

Decentralization, and the Role & Functions of Union Parishad in Bangladesh

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The Concept of Decentralization

There are different types of decentralization. These are political, administrative, fiscal and market decentralization. Political, administrative, fiscal and market decentralization can appear in different forms and combinations across countries, within countries and even with in sectors. Political decentralization is the transfer of authority to a sub national body.

Political decentralization aims to give citizens or their elected representatives more power in public decision making. It is often associated with pluralistic and representative government, but it can also support democratization by giving citizens, or their representatives, more influence in the formulation and implementation of policies

Decentralization has been defined by various scholars of public administration as transference of authority from a higher level of government to a lower, delegation of decision making, placement of authority with responsibility, allowing greatest number of actions to be taken where most of the people reside, removal of functions from the center to the periphery, a mode of operations involving wider participation of people in the whole range of decision making beginning from plan formulation to implementation

As we know decentralization means transfer of power and authority from the central government to local or sub national units of the government for the meeting of grass root peoples demand.

The term has been more used to mean institutionalization of local government for unburdening the central government, facilitating local decision-making for local problem-solving, and encouraging popular participation as a democracy-enriching device. World Bank also referred to the increasing demand for decentralization in many developing countries in the world.

In most South Asian countries, local authorities are characterized by a weak institutional capacity to deliver public services and promote local development. In Bangladesh, the functions and role of rural administration have remained limited from the time of its establishment. However, rural administration in India is empowered relative to other South Asian countries.

Table. Comparison of Rural Administrative Units in Bangladesh and India

Countries	Lowest-tier	Middle-tier	Upper-tier
Bangladesh	Union Parishad	Upazila/Thana Parishad	Zila Parishad
India	Gram Panchayet	Pachayet Samittee	District Council

Above table compares the rural administrative units in Bangladesh and India. This table indicates that in both countries rural government administration is divided into three levels: lower, middle and upper. It has been said that, as the lowest level local administration is the level of government closest to the citizens, it is best placed to serve the population. Gram Panchayat (GP) is the lowest level administration in India, and has been playing a significant role in rural development. However, Union Parishad (UP) in Bangladesh faces serious problems in performing their roles and functions.



The Roles and Functions of Union Parishad

Basic Information

Union Parishad has a long history in the rural government administration in Bangladesh. There are total 4484 Unions, and each Union comprises about 10-20 villages. However, there is no administrative organization at the village level.

The size of the Union varies substantially in terms of geographical area, number of villages and population. Every UP has a Chairman and twelve elected Members. Among the twelve, three members are reserved for women (one each from the three wards, to be directly elected). The term of a UP elected members are five years.

The Local Government Ordinance of 1983 indicates that UP has a wide range of functions. Of these, the following 10 functions are compulsory :

- 1.Maintenance of law and order.**
- 2.Adoption of measures for preventing crime, disorder and smuggling.**
- 3.Adoption and implementation of development schemes in the field of agriculture, forest, fisheries, livestock, education, health, irrigation and flood protection.**
- 4.Promotion of family planning.**
- 5.Development of local resources.**
- 6.Protection and maintenance of public properties.**
- 7.Review of the development activities.**
- 8.Motivation of the people to install sanitary latrines, and to maintain cleanliness.**
- 9.Registration of births, deaths, blinds and beggars.**
- 10.Conducting all kinds of census.**

The Local Government Ordinance 1983 also authorizes UP to perform 38 optional functions covering various aspects of rural life. These relate primarily to provision, maintenance and upgrade of public places including parks, meeting places, public access ways and streets, management and protection of sources of potable water and other public services.

The Functions of Union Parishad

A large number of functions have been prescribed in the UP law. In practice, however, Union Parishad functions are usually confined to the following 14 areas:

1. Assessing and collecting taxes.
2. Maintaining law and order through the village police.
3. Maintaining birth and death register.
4. Constructing and maintaining roads, bridges, culverts, etc.
5. Constructing and maintaining ponds.
6. Maintaining *haats* and *bazzars*.
7. Issuing various kinds of certificate and licenses.
8. Providing road lighting.
9. Setting rural petty disputes.
10. Promoting cottage industries.
11. Maintaining UP information and records.
12. Motivating people to adopt family planning methods.
13. Conduction relief works.
14. Celebrating national days.

