LOCAL GOVERNANCE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN BANGLADESH: THE NEED FOR ACCELERATED VOLUNTARISM AND PEOPLE’S PARTICIPATION

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Abstract: This paper examines the local governance and sustainable development linkages over viewing the key concepts to be discussed, which also highlights the necessity of extensive voluntary actions and underlying importance of mainstreaming popular participation in all levels of decision-making process for the growing sustainable development in Bangladesh. Moreover, poverty alleviation and people’s participation in decision-making process have come under especial attention with the emphasis of empowering people through local institutions and widening of voluntary programmes for meeting up the felt-needs of the local people to reach the goal of sustainable development in the new millennium.

Introduction

Although a new country, Bangladesh has a long recorded history (Siddiqui, 1994). After a long colonial rule and twenty-five years of domination by Pakistani rulers, this delta-shape country has been at liberty since 1971 through an armed struggle. With the change over time, some changes and developments have also hitherto been occurred in all sectors of the state. But the issue of governance, pertinent to sustainable development, faces questions from donor agencies, members of civil society and funding agencies, has been gaining importance among various stakeholders involved in development programmes. That is why governance in general and good governance in particular has been gaining momentum in Bangladesh.

The governance crisis in Bangladesh is now acute. After the expiry of autocratic government, people were naturally expecting all round governance reforms in the country. However, the fact is that despite repeated lip service by the powerful, precious little has been done by the way of governance reforms during the last one decade. As a result, Bangladesh has entered the new millennium in a rather sorry state (Siddiqui, 2000).

Many development scholars attributed the dismal economic performance of many countries to the problems of governance. And thus, sustainable development can not be achieved without good governance. So in this backdrop, sound local governance is a crying need and a prerequisite for sustainable social and human development. Achieving sustainability through local governance is a common issue in many developing countries like Bangladesh. The importance of decentralized governance is increasing in every democratic country and so is in Bangladesh for its multifarious benefits and utilities. Taking all these facts into consideration, this paper makes a point of local governance, which shows greater potentials in achieving sustainable development through an improved system of governance at local level. The article also recounts the factors responsible for the growth of voluntarism in Bangladesh and reviews potential advantages of local voluntary organizations in sustainable development. The paper also gives emphasis on popular participation in all phases of planning and decision-making process for the purpose of sustainable development as a whole.

Local Governance: A Leading Issue

The term ‘governance’ has been very popular in developing countries considering it as the pre-condition for sustainable development. The economic and human development of a country largely depend on the degree of good governance what according to many scholars, development specialists and social thinkers say. Local governance is a local people’s administrative authority to manage a nation’s affairs at local level. Local governance comprises of a set of institutions, mechanism and process through which citizens and their groups can articulate their interests
and needs, mediate their differences and exercise their rights and obligations at the local level (UNDP, 2004). It requires partnership between local governmental institutions, civil society organizations and private sector for participatory, transparent, accountable and equitable service delivery and local development. Local governance necessitates empowering local governments with authority and resources and building their capacity to function as participatory institutions that are responsive and accountable to the concerns and needs of all citizens. And at the same time, it is concerned with strengthening of grassroots democracy and empowering citizens, communities and their organizations. Governance is a terminology that is acquiring larger usage and significance in recent times, but it is, by no means, a new phenomenon. Governance has been defined as the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social resources for development (World Bank, 1994). The concept ‘governance’ can be defined in various ways, which simply means a process of decision-making and implementation process. Governance in a broad sense encompasses virtually every institution in society, from the family to the state, in the context of development cooperation. Governance is a process whereby citizens’ needs and interests are articulated for the positive social and economic development of the entire society and in the light of a perceived common good. Governance means more than government: it refers to a political process that encompasses the whole society and contributes to the making of citizens, active contributors to the social contact that binds them together (UNESCO, 1997). But in the world today decentralized governance soon began to be seen as an alternative system of governance where a ‘people-centred’ approach to resolving local problems is followed to ensure economic and social justice (Kothari, 1996). When central governance fails to ensure equal rights to citizens and faces problems to maintain social and economic harmony with equal social justice, local governance is presumed to ‘perform the same to satisfy the needs of the local people. And thus local governance should be seen as an important correlate of development policies to equip local groups and bodies to become qualified and fittest members of the global village. If we add the adjective ‘good’ before governance it means more than governance barring good. Good governance refers to the process of mechanism where citizen’s rights are exercised, accountability and transparency are maintained properly and people’s participation is ensured for the equitable pursuit of economic well being of the society.

