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ARTICLES

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Structural Framework of Annual Performance Agreement in Bangladesh: An Assessment of the Gaps

Md Mamunur Rashid Bhuiyan¹

ABSTRACT

Annual performance Agreement (APA) was introduced by the government in 2015 to enhance accountability and responsiveness in public sector organizations. This agreement follows a structure. The main objective of this study was to assess the gaps in the current structural framework and to explore some potential solutions. To achieve these objectives, semi-structured questionnaires were administered and APA focal points from 30 different Ministries/Divisions participated. Apart from this, a focus group discussion and Key Informant Interview of 5 experts in this field were also held. The study revealed that the current structure was not able to ensure logical performance of the organizations. It could not prevent easy and arbitrary target setting in the absence of a linkage between budget and activities. The absence of a monitoring framework also impeded its implementation. Furthermore, the current structure was unable to address the qualitative aspects of performance. The result also demonstrated that the structure was complex with some unnecessary sections and annexures. The potential solutions included creating a format for linking budget with the activities, mentioning the base of each target linking it with relevant policies/plans and projects, developing a separate monitoring framework and removing unnecessary sections and annexes. The study emphasized addressing these gaps/constraints through considering the recommended solutions for making the current framework comprehensive, performance focused and more effective.

Keywords: Annual Performance Agreement, Performance Management, Strategic Objectives, Key Performance Indicators

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INTRODUCTION

Background

Different countries across the world implement performance agreements in different names and formats to manage organizational performance (Trivedi, 2018). Performance agreement is designed to measure performance of an entity in the form of performance targets (GoK, 2007). It is a negotiated agreement between two parties. It supports in managing the performance of an organization in an efficient and effective manner (Ko et al. (2004: 39). Usually, the most important results that a government entity aspires to achieve within a specific period of time are included in an agreement (Cabinet Division, 2015). It supports in managing the tasks systematically which is helpful for pursuing organizational goal. This is undeniable that a well-structured agreement plays a key role in its successful implementation. Trivedi (2018) mentioned that 80% of the performance of an organization depends on the quality and comprehensiveness of the system it follows. Any limitations in the system or in the framework may result in weak performance of the specific organization.

In the report of the Public Administration Reforms Commission (2000) it was mentioned that the performance of the individuals working in public organizations all together would determine the performance of an organization. Their performance would be based on some indicators and that would be linked with the budget. The report highlighted the importance of ensuring efficiency and effectiveness of the activities done by the public sector organizations through the performance indicators. The report also indicated that performance indicators should be divided into different categories such as physical indicators, service indicators, financial indicators etc. This was the first ever idea in Bangladesh to measure organizational performance in a systematic and structured way. However, the structure of the performance management framework was not so clear though some of the recommendations were implemented in the course of time.

Later, the government of Bangladesh introduced Annual Performance Agreement in 2015 to ensure transparency, accountability and efficiency in organizational activities (Cabinet Division, 2015). A performance agreement is an elaborate plan of prioritized activities that a government entity wants to accomplish within a specific time period. This document contains an overall performance matrix including activities, performance indicators and targets along with future projection of performance.

As per the provision of the latest guidelines developed by the Cabinet Division for 2022-23 financial year, an APA of an organization essentially contains an overall picture of the organization, a preamble, three sections and nine annexures. Section one

provides the context and background for APA and contains vision, mission, strategic objectives, specific activities, second section contains outcome and impacts of the activities and third section contains an elaborate work plan for performance. This section contains strategic objectives, related activities, performance indicators, targets and future projection of the targets. The agreement contains nine annexures containing different aspects like abbreviations, evidence of performance, relation with other offices, consulted policies for the preparation of the work plan. Another five annexures are on five work plans on good governance tools namely National Integrity, Innovation and e-Governance, Citizens Charter, Grievance Redress System and Right to Information (Cabinet Division, 2022). However, there was no indication in this structure on how to link activities with budget, how to prevent easy and arbitrary targets and how to measure qualitative aspects of performance.

The Government of Bangladesh developed a framework for preparing APA in a structured manner. The structure supports the public sector organizations in identifying the overall performance issues, fixing targets and setting performance indicators. This study attempts to assess the gaps/constraints in the current framework of APA for further improvement of the framework.

Problem Statement

The Annual Performance Agreement (APA) system in Bangladesh, while well-intentioned, suffers from several significant problems that impede its effectiveness. Firstly, there is often a lack of clarity and specificity in goal setting. Objectives outlined in APAs can be vague and open to interpretation, leading to confusion and disputes over performance evaluation. Secondly, the APA framework tends to focus heavily on quantitative targets, often overlooking qualitative aspects of performance. This can encourage a narrow focus on easily measurable indicators, neglecting broader developmental and strategic goals. Additionally, the current structure places a considerable administrative burden on agencies involved in setting and monitoring APAs. The lack of streamlined processes and the absence of automated systems can lead to inefficiencies, bureaucratic hurdles, and delays in the agreement's implementation. Furthermore, the system's limited transparency and accountability mechanisms can result in a lack of motivation among stakeholders to genuinely commit to the agreed-upon targets. Without effective monitoring and consequences for non-compliance, the APAs may fail to drive the desired improvements in public service delivery (Rahman et al., 2019).

To address these problems, there is a need for a more streamlined and transparent APA framework that balances quantitative and qualitative goals, ensures clear and realistic targets, employs technology for efficient tracking, and establishes strong accountability mechanisms to foster genuine commitment to performance enhancement.

Rationale of the Study

APA in Bangladesh is still based on the structural framework that was developed in 2015 (Haque, 2022). Meanwhile, the dimensions of the activities of the government organizations have changed a lot. Achieving SDGs by 2030 and realizing the vision of being a developed nation by 2041 will also require solid performance by the public sector organizations. The ongoing COVID pandemic and Russia-Ukraine war has also made the governance more complex. On the other hand, the advancement in technologies has forced the public sectors to redefine the mode of public sector operation and service delivery. There is a need for a well-structured performance management framework which can address these changes and can ensure optimum performance of an organization is crucial (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2022). The Commonwealth Secretariat (2022) identified that an effective performance management system is the pre-condition for effective service delivery and attainment of development goals. Different studies have suggested the need for a comprehensive framework for the effective management of public sector performance (Trivedi, 2018). However, there is no detailed study on identifying the gaps of the existing framework of APA to manage organizational performance in Bangladesh. There is a dire need to assess the gaps in the current structural framework of APA to improve it for ensuring better performance of the public sector organizations.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are as follows.

