

An alternative way to replicate good practices

Md. Zahirul Islam, Knowledge Management Specialist, SDC Local Governance Programme, Sharique

Background: Sharique, an SDC Local Governance programme has been working with local governments since 2006. The beginning was not easy and the path was full of challenges. Commitment to their citizens and desire to improve services in rural areas have led a number of local governments towards becoming not just more effective but also become a role model of good local governance. During the first two phases of Sharique (2006-2012) a number of good practices were initiated by local governments together with their citizens. This triggered a lot of interest from the neighboring local governments. Sharique jointly with its local government partners have organized a series of peer exchange sessions, cross-country learning visits and learning forums. Practice showed that representatives of local governments and the citizens' groups learn much easier and with more enthusiasm when they have the opportunity to learn from peers.



Shilmaria Union Parishad: A selected Union Parishad Local Academy (UPLA)

Thus, in Phase III of the Sharique project it was decided that peer learning needs to be tested as an alternative to formal forms of learning in classrooms. A number of Union Parishads (lowest level of local government in Bangladesh) strongly supported the idea and promoted themselves as potential learning facilitators for other local governments in the country.

In support of this idea, in January 2014, an in-depth study of the existing good practices took place in the Union Parishads of Rajshahi, Chapai Nawabganj and Sunamganj districts. The mission was organized by a group of staffers from Sharique, a number of Union Parishad's representatives and a third party representative. In consultation with citizens, UP representatives and Sharique staffers, the group selected ten good practices of local governance from which others could learn.

The National Institute of Local Government (NILG) of Bangladesh supported the initiative with great enthusiasm and became a valuable partner in the project. Thus, the concept of a Union Parishad Local Academy was born. Supported by the National Government's Agency for capacity building of local governments – NILG, and implemented by the local governments themselves the Academy has a destiny for success.

The following describes the process of converting good practices into 'Union Parishad local government academies' (UPLA) designed to facilitate learning through practice sharing and observing.

Process

An important step in designing a local academy is to have the consent and dedication from those who claim they can offer good practices. The real dedication comes through the desire to share the good practices and to help other local governments and groups of citizens learn how to implement practices in their communities.

Another important element in the process is getting the relevant national authorities on board of the initiative. UPLA's initial success came right away thanks to the great support of the National Institute of Local government, which is the national agency in charge of training local governments.

Validation of the promoted good practices is crucial for credibility and transparency. The local academy must be a local initiative supported by national partners. While the role of the project is important in the steering of the process, it is necessary to have a third party evaluation commission who validates the proposed practices. Once the good practices were selected, Sharique together with the NILG designed an innovative concept for the set up of the UP Local Academy. It was decided that the Local UP academies will be managed and run by the local government representatives in collaboration with resource persons from among the communities, which are selected by the local governments and evaluated by the UPLA accreditation commission.



Official team from Sharique, Union Parishads and the National Institute of Local Government (NILG) are validating Best Practices of the UPs

NILG together with the Union Parishads developed a curriculum, which incorporated the main ideas from discussions and meetings as well as from field exposure.

In order to give the UP Local Academy an official status, the NILG accredited the three local governments as training service providers, which are now called UPLA. Accreditation is an important element of the UP Academy. Besides recognition and appreciation, it gives the Union Parishad the right status of the learning center. This instills credibility and trust and hopefully will help attract more trainees.

Preparation for rolling out the UPLA: Once the institutional and organizational form was agreed upon, significant preparation work for the UPLA began. Sharique has supported the UPLA with a grant to

enhance their facilities and prepare for the first round of trainings. A workshop involving all engaged parties was organized. During the workshop roles and responsibilities were discussed, methodology for learning facilitation was approved.

The process was accompanied all the way through the knowledgeable experts of the NILG and under the supervision of the UPLA team consisting of members from Sharique and NILG.

A Training of the Trainers (ToT) was conducted for the prospect resource persons at Shilmaria UP, one of the UPLAs in Rajshahi, on 19-22 October 2014. This event created a positive impression of the capacity of the resource persons. The ToT built confidence in the UPLA among the members of the NILG and other partners and proved that the UPLA had the required skills to demonstrate their practices to peers.



Launching event of UPLA: After all the preparation for the UPLA, on December 13-15 the inauguration ceremony took place followed by the training for a first group of 19 elected UP representatives from Chapai Nawabganj.

Training of the Trainers for UPLA resource persons: NILG directors are on their move

The inauguration of the local UP academies by the Additional Secretary and Director General of NILG has given the event a high profile and encouraged the representatives of the local academies to conduct the mission in a most effective way.



Additional Secretary of the government and Director General of NILG Mr. Mustafa Kamal Haider is delivering his inaugural speech at the Launching ceremony of UPLA



People involving representatives from NILG, development partners and Sharique at a workshop on UPLA

Next steps:

Promotion and advocacy: Sharique partnered with the local electronic media Community Radio Padma to promote the concept of the UPLA. In addition, 26 episodes on good practices in local governance were broadcasted in the period from July to December 2014 through the ***Weekly Agrojatra***.

The organizers of UPLA intend to continue promoting the UPLA concept through the print media and by sharing the news among the network platforms like Horizontal Learning Programme (HLP), Governance Advocacy Forum (GAF) and other development partners implementing governance programme in Bangladesh.

Challenges: the most important challenge is to sustain the UPLA as a center of learning and ensure participation from local governments representatives from across the country. A number of issues are related to funding. In order for UPLA to become successful and recognized in the country a solid learning base needs to be created. While the selected UPLA already 'own' a series of good practices, the skill of convincing others to come to the UPLA for learning is still to be developed. Funding the programme is a key to making it successful. It is believed that once local governments across country learn about the UPLA and have the resources to pay for training, the UPLA will become a hot spot for learning. However, while raising awareness of these learning points is a realistic goal, getting the professional development funds to pay for such learning is still a challenge. Sharique together with the NILG are looking for possibilities to mobilize already existing resources, which are in the hands of the UPs. Among such is the National Government's Local Governance Support Program (LGSP II), which envisions a 10% fund allocation for capacity building.

Steps forward: Three UPLA will roll out in 2015 and will promote the concept of peer learning through exposure to good practices in the field. An evaluation of the effectiveness of the UPLA will be conducted

at the end of the year. In the meantime, the NILG will continue to support the project by providing technical assistance and backstopping.

Sharique and NILG plan to launch more such UPLAs if the first three turn out to be successful and serve the purpose of an alternative to classroom good practice learning.