Good governance is a good rule that essentially signifies the welfare and betterment of a state and its populace. Accountability reduces corruption and assures citizens that their government’s actions are guided by the needs of the society. Accountability and transparency make organizations and institutions more responsive to the needs of the poor. They enable the poor to exercise their voices to influence service provisions. Without accountability and transparency organizations and institutions are likely to be corrupt and authoritarian (Siddiqui, 2000). It is found in many studies that state-sponsored development of modern kind has often led to regional disparities, social disparities, backwardness among some sections of the society and palpable rural-urban conflicts. Decentralized governance has got momentum and it is a need of the common people, which at least can ensure the felt needs of the local people enabling them to participate more directly and effectively in governance process. If people can participate more effectively in the decision-making process they would be able to put forward their opinions for their community development. And people participate more effectively if institutions are located close to where they live (UNDP, 2004). The more the local people will be closer to the decision-making process, the better sustainable development of Bangladesh is surely to be achieved.

**Sustainable Development: An Overview**

Sustainability refers to the maintenance or enhancement of resource’s productivity on a long term basis (Chambers, 1988 quoted in Hasan, 1999). The concept of sustainable development causes considerable confusion, albeit it is very widely used. Although it is important to impose a single definition, the researchers believe that clarity of understanding is important.
in order to make the concept useable. A clear definition would help to secure sufficient consensus to promote collective action between individuals and agencies operating within a range of policy areas and at different levels of governance.

There are various definitions of sustainable development which are used to mean the concept. One of these definitions, a widely used one given by Brantland Commission, which defines sustainable development as, “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (WCED, 1987).” Sustainable development is in some cases is thought of as involving increases in the quality of life which are equitable.

But the problems of sustainability in the developing countries can be held responsible for poverty and issues related to it. Poverty is a social disease, which hinders ‘long term’ productive life, and so needs to be eradicated. The path of sustainable development will be easier through the alleviation of poverty. Frank (1996) also underlines the importance of community participation and beneficiary involvement in sustainable development programmes. Empowering communities with formal skill development training is also important for sustainable development. The aforementioned aspects of sustainable development can be achieved by decentralizing the management of resources upon which local communities depend, and giving these communities an effective say over the use of these resources (WCEP, 1987). Sustainable development calls for human beings to be placed at the centre of the stage; and appropriately constituted local governments are the best institutional mechanism to achieve this imperative towards promoting sustainable development (Ahmad and Ahmed, 2002).

Many local communities in developing countries and in Bangladesh are in the trap of poverty created during the colonial and neo-colonial period due to multifarious reasons. As a result, the most of the people in the developing countries still continue to live in abject and endemic poverty. Unequal distribution of resources, consumerism and materialism created out of capitalism is considered to be inimical to sustainable development. The lavish use of energy and much consumption of resources by the affluent sections of the society have caused environmental damages. For a developing and poor country like Bangladesh, the important principles that must be addressed for the success of sustainable development are thus: eradication of human poverty, empowerment through traditional institutions, and the introduction of locally-based planning with the participation of its beneficiaries. (Quoted in Hasan, 1999). Alongside government programmes and activities for sustainable development, community-based an organization that emanates from and is operated by the community itself has a better chance of mobilizing people is adopting a culture of sustainable development. Since poverty is a major issue in many developing countries, and so is in Bangladesh, much more attention should be paid to eradicate this chronic and socially embedded problem. At the same time, people’s participation and empowerment of local people through traditional practices demand an underlying importance for sustainable development. If decision comes from the people in a bottom-up process and people’s participation is ensured and encouraged, the goal of sustainable development can certainly be achieved over a period of time. In this context voluntary organizations can play a very pivotal role to encourage and mobilize local people and resources with an aim at supporting local groups for sustainable development.

