

## **INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS IN BANGLADESH**

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Traditionally, the governments of every state have major contribution to the socio-economic development of the country. In this era of globalization, the increasing international interactions among governmental and non-governmental institutions have significantly impacted on the socio-cultural and economic living of the people. The activities and role of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) have particularly become influential in world affairs. NGOs have emerged as an integral part of the institutional structure to address the problems of poverty, under-development, gender inequality, environmental conservation, disaster management, human rights and other social issues. In order to support social and economic empowerment of the poor, they have widened their activities in the form of group formation, micro-credit facilitation, formal and non-formal education training, health and nutrition, family planning and welfare, agriculture and related activities, water supply and sanitation, human rights and advocacy, legal aid and other areas. NGOs are also consulted by government as well as international organisations. The United Nations has created associative status for them. They are now tens of thousands in the world, operating in most of the countries and especially active in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East. Though these organisations are not directly affiliated with any national government, still they often have a significant impact on the social-economic and political activities of these countries or regions. However, the NGOs, whether strong or weak, play more of an oppositional rather than operational role. Thus, the governments are highly suspicious of them. A number of factors influence the development of NGOs; many of which are pre-determined by the relationship between the NGO and the Government.

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Bangladesh, which emerged as a newly independent country of South Asia in 1971, is considered as one of the poorest countries in the world. It is a small and densely populated country with over fifteen crore population thronging a land area of only 147,570 square kilometers. The density is more than 1099 people per sq. km. and a majority of the total population lives in rural areas. A total of 87,310 villages make up the rural scenario. From the administrative point of view, Bangladesh is divided into 7 Divisions, 64 Districts and 481 Upazillas.<sup>1</sup> The Government and various NGOs play an important role towards the country's development process in Bangladesh. Thus, the task of institutional relationship between the Government and NGO has become overwhelmingly challenging on the part of Bangladesh. In recent years, partly because of the powerful influence of donors, the Bangladesh government has begun to give greater weightage to the activities of NGOs. While acknowledging the role played by NGOs, the government is looking for ways to regulate their scope of activities and flows of funds from foreign countries. The status of relationship between government and non-governmental organisations in developmental sector of Bangladesh is very poor both in the rural and urban areas. Therefore, attention to improve the institutional relationship between them is required to lead the country's development at local and national level.

### **A Conceptual Framework**

The Non-Governmental Organisations are not a new phenomenon. They are considered as trend setters in development and hence the popularity of the term 'Alternative Development Strategies' vis-a-vis NGOs<sup>2</sup> being used. It is also observed that NGOs have generally been able to reach the poor where the Government failed.<sup>3</sup> Non-Governmental Organisation is a legally constituted non-profit making body, which are created by private persons or organisations with no participation or representation of any government. When a NGO is funded totally or partially by governments, it maintains Non-governmental status as far as no government representatives are part of the organisation. In sum, NGO is a

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<sup>1</sup> Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), *Statistical Pocketbook of Bangladesh*, Dhaka, GOB Report, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> A. G. Drabek, "Development Alternatives: The Challenge for NGOs", *World Development*, Vol. 15, Dhaka: Supplemental Issue, 1987.

<sup>3</sup> L. Brown, and D. C. Korten, "Working More Effectively with Non-Governmental Organizations", in Paul, se. et al (eds.) *Non-Governmental Organizations and the World Bank: Co-operation for Development*, Washington, The World Bank Press, 1991.

formal, non-profit, non-partisan private body that comes into being as a result of personal initiative of an individual or a group of individuals to voluntarily undertake development work at grassroots level to better the lives of poor.<sup>4</sup> They are active in the field of development issues such as rural development, alleviation of poverty, health and education, and global issues such as the environment, human rights, refugees and the population crisis.<sup>5</sup> Yet, the definitions of NGOs are contested and confusing. However, according to Brown and Korten, define NGO possess six attributes (1) non-governmental, (2) non-profit-making, (3) voluntary (4) of a solid and continuing form, (5) altruistic, and (6) philanthropic.<sup>6</sup>

In this study, the NGOs are defined as a formal independent societal organisation. The legal or institutional relationship with the government is primarily aims to promote common goals at the national or international levels. Often these goals involve the promotion of full stakeholder participation, mutual learning, accountability and transparency, local self governance, long-term sustainability, and perhaps above all, a people centered approach.<sup>7</sup>

### **The Growth of NGOs in Bangladesh**

The NGOs had been working in traditional form since the British colonial period. The development oriented activities are relatively new in Bangladesh. The massive destruction of the physical infrastructure and the economy of Bangladesh by the liberation war and resulted peoples suffering had called immediate relief and rehabilitation intervention. The government neither had the capacity nor had the appropriate institutional mechanism to address the volume and diversity of such enormous problems single handed. Thus, this newly independent state and the ongoing political instability, the governments have largely failed in developmental works. Here, the NGOs have grown

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<sup>4</sup> S. Amnuzzaman, "NGOs and Grassroots Base Local Government in Bangladesh: A Study of Their Institutional Interactions", 1998, in F. Hosssain and S. Myllya (eds.) *NGOs Under Challenge Dynamics and Drawbacks in Development*, Helsinki, Department of the International Development Cooperation, 1998, at pp. 84-104.

<sup>5</sup> Tadashi Yamamoto, *Emerging Civil Society in the Asia Pacific Community: Non-governmental Underpinnings of the Emerging a Pacific Regional Community*, Singapore, Center for International Exchange Press, 1995, at p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Supra Note 3.

<sup>7</sup> J. Hailey, "Learning for Growth: Organizational Learning in South Asian NGOs", 2000, in M. U. Haq, *Human Development in South Asia*, Dhaka, University Press Limited, 1997.