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Prospective Report

*Effectiveness of e - Governance system to  
improve the Union Parishad's activities*

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e - Governance



## **ABBREVIATION**

A2i	- Access to Information
e-Governance	- Electronic Governance
e-Application	- Electronic Applications
EWBS	- Emergency Warning Broadcasting System
GDP	- Gross Domestic Product
GOB	- Government
ICT	- Information and Communication Technology
IT	- Information Technology
LG	- Local Government
LGD	- Local Government Division
PMO	- Prime Minister Office
UISC	- Union Information and Service Center
UP	- Union Parishad (Same as Union Council)

## **ABSTRACT**

The present structure of local government in Bangladesh had its origin in British colonial period. The first attempt at establishing local government institution was made during the latter part of the nineteenth century. During Pakistan period under the Basic Democracy Order of 1959 local government bodies were set up at four tiers. After Bangladesh became independent decision was taken to strengthen local government institutions at three levels and to make provision for women members. Paragraph 59 & 60 the Bangladesh constitution has an outline of a local government system with elected representatives facilitating effective participation the people for each unit of administration. A major change was also initiated in the local government system through the introduction of the Local Government Ordinance in 1982. Union Parishads are formed under the Local Government (Union Parishads) Act, 2009 (Updated). A Union Parishad is the body primarily responsible for better public services to their entire community.

The government is committed to establish strong local government institutions at various levels through active participation of the elected representatives in the administration as well as development activities. Now our Local Government is implementing various development and service-oriented activities for poverty alleviation and to make the rural people's life more comfortable, sound and meaningful. The Union Parishad, Upazila Parishad, Zila Parishad, Municipalities and City Corporations are the Local Government Institutions. Among these LG institutions, Union Parishad is the lowest tier which is responsible for all the development activities and administrative functions for the rural area.

The government places an unprecedented emphasis on revitalizing local government institutions at the rural level (around 4,579 Union Parishads) and at the sub-district level (Upazila Parishads). The LGIs are being re-designed to play an extremely critical role to serve as local delivery enters for information and e-services, thereby upholding the government's commitment to get services to citizens 'doorsteps. Local government administration trying hard and soul for their improvement with greater transparency, accountability and ensuring that people's voices will be channeled to policy making levels. Collection of demographic information, birth, death and marriage registration, school enrolment, vaccination, employment and many other pieces of information using ICTs are now providing a greater degree of efficiency in targeting, policy making and accuracy in information dissemination. But without proper management, infrastructure development and technical manpower for ICT system in rural area, it can never run efficiently. Still we are implementing some new techniques to manage the service delivery system of rural area through E-governance system and also trying to pick some good practices from developed countries like Japan.

In today's world Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has tremendous impact on socio-economic livelihood of people of the rural area. Government functions are the most profound areas where ICT can play a pivotal role in fostering and ameliorating the citizen centric services. Our central government has already introduced an ICT policy (2002) for smoothing e-Governance system. Because of adaptation of e-Governance is a key for smart governance and making information technology (IT) relevant to ordinary citizens in Bangladesh where a large proportion of the population suffers from digital divide. Now this is a big challenge for us to effectively run this e-Governance system in rural area.

## Background of The issue:

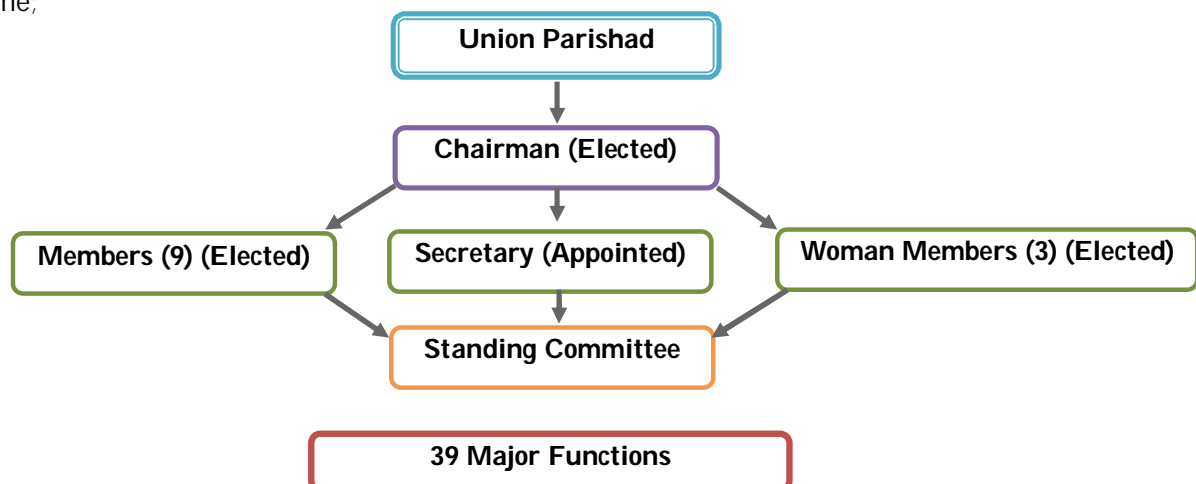
### Introduction:

Unlike Japan's two-tier local government system, local government of Bangladesh is divided into rural, urban and hill districts (Specialized Local Government System) which have more or less similar functions. Urban authorities are single-tier and include 11 city corporations (Big cities) and 315 Paurashava (Municipality). Rural local government has three tiers: 61 Zila Parishads (district), 483 Upazila (sub-district) Parishads, and 4,573 Union Parishads (Union council). There are also 3 Hill District Parishads. Union Parishads (Parishad means Council) are the smallest and one of the important tiers of rural administrative and local government units in Bangladesh.