- i) To identify the gaps in the current structural framework of Annual Performance Agreement.
- ii) To recommend specific solutions for the improvement of the framework.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The structural framework of organizational performance agreements (OPA) has been a subject of scholarly inquiry within the field of public administration and management. Literature in this area underscores the significance of establishing a clear and effective structural framework to maximize the benefits of performance agreements in organizations.

Researchers emphasize the need for well-defined and transparent objectives within the OPA framework. Behn (2003) argues that clear and specific performance targets enhance accountability by providing a measurable basis for evaluation. Moreover, the strategic alignment of OPA objectives with broader organizational goals is highlighted by Gogan and Draghicia (2013), as this alignment fosters a sense of purpose among employees and ensures that performance efforts contribute to overall mission accomplishment.

The balance between quantitative and qualitative indicators within OPAs has also garnered attention. While quantitative metrics are easily measurable, scholars like Moynihan and Landuyt (2008) suggest incorporating qualitative indicators to capture complex and nuanced aspects of performance. Integrating both types of indicators ensure a comprehensive evaluation of an organization's effectiveness.

The role of technology in the structural framework of OPAs has gained prominence. Research by Radnor and McGuire (2004) emphasizes the utilization of digital tools for effective performance measurement, reporting, and feedback. These technological systems enhance efficiency, accuracy, and transparency in the monitoring and assessment process.

Furthermore, scholars have discussed the importance of decentralized responsibility in the OPA structure. Piotrowski and Rosenbloom (2008) emphasize the value of empowering individual units or departments to set their own performance targets within a broader framework. This decentralized approach fosters a sense of ownership, innovation, and adaptability.

However, the literature also acknowledges challenges in OPA implementation. Andersen and Henriksen (2006) highlight potential resistance to change due to employees' concerns about fairness and ambiguity in goal setting. Bovaird and Löffler (2003) caution against an excessive focus on performance measurement, which might lead to unintended consequences such as "gaming" or neglecting qualitative aspects of performance.

Bhuiyan and Jahan (2017) in a study identified that current APA structure can only address quantitative aspects of performance and cannot address the quality issues. The study also stated that only numerical values cannot ensure the performance of government organizations. They also highlighted the scope of setting soft target to get a good score in final evaluation and mentioned about rethinking of the current structure to prevent that malpractice. This study was also not able to provide any structural frame on how to remove these shortcomings from the current structure.

In another study Bhuiyan *et al.* (2020) showed that the current APA cannot link employee performance with organizational performance, and it impeded the implementation of the agreement in an efficient manner. They also brought the example of USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom, Malaysia, South Korea, Fiji, Kenya and South Africa where such type of linkage played a key role in achieving organizational performance.

The study also highlighted the precedence of linking policy and budget with performance which is not very prominent in Bangladesh. Malaysia's Integrated Performance Management Framework ensures linking budget and policies with their

performance framework. The ministries need to prepare a strategic plan for getting the budget. In South Korea final budget allocation decisions by the Ministry of Planning and Budget tend to favour programmes with strong performance results and thus a strong linkage between both is prominent.

A study conducted by Rahman et.al (2019) underscored the importance of updating good governance related activities in the APA of field level offices time to time considering their capacity of implementation of those activities. The study also focused on the absence of linkage between employee and organizational performance and underscored the necessity for a comprehensive monitoring framework for APA.

The Commonwealth Secretariat (2022) in their '2nd Biennial Pan-Commonwealth Meeting of Heads of Public Service /Cabinet Secretaries' came up with 16 generally agreed performance principles for the organizational performance of the member countries. These principles include making a strong framework for ensuring better organizational performance. Important aspects of those principles are inclusion of financial, quantitative and qualitative targets and establishing strong linkage between organization's vision, strategic objectives and Key Performance Indicators. The framework will take the 'whole of government' approach'. Importantly, performance agreements will be linked with the budget system.

In conclusion, the literature underscores the significance of a well-structured framework for organizational performance agreements. Clear and aligned objectives, a balanced mix of indicators, technological integration, and a decentralized approach are crucial elements. Nevertheless, scholars highlight the need for careful attention to potential pitfalls and challenges to ensure that the structural framework effectively promotes accountability, transparency, and improved organizational performance.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Methods

The study employed qualitative approach in collecting data. Semi-structured questionnaires, Focus Group Discussion and Key Informant Interview were used to collect primary data. Secondary data was collected through review of the existing literature in the respective field. The existing framework of APA was reviewed thoroughly to identify the gaps. For getting views about the current framework, semi-structured questionnaires were administered with the participation of APA focal points of different Ministries/Divisions. Apart from this, some experts in this field were interviewed as Key Informants. Side by side a focus group discussion was arranged with the relevant officials of the Cabinet Division.

Justification of the Methods of Study

The study employed different methods such as semi-structured interviews, focus group discussion and key informant interviews for the collection of data. These methods provided more comprehensive and reliable data. The strength from one method was used to overcome the weakness of other method. The results from the methods helped in validating each other and provided stronger evidence for a conclusion.

Target respondents, study area and sample size

The target respondents, study area and sample size has been shown in the following table with justification.

Table 3.1: Target respondents, study area and sample size

SI	Area and sample size	Justification notes
1.	APA focal points (purposely selected) of 30 different Ministries/Divisions	They are involved in formulation and implementation of APA and possess practical knowledge about the framework
2.	Experts/Key Informants (5)	They are the think tank and possess comprehensive knowledge on the issue
3.	Officials (10) of the Cabinet Division involved in coordinating APA implementation	They are directly involved in coordinating the overall implementation of APA at government organizations

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study employed semi-structured interviews, key informant interviews and focus group discussion tools to collect primary data on the issue. The result against each aspect has been summarized and discussed below;