Voluntary Organizations: The Fourth Sector

Voluntary or community-based organizations are called the fourth sector of development enterprise. UNV Chief (2003) said in the World Summit on Sustainable Development-“Voluntary action is fourth cornerstone of sustainable development”. Like other cornerstones, sustainable development must be encouraged, understood and facilitated because in this era of globalization turning into global village, the need for voluntary actions calls for much attention of policy-makers, stakeholders and community members for sustainable development of the country. Now a pertinent question comes here to raise is: what
is voluntarism? Voluntarism comes from the Latin Word “Voluntas” meaning “will”, it may assume various forms of impulses, instincts, passions, desires, etc. ‘voluntarism’ refers to the offering of goods and services through one’s own free will (Millerand et al., 1986). Voluntarism can also be defined as a will of free service leaving out the question of paid or unpaid, where the service is given to promote social welfare and also to help the people of the locality to undertake activities in a self-reliance manner, partially or wholly, to satisfy their felt needs.

Voluntary organizations are the major vehicles for social development. The people involved in the voluntary organizations provide financial support and required services thorough their free will. Voluntary organization, in this paper stands for, non-profit groups formed by the people of any community to accomplish some developmental goals. These local voluntary or community-based organizations may also be called development agencies, or self-help organizations, which are run, financed, established and organized by the people of respective community whereas an NGO is established, organized and financed by people outside the community where it functions. Voluntary works through voluntary or community-based organizations can bring a change among local people where they can play a vital role for sustainable development. Voluntary organizations can be good development partners of the government to lead the country for sustainable development.

**Voluntarism in Bangladesh: The Historical Roots**

Voluntarism is not a new phenomenon in this country because as it seems to be a part of cultural heritage of the people of this region. Voluntary and charitable organizations in this region received recognition, even in the British-era, as early as in 1860s through the Societies Registration Act (GOB 1985). In Bangladesh the people were converted to Islam, before the Muslim became the ruler of the area and so new converts had to struggle against different social disadvantages (Hasan, 1999).

At that time, thus, financial and emotional help to each other became very popular social necessity among the people of the then society. This practice has continued, and the Islam, the religion of majority people of Bangladesh gives much more emphasis on charity. *Zakat* (annual compulsory charity for the purification of wealth), one of the five pillars of Islam has an important bearing on society, apart from this the other forms of charity such as helping the neighbors, donating a small amount of agricultural produce to charity is a culture followed by the Muslims in this country.

The organized form of voluntary organizations was first established in Bangladesh (Bengal) following the Bengal famine of 1943, which claimed the lives of three million people. Following the typhoon in 1970 that registered a death toll of 500,000 people in Bangladesh, the number of VOs increased (Ibid).

After this massive destruction of human lives, cattle, crops and other properties, the survivors organized themselves to solve their own problems. Due to the principles of self-help and reciprocal cooperation, many voluntary organizations followed the earlier initiatives and started to operate at local levels.

The self-help movement in Bangladesh has intensified rapidly since her independence in 1971. Almost 50 percent of the voluntary organizations active in Bangladesh were created between 1975 and 1990 (Hasan 1991 quoted in Hasan 1999), when the country was under military rule or quasi-military rule following the military coups in 1975. The existence of military and authoritarian governments prompted local people in many parts of the world to organize themselves. When the independent government failed to meet the need of the people in Bangladesh they became inspired to themselves to find-out an alternative way for the fulfillment of their needs.

