self-government for Rural Areas in Bangladesh. Local Government Institute, Dacca.
- Ahmed, Tofail and Kader, Md. Abdul. (1993): Esthanyo Sarkarer Jugosandhikkhon: Kathamo-Karjogoto Punargothoner Aloke Kichu Superish (in Bengali). Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development, Comilla.
- Ahmed, Tofail. (1993): Decentralisation and the Local State Under Peripheral Capitalism: A Study in the Political Economy of Local Government in Bangladesh. Academic Publishers, Dhaka.
- Ahmed, Tofail. (1998): Esthanyo Sarkarer Sansker Bhabana Dui Dashak (in Bengali). Coastal Association for Social Transformation, Bhola.
- Ahmed, Tofail. (1999): Bikendrikaran, Math Proshason O Esthanyo Sarkar- Ekush Sataker Janaproshason Sansker Bhabana (in Bengali). Community Development Library, Dhaka.
- Alam, Bilkis Ara. And Azam, K.Q.(eds) (1987): Union Parishad Manual (in Bengali). National Institute of Local Government, Dhaka.
- Bangladesh Institute of Theatre Arts (BITA). (2005): Study on the Usefulness of Alternative Media Campaign in Popularizing Local Government Issues, BITA, Chittagong.
- Chowdhury, Lutful Hoq. (1987): Local Self-Government and its Reorganization in Bangladesh. National Institute of Local Government, Dhaka.
- Muttalib, M. A. and Khan, Mohd. Akbar Ali. (1983): Theory of Local Government. Sterling Publishers Private Limited, New Delhi/Bangalore/Jullundur.
- National Institute of Local Government (NILG).(1998): Union Parishader Moulik Bisay. National Institute of Local Government, Dhaka.
- Saha, Dilip Kumar. (1997): Esthanyo Sarkar: Union Parishad Babosthapon. Maitri Saha, Noakhali.
- Siddiqui, Kamal. (ed) (1992): Local Government in South Asia: A Comparative Study. University Press Limited, Dhaka.
- Siddiqui, Kamal. (ed) (1995): Local Government in Bangladesh. University Press Limited, Dhaka.
- Siddiqui, Kamal.(2000): Local Governance in Bangladesh: Leading Issues and major Challenges. The University Press Limited, Dhaka.