Semi-structured interviews

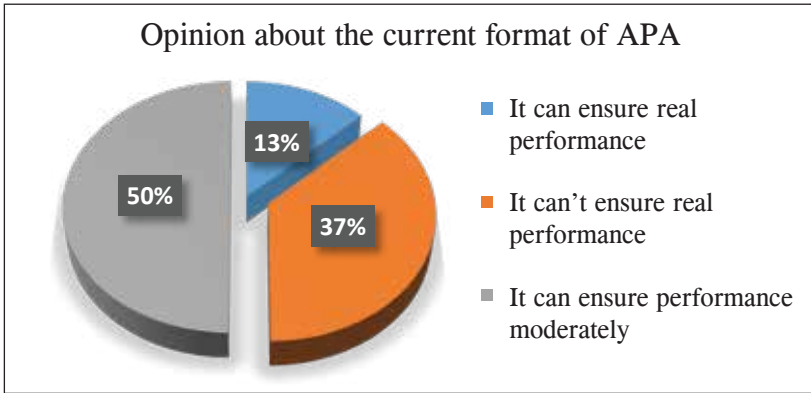
Semi structured interviews were conducted with the participation of 30 APA focal points of different Ministries/Divisions. Feedback from the semi structured interviews has been discussed below:

Opinion about the current format of APA

The respondents were given three options regarding the structure. Half (50%) of the respondents opined that the current structure of APA can ensure performance

moderately while another 37% mentioned that it cannot ensure real performance. All responses have been shown in the figure below;

Figure 1: Opinion about the current format/structure of APA (n=30)

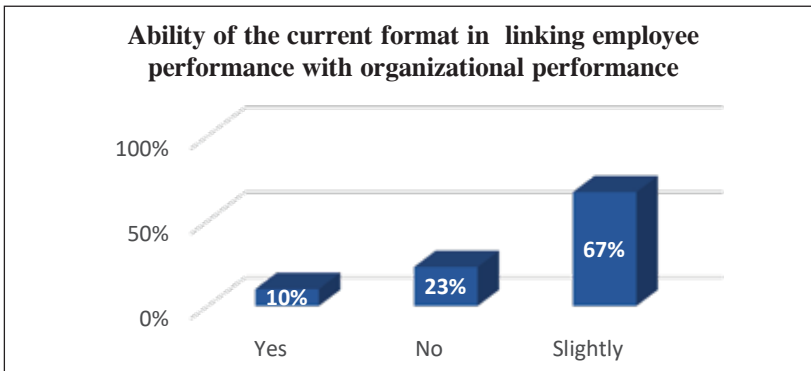


Source: Field data (n=30)

Ability of the current format in linking employee performance with organizational performance

In terms of the ability of the current format of linking employee performance with organization, majority (67%) of the respondents mentioned that it can relate employee performance with organizational performance slightly. Another 23% stated that it cannot relate employee and organizational performance.

Figure 2: Ability of the current format in linking employee performance with organizational performance

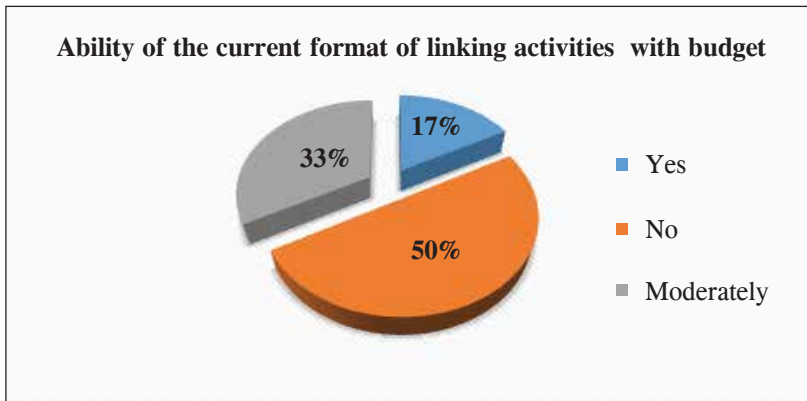


Source: Field data (n=30)

The ability of the current format of APA to link activities with budget.

The respondents were given three options as an answer to this question. Half of the respondents (50%) mentioned that the current structure cannot link activities with the budget. On the other hand, 33% of them opined that it can moderately relate these two aspects. Another 17% mentioned that it can link activities with the budget. The whole articulation has been shown in the following pie chart;

Figure 3: The ability of the current format of APA to link activities with budget

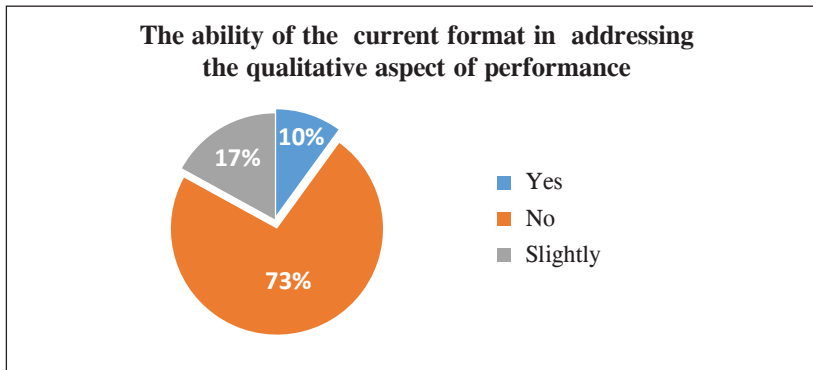


Source: Field data (n=30)

The ability of the current format in addressing the qualitative aspect of performance

To understand the ability of the current format in addressing the qualitative aspect of performance, the respondents were given three options for this question. As per the opinion of majority of the respondents (73%); it cannot address the qualitative aspect of performance while only 17% mentioned that it can slightly address the issue. The result has been shown in the figure below;

Figure 4: The ability of the current format in addressing the qualitative aspect of performance

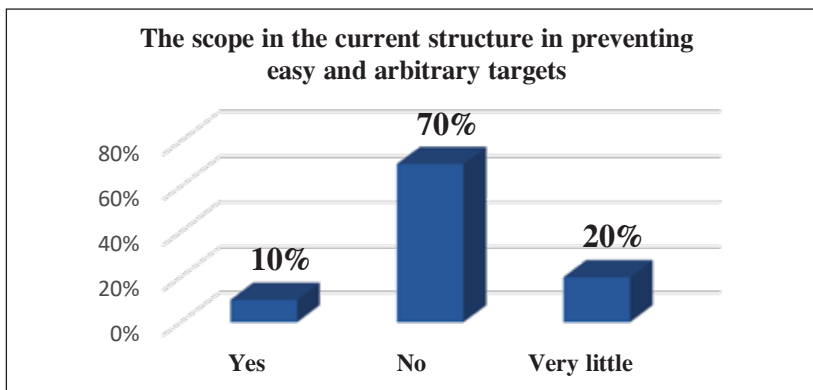


Source: Field data (n=30)

The scope in the current structure in preventing easy and arbitrary target setting.