**Voluntary Organizations and Programmes in Bangladesh: Initiatives for Development**

Voluntary organizations in Bangladesh can mobilize and are mobilizing people for development. All the locally organized and funded organizations in Bangladesh (except one percent) are organized and run by volunteers (Ibid.).
The local voluntary organizations also have been able in the past to mobilize financial resources. The amount of money mobilized by the voluntary organizations from the internal sources is not negligible in comparison with the funds available to the lowest tier of local government (Union council) in Bangladesh. More than 65 per cent of VOs functioning at the local level have an annual budget more than average annual budget of the Union council which amounts at TK. 56,000 or 2,220 dollars in 1980s. (Hasan 1999).

Moreover, many philanthropists committed to help the poorer sections of the society have also been instrumental in developing voluntary development programmes in Bangladesh. The most significant contribution was made by Akter Hamid Khan, a member of the (British) Indian Civil Service (1938-44), who left the lucrative job and became an apprentice Locksmith (1944-46) to experience himself the hardship of poor people (Raper 1970). Khan was the pioneer of programme popularly known as, Comilla Model – a village based co-operative programme for comprehensive rural development. He also established the East Pakistan Academy of Village Development presently known as Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development, BARD, situated in Comilla. The BARD is now the major organization in Bangladesh imparting rural development training to elected officials and to the members of public service. Except BARD, other development programmes organized by public servants are Palli Mongal Samities (Village Welfare Societies), by T.I.M.N. Chowdhury in the 1930s, promotion of development in Comilla (N.M. Khan) and in Pabna (H.S.M.Ishaque) both in 1930s (Haq 1978 in Hasan 1999) Rangunia Model cooperatives in the 1960s and the Swanirvar (Self-reliance) programme in the 1970s were organized by Mahbubul Chashi (a district administrator) Ulashi-Jadunathpur (a major canal digging project for irrigation) in the 1970s was organized by Mahiuddin Khan Alamgir, who was then a district administrator (Stevens et al. 1976). Some altruistic individuals committed to society and to help the others at the grassroots level took the initiatives to organize voluntary organizations with a view to bringing a change in rural areas and the society as a whole. Voluntary actions should be highly encouraged and patronized by the government to ensure sustainable development. Initiatives taken by any socially committed person can pave the way for sustainable development, be it sporadically organized, or individually initiated. Nevertheless, even with present arrangements the local voluntary sector has gained some success in the aspects of development. If activities of voluntary organizations are widened, under the aegis of local governance, the path of sustainable development will be easier.

Voluntary Organizations and Sustainable Development: Exploring the Linkages

In the foregone section we have discussed the local voluntary organizations and programmes in Bangladesh, where we have shown that there have been altruistic individuals and voluntary enterprises and activities supporting and promoting development in Bangladesh. The local voluntary section has gained some success in the eradication of poverty and in the empowerment of local communities through traditional practices and institutions. This section analyses the involvement and performance of the voluntary organizations in these two essential aspects of sustainable development.

