

# Policy Brief

National Integrity  
System Assessment  
Bangladesh

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT



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## Local Government

Local governance in Bangladesh is divided across many administrative units: divisions, districts, upazilas (sub-districts), unions, and wards. LGs include 10 City Corporations, 311 Pourashavas (municipalities), 64 Zila Parishads (district parishad), 485 Upazila Parishads (sub-district parishads) and 4502 Union Parishads (rural local governments). Besides, there are 3 Hill District Councils. These local government institutions manned by nearly 77,000 elected representatives and 75,000 government officials. Premised on a strong Constitutional and legal framework, LGs are headed by an elected Mayor/ Chairman and Members/Commissioners. There is a provision of 30% seats reserved for women. Since inception, these LGs have been entrusted with maintenance of law and order, infrastructure development, promotion of health, education, and some other basic social services.

The Government of Bangladesh, from a policy perspective, has recognized the role of the Local Government as a vehicle for service delivery and good governance at the grassroots. Political leaderships across the regimes have highlighted the need, importance and significance of Local Government (LG) in the broader political and administrative contexts. However, in practice LGs are still weak and bear features more of deconcentration than a true form of decentralization.

Considering fiscal perspective and the extent of control of the central government, Bangladesh can be considered as a highly centralized State. The overall accountability mechanism is diffused - it is accountable to multiple authorities of the central government. Community based accountability is weak and non-functional. Some new provisions of accountability and transparency like citizens' charter, open budget system and access to LG information through right to information have been introduced but in reality LGs do not follow such processes and in many cases, are not even aware of such practices.

LGs tend to depend heavily on the national government's fiscal transfer. Such dependency eventually forces the LGs to compromise on their autonomy. Despite legal reforms, much political rhetoric and policy pronouncements, move for improvement of local governance initiatives resembles a "window dressing" rather than "real" change.

## Strengths

- LGs have strong Constitutional framework.
- Local visibility and presence particularly in times of crisis.
- Increased availability of resources.

## Weaknesses

- LGs are chronically poor.
- Control oriented regulatory framework.
- Limited autonomy of the LGs which are subject to authoritarian supervisory role of the "central government".
- LGs lack transparency and accountability as general people have little idea about budget allocation, implementation of development projects; and income and expenditure.
- Monitoring mechanisms are weak, inadequate and ineffective.
- LGI leadership suffers from image crisis on account of corruption and lack of transparency, and politicisation to a certain degree.

## Recommendations

- The government must formulate an inter-governmental fiscal transfer policy for effective distribution of resources among different tiers of LG to minimise/remove uncertainties and scope for political manipulation.
- A permanent Local Government Finance Commission may be considered to ensure objective distribution and allocation of public fund and to implement and monitor the proposed inter-governmental fiscal transfer policy.
- Rules and procedures must be developed to make LGs more responsive to their constituents.
- Capacity of the LGs must be strengthened by providing incentives for resource mobilisation at the local level.
- Steps must be taken to prevent manipulation of LGs by Members of the Parliament.

## About Policy Brief Series

One of the key strategic areas of TIB's research has always been the institutions of democracy and specialized pillars of governance and accountability, which constitute the National Integrity System (NIS), a collective of institutions and practices that are crucial to maintaining integrity and accountability in government, non-government and private sector. The NIS in Bangladesh broadly consists of the following institutions: Parliament, Executive, Judiciary, Public Administration (bureaucracy), Local Government, Police (law enforcement agency), Comptroller and Auditor General (supreme audit institution), Election Commission, Anti-Corruption Commission, National Human Rights Commission, Information Commission, Political Parties, Civil Society, Media, and Business.

TIB has conducted a series of research, surveys and diagnostic studies on many such institutions, by which it has not only created demand, but also catalysed a number of significant legal, institutional and policy changes. Against this background, this policy brief series attempts to diagnose and analyse the strengths and weaknesses of the NIS in Bangladesh and recommend implementable measures to strengthen these institutions.

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This policy brief draws on *National Integrity System Assessment Bangladesh 2014* available at: <http://ti-bangladesh.org/nicsa/2014/en/>

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