The history of local government in Bangladesh shows that local bodies have been established at different levels in different periods Laws /Ordinances have been made to form local bodies at village, Thana, District and Divisional level from time to time. Since inception the local government institutions were given the responsibilities for maintenance of law and order infrastructures development and their maintenance, health, education etc. within their area. Though they had sources of own, revenue income foremost of their activities they mainly relied on various grants from the government. Recently Local Government Union Parishad act 2009 have provided UP with powers to levy, tax and fees including women representation. So the volume of duties and responsibilities has increased, but there is no change made in administrative personal system of Union Parishad. With the burden of all administrative activities, sometime the UP secretary (only administrative person) becomes helpless and hopeless for thinking forward to the development of rural area. In 2002 the central government of Bangladesh introduced the National ICT policy. Now we are trying to reduce the haziness of all UP activities through the ICT system. Because of the administrative reform is a long term and very difficult issue. So adaption of ICT policy in rural area also can reduce the working pressure of UP secretary.

### Structure of the Union Parishad:

Each UP is now comprised with nine wards, one chairman, and nine members from nine wards including three elected women members representing for each three wards. ***UP secretary is the only official staff of UP*** and chairman is the chief executive. Each UP has 13 different standing committees to perform its 39 different types of functions. Such as: Preparation of a comprehensive Union Plan and inclusion of inter-ward development projects after identification and prioritization; assist and cooperate for the development of primary schools; supervise family planning related activities and services and monitor the same;



Arrange for supply of safe drinking water and promote sanitation programme; construction of inter-ward roads, maintenance of the same, management of small scale irrigation and water resources; promote social resistance over violence against women, terrorism, all types of crimes and cooperate with administration for maintenance of law and order; Therefore, the Union Parishad can become more active than before by using the ICT system as well as the e-Governance system. There are lots of services which can be provided by Union Parishad through ITC system within present frame work. Such as:

- Computerized registration services
- Digital Communication & Audio-Video related services
- Agriculture Information
- Disaster Management information
- Driving License
- Online Education services
- Environment and Forests of Bangladesh
- Online Health service
- Online Income Tax
- Mobile Banking system
- Passport
- Online Recruitment system & information
- Online Visa service
- Online Utility Services
- Online University Admission etc.

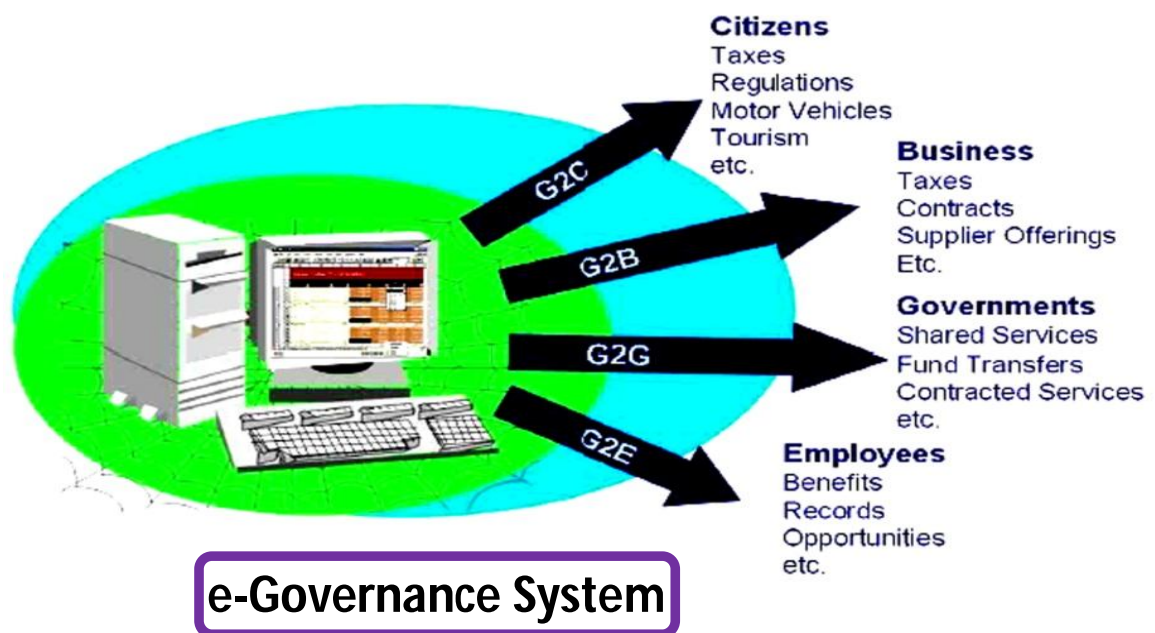
And these services indicate the national 4G system which are mostly related to e-Governance system in rural area.