Poverty Alleviation: Step Towards Development

Poverty is a state of vulnerability. Poverty, an indicative of inferior social position, can be defined as an insufficiency of economic resources to meet the predetermined dietary needs of an individual or a household (Rahman, 1994). Poverty is the lack or misuse of resources to obtain the types of diets, participate in the activities and has the living conditions and amenities that are customary in the societies to which a person belongs (Townsend, 1979). To eradicate poverty, one needs to start with primarily financial support and other resources to provide customary diets, health care facilities, and education for the beneficiaries. Governments of all developing countries, donor agencies and policy-making bodies have strong needs to remove poverty. To do this, the poor have to be empowered with income yielding assets and increasing access to natural resource. (Aziz,
Dr. M Yunus, a professor of economics, identified poverty as the problem of people’s access to credit in Bangladesh. According to him a person having access to credit with no collaterals can stay out of poverty in a self-reliance manner. Professor Yunus, the creator of Grameen Bank, a micro-credit organization, which aims to cater to the needs of poverty-stricken people with no collaterals. The main thrust of this organization is directed towards integrating the poor into the development process and to reduce their levels of poverty through employment and income generating activities. The Grameen Bank success is derived from the fact that it has operated completely unlike other banks and that it derives its values, methodologies, and legitimacy from the same wellspring as the voluntary organizations (Smillie 1995 quoted in Hasan 1999). The Grameen Bank recruit the field officer from the respective community and provide them with loans in cash to promote self-employment and make them income earners and organize themselves for self-development. Ganosastho Kendro (GK, People’s Health Centre) is another voluntary organization established with an objective to provide health care to people. Later the GK, moved to a holistic approach of community development with the initiative of local people when it could have been able to identify health problem as the outcome of the vicious circle of poverty, the Ganosastho Kendro has been successful in providing complete health care to people living in the areas contiguous to the centre. The objectives of Ganosastho Kendro are to evolve a system by which the health care of the entire population of a particular area can be provided efficiently and effectively with minimum expenditure and minimum benefits, and with the employment of the minimum number of medical staff (Zaman 1984). Thus, the initiative taken by the Ganosastho is a holistic approach for health care of the people and it is an efficient strategy for the eradication of poverty. These mentioned VOs have achieved success in alleviating poverty situation in Bangladesh. A survey on performance of voluntary organizations in rural areas in Bangladesh suggests that almost 83 percent of the people involved in voluntary organization programmes saw a substantial improvement in their income in a very short period of time. In fact, 26 percent of these people have been able to more than double their income after they joined the voluntary organizations (Hasan 1991 quoted in Hasan 1999). With these initiatives taken by the aforementioned voluntary organizations at least absolute poverty can be eliminated. Due to their initiatives for poverty eradication and imparting training to those people for self-development raises their levels of consciousness and faith on themselves in their ability in changing their fates with only a little outside help. And these voluntary organizations have been successful in developing skills, raising consciousness and eradicating poverty of the people concerned. Poverty can be eradicated through the mobilization of resources in Bangladesh, where local people can help themselves to this end. Chanda (voluntary contribution) is one of the major forms of resources mobilization. In rural areas of Bangladesh, the amount of money is collected through Chanda in Muslim religion congregations. The Chanda could be a great and potential source of poverty alleviation tool and rural sustainable development strategy. The total monetary contribution collected in all the religious congregations held within a union council area, could be at least the size of the annual union council budget of the area (Hasan 1993). The money collected as Chanda during congregations can be used to undertake some emergency projects within the area, such as, repair work on roads, school, madrasha, building, or bridge, culvert, mosques etc. In doing so, a good number of workers are needed, creating employments for the people in the area. Thus, employment opportunities for the local poor help in the eradication of poverty through the improvement in the access to education and market.

