

## **Citizen Participation and the Quest for Accountability and Transparency in Urban Local Government in Bangladesh: A Study on Rangpur City Corporation**

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**Abstract:** Citizen participation is fundamental to promote accountability and transparency in urban local government of Bangladesh. For the last half-century, citizen participation has been considered as a key tool to empower the citizens in which citizens can actively participate and provide input in decision making process that spearheads the accountability and transparency in urban local government of Bangladesh. However, the level and access to citizens in urban local government functioning process is limited for many reasons in developing countries compared to developed countries. This study has explored the mechanisms of urban local government of Bangladesh to ensure the accountability and transparency in decision-making process as a case of Rangpur City Corporation (RpCC). This research is conducted by qualitative research approach where data and information has been collected from primary sources. In addition, some secondary data has been used to furnish the research. Research report shows that the level and access to citizen in the functioning of RpCC is very minimal. It is also found that RpCC has been taken a limited initiative to ensure accountability and transparency in their activities. While RpCC has hung out the citizen charter in front of office building as a part of transparency mechanism but people's awareness about citizen charter is very low. Moreover, it is found that employees of RpCC are engulfed in corruption from top to bottom. It recommends that inclusion of the people in RpCC activities is the only way out to solve the problem.

**Keywords:** Citizen Participation, Accountability, Transparency, Local Government and Bangladesh

### **Introduction**

Nowadays citizen participation in local government decision-making process, especially service delivery organizations, has gained momentum to donor agency and policy makers of developing countries that enhance the accountability and transparency of authorities. Citizen participation in the local government decision-making process is considered as citizen power (Arnstein, 1969; Berner, Amos and Morse, 2011). Citizen participation in local government spearheads the democratic process by ensuring the transparency and accountability of local government authorities, and that translates it self into local development. It enables citizens to explore their hidden power and engages in their own areas of development jargon. Citizen participation covers all positive elements that could enhance citizen humane development and create a bridge between the society and the government. Wang (2001) stated three impacts of citizen participation of which citizen participation leads to satisfy the needs of the public because participation allows government

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to understand what the public needs are. And citizen participation builds mutual consensus between government and citizens on service priorities and good performance. Lastly ‘participation improves public trust of governmental decision making’ (Wang, 2001, p. 324). Participatory theorists argue that ‘meaningful citizen participation facilitates social stability by developing a sense of community, increasing collective decision making, and promoting acceptance and respect of the governance process’ (Pateman, 1970 Cited in Callahan, 2007, p. 1180). Citizen participation ensures the transparency in the activities of local government and establishes the accountability of local functionaries and also check to the rise of authoritarian leader in local government.

Like many other developing countries, citizen participation at local government institutions in Bangladesh is minimal because of the parochial political culture and inequality in socio-economic status of the citizens that has developed a patron-client relationship in social and political system in Bangladesh (Wahed Uzzaman and Alam, 2015; Haq, 2014). Experts on community development pointed out that elected representatives and government officials are not accountable for their activities to the local people in Bangladesh. Elected representatives maintained good relations with the government officials to share funds illegally among themselves (Waheduzzaman and As-Saber, 2015). Devas and Grant (2003) stated that decision-making in Kenyan local authorities (LAs) remains non-transparent, with most decisions still being made behind closed doors and a lack of publicly available information on budgets and accounts. Scholarly report shows that in some cases, elected representatives of Bangladesh are not interested to involve citizens in local government activities. They think that they are elected by the people, and that, their decision means peoples decision. Chowdhury and Aktaruzzaman (2016) in their research stated that the ‘elected representative believes that engaging citizens would constitute a threat to them, and hence they are not interested in ensuring citizen participation or providing data on participation (p. 125)’. However, sometimes citizens themselves are not interested to participate in local government activities for poor socio-economic status like less civic skills and less education. In Bangladesh, almost 30 percent of the people are illiterate and, in some regions, this trend is higher (BBS Report, 2017).