**G2G: Government to Citizens**

**G2B: Government to Business**

**G2G: Government to Governments**

**G2E: Government to Employees**



**e-Government** and **e-Governance** Both the terms are treated to be the same; however, there is some difference between the two. "e-Government" is the use of the ICTs in public administration combined with organizational change and new skills to improve public services and democratic processes and to strengthen support to public. So, the perspective of the e-governance is "the use of the technologies that both help governing and have to be governed" (Rossel, Pierre, and Matthias Finger. "Conceptualizing e-Governance." *Management* (2007): 399-407). And those terms are interrelated with our ICT policy. Our present local government now providing all those services mentioned above through Union Information and Service Center (UISC). So we can call it e-Governance system.

### **Core Objectives of ICT policy 2002**

This Policy aims at building an ICT-driven nation comprising of knowledge-based society by the year 2006. In view of this, a country-wide ICT-infrastructure will be developed to ensure access to information by every citizen to facilitate empowerment the rural people. Some objectives are;

- ❖ Provide effective incentives for development of ICT sector to both local and foreign entrepreneurs.
- ❖ Develop an efficient ICT infrastructure that provides open access to international and national network;
- ❖ Promote and facilitate use of ICT in all sectors of the economy for transparency, good governance and efficiency improvement;
- ❖ Develop a large pool of world class ICT professionals to meet the needs of local and global markets.

On the ICT policy statements, we can find that the Government shall use ICT system within the public administration to improve efficiency, reduce wastage of resources, enhance planning and raise the quality of services. Also government shall implement wide-spread ICT systems to provide nationwide coverage and access by any citizen to the government databases and administrative systems which can be used to extend public services to the remotest corner. Therefore, the Union Parishad becomes most important local government tier to introduce e-Government system in rural area. Maximum of our peoples are living in rural area and their service delivery units are the Union Parishads.

### **Effectiveness of Union Parishad as a Service Delivery Agency with e-Governance system:**

A study conducting by myself titled "Role of Union Parishad to establish and encouragement of e-Governance system" indicated some significant potentials of UP as a unit of local level development and service delivery. Following are some of the most noteworthy potentials:

- a. UPs have capability to absorb and manage additional financial resources to undertake both conventional and non-conventional development activities through e-Government system. With the help of ICT they can minimize the manpower problems. They can also conduct some technical trainings and workshops to improvement of their knowledge and ICT related services through their local budgets.
- b. UPs are capable to mobilize additional resources for its own development activities with new innovative techniques using ICT.
- c. UPs have the potential to ensure 'social accountability' and 'quality assurance' of the delivery of services through technology.
- d. UPs have all potential to be more 'responsive' to community needs and 'accountable' to the community at large with appropriate 'watch dog' role of community.
- e. Higher level of community participation through modern technology can enhanced quality and durability of UP projects.

- f. One of the portions of UP complex (Union Information and Service Center) can be developed as a 'development hub' with better coordination and collaboration of GOB extension agencies/workers and UP elected official including the UP Standing Committees.

UP is yet to be a decentralized rural local government while this institution is provided with mandatory and discretionary functions including own revenue rising powers. Despite its long history, frequent changes in the composition of this elected body, inadequate technical manpower and equipment have also prevented it from pursuing long term development efforts in the rural area as well as poor service delivery system to the citizen. Therefore the backwardness of ICT systems, Union Parishads can't keep pace with urban local government.

### The issue(s)

Bangladesh has constitutional provisions to increase capacity and build up local government institutions in every administrative unit. Union Parishad is a local government body, which is assigned with many important and emergency duties. But due to the lack of expected level of governance, it has poor achievement in many sectors. Centralized Planning System is the main obstacle to the way of flourishing the decentralized governance in Bangladesh. On the other hand the term 'e-Governance' has multidimensional approaches. Several dimensions and factors influence the definition of **e-Governance** or **Electronic governance**. The word "electronic" in the term e-Governance implies technology driven governance. e-Governance is the application of information and communication technology (ICT) for delivering government services, exchange of information communication transactions, integration of various stand-alone systems and services to others as well as back office processes and interactions within the entire government framework. And the primary barriers for effective e-Governance in rural area are lack of technical manpower. Though the newly appointed UP secretaries has some ICT knowledge but they need some special trainings or seminars or field trip to observe partially and become a skilled worker.

Central Government has been taking some remarkable initiatives for developing the e-governance systems through Union Parishad. Adaptation of e-Governance is a key for smart governance and making information technology (IT) relevant to ordinary citizens in Bangladesh where a large proportion of the population suffers from digital divide.