**Empowering Local Communities: The role of Local Institutions**

The major resource of a country is people. And there is a correlation between population and development. So the primary objective of development is to improve the living conditions of the people. People are our major resource. The success of the development process very much depends on their empowerment through traditional practices where local institutions can play a very substantial role. In this section of discussion attempt albeit briefly, to provide a reflection on the empowerment of local
communities through local institutions laying importance on the traditional practices of the same. The traditional Panchayet system, that still exists in Bangladesh as samaj, which is a very old institution. This is a body of a large number of families in a particular area. Not a single family lives outside the Samaj, (Alam; 1979), and is active in performing several important community functions, such as village defence, management and maintenance of religious institutions, organizations of festivals, cultural and recreational activities, and management of cemeteries (Hasan 1993). The Samaj is involved in the establishment, management, and maintenance of madrasha (educational institutions emphasizing religious teachings) and moqtabs (primary religious teaching institutions providing some general education as well). The Samaj enjoys enough powers and authority (Barman, 1983, quoted in Naznin 2002) and is related to activities-administrative, educational, cultural and economic (Nazimuuddin 1980). Occasionally, Samaj also conduct and maintain rural roads, bridges, culverts, and dams by its own voluntary labor and financial support. A Samaj can generate human and financial resources every year for preparing unpaved roads, extending paved roads, making and maintaining playgrounds for the community people and sinking tub wells for supplying pure drinking water for the local people. Many community level groups, and individual initiated development programmes for the community at large other than Samaj sponsored programmes. In many parts of Bangladesh especially in rural areas community people are involved in voluntary activities for their own local development such as-running and maintaining educational institutions, making dams or embankments for flood control, imparting training to women or young non-literate for poultry farming or fisheries and skill development training. In many remote areas in Bangladesh, many community groups are also involved in cattle and poultry farming, agricultural cooperation, and adult education programmes. A major strength of these local voluntary organizations is their participatory approach for development, and participation of the beneficiaries has created scope for other development activities. The local voluntary organizations present their ideas and invite the local people to form groups and come forward with their programmes with a view to achieving their goals for community development. These local voluntary organizations encourage the local people’s views, their traditional values and inspire them to take part in voluntary actions. The successful story of voluntary organizations is that of women’s participation in their programmes. Women are the neglected and backward section in Bangladesh and are most often left out from the government plan, decision-making and development programmes. In Bangladesh, most of the beneficiaries of voluntary organizations are women having all accesses open to them.

These voluntary organizations have their commitment and as earnest eagerness to mobilize local people for development. Motivation and positive attitude of these organizations are their main will force and impetus by which they can encourage and mobilize local people in self-help principles. For the reasons voluntary organizations have been successful in undertaking people-centered development programmes. The direct and spontaneous participation of the local people in development efforts have paved the way for the organizers to identify the local people needs and ways to meet the needs with no or only a little outside help. The real purpose of local people’s participation is to develop human capabilities for decision-making and action. Voluntary organizations in their initiatives have been successful to promote local people and encourage them to get together for making on their own development programmes. Only a little support from government for these organizations can make a big success in achieving the goal of sustainable development.

**People’s Participation: Prerequisite for Development**

People’s participation in the affairs of the development activities is an important part of governance. Participation means people’s involvement in decision-making, planning and implementing of development objectives. And participatory approach to sustainable development has become popular worldwide which is often termed bottom up approaches for management and policy-making. Public participation in this regard is a cornerstone to both community development and community
economic development. In order to make this cornerstone functional, a sense of consensus, or at least significant majority support, is very necessary. As Milton Esman observes, “one of the tasks of nation-building and development is of bring members of the national community into a network of relationships and institutions which enables them to participate actively in decisions affecting their individual and group welfare (Milton Esman quoted in Bava 1997). Participation refers to the involvement of the people in decision-making and implementation of development programmes, in sharing their benefits and also in evaluating such programmes (Uphoff et al. 1977 cited in Zinnat Ara Naznin, 2002). The rationale of people’s participation is derived from the democratic imperative that all those whose interests are affected by decisions out to take part in the decision-making process. The important and significant causes lie behind the fact is that “when everybody takes part in the decision-making process, self-interest is supposed to guide them to arrive at decisions that are consistent with everybody’s good (Aziz and Arnold, 1966). Participation is about building partnership and ownership from the bottom up. More recently it was discovered that participation helps promise outside the project framework for planning and implementing large-scale government programmes (Thompson 1995), and for encouraging good and often local governance (Gaventa and Valderraina 1999, in Blackburn et al. 2000). In the 1960s the governments of the Third World promised to put an end to rural poverty through “Green Revolution.” Today it is people’s participation (Banargee, 1979) which has been more important. After the mid 1970s the new strategy of participation has emerged as a major new force in development thinking. It is believed that people’s participation may lead to good governance paving the way for sustainable development. Through participation the people of the community concerned become more enthusiastic and encourages than what there were ever before the process for people’s centred development initiative began. When they feel concerned with the community development programmes they become more assertive and hold positive attitude towards the initiatives. And people learn how to promote their own development by actually participating in the process of planning, implementation, monitoring and evolution. Participation as an educative process contributes to human resource development. It is one of the parameters for promoting good governance which envisages participation of the entire society in governance through change in their subsidiary roles and their direct involvement in areas hitherto kept exclusive in the public domain (DDA 1993, UNDP, 1995, World Bank, 1994). Participation is also discussed as a process whereby the poor people seek to enhance some influence and to gain access to the resources which would help them sustain and improve their standards (Oakley 1991, quoted in Nazneen). Participation of citizens in the development process in the heartbeat and pulse rate of development administration (Bava, 1997). It also refers to the decentralization of governance which is an effective mechanism for increasing sustainable development. Further, by facilitating people’s participation, decentralization can act as a vehicle for mobilizing popular support for development programme and projects because of the feeling of local ownership of the initiative. It encourages, people to maximize their own commitment and contribution towards the successful implementation of development projects and towards making development enduring (UN, 1992). The participation of people in the governance process is considered to be very significant and crucial for sustainable development. With the participation of the local people on a regular basis economic development can be achieved at the level of expectation and political development as well. People’s participation in decision-making, planning and evaluating policies plays a key and supportive role in local governance leading to sustainable development.