In urban local government, municipalities and city corporations have different committees’ comprise by elected representative along with eminent citizens and civil society members. In Bangladesh, government has made different policies and regulations for guaranteeing and securing citizen participation in local government decision making process, though this engagement is somehow passive(Waheduzzaman and As-Saber, 2015). To run the city corporation, government has enacted a law namely Local Government (City Corporation) Act, 2009 (Amended in 2011), which is applicable for all city corporation, that clearly defines the scope of functions of city corporation in Bangladesh, and how and what ways city corporation will ensure accountability and transparency to the concerned masses.

Other development organizations who work for local development and democratic governance like World Bank, USAID also exert their influence on the local government bodies to ensure the active participation of ordinary people by enabling them to feel that they are active partners in development process. Although government and donor agencies have taken some initiatives to ensure accountability and transparency of local government bodies by engaging citizen participation, but in reality local government organizations of Bangladesh has not properly maintained the process of accountability and transparency mechanism in their activities.

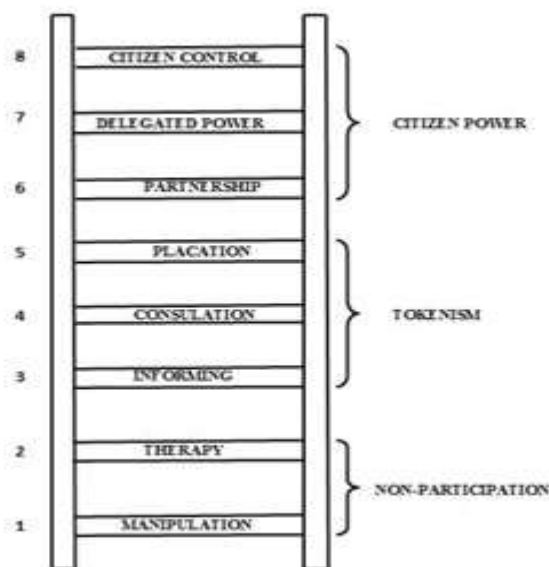
Some research works (Chowdhury and Aktaruzzaman, 2016; Haq, 2014) have been conducted on citizen participation in urban local government of Bangladesh and the result shows that urban local government of Bangladesh has not taken necessary steps to ensure accountability and transparency in their activities. Due to lack of finance and inadequate logistical support, almost all urban local government bodies in Bangladesh have not engaged the citizenry in the decision-making process. Scholar Panday (2017) gave similar opinion that urban local governments in Bangladesh are not autonomous to resource mobilization. Annual Budget of a city corporation partly comes from the central government which are very limited and the rest of them come from the city corporations own internal revenue collection. In this backdrop, the researcher has chosen Rangpur City Corporation (RpCC) as a case of research where he tried to explore the nature of mechanisms that is adopted by urban local government bodies of Bangladesh, particularly RpCC, to ensure accountability and transparency. The study also focuses on the challenges of citizen participation in RpCC like political will of the authorities, level of logistic supports and citizen aspirations. Specifically, the objectives of the study are to explore the mechanisms that are existed and practiced of RpCC to ensure accountability and transparency, to investigate the nexus between citizen participation and accountability and transparency of RpCC, and to find out the persistent problem to engage citizenry in RpCC.

### **Citizen Participation: Conceptual Framework**

Over the past half-century, it is regarded that citizen participation in local government decision-making process is fundamental that empowers the underprivileged and creates a bridge between the citizens and state (Berner, et al., 2011). Firstly, the US had used this term, citizen participation, as a concept in local government budget making process in 1960s where citizens provided their opinion in municipal budgetary mechanism. Nowadays, the concept, citizen participation, has been widely used in local government decision-making process in western societies. Citizen participation refers to the engagement of citizens in policy making, policy implementation and policy evaluation for effective, legitimate and participatory development. Arnstein (1969) opined that ‘citizen participation as a categorical term for citizen power. It is the redistribution of power that enables the have-nots citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future’ (p. 216). She posited that citizen participation empowers

and uplifts the disadvantaged people in the society. She came up with a ladder of citizen participation (Figure 1) that ‘describes the degree of citizen empowerment corresponding with varying levels of involvement’ in government activities (Berner, et al., 2011).