Some of the UPs have already started these kinds of services but they can't get the satisfactory achievement. So a question can arrive easily, is our e-Governance system working effectively and efficiently? The answer may be "not". Still we are straggling on that issue. The status of people who are using ICT is as bellows;

**Table-1: Percentage of households having ICT facilities**

No.	Type of facilities	Urban		Rural	
		2005	2010	2005	2010
01.	Telephone	10.36	5.79	0.33	0.70
02	Mobile Phone	26.73	82.74	6.05	56.76
03	Computer	4.88	8.58	0.17	0.97
04	email	0.81	4.10	-	0.39

Source: BBS, Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2005 & 2010

The table shows increasing tendency of use of computer facilities in Bangladesh especially in rural areas. Understandably, the use of the ICT facilities is much higher in urban areas compared to rural areas. Because of without computer and internet connectivity e-Governance can never run effectively. And there is huge lacking of infrastructure

development in rural area. The other issue is about technical manpower. The status of IT trained manpower in the government sectors are;

**Table-2: Status of IT trained manpower in the government**

No.	Type of Institutions	% of officers trained	% of staffs trained
01.	Ministry/Division	27.81	29.22
02	Dept./Corporation	22.58	7.31
03	Academic institution	5.78	3.57
04	Total	21.29	7.82

Source: Comprehensive Study of e-Government Initiatives in Bangladesh

Table-2: shows that, only 21.29% of total government officials can be counted as an IT trained person. When we divided this percentage in to two categories as a rural area and urban area then this percentage will be very poor for rural area. So we can easily understand about the barriers of ineffective e-Government in rural area. Also we've some lacking in our policy formulation. For smoothness & efficiencies of those services, country's first National ICT policy approved in 2002, touched upon issues related with e-governance. Therefore, the Access to Information (A2I) Programme, a follow-up project in the PMO, started in 2007 with a proclaimed goal to leverage ICT in public service delivery and build necessary capacity of the stakeholders to promote the use of ICTs in the development of rural area. In the meantime Union Information and Services Centre (UISC) has launched on some Union Parishads. In the rural area 'Union Information & Service Centers' (UISC) is acting as a main entrance between the UP functions and the central government systems. This system is directly monitoring from Prime Minister Office under the 'Access to Information' (a2i) project. But it can't run smoothly and also can't get the expected success rate due to some minor lacking on policy making system.

### Critical issue(s)

Bangladesh is a poor developing country. The population in Bangladesh is predominantly rural, with almost 80 percent of the population living in rural areas.<sup>[a]</sup> Many people live in remote areas that lack services such as education, health clinics, general government services, adequate roads, particularly road links to markets etc. An estimated 36 percent of the population in rural areas lives below the poverty line.<sup>[b]</sup> Another 29 percent of the rural population is considered moderately poor. Though they may own a small plot of land and some livestock and generally have enough to eat, their diets lack nutritional value. The local government bodies, or more specifically the Union Parishad, are struggling in delivering expected public services to the common people at the grass root level mostly due to lack of appropriate administrative and financial authority as well as institutional capability.

The UP could play a catalytic role in local level development if it could overcome the existing service delivery systems, administrative and financial limitations and the shortage of technical manpower through the help of effective ICT and proper training system. And these are the critical issues for actual development of rural area. A careful review of the responsibilities and authority of the UP shows that for the effectiveness and efficiencies of e-Government system we've to take at least 3-4 best steps among the alternatives. There are about 4579 Union parishads in Bangladesh. Each Union is made up of nine Wards. Usually one village is designated as a Ward. That indicating about administrative reform, which is almost impossible within a short period.

[a] "Bangladesh: Priorities for Agriculture and Rural Development", Agriculture in South Asia, The World Bank, accessed 22 July 2013