The opinion of the respondents demonstrated that the current structure of APA cannot prevent easy and arbitrary target setting. Among the total 30 respondents, 21 (70%) mentioned that the current structure cannot prevent setting easy and arbitrary targets. This was quite alarming for ensuring value for money and result based management in public organizations. Another 6 (20%) highlighted that it can do very little. Rest 3 (10%) mentioned that it can do the needful as shown in the figure below.

Figure 5: The scope in the current structure in preventing easy and arbitrary target setting.

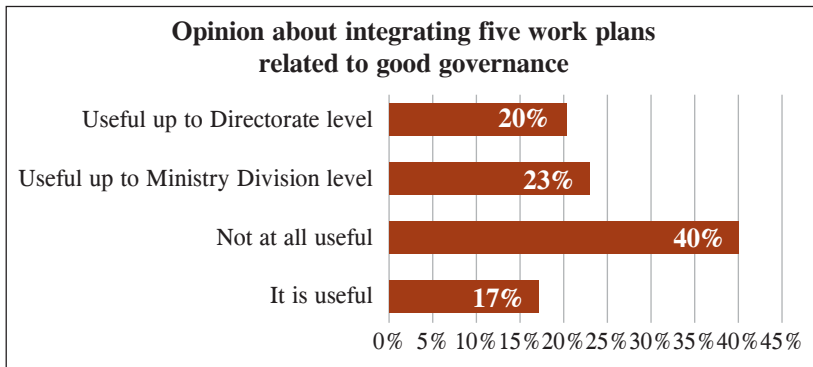


Source: Field data (n=30)

Opinion about integrating 5 work plans related to good governance with APA

In the case of integrating five different work plans related to good governance with APA, the respondents provided mixed reactions. A total of 40% of the respondents highlighted that this integration is not at all useful. About 23% opined that it is useful up to Ministry/Division level while 20% of them mentioned that it is useful up to Directorate level. Another 17% of respondents found the integration useful. The overall findings have been shown in the figure below;

Figure 6: Opinion about integrating 5 work plans related to good governance with APA

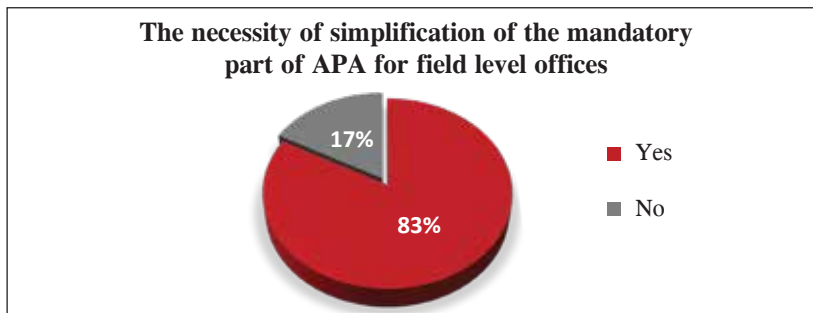


Source: Field data (n=30)

Necessity of the simplification of mandatory part of APA for field level offices

About 83% respondents opted for ‘yes’ in answer to this question which demonstrated a very challenging scenario for the field level offices in implementing APA under this structure. Another 17% mentioned that it does not require any further simplification as shown in the figure below;

Figure 7: Necessity of the simplification of mandatory part of APA for field level offices

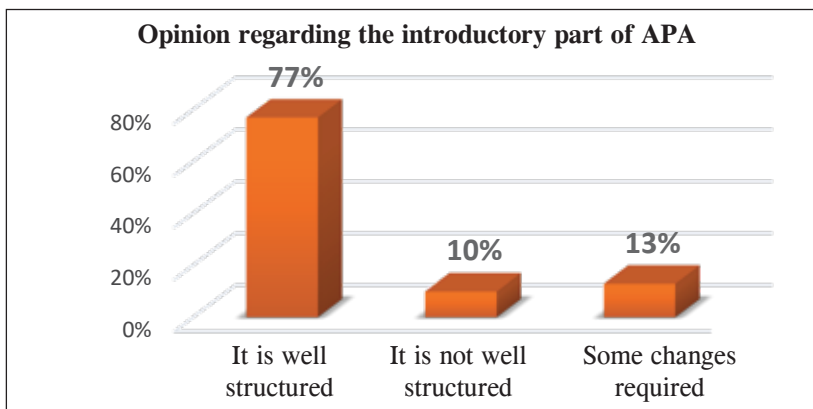


Source: Field data (KII)

Opinion regarding the introductory part of APA

Against the provided options 77% of the respondents opined that the introductory part of APA was well structured while 13% of them mentioned that some changes were required to make it useful and 10% of the respondents mentioned that it was not well structured as shown in the figure below;

Figure 8: Opinion regarding the introductory part of APA

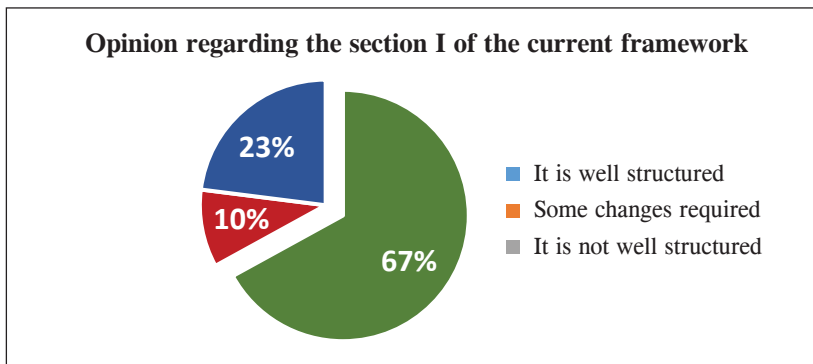


Source: Field data (n=30)

Opinion regarding the section I of the current framework

The respondents were given three choices. Almost 67% of the respondents mentioned that this section was well structured. Another 23% respondents highlighted the need of some changes in this section as shown in the table and figure below;