**Figure-1: Ladder of Citizen Participation**



Source: Arnstein, (1969)

Citizen participation has different methods that show its effectiveness and usefulness (Rosener, 1978; Cited in Kathlene and Martin, 1991). Rosener (1978) argues that ‘in the first place, policy makers need to explicitly define their expectations about citizen participation and then match these goals with the appropriate participation method’ (Rosener, 1978 Cited in Kathlene and Martin, 1991, p. 46). Citizen participation also manifests in democratic governance that leads to local development. It is also assumed that citizen participation is a ‘basic building block for contemporary democratic society and sustainable communities’ (Cuthill and Fien, 2005 Cited Aulich, 2009) as such, it covers all aspects of engagement of the people in policy making process that enhance transparency, accountability, responsiveness and legitimacy in policy process.

The nature of relations between citizen participation and accountability, transparency are important for democratic governance as well as local development in developing countries. It is argued that effective citizen participation makes governance more transparent, more accountable and more legitimate (JICA, 1995). In developing countries like Bangladesh, local government officials, elected and recruited, are mostly corrupted and self-centered. To establish professionalism and accountability in elected representative and government officials, citizen participation is more effective because it bounds elected representative and government officials to engage the citizen in decision-making process and open up the information for all. For example, in a paper on ‘Gaps in Pursuing Participatory Good Governance: Bangladesh Context’, Waheduzzama and Mphande (2012) demonstrated

that community participation is an integral part for effective and accountable local governance in Bangladesh. They described the four models of community participation in local governance that existed and practiced in developed and developing countries like authoritarian, bureaucratic, political and democratic models. They found that the level of accountability, transparency, predictability and responsiveness of selected case study are minimal and not spontaneous. They also found that elected representatives and bureaucrats are not supportive to include the community people in decision-making process in the local institutions.

Although citizen participation in local government policy making process of Bangladesh has encouraged by adopting and making different policies and regulations, the process of citizen participation in local government activities is different regarding the types of local government. For example, rural local government has special arrangement for citizens to participate in decision making. But urban local government this process is somehow latent (Waheduzzaman and As-Saber, 2015). In local government, citizen can participate in different ways like decision-making process, project implementation or evaluation level, and project monitoring time. Municipalities and city corporation, urban local government bodies of Bangladesh, can involve citizens in decision-making process in informal ways like open space meeting, open budget meeting and citizen survey along with formal procedures.

What are the most important factors to inclusion of citizenry in local government decision-making processes are the initiatives of local government officials and active citizens. Berner et al., (2011) in her research found that participatory budgeting in local government is a complex process, and that only a handful people have time, resources and know-how to review it. Gaventa and Valderrama (1999) stated some factors that are obstacles to citizen participation in local government. One of the most important factors is power relation; they found that central government, local elites, NGOs and CBOs are often prone to co-opt citizens in local government decision-making process. They also found some other factors like weak participatory skills, lack of political will and insufficient financial resources at the local level that create obstacles to effective citizen participation in local government. Similarly, Kathlene and Martin (1991) discussed about the impediments for effective citizen participation in decision-making. They focused on three factors that inhibit effective citizen participation. Their diagram as follows:

**Table-1: Obstacles for Effective Citizen Participation**

Citizen Limitations	Policy Maker Limitations	Design Limitations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost/ benefit payoff to individual</li> <li>• Access to official and technical information</li> <li>• Access to critical points in the decision process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of citizen participation goal congruence among political actors</li> <li>• ‘legitimate’ role of the political actors versus citizens</li> <li>• How public opinion is valued</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who participates</li> <li>• How many participates</li> <li>• How citizen participation is integrated in the policy making process</li> </ul>

Source: Kathlene and Martin (1991, p. 48)

It is apparently clear that developing countries have been affected by lack of effective citizen participation than developed countries because actors and factors in developing countries that are also main instruments to engage citizens in decision-making process are weak. However, some researchers have stated that structural gap and low political culture are the main barriers to effective citizen participation in developing countries like Bangladesh (Haq, 2014, Waheduzzaman and Mphande, 2012).