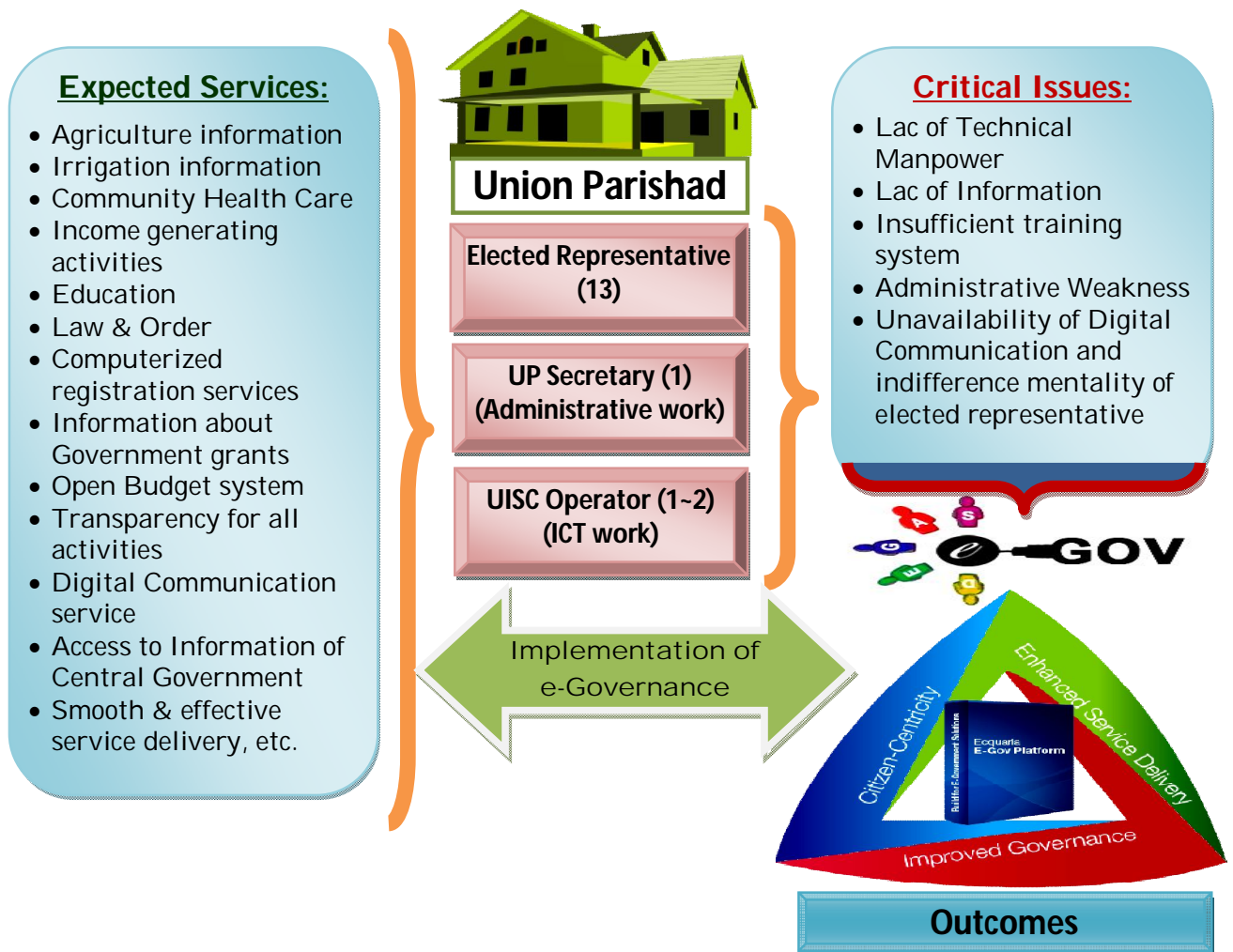
[b] "Rural poverty in Bangladesh", Rural Recovery Portal



Now it is very much durable to central government for taking proper initiatives of the development of rural area and we've to stay always under the black pressure from national and international donor agencies. We can't but have to involve them in this kind of development activities. Our local government system is also not fully independent. So centrally imposed law and order is another obstacle to development the administrative system. Regarding this issue a tinny light of hope has just been launched. This is the *UISC*, which is trying to cover all the Union Parishads. If we are able to serve the major public services in locally (specially for Union Parishad) through the ICT system, then it can be minimize all the present unexpected conditions or barriers of UP to their self development.

The Quick Win initiative (*UISC*) expanded rapidly culminating in a launch in all 4,501 UPs of the country on November 11, 2010 by the hon'ble Prime Minister of Bangladesh. These are the one-stop service outlets operating at Union Parishad of the country. Through use of ICT, UISC is able to bring various types of information related to government, livelihood and private services to the doorstep of citizens in rural areas. But all the initiatives are leisurely going in vain. Therefore in reality, still we can't achieve the targeted success. The major barriers are:

- Shortage of manpower as well as technical person
- Insufficient training system
- Inadequate modern equipment, net connectivity and power backup system
- Unbalanced management and indifference mentality of elected representative



## **Access the issue(s) in the light of Japanese experience:**

Though the e-Governance system is an ICT related issue, it is also linked with the other administrative issues. So it is not possible to establish a proper e-Governance system in rural area without done some administrative reform and changes in human resource management system. Japan is a developed country and has the world's third-largest economy by nominal GDP and the world's fourth-largest economy by purchasing power parity. Through this training program, we've the opportunity to learn and gather more about the local government system in Japan. This is also helpful to compare our local government system and share some good practices to minimize our problems in the light of Japan experience. Here I'm going to brief about some good practices of Japans' Local Government as well as their efficiencies for Bangladesh prospects.

Japan ranks high in metrics of prosperity such as the Human Development Index, with Japanese women enjoying the highest life expectancy of any country in the world and the infant mortality rate being the third lowest globally. So there must be some strategies and after the 2nd world war, very rapidly they become a developed country.