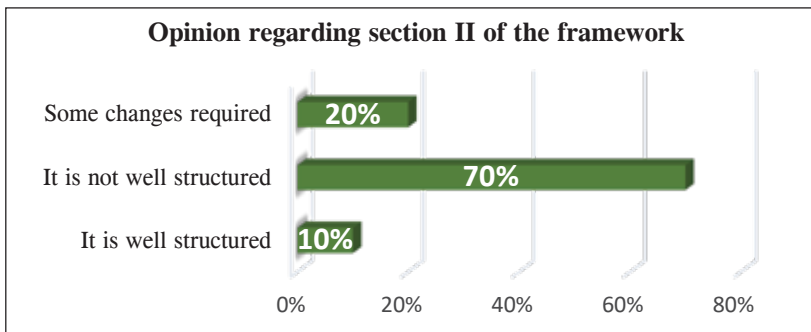
Figure 9: Opinion regarding the section I of the current framework



Opinion regarding the section II (outcome/impact) of the framework

The respondents were asked to select one option from three as shown in the figure below. Most of the respondents (70%) opined that it is not well structured. Another 20% of them mentioned about the necessity of some changes in this part and rest 10% mentioned that it was well structured as shown in the figure below;

Figure 10: Opinion regarding the section II (outcome/impact) of the framework

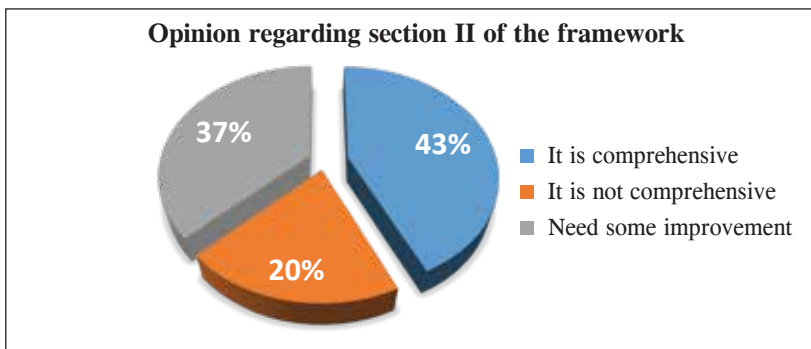


Source: Field data (n=30)

Opinion regarding the section III of the framework

Among the respondents about 43% mentioned that this section was comprehensive while 37% stated that it required some improvement. At the same time another 20% of the respondents stated that the structure of this section was not comprehensive. It is noteworthy to mention that total 57% (37% + 20%) respondents were not satisfied with the structure of this section as shown in the table and figure below:

Figure 11: Opinion regarding section III of the framework?

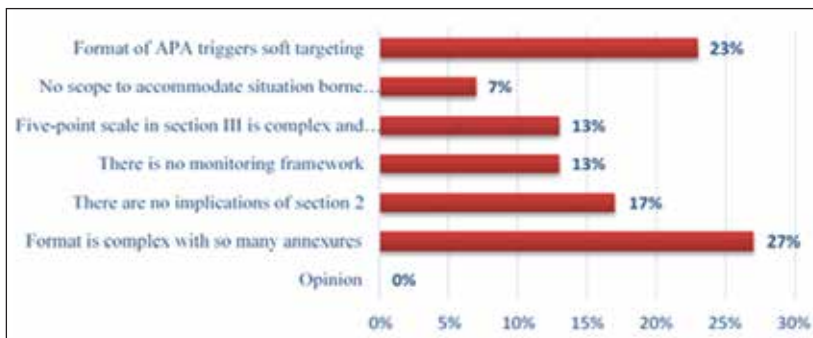


Source: Field data (n=30)

Gaps in the current framework

This was an open-ended question for the respondents. Their answers have been categorized as shown in the table below. About 27% of the respondents mentioned that the current APA format was complex and burdened with so many annexures. Another 23% mentioned that this format triggers soft targeting. 17% of respondents stated that section 2 of the structure has no implications. Another 13% of the respondents highlighted the absence of a monitoring framework while respondents of same percentage mentioned that the five-point scale in section 3 was complex and meaningless.

Figure 12: Gaps in the current framework



Source: Field data (n=30)

Recommendations for the improvement of current APA framework

The respondents were asked to provide some suggestions for minimization of the gaps and improvement of the framework. They came up with the following recommendations.

- Five work plans should be removed from the annexures of the framework and there should be a unified work plan as mandatory part to incorporate good governance related activities;
- Section 2 should be omitted as there is no implication of this part;
- A separate monitoring framework should be incorporated with the current structure;
- Instead of the current five points scale there should be a single point scale which would be treated as 100%;

- A provision should be included in the structure to mention budget allocation against each activity of the respective organization;
- At least 5% marks should be allocated for the qualitative aspects of performance;
- An annexure should be created to justify the set targets based on the policy, plan, program and project of the respective government organization;
- There should be provision in the structure to accommodate situation borne change of target or inclusion of activities if required;

Focus Group Discussion

A focus group discussion was held with the participation of the core officials of the Cabinet Division who were involved in coordinating the overall implementation of APA at the public sector organizations. The discussion unveiled the following gaps in the framework along with some recommendations to overcome those gaps.

Identified gaps in the current APA framework

- Section 2 (outcome) and 3 (performance plan) are not synchronized;
- Strategic objectives are not reflecting in section 2. It is developed arbitrarily;
- There is no monitoring framework in the current structure;
- In annexure IV the issues other than policy/plans are not included;
- Five-point scale in the current structure has no use and create confusion;
- There is no use of annexure III related to the activities of other offices;
- Current structure cannot accommodate qualitative aspects of performance;
- Five work plans have created complexities in implementation of APA especially the field level offices do not have the capabilities to implement these plans;

Recommendations to overcome the gaps

- Section 2 should be synchronized with the strategic objectives/performance areas of the respective organizations;
- Five-point scale in section 3 should be merged in a single point scale to remove ambiguities;

- Annexure III should be omitted from the structure;
- Five work plans related to good governance and reforms initiative should be dropped from the structure. A single work plan representing good governance and reforms initiative should be included in the framework;
- A monitoring framework should be incorporated with the current structure;
- Qualitative aspects of performance should be taken in consideration with the quantitative aspects;
- Some clusters in the part of organizations strategic objective/performance areas part can be created such as administrative, financial, development, capacity development can be created to guide determining the activities in an efficient manner;

Key Informant Interview

Five Key Informants (one APA national committee member, one former additional secretary reforms of the Cabinet Division, two APA technical committee members and another official of the Cabinet Division directly involved in coordinating APA related issues) were interviewed to know their insight on the issue.