### Methodology of the Study

This research work is mainly employed the qualitative research approach. Necessary data and information for the study has been collected from primary sources along with secondary data. For primary data, key informants interview method was used along with two other methods, in-depth individual interview and focus group discussion. An unstructured and open-ended questionnaire was administered to the interviewees by the researcher through face to face interview. For secondary data, documentary analysis was extensively done during the study. In addition, different government and international reports that are related to this research have been reviewed to enrich the research findings.

Purposive sampling method was used to achieve a deeper understanding of the research topic. Specifically, respondents of key informants interview and in-depth interviews are selected purposively who have gained a critical knowledge based on the citizen participation in urban local government, and also who have work experiences with the citizen engagement in urban local government. In order to collect the intensive data and information about the topic, focus group discussion method was used in this research. The main objective of the focus group discussion is to explore rather than description of the problem. In total, 60 respondents were selected from three categories (Table 2).

**Table-2: Number of respondents according to data collection methods**

Methods of Data Collection	Number of Respondents	Background of the Respondents
Key Informants Interview	6	Coordinator of International NGOs, Experts who have specialized knowledge about citizen participation
In-depth Individual Interview	18	Present and former Mayor and CEO, Councilor
Focus Group Discussion	36	Community leaders, Youths leaders, Religious leaders
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	

### Urban Local Government System in Bangladesh and Rangpur City Corporation

Local government in Bangladesh has evolved in the colonial era and first envisioned in 1885 by enacting ‘Bengal Local Government Act of 1885’ of British Raj which was three tiers local government--union, upazilla and district (Rahman and Ahmed, 2015). From the colonial period, local government structure has changed from time to time to fulfill the agenda of the central government rather than to satisfy the needs of the local people. Since the independence of Bangladesh, a number of measures have been taken to improve the capacity and service delivery of local government institutions. Successive government also tries to retain these processes of modification but ‘local governments continue to be plagued with a variety of perceived weaknesses in their role, capacity and authority to deliver services and governance’ (Rahman and Ahmed, 2015, p. 3).

Presently, two types of local government are functioning in Bangladesh under the ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives, namely urban local government and rural local government. Urban local government in Bangladesh has been functioning in wider aspects at the local level in urban areas of Bangladesh. Khan (1997) posited that Bangladesh has been practicing four types of urban local governance system i.e., municipal government, special development bodies, special purpose authorities and special government bodies. City corporations (municipal corporations) and Pourashava (municipalities) are the two bodies of municipal government. In 1688, East India Company established the municipal corporation in Madras, and that was a first Municipal Corporation in Indian sub-continent (Awan and Uzma, 2014). After the independence of Bangladesh, the government of Bangladesh for the first time set up Dhaka Municipal Corporation in 1974, under the Act of 1974.