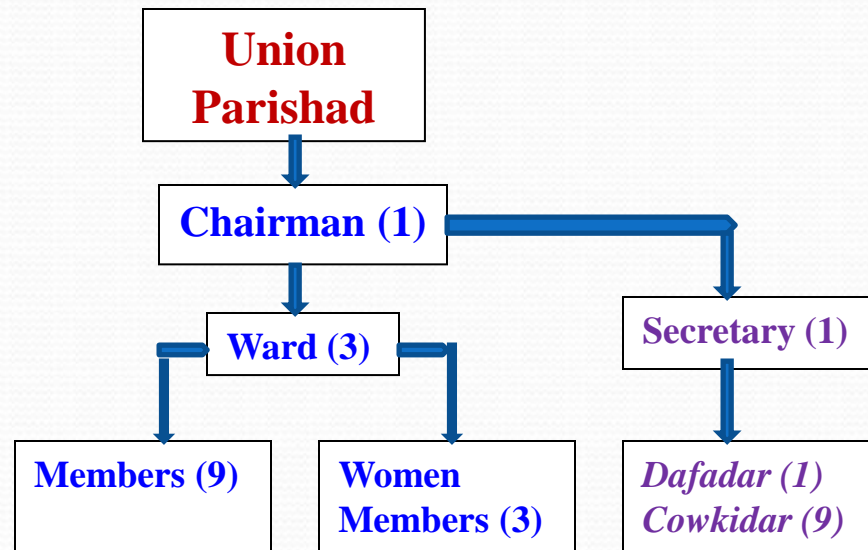


Figure . Administrative Structure of Union Parishad

Table 2. Major Roles of UP Elected Members

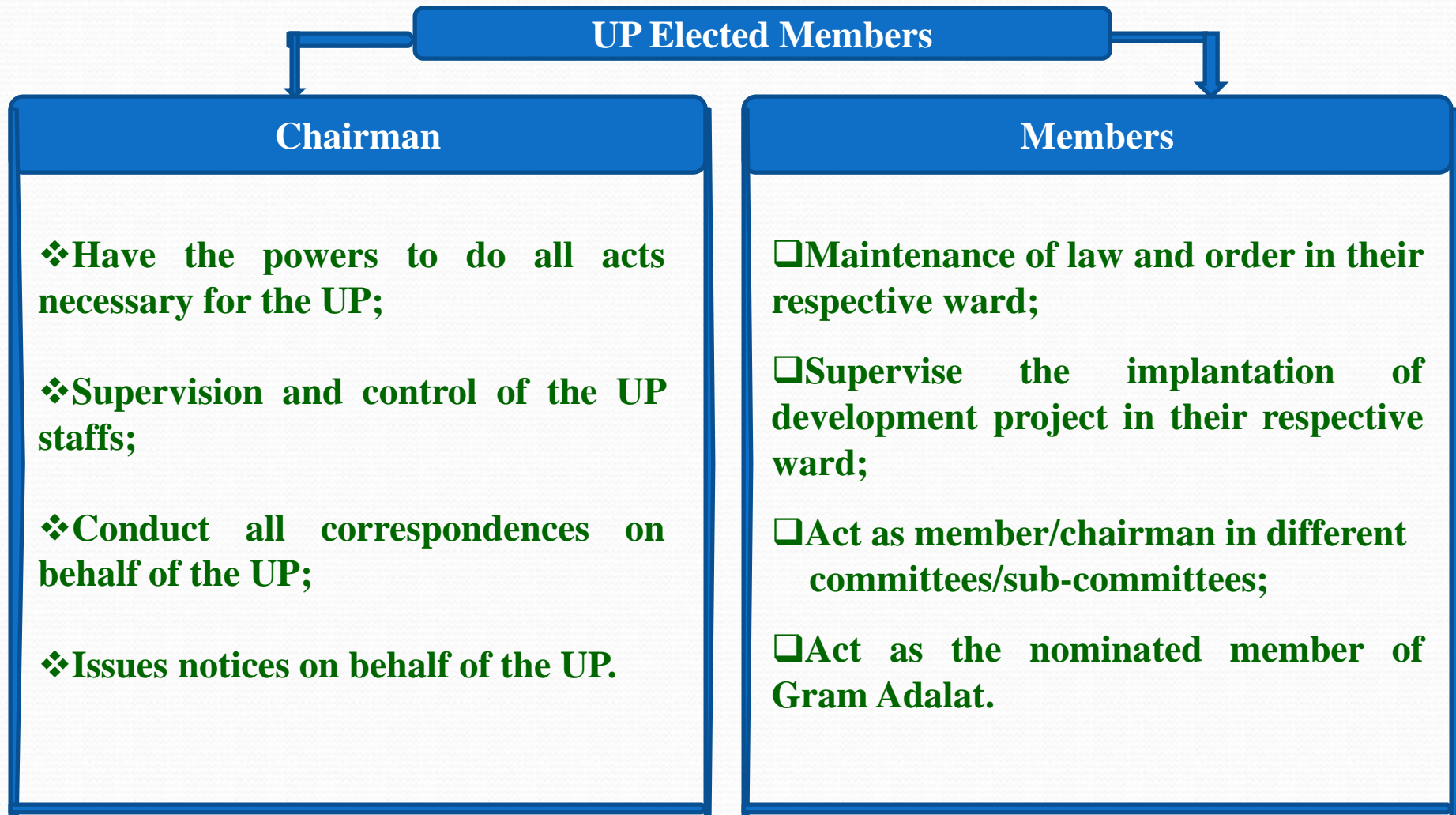


Table 2.1. Major Roles of UP Staffs

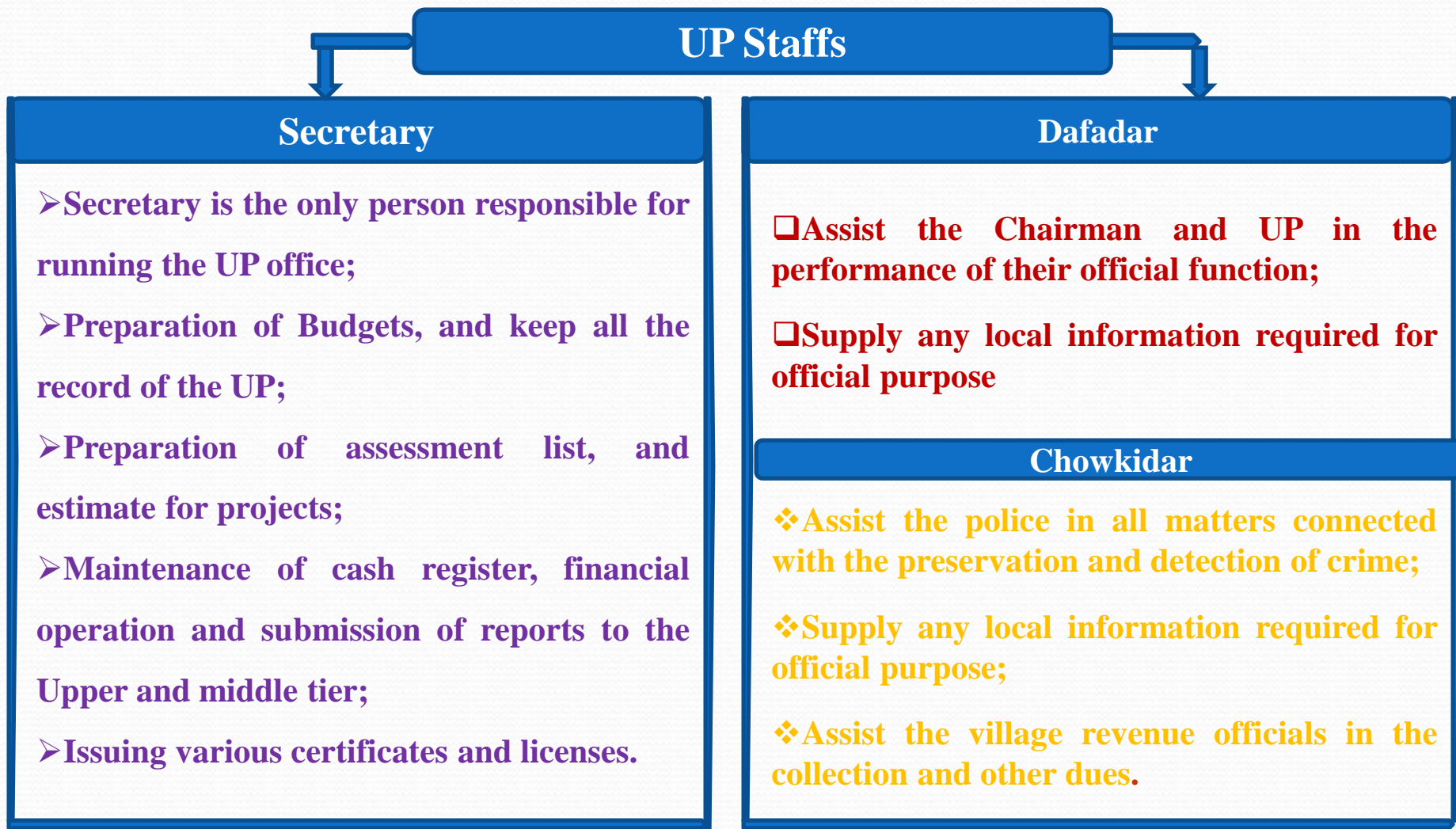


Table 3. Honorarium and Salaries of the UP Elected Members and Staffs

Elected (Honorarium)	Staffs (Salaries)	Total Allowance (Per person in per month)
Chairman		Tk. 8000.00 (3600 is paid by the GOB and the rest by UP)
Members (Both Male & Female)		Tk. 5000.00 (2375 is paid by the GOB and the rest by UP)
	Secretary	Tk. 35824.00 (75% is paid by the GOB and the rest by UP)
	Dafadar	Tk. 3400.00 (1700 is paid by the GOB and the rest by UP)
	Chowkidar	Tk. 3000.00 (1500 is paid by the GOB and the rest by UP)

Table 4. Major Sources of Income in the Union Parishad

Governments Grants	Local Sources	Other Sources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grants to development heads (From central government); • Grants to salary and other allowances of the UP staff; • Grants in aid; • Grants for Rural Works Program (RWP); • ADP and other compensatory grants; and • Project aid grant. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Tax on the annual value of homestead; ❖ Tax on the professionals, trades and callings; ❖ Fees (lease money) from specified hats and bazaars within the union boundaries; ❖ Fees from <i>Jalmahals</i> situated within the Union boundaries; ❖ Fees for different licenses and permits granted by the UP; ❖ Land transfer tax (1%). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Rents and profits from properties; ○ Profit from investments; and ○ Receipts from individual and trust.

Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

A focal point becomes necessary when there is more than one tier of local government. UP has a long history, and it is the oldest rural institutions in Bangladesh. UP can be the focal point of all development in rural Bangladesh, although UP has been facing various problems in performing their functions. To accelerate rural development in Bangladesh, UP needs to become more responsive, effective and accountable to the ordinary villagers. The following recommendations may help:

- ★ It is necessary to establish a rural government administrative structure at the village level, to ensure people's participation at all stages of the development process. A UP for 10-20 villages is not a practical proposition. Every village has its own existence. Distance becomes a barrier for aged persons or women to participate in UP activities. To take grassroots democracy to the doorsteps of the people, every village irrespective of its size and population should have a village council.

Concluding Remarks and Recommendations (Cont.)

- ★ UP should enact new legislations to ensure not only provision for representation of women, but also for poor villagers, and minorities in rural areas.
- ★ Increasing the staff at the UP will help in the more efficient performance of duties such as public delivery, record keeping, monitoring implementation, maintaining and displaying accounts.
- ★ According to the UP guidelines, representatives of the Union Parishads are accountable to the community. However, in practice, the representatives of the UPs mostly fell accountable to the Upazila or their District bureaucratic bosses, rather than to the community. Direct funding to the UPs could increase accountability to the rural communities.
- ★ UP should be constituted with numbers of elected members depending on the numbers of voters/populations in the UP area.
- ★ Effective training should be given to the elected members and staffs, and it should be made compulsory for them to attend the training courses.