Their comments/opinions on the gaps and recommendations for further improvement of the framework have been summarized below;

Gaps in the current framework

- In the current structure there is no mechanism for setting logical targets. It is done arbitrarily;
- There is no linkage of the activities with budget which facilitate determining easy targets;
- There is no specific format for the identification of activities based on policy/plan and other documents related to the concerned Ministries/Divisions;
- There are no indications of the organization responsible for the implementation of some targets determined by the Ministries/Divisions;
- Five work plans on good governance have created complexity in implementing APA;
- Current structure cannot address the inclusion of ADP related targets;

- Five work plans on good governance have made the implementation of APA more complex for the field level offices;
- There is no use of section 2 as the impact or outcome cannot be measured due to lack of data;
- Annexure III related to the activities of other offices has no implications;
- No scope of measuring the qualitative aspects of performance.

Recommendations for further improvement

- There should be a separate annexure to relate activities with the existing plan/policies of the ministries/divisions. In that annexure the name of the concerned plan/policy, recommended actions under that plan/policy, implementable activities, activities included in the APA along with the activities not included should be clearly mentioned;
- There should be a clear base for determining targets in the APA. To do that budget of that specific activity should be mentioned against that with code number. If that activity is implemented through a project or a programme, the specific target of that project for that year should also be mentioned clearly. Real Achievement of that project so far should also be mentioned to understand gap;
- There should be a single work plan for the good governance and reform related activities to avoid complexities;
- There should be a specific weightage for evaluating the qualitative aspects of performance. But it should not cross more than 5% of the total marks;
- The name of the responsible organizations for implementing a specific activity should also be mentioned in the respective annexure;

Overall Findings

The research identified two broad objectives which were pursued under a specific research strategy. It is evident from the analysis of the result of questionnaire survey, KII, Focus Group Discussion and thorough review of the current structure that there are some gaps/constraints in the current framework of APA. Data from the questionnaire survey has strongly been corroborated by Focus Group Discussion and KII results. The study also explored some ways to fill up these gaps for the improvement of the current structure of APA. The gaps identified through the review

of existing research work were also filled up. The overall findings of the study are as follows;

Findings on gaps/constraints in the framework

The overall structure of APA is complex with so many forms and annexures and it is unable to demonstrate real performance. The current structure cannot address the issue of setting logical targets by the public sector organizations. It cannot prevent the issue of setting easy and arbitrary targets. Similarly, the framework cannot link performance with the budget and there is no scope of measuring qualitative aspects of performance in the current framework. Moreover, the integration of five work plans on good governance with APA has made the structure more complex. Furthermore, there is no monitoring framework in the current structure of APA and section 2 of the framework has no linkage with strategic objectives of the Ministries/Divisions;

Findings on Solutions

The study showed that it is possible to create a performance base through linking every single activity with the policy/plan and other aspects of the government organizations. The allocated budget for the activities can also be linked with targets through mentioning the amount of budget for every single activity. There is scope of merging five work plans related to reform and good governance into one to avoid complexities in implementation. Besides, the qualitative aspects of performance can be addressed through giving some weightage in overall evaluation and a monitoring framework can be developed to support implementation in an effective and efficient manner. There are also scopes of removing some unnecessary sections and annexures such as section 2 and annex 3 of the current structure.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

APA has significantly contributed to ensuring accountability of the public sector organizations. But its maximum potential is yet to be harnessed due to some gaps. The study intended to assess the gaps in the current framework of APA with a view to make it more effective and performance focused. The study entertained the views of the key stakeholders and has been successful in achieving the research objective of revealing the gaps in the current framework along with exploring suitable solutions. The identified gaps included complexity in the framework, missing link between budget and activities, absence of monitoring framework, absence of a mechanism for setting logical target and less scope of measuring qualitative aspects of performance. These gaps demand quick intervention in the context when Bangladesh envisions to be a developed country by 2041. With identification of the gaps, the study also framed

some pragmatic recommendations to overcome those gaps. It is expected that the identified gaps along with the recommended solutions altogether will play a crucial role in developing a comprehensive framework of APA that will be supportive in ensuring real performance of the public sector organizations.

Recommendations

Based on the responses made by the respondents and overall findings of this study, some recommendations have been framed in a view to make the current framework of APA more effective.

- i) There should be a separate annexure to relate activities with the existing plan/policies of the Ministries/Divisions. In that annexure the name of the concerned plan/policies, recommended actions under that plan/policy, implementable activities, activities included in the APA along with the activities not included should be clearly mentioned as shown in the table below;

Table 5.1: Linkage of activities with different plans/policies

Name of the plan/policies/ and other documents and issues related to Ministry/ Division	Recommended actions	Activities for implementation	Identified activities to include in APA	Activities not included in APA	The reason of non-inclusion
1	2	3	4	5	6

- ii) There should be a clear base for determining targets in the APA. To do that the budget of that specific activity should be mentioned against that with code number. If that activity is implemented through a project or a programme, the specific target of that project for that year should also be mentioned clearly. Real achievement of that project so far should also be mentioned to understand the gap as mentioned in the table below;

Table 5.2: Linkage of activities with budget

Name of the Operation unit/ program/scheme/ project	Budget allocation	Activities in APA	Target of the operation unit/scheme/ Program/ project	Achieved so far	Remaining target	Target in APA
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

- iii) Five work plans related to reforms and good governance should be dropped and there should be a single and simplified work plan for these initiatives to avoid complexities;
- iv) There should be a specific weightage for evaluating the qualitative aspects of performance. But it should not cross more than 5% of the total score;
- v) A separate monitoring framework should be developed to strengthen implementation monitoring of APA. It will include quarterly reporting, inspections/visit, coordination with other organizations for achieving targets, meetings and other activities taken for the effective implementation of the agreement;
- vi) Five-point scale in section 3 of the existing structure should be merged in a single point scale to prevent arbitrary target setting;
- vii) Section 2 of the framework should be linked with the strategic objectives through mentioning strategic objectives against each outcome or impact;
- viii) Annexure 3 should be removed from the current framework and should be integrated with the monitoring framework;

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Strengthening Grievance Redress System: A Case of Narsingdi District Administration