## **Administrative reform in terms of improving service delivery under e-Government:**

Taking a look at the number of tiers of administrative units in Japan, Prefectures and Municipalities are specified in the Local Autonomy Law as the two basic types of local authorities, and Japan's local autonomy system adopts a two-tier system of prefectures as regional government units and municipalities as basic local government units. So the benefits of these two tiers system are:

- a) For their two tiers system they've only few elected representatives for each local government unit and always bound to maintain law & order.
- b) Prefectures and municipalities are independent incorporated entities based in their respective regions and comprised of their residents, which serve to carry out local public administration within their jurisdictions. Furthermore, prefectures and municipalities are governing bodies where representatives elected in a democratic manner by local residents. Therefore they exercise their power without any major violence.
- c) There are 47 prefectures and 1,718 municipalities of various sizes. The number of prefectures still remained unchanged since the introduction of the modern system of local autonomy in 1888. Even the number of municipalities has decreased continuously. Between April 1, 1999 and April 1, 2008 the number of municipalities has decreased from 3,229 to 1,788. As a result, the administrative and financial powers of the municipalities were enhanced, which was helpful for the development of local autonomy and, in particular, for responding to the urbanization which accompanied the period of high economic growth that followed.
- d) Part of the reason for this is a strong feeling that administrative services provided by local governments should, like those provided by the national government, be uniform in their contents and standards in every region of the country.
- e) The remuneration or honorarium of elected representatives is good enough for better livelihood and it consumed form local government sources.

So we can make some changes in the local government administrative system of our country for better services to the rural area. Such as:

- In our country there are 5 types of Local Government system dived into two tiers  
 Urban Local Government: City Corporation, Municipalities and Rural Local Government: Zila Parishad (District), Upazila Parishad (Sub-District) and Union Parishad (Villages). In every layers there are many elected representatives functioning, so we've to face much conflicts between citizen, local administration

and public representative. That's why we can follow the Japans' local government System for more efficient and smooth service delivery to the rural people.

- Based on 5 layers, there is some violence of law and order can easily take places in the lower tier of our local government system (Union Parishad). This can be called as "centrally controlled democratic practice"
- Our local government system specially Union Parishad are still gradually increasing. Therefore, now we've to think about the decreasing of some areas by merging with others.
- For different type of layers, maximum time the relationship between local administrative and public representative becomes conflicted.
- At the moment if it is not possible to reform our local government administration, we can adopt the e-Governance service system to minimize our existing service delivery problems in rural area.
- There is some fixed remuneration or honorarium system of elected representatives which are not sufficient for their livelihood. So it can be increase.

### **Personnel system and training management in Japanese Local Governments:**

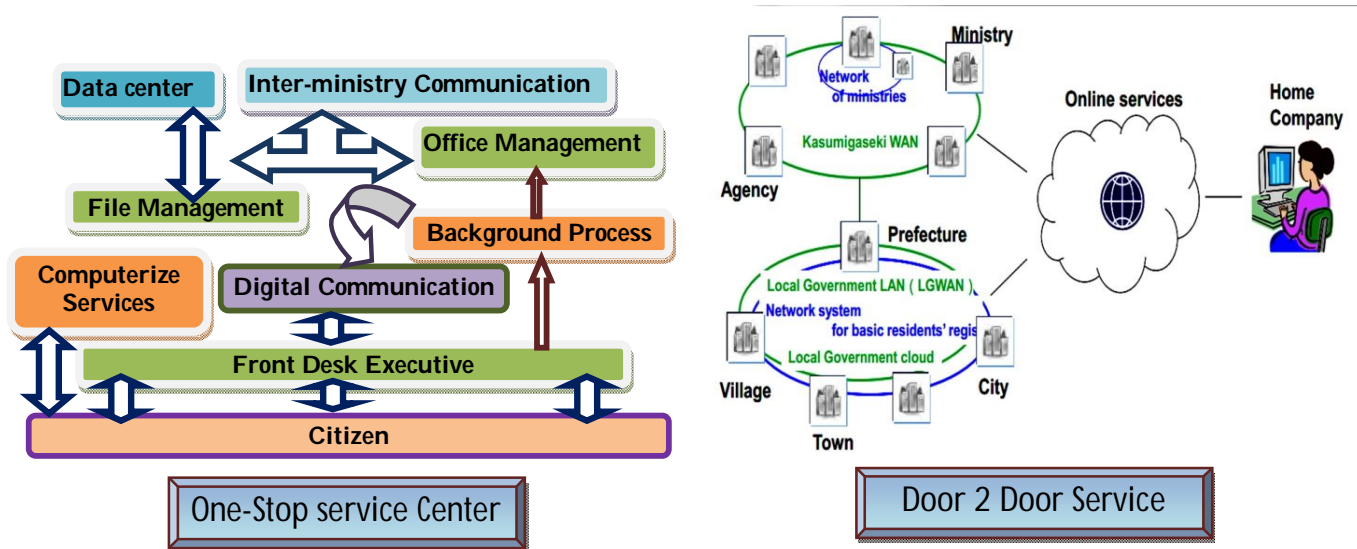
- a) Personnel systems and policies can have a substantial influence on the quality of local e-Governance system. Japanese local governments provide stable and well-paid careers. Japanese National Government tries to balancing with the salary of private sector job. Even the local government official's pay scales are slightly higher than those who are working for central government. As a result, Japanese local governments have attracted good staff into their ranks and built up strong human resource capacity over time.
- b) Specialized On-Job and Off-Job training system for Japanese local government personnel are very much effective to their job sector. Then can manage their ICT system in rural area through expert personnel who have already successfully finished their technical training course.
- c) All local public servants are prohibited from strikes or work slowdowns, or from any other actions which disturb normal operation of local public services. They are also prohibited to attempt, conspire, instigate or incite such actions because, as public servants, they are required to work entirely for the general public interest.