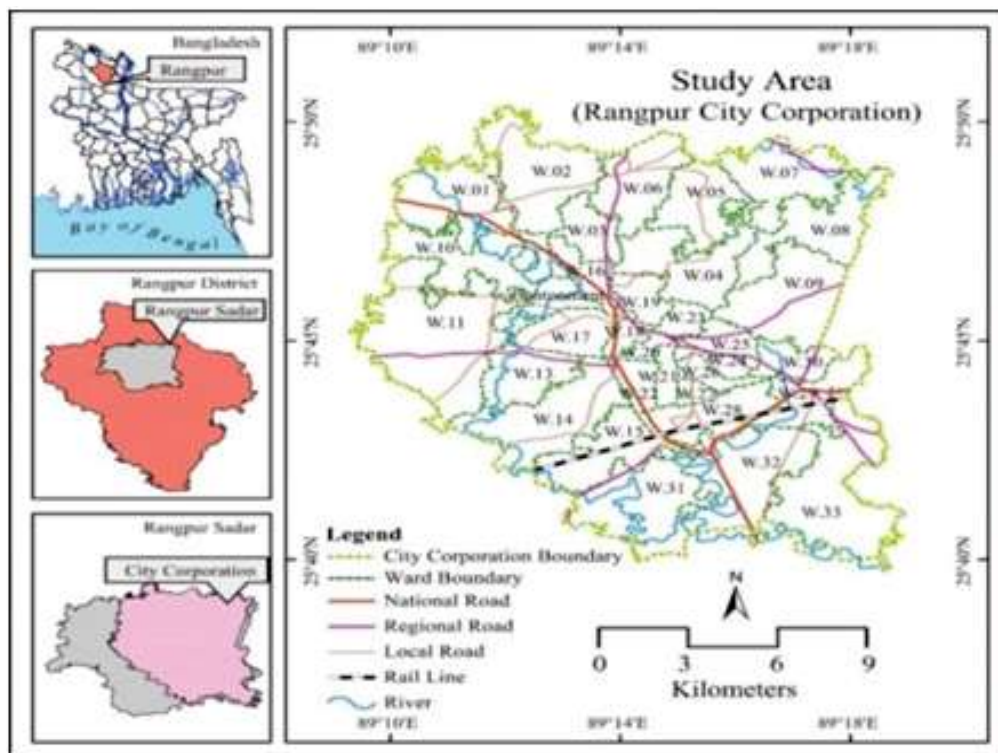
Rangpur City Corporation (RpCC) was established in 28 June, 2012, as an eleventh City Corporation and also the largest city corporation in Bangladesh in terms of size (Taher and Asad, 2017). The total population of RpCC is around 7, 96,556. And the literacy rate of Rangpur city is 65 percent, which is less as compared to the national average. Now its area is 205.76 square kilometer and divided into 33 wards (Map 1). According to the Local Government (City Corporation) Act, 2009, (Amended in 2011) RpCC is comprised of one (1) Mayor and thirty three (33) male ward councilors and eleven (11) women councilors for the reserved seats. Since its establishment as a full fledged City Corporation of Bangladesh, two elections have been held on five-year terms. The first and second election was held in 2012 and 2017 respectively. First RpCC election was free, fair and credible. According to DW’s<sup>1</sup> observation report, Rangpur City Corporation election was peaceful through huge presence of voters. Their report also showed that approximately 75% voter cast their vote (Democracy Watch Report, 2012). Others election monitoring agency also gave positive report about voter turnout. They reported that the first election was marked by enthusiastic participation of voters. Second Mayor of RpCC was elected

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<sup>1</sup> Democracy Watch (DW) is a non-governmental election monitoring agency in Bangladesh.

on the party-based system, in which the candidates are nominated by the political parties, and use their respective party's symbol to contest the election.

Map-1: Map of the Research Area



Source: Banglapedia: National Encyclopedia of Bangladesh (2012)

RpCC is regulated by Local Government (City Corporation) Act, 2009 (Amended in 2011). To take the decision, this city corporation formed different committees by elected officials along with civil society members. City corporation has some wings that provide the services of the citizens. By analyzing city corporation act 2009, it is evident that the scope of citizen participation in decision-making process is very limited because city corporation act clearly defined that corporation meeting should be held in private except specialized committee meeting. Though city corporations have some restrictions to engage citizenry, they can take opinion of the citizens by arranging different meetings such as open budget meeting, monthly ward meeting, citizen survey, and town meeting. Previous studies like Chowdhury and Aktaruzzaman (2016) have found that municipalities have arranged some ward meeting in small scale and allowed people to tell their problems, but the demand of the citizens are too much. They also pointed out that local representative believes more people mean more trouble. Similarly, Waheduzzaman and Mphande (2012) in their research revealed that 'local elected representative believe that they are a kind of proper stewards to ensure peoples participation in local development programs and they are adequately representing the local people (p. 50)'.

## Key Findings and Analysis

Accountability and transparency are two elements of democratic governances that are necessary for every institution because these elements enhance the democratic process and establish the fairness by engaging citizen. If citizens are involved in decision making process of an institution, corruption will be decreased and public trust will be increased that means citizen participation will bridge the gap between rulers and the ruled. Every country has specific laws and provision to ensure accountability and transparency of their public institutions. Theoretically there exist two mechanisms to ensure accountability: downward accountability and upward accountability. Upward accountability refers to the elected representative and public officials will be accountable to their appointed bosses/ central government for their activities.