Voluntarism and Popular Participation: The Need Analysis

Voluntarism is in today’s world considered to be one of the most effective and important vehicles for social change and voluntary organizations can handle some important sectors of sustainable development because such organizations are much closer to the people inflicted with poverty at local level. Local voluntary organizations can develop a close link with the local people by building confidence among them with all social welfare
assistance provisions. And thus collateral free assistance encourages people for self-reliance programmes for their own local development. These local voluntary organizations can provide an efficient and effective alternative to public sector in the delivery of programmes and projects for sustainable development (WCED, 1987). Empowering people or ensuring empowerment to people, is a process of sustainable development, which requires raising consciousness among them. Due to the trust the local voluntary organizations can master in the community, these organizations can undertake conscientisation (Friere, 1979 quoted in Hasan 1999). The programmes for raising awareness among people aims at making them understand the importance of self-reliance, skill development, education, health care and birth control, etc. These programmes make people realize their importance in the society and zealous about their rights, which are often flouted by the traditional authority and help develop confidence about them in initiating development programmes. The existence and functioning of conscientisation programmes offered by the voluntary organizations are important for a country like Bangladesh where due to lack of awareness the people are fallen victim of exploitation in the society. For the sustainable development of the country, it is important to encourage voluntarism to eradicate human poverty because these voluntary organizations can be used as integral parts of local government bodies. Irrigation, canal digging and rural road construction, supported by voluntary labor and funds from the community where the projects were situated, were a large portion of government programmes. For example, in one self-reliance project, the Ullashi-Jadunathpur (UJ) project in Jessore, undertaken through voluntary labour, 5 million cubic metre canal digging work was done in 1977 to improve the irrigation facilities in the area (Ahmed and Mahbub Hossain, 1979). Voluntary organizations can go to the grassroots where they are located with their development programmes as being non-profit organizations. By widening of voluntary works the path of sustainable development can be easier on which the community people can build up their social and economic foundations. And at the same time, participation is a democratic culture, which as a feature of good governance will lead the country to sustainable development. And it is also a system of decentralized governance. (Kothari, 1996) looks upon the system of decentralized governance not only as a means of effective democratic functioning of the governing system but also as an instrument of social and economic transformation of the rural society. Mohabbat Khan (1996) argues that political and economic development at the local level requires participation of the local people on a regular basis. People are the principal factors in the recovery and development process. It is obvious; therefore, the success of the recovery and development process very much depends on the effective participation of the people in that process. Bangladesh, like other developing countries, is currently undergoing a massive and long term process of democratization and liberalization, requires serious efforts to be made to establish and sustain democracy and human rights to promote and sustain the necessary economic growth and sustainable development. For doing this, people should be given access to put forward their opinions in decision-making, and project planning and implementations so that people-centred development programme can have a successful implementation. The process of participation of the people in any decision-making process leads to sustainable economic and social development as it ensures good governance at local level. People are the building blocks of development of the nation and society, so they have to play a great role in the stupendous task of sustainable development and nation-building by taking part in decision making process, at local level.

Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

Local governance is a key issue in developing policy for human settlements. In addition, in many countries especially those of Latin America the transition from authoritarian regime toward democratic governance have increased people’s involvement in local decision-making. Under the aegis of local governance, innovative participatory budgeting and planning practices have emerged in a wide variety of contexts. The aim of these new practices is to contribute to local sustainable development through developing a joint vision and strategy for the future. For a long-
time in recent past, Bangladesh remained under authoritarian rule owing to colonialism and military dictatorship. During this time, concessions at the local level were often used to legitimize authoritarianism at the national level (Siddiqui, 1994). Even when democracy was ushered in, problems remained the same due to patron-client relationship, gender discrimination and other drawbacks. Participation is primarily seen in terms of empowerment of the disadvantaged, since powerlessness is considered the main reasons for their exclusion from development benefits. In the context of Bangladesh, it would demand that the poor and the women, who constitute the majority have been generally left out of the decision-making and implementation process, actually become an active part of the same through mobilization. Moreover, Bangladesh is still in the list of some aid depended countries, where development related policy-making is considerably influenced by donor conditionality. And thus, good governance has been a buzzword in the donor-prescribed development initiatives. Most donors now include good governance as a condition of their aid performances. So in this case criticism can be made on the failure of ensuring good governance at local level on the governmental initiatives. Good governance is a sine qua non for sustainable development and freedom of choice is a key to good governance. If people’s effective participation is established, it can help establish good governance, characterized by efficiency, transparency and accountability (Ahmad and Ahmed, 2002).

Furthermore, Voluntarism is a part of our cultural heritage. The people of Bangladesh have a tradition of involvement in different forms of voluntary activities. The major growth in the voluntary organizations in Bangladesh, however, primarily followed the failure of the government in meeting the needs of the people (Hassan 1999). Voluntary organizations as partners of the government can take major initiatives to eradicate poverty, develop skill of the people through training programmes, and provide health care to the people in the adjoining areas, whereas government organizations have failed to achieve these above objectives for the people. So in this regard, the government should take the following measures to encourage the participation of voluntary organizations and strengthen people’s participation in decision-making at local level for sustainable development. And these measures are to:

- Take policy and institutional frameworks needed for the people to make their choices count in governance.
- Establish good governance, which refers to the transparency, accountability, and the rule of law to prevent crime and corruption and ensure distributive justice for progress towards sustainable development.
- Take initiatives for effective governance at all levels of society with an aim at establishing decentralized governance for identifying local problems and ascertaining the felt-needs and aspirations of the people.
- Make the best possible framework for promoting local people’s participation in governance and development process as well as for articulation of local needs and mobilization of local resources (Ahmad and Ahmed, 2002).
- Organize, assist and encourage the spirit of people for voluntarism highlighting their roles and importance in different aspects of sustainable development of the country.
- Make easier way for voluntary organizations to work with the people without any bar so that they can take part in development process.
- Bridge the gap between male and female for establishing a viable society and equal social justice to reach the goal of the new millennium.
- Take initiatives to mobilize local people and resources, especially voluntary labor for sustainable development, and thus facilitate monitoring the implementation process.
Unless the voluntary organizations become a part of the overall development process of the country concerned, the voluntary organizations will lose enthusiasm and ultimately may fade away, and a potential vehicle for undertaking local-based sustainable development may be destroyed (Hasan 1999). The local and national governments in Bangladesh should come forward to accept voluntary organizations as development partners of the country. And the involvement of the local voluntary organizations in development process also ensures good governance in the country. Furthermore, mainstreaming popular participation and encouraging voluntary actions will ensure good governance at local level leading to sustainable development.

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