In Bangladesh there are no such systems. Therefore with the low payment salary systems the officials are become bore and their efficiency also becomes less than expectation. Though we've some technical training institutes but they are not well equipped. So we can follow the Japanese local government personnel system and their training management. After increasing salary we can also forbid them for all kinds of strikes or work slowdown.

### **Effective and efficient e-Governance services:**

- a) The e-Governance system (e-Application) has been operated at the Government portal Site "e-Gov" enabling to accept multiple administrative procedures such as applications and reports at the single gateway through Internet. Cooperation between the central and local government with some cloud services have launched.
- b) This is also for one-stop citizen service system in rural area which can ensure Efficient and smooth service delivery system from single service point. Our technical visit was in Tachikawa city (Tokyo), Kawaguchi city (saitama prefecture) for understanding about the collaboration with citizens and one-stop service delivery system and all those personnel are well trained.

- c) The “e-Government Customer Support Centre” is opened to deal with various inquiries on how to use “e-Gov”
- d) Going to provide a safe and secure community by utilizing Information and Communication Technology (ICT), in which local authorities and neighboring volunteers work together harmoniously to watch over and help elderly and people who are in need of nursing care. There are also a technical group and they are very expert on their field. (Tsuncho, Kochi Prefecture)



- e) Promotion of Tourism and Exchange, creation of new online market, local / emergency information automatic display service, simultaneous warning transmission to mobile phones (for disaster/evacuation information from state/local governments, emergency warning broadcasting system (EWBS), Fully automated digital library system, etc. They can manage such kinds of activities because of their sufficient skilled manpower.
- f) Automatic waste management system and recycle plaza for clean and healthy environment developed under local government through privatization policy.

For Bangladesh it may be very hard to change or reform the total local government system as well as public service and finance system within over year. But it can possible to make the existing e-Government system effective and efficient.

We can do such things:

- We can take initiatives to start one-stop citizen service in rural area. The “e-Government Customer Support Centre” can be opened to deal with various inquiries and how to use “e-Gov”
- We can engage some technical personnel from various organizations for developing cloud service systems to cooperate between the central and local government.
- We can also develop our local tourism spots, creation of new online market, local / emergency information automatic display service, simultaneous warning transmission to mobile phones (for disaster/evacuation information from state/local governments, emergency warning broadcasting system (EWBS), fully automated digital library system, etc. without the help of donor agencies.

- We can also build automatic waste management system and recycle plaza for clean and healthy environment developed under local government through privatization policy.

### **Prospective solution to the issue(s) and future perspectives:**

My further study regarding these issues can be helpful to identify the present conditions of e-Governance system of rural area in details. And also can build up some important variables which are mostly relevant to develop and digitalization of e-Governance system in rural area of Bangladesh through Local Government (Union Parishad). In short, to improve the Union Parishad activities and for appropriate & functional e-Governance systems, Local Government (Union Parishad) has to take two kinds of activities: Short term initiatives and long term initiatives.