Md. Shahidul Islam Chowdhury²

ABSTRACT

Grievance Redress System (GRS) is one of the critical social accountability tools for ensuring accountable and people-friendly Public Administration of Bangladesh. For ensure quality service delivery and accountability, Cabinet Division introduced GRS in 2007. Subsequently, in 2014, online GRS was designed to modernize and update the management of existing system, under the supervision of the Cabinet Division. The purpose behind the initiative was to redress the citizens' grievances effectively and timely. Moreover, Cabinet Division published a guideline in 2015 on GRS. Finally, second version of GRS software was hosted in 2018 for establishing user-friendly online GRS in the Ministries/Divisions and subordinate offices. Present study was carried out to assess the current status of implementation of Online GRS in the district level government offices of Bangladesh alongside its potential challenges. In order to attain the research objectives qualitative approach was followed in this study. Semi-structured questionnaire, in-depth interview, observation, Key Informant Interview and Focus Group Discussion methods were used to collect primary data while all relevant sources were used to collect secondary data. The study revealed that the implementation status of GRS in the field level government offices was its infancy. The service providers were not properly following the guidelines of GRS and they were found busy with other state functions and less attentive in strengthening the system. There were stumbling blocks in implementing the system including a small number of complaints submission, institutional incapacity, lack of proper monitoring and evaluation etc. Lack of public awareness was one of the leading causes of poor implementation of GRS. The research has come up with the conclusion that institutionalization of awareness building program, capacity development of the service providers, establishing a separate legal Authority of GRS under Cabinet Division and result-based monitoring and evaluation are essential to better outcome of GRS.

Keywords: Grievance Redress System (GRS), social accountability tools, people-friendly public administration, quality service delivery, service providers, service seekers

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INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

In order to ensure accountability and quality public service, the Government of Bangladesh is presently working with five accountability tools. Grievance Redress System (GRS) is one of the important five accountability tools (Cabinet Division 2018). In today's modern public governance, the term accountability becomes a buzzword. Accountability is a logical concept that facilitates connectivity between service provider and the service seekers or who are affected by the piece of works they perform (Bovens et al. 2014). Moreover, SDGs (Goal 16) and 'Vision 2041' aligned with GRS and for attaining all the desired goals of the government GRS can play an essential role. Through GRS, aggrieved citizens can take the opportunities to mitigate their complaints whenever such complaints appear during interaction between government offices and citizens. Therefore, GRS ensure peoples friendly service delivery as well as participation of citizens in the process of decision making and there by people get empowered (Hossain & Islam 2020).

Five dimensions of service quality which includes reliability, responsiveness, empathy, assurance and tangibles have significant influence on customer satisfaction (Mohammad & Alhamadani 2011). However, it is not expected that each and every decision of the government authority will satisfy the aggrieved citizens who are affected by the decisions. GRS is an appropriate platform for the aggrieved citizens to submit their complaints (Alom 2021). In spite of having the GRS platform, most of the dissatisfied citizens do not submit complaint (Oren 1992). Ultimately, the efficacy and sustainability of GRS can be improved when it is institutionalized while government internal systems of accountability are more crystal clear and open to citizen participation (Singh et al. 2004).

Government of Bangladesh established a grievance redress system in all line ministries in 2007. GRS has been launched and institutionalized considering that the scopes for corruption might be reduced through extensive digitization. Therefore, the online GRS which is mutually active web-based software has been introduced by the Cabinet Division to correctly handle the complaints in Government offices. The system is available online at www.grs.gov.bd. In addition, the Coordination & Reform Unit of the Cabinet Division published a guideline in 2015 on Grievance Redress System (Cabinet division 2018). However, the formal grievance redress system has some obstacles to the availability and efficacy, especially, the marginalized or poor people may lack the potentialities and link to approach formal systems. However, responsiveness of service providers might be hindered by diverse constraints namely financial, institutional and manpower (Ranganathan 2008).

The execution of GRS strengthens accountability and transparency in public service delivery by ensuring the engagement of the citizens (Aziz 2015). However, in our context, the reality is different. Both the service providers and the service recipients, as a whole, are not substantially sensitized in operating the tools because of the knowledge gap. Against the above context, this study has been carried out to examine the perceptions of the selected citizens and top management who are concerned with GRS at district level about the efficacy of current process. Hence, the research questions have been designed to find the status and challenges of GRS.

Problem statement

In Bangladesh, majority of the Government offices do not usually follow GRS (Hossain & Islam 2020). As implementing agencies of GRS Government offices are predominantly falling behind to make the system effective and people-friendly. Successful implementation of GRS faces many drawbacks from the service providers and the service recipients and both of the parties are more or less equally liable for its failure (Ranganathan 2008). The reality is that the rate of grievance redress in the ministries level is quite good but it is very low in the sub-ordinate offices. It might be the cause of inter-agency coordination gap or sub-ordinate offices are not properly monitored by the concern ministry which indicates existence of institutional inability. However, it is also fact that the number of grievance submission is quite low. Diverse causes might be involved for a smaller number of complaints submission which includes peoples are not aware about how and to whom complain, panic of the consequences of doing so or have less trust on the government officials and many more (Aziz 2015). So, it is crucial for the government to find out the root causes of the failure of GRS implementation in the field level offices. Otherwise, establishment of people-friendly and accountable public administration would not be possible. There is an antagonistic relation between implementation of GRS and delivery of public service as because redress of grievance also a public service. Consequently, effective implementation of GRS will ensure better public service delivery. Hence, to make sure the public offices are accountable to the service seekers, it is essential to make GRS effective in the all-levels Government organizations. So, this was the main focus of this study.

Rationale of the Study

It is expected that effective mitigation of public grievances in a specified time will ensure quality service and accountability of the government offices. Moreover, introduction of online GRS obviously will expedite the process. District administrations provide numerous services and it is the most important government entity in implementing GRS. Therefore, understanding the real picture of implementation in the field level is crucial. The present study attempted to find out the current implementation status of GRS in the selected field administrations with

potential challenges. After adoption of the GRS none of the study dealt with the effectiveness of GRS and this area is unexplored. Besides, Cabinet Division is the central management authority of GRS implementation and being an officer of the Cabinet Division, the researcher has special interest to conduct the study on GRS. Moreover, this study may helpful for the concerned government authorities for further policy interventions in strengthening the GRS.

Objectives

1. To assess the implementation status of GRS in the selected District Administrations and sub-ordinate offices.
2. To find out the challenges and possible remedies for making GRS effective.

Research Questions

1. What is the present implementation status of GRS in the selected public offices?
2. What are the problems of successful implementation of GRS and how this system can be made effective?