Downward accountability states that elected representative and public officials will be liable to beneficiaries/ local populace for their performance. It can be done legally or informally. Noor, (2015) in her research, mentioned three approaches: information disclosure, participation mechanism, and complaints procedures that helps to ensure accountability in any institution. Pandeya (2015) in his research on ‘citizen participation in local government decision-making process in Nepal’ posited that in Nepal, institutional and policy frameworks and participation mechanism to citizen participation in local government is favorable. He also found the following impact of citizen participation:

‘citizen participation in local government showed positive impacts on achieving development gains, improving local planning systems, strengthening local accountability, and empowering citizens, because participation imparted more awareness, knowledge, and skills among citizens and encouraged local government officials to be more transparent, legitimate, and inclusive’ (p. 92).

Although Bangladesh constitution has guaranteed the accessibility of citizen in decision-making process but this accessibility only ensured the formal participation of citizen. For example, in NSAPR<sup>2</sup> II, Government of Bangladesh has promised ‘effective systems of citizen participation as well as accountability that will ensure that public servants are responsible to elected officials, and elected officials are in turn responsible to their constituency’ (NSAPR II, p.72). Other policies like the perspective plan, 7th five-year plan is also given priority to ensure citizen participation in local government for promoting and upgrading of local populace livelihood status. In response to this state affair, a good number of projects have been taken to address the issue of citizen participation and strengthening urban local government and such projects are in progress and such have been completed. In RpCC, WB and JICA have been working to promote capacity development and enhancing

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<sup>2</sup> NSAPR II refers the National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction II FY 2009 – 11, Prepared in the light of Election Manifesto of the Bangladesh Awami League 2008.

the people's power by participatory decision-making tools. In Bangladesh, Local Government (City Corporation) Act 2009, (Amended 2011) has stated some provisions that helps City Corporation to establish accountability. Section 44 of Local Government (City Corporation) Act 2009, (Amended 2011) explains that the corporation shall publish 'citizen charter' with description of the services to citizens, conditions for the services and the timeline of the services. And section 110 (1) states that any citizen shall have the right to information regarding the corporation in the specified system. Hence, the authorities have been given the power to classify any records for corporation interest.

### **Implementing citizen charter by RpCC to establish accountability and transparency**

In order to ensure accountability and transparency to populace, RpCC has hanged on a citizen charter beside the reception desk. Through citizen charter, RpCC has published that what facilities/ services will get people from the RpCC and how many days it will take to implement these facilities. Elected representatives and government officials also claimed that they always tried to fulfill the basic services of populace with limited resources. But, in reality citizens don't get their desired services from the RpCC for various reasons like lack of awareness of concerned people, elitist attitudes of government officials and inadequate resources to implement the citizen charter. From key informant interviews and FGD, researcher has got mixed answer. What procedure have you been followed to ensure accountability and transparency in RpCC activities? In addressing this question, one of the key informant interviewee, who also public official of RpCC, posed his views in this way.

In front of the office building, we hang on the citizen charter where the public will get all information regarding services of the RpCC. And we also update it once in a year. There is also a complaint box where everybody can complain for harassment or extra charges. We have made annual performance report of RpCC and have circulated it in concerned authorities. However, we are not able to publish all report on our website.

Although RpCC authorities hang on citizen charter to ensure transparency, ordinary people's views are different. Citizen views are that citizen charter is in every place but in reality, they pay extra money for getting any services and this (payment of money) have not been written in citizen charter. They also accused that sometimes we lobby for getting services because RpCC authorities does not provide the services properly that have written in the citizen charter. They also commented that people's awareness about citizen charter is very low.

From observations and documentary review, it is uncovered that RpCC does not handle its services properly. For instance, the researcher did not find any report especially resolution of monthly meeting and annual performance report on their website. But Local Government (City Corporation) Act 2009, (Amended in 2011) has clearly defined that city corporation should publish its documents on their respective website so that people will know the activities of the city corporation. It also found that employees of RpCC are

engulfed in corruption from top to bottom. One of the interviewee made a comment the following way.

You will not get any services without paying extra charges. From top to bottom, all employees are corrupt. When top of the authority engage in corruption how can you think that others are not involved in corruption? In engineering section, they did not disburse money to the contractor without asking for extra charges.