#### **Short term initiatives:**

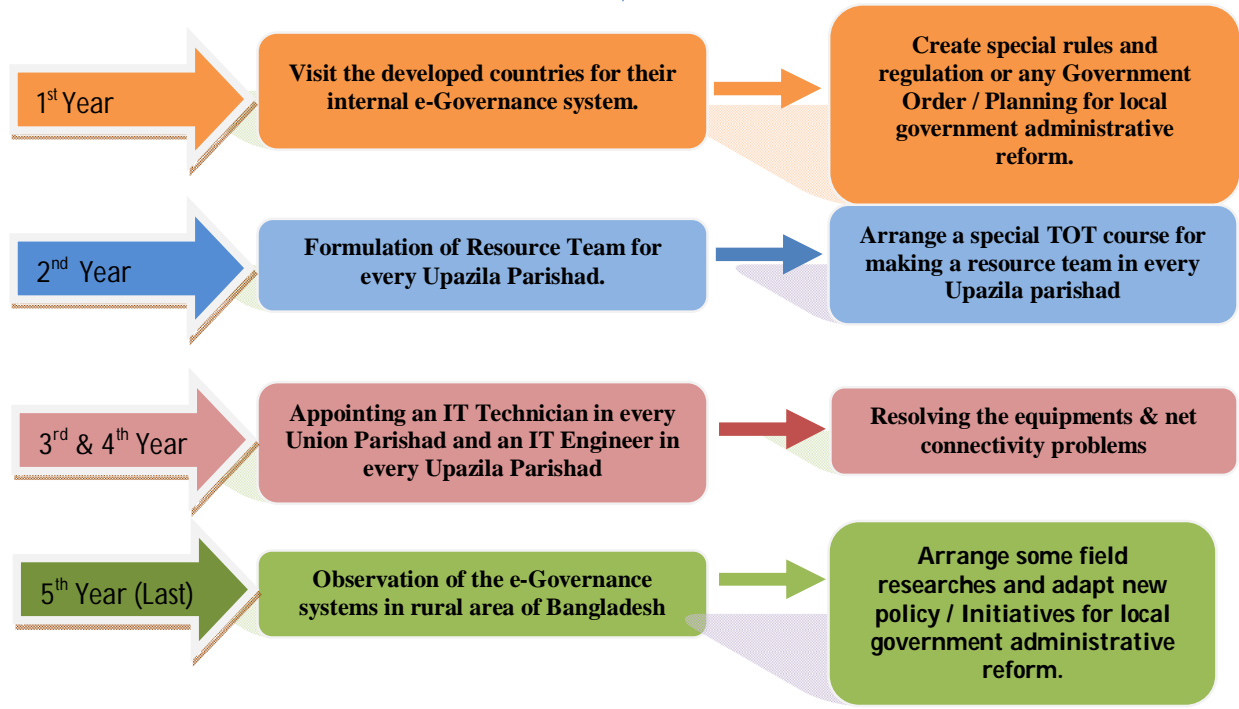
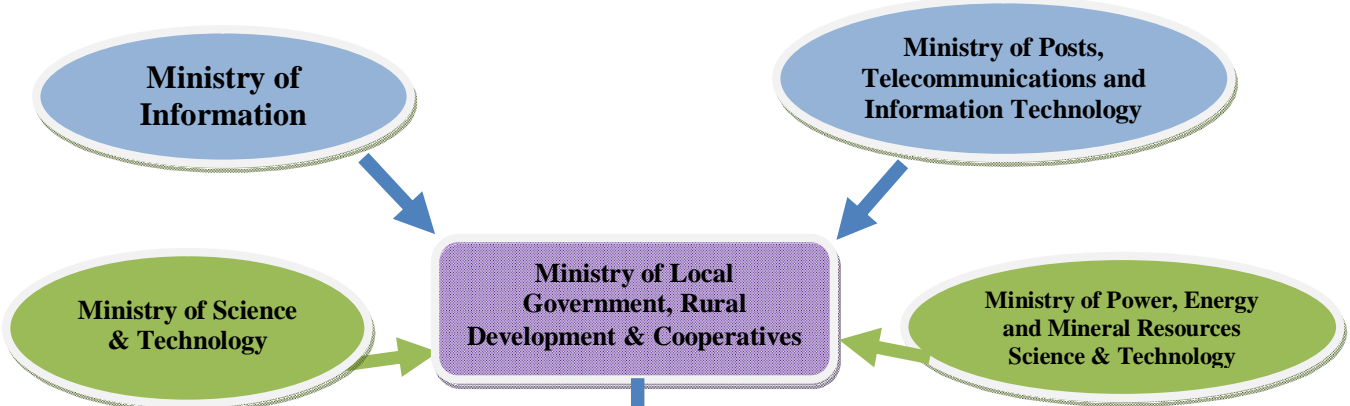
- First of all our policy makers can frequently visit the developed countries to gather some useful information about their local government function with ICT system. How they are managing this systems and which kinds of techniques they adapted.
- Union Parishad administration has to take necessary steps for appointing at least one year diploma course completed IT Technician for technical assistance. Same as every Upazila Parishad administration can be appoint at least one diploma holder (4 years) IT Engineer (Information Technology) who will be always ready to move any Union Parishad of his/her area to ensure the quality services.
- Enhancement the capacity of employee as well as public representatives through training. Regarding this issue we can follow the Japanese government personnel training system.
- We can immediate privatize some small services which can make our e-Government more effective and efficient in rural area.
- Our central government also can publish special rules and regulation or any Government Order (GO) to every Union Parishad for promptly taking necessary action regarding any obstruction of e-Governance systems.

#### **Long term initiatives:**

- We must have to think about local government administrative reform. We also can remove the hierarchical relationships between Union Parishad, Upazila Parishad and Zila Parishad. So they become mutually independent local government entities.
- Though the Union Parishad is one of the oldest LG institute in Bangladesh, so they have to take steps for more decentralization as well as special rules & regulation for policy making at the grass root level.
- Due to unavailability of fund of some Union Parishad, every Upazila Parishad can take the responsibilities for infrastructure development of UISC room as well as IT services.

If I'm able to work on this issue, firstly I'll prepare a five years policy diagram. Such as:

# 5 Years Plan



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