This report is true because present mayor has cancelled the jobs of almost 200 employees, who were recruited by the former mayor (Dhaka Tribune, 19 May, 2018). Media report shows that former mayor had recruited some employees by taking money without recourse to any rules and regulations and without approval from the ministry of Local Government. It also shows that the current mayor has pledged--a corruption free RpCC administration in delivering services and ensuring transparency when he took over his responsibilities. Other research report also shows the same view. For example, Majumder (2015) stated that ordinary people of Bangladesh believed that the local government authority are engulfed in corruption and have failed to use funds properly that are allocated to them from the center. Even people have to bribe officials of the local government to get some services and facilities extended to them. (Majumder, 2015). He suggested that inclusion of the people in local government activities is the only way out to solve the problem.

Accountability and transparency by engaging citizens in different committee's in RpCC City corporations have some formal committees like 'standing committee' and 'corporation council' along with some specialized committees. These committees have enough opportunity to accommodate citizens when they took plan for city development if those meetings are not declared by majority member as private. It is considered that participation increases the transparency and accountability of an institution. Devas and Grant (2003) in their research stated that the nexus among decentralization, citizen participation and local government accountability in African countries in Kenya and Uganda. They found that decentralization process is not only the mechanism that can ensure the participation of citizen in local government rather accountability mechanism is most crucial for effective citizen participation in local government. The extent of citizen participation in Uganda is also shrinking and decision-making process in local government is not transparent. In Uganda, corruption in local government remains rampant. In their research, they suggested the need for good practices like committed and dynamic local leadership, external pressures from civil society organization, the media (community radio) that could ensure accountability in decision making process in Kenya and Uganda.

The field study and relevant document study shows that RpCC has arranged corporation council meeting once in a month and this committee is the supreme authority to approve and implement the budget in different sectors. RpCC has also formed different standing committee like standing committee of education, health and family planning; standing committee of water and electricity and so on but these committees are not properly functioning for non-cooperation of city council and lack of interest of committee

members. From in-depth individual interviews and documentary analysis, it finds that RpCC authority has not invited any specialist citizens that people will provide opinion on city development. When asked respondent on how they ensure accountability and transparency in their activities? One interviewee who is also councilor of RpCC states.

We are not bound to invite citizens in RpCC activities. We are elected by masses. Our decisions means peoples decisions. And we, councilor, knows everything about peoples demand. Local people do not understand the corporations' decision-making process and we feel our decision will be good decisions and that would overwhelm all stakeholders.

The above opinion proclaimed that elected representatives are not interested to engage citizens in RpCC activities and the involvement of the specialized persons in RpCC activities are not in a satisfactory level.

The field study and RpCC's document also shows that RpCC has formed two specialized committees i.e. the civil society co-ordination committee (CSCC) and city development co-ordination committee (CDCC) to engage the citizens for city development. Various development organizations like the World Bank, JICA are now implementing their program in RpCC and they have some provisions under which RpCC will be compelled to engage the citizens to oversee the projects. Basically, these two committees are allowed to engage ordinary citizens in RpCC activities. One civil society member said that:

We are the members of CDCC but we did not get any invitation from the former mayor. It was a condition of Donor Agency that RpCC authority should form CDCC and CSCC. That's why they formed it. We hope that the present mayor will make CDCC effective and take our opinion for city development.

From the above interview, it is revealed that RpCC has included civil society members in two committees but it is limited to black and white, not in practice. By participating a CSCC meeting, researcher found that Mayor of RpCC has not taken any opinion from the participants and he assure that he will hear of all public matters in the next meetings. A study by Haq (2014) revealed that the standing committee of City Corporation was formed by persons who were handpicked by the office holders of City Corporation and there is no scope for ordinary people especially poor and the disadvantaged.

### **Organizing public meetings by RpCC to ensure accountability and transparency**

To ensure accountability and transparency of local government officials in the western world, elected representatives or government officials, public meeting/ town meeting is one of the most important mechanisms where every ordinary citizen can attend the decision-making process of local government bodies. Although there is a nuance difference between public meeting and town meeting, but these methods are widely used in local government decision making process of all European countries and US as well. It is a meeting set out by local government authorities to collect the opinion of citizenry for specific issues like how to settle the homeless people, how to improve service delivery and how to make a good housing zone. It is also considered that public meeting is one of the meaningful tools

to engage citizens in the process of an organization where ordinary citizen can provide inputs of the public matters. In public meeting, citizens with different viewpoints work together to complete a specific tasks that give them a sense of common purpose. It is highly transparent process where everybody can hear what everybody else said. A study by Gustafson(2019) stated that.

In town meetings, it has often been claimed; residents learn to work together on practical matters that affect common goods, such as roads, parks, and public schools. These schools of democratic citizenship foster the cognitive and expressive skills required for coalition building and problem solving. They give participants a sense that they can have an impact on the public domain and contribute to the experience of communal life (p. 1).

Similarly, Cohen and Arato (1992), in their research pointed out that European countries like Italy, Austria, Norway, and Britain, frequently engages citizen in national issues. He demonstrated that..

...in recent years, citizens of Italy, Austria, and Sweden have voted to ban nuclear power in their countries; the people of Ireland voted to permit abortion in certain instances; those of Norway voted not to belong to the European Union; and the Australians voted to maintain their connection to the British monarchy; the French voted to cut the term of office of their president to five years, and in the near future, a national referendum will be tabled before the people of Great Britain decide whether to replace the pound with the Euro (Cohen and Arato, 1992, p. 87 cited in Mapuva, 2015, p. 411 ).

Although arrangement of a public meeting, for taking opinion of ordinary citizen, in local government activities in western worlds are common phenomenon, but in South Asia particularly in Bangladesh this practice is new and quite debatable because local government of Bangladesh has been continuing their activities despite of the budget constraints and lack of efficient leadership with plethora of regulations and policy. Recently rural local government bodies in Bangladesh especially union council, in small scale, has been arranging participatory budget making program with the citizenry on the union council premises in every fiscal year. Though international donor agencies have been pressurized the local government bodies, rural and urban, to arrange the public meeting program with the citizenry, but urban local government bodies like city corporation and municipalities have not organized yet on the pretext that there is not proper guidelines on public meeting from central government. After reviewing present City Corporation act of Bangladesh, it is found that there is no clear direction to arrange public meeting by city corporation authority. From field study and documentary analysis, researcher found that RpCC has not scheduled any public meeting until its formation. Local civil society organizations and donor agency have always pressurized the RpCC authority that they have to take views of the citizenry for local issues like how to improve service delivery and how to make ward budget in ward level by arranging public meeting. One in-depth interviewee who is the president of local journalist association proclaimed his opinion in this way.

Before election, present mayor promised that he would arrange public meeting twice in a fiscal year for making RpCC as a best service provider. But, after came in power, he didn't take any opinion from local civil society members. So, arranging public meeting by RpCC is like live in fools of paradise. They get fear to arrange the public meeting as it could open up their real character.

Above comment revealed that RpCC authority has not interested to accommodate citizens in the decision making process though public meeting is one of the best way to engage citizens. The only mechanism that is used to ensure accountability of local government authorities is the provision of public meeting but this mechanism is totally absent in RpCC.

### **Conclusion and Policy Recommendations**

This paper discusses the issues of how citizen participation ensure the accountability and transparency of local government authorities of Bangladesh in the case of RpCC and what are the present apparatus of RpCC to accommodate citizens in their activities. After rigorous reviewing the regulations and RpCC documents, it is evident that the mechanisms of RpCC to ensure accountability and transparency are so weak and limited. There remains limited space to accommodate citizens in RpCC activities structurally, and also found that authorities of RpCC are reluctant to engage citizenry because they are directed by invisible actors and factors like local political elites, musclemen and local leader of ruling parties. It is also found that RpCC authorities are not committed to provide space of the citizenry of which local citizen's spontaneously participate and gives input in the decision making process of RpCC. Introduction and implementation of specific policies/ regulations of citizen participation, formally and informally, in urban local government activities, no doubt, could expedite the accountability and transparency of urban local government authorities. By engaging in decision making process of ordinary citizen, RpCC authority can build the trust and foster the sustainable development. It is also imperative that government and civil society organizations should encourage the citizens by rigorous campaigning that their meaningful participation are necessary and important for democratic enhancement, and to promote the accountability and transparency of the institution.

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