Literature Review

Definition and Causes of Grievance

Grievance might be defined as 'statements about expectations that have not been met' (Aziz 2015). Furthermore, Sugandhar & Chaudhary (2020) opined that the word 'grievance' can be defined as complaint or dissatisfaction against an unjust or unfair act and system. Moreover, 'application submitted electronically or by conventional methods in a specific format by citizens/clients regarding their dissatisfaction on services or products and/or processes of service delivery or unlawful act related to services delivery or refusal to provide lawful rights to the service seekers, will be considered as a grievance' (Cabinet Division 2018; UNDP 2016). There are three types of grievances namely public grievance, staff grievance and official grievance (Cabinet Division 2018). Generally, complaints arise for the reasons that citizens experience ill-considered or disrespectful treatment, exclusions, mistakes, inconsistencies, misleading guidance, ambiguous procedures, displayed unfairness or injustices in their dealings with public officials (Brewer 2007).

Definition of Grievance Redress System

Grievance redress mechanism of an organization is the scale to measure its effectiveness and capability as it comes up with essential feedback on the working of the government (Nair 2016). It is a formal method with specific rules and procedures to resolve grievances in a systematic manner. It gives a productive avenue for

expressing grievances and possible solution for the citizens and elevates a mutually positive relationship between Government and citizens (Hossain & Islam 2020). Similarly, Sugandhar & chaudhary (2020) argue that grievance redress mechanism is a system set up by organizations to receive, record, investigate, redress, analyse, prevent and /or take any other appropriate action in respect of grievances lodged against them. Furthermore, according to the report of UNDP (2016), GRS usually widely defined as 'instruments, methods, and processes by which a resolution to a grievance is sought and provided'.

The process followed in grievance redress

If the service seekers get aggrieved anyway, they can apply either online or offline. After submission of complaints in any ways whatever it is online or offline or anonymous responsibility lies with the Grievance Redress Officer (GRO) to resolve it. Generally, within 40 days of complaints submission GRO has to resolve it. However, if there is any matter to further investigate then GRO is allowed to complete the task within additional 20 days' time-frame. If anybody is dissatisfied with the decision of GRO there is an option for appeal. The citizen should get the solution within 20 days in the appeal segment. Above all, the full tenure for grievance redress is 60 days (Cabinet Division 2018).

Relationship with public service delivery, citizen's satisfaction and GRS

It is no doubt that satisfaction of service recipients depends largely on timely and smoothly delivery of services. So, it can be said that there is a meaningful relationship between GRS and service delivery (Aziz 2015; Cabinet Division 2018). Moreover, Cronin & Taylor (1992) asserted that distinguished quality of service leads to the satisfaction of the customer. The other researches also affirmed that quality of service is the predecessor of satisfaction (Spreng & Mackoy 1996; Brady & Robertson 2001). Moreover, Strauss & Hill (2001) argue that effective managing of the grievances increased the level of customer satisfaction, establishing long term relationships. According to Jing (2010), by delivering quality service the bank management may heighten the level of customer satisfaction. In addition, GRS ensures G2G communication as a result, field level offices can also be answerable to the head of the administration. Moreover, any aggrieved citizen can make public officials accountable by file a complaint through this system and thereby some preconditions of good governance can be achieved through GRS. (Hossain & Islam 2020).

Barriers of GRS and causes of a smaller number of complaint submission

A large number of people and service seekers have no idea about GRS due to lack of proper publicity (Hossain & Islam 2020). Similarly, Oren (1992) argued that most of the dissatisfied customers do not complain for two principal reasons. firstly, they do

not know how, or to whom complaints can be lodged and secondly, they do not trust it would be valuing their time as well as difficulty. Similarly, Brennan & Douglas (2002) mentioned that considerable number of clients do not submit grievance straightforwardly for the reason that they simply do not believe it would bring any result. Furthermore, Chebat et al. (2005) asserted that many consumers have minimum degrees of confidence or feel powerlessness or anxious about challenging the service providers. In addition to that, in some contexts, they panic that they would experience maltreatment or inferior service delivery following their grievance has been submitted (Lyon & Powers 2001). Moreover, Seneviratne & Cracknell (1988) found that 58% of the service seekers had no knowledge about the existence of grievance redress mechanism in their local office.

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Selection of an appropriate research methodology usually depends on the objectives and research questions to be explored (Ekanem 2007). Therefore, the main focus of this chapter is to contend the methods that has been applied in defining the research questions and for data collection. The research followed interpretive paradigm.

Research Design

Research design is a plan or framework to conduct the research that investigates the research questions. (Pandey & Pandey 2015).

Inductive and Deductive Approach

There are two approaches immensely highlights to conduct a research namely inductive and deductive approach (Creswell 2007). Inductive approach focuses on collecting and analyzing facts with a view to established a theory. Moreover, inductive approach of the study ensures analysis of peoples' perception as well as their considerations about a problem or situation effectively. However, deductive method of research intimates with the hypothesis or theory testing (Creswell 2007). The research adopted inductive approach since it is concerned with meaning-making of the GRS.

Qualitative and Quantitative Research

For any research, data can be gathered either by qualitative or quantitative method (Creswell & Plano 2007). However, Bryman & Bell (2011) stated that quantitative study mostly deals with the numbers, it concerns with the theory testing and this method is mainly structured. On the contrary, qualitative study deals with the expressions or words, it reflects the ideas of respondents, it relates to developing

theory, and this method is mainly unstructured. Anderson (2007) criticizes that in quantitative method it is critical to realize the perceptions of the people to answer the 'why' question. Conversely, qualitative research produces invaluable insights of people's, attitudes, behavior, knowledge and beliefs that might be overlooked by any other methods (Bryman & Bell 2011). Therefore, to achieve the objectives qualitative method was used in this study.

Methods of Data Collection

Pandey & Pandey (2015) opined that diverse tools can be used for the collection of data which includes questionnaire survey, Focus Group Discussion (FGD), interviews, observations. Moreover, semi-structured questionnaire is the most suitable method of collection of qualitative data since it permits the researcher to ask additional questions that fosters the validity of the collected data (Bryman & Bell 2011; Creswell 2007; Yin 2009). In this research, data were gathered both from primary and secondary sources. For collection of primary data researcher has adopted semi-structured questionnaire, in-depth interview, observations, FGD and KII (Key Informants Interview) tools. The researcher conducted semi-structured questionnaire for the service seekers. Top most management of concerned government offices were interviewed separately by means of KII. However, relevant books, journals, government circulars, reports, and internet were used as a source of secondary data.

Sampling Methods and Study Area

In case of qualitative study, researchers guided by his/her own perception i.e., who can provide the 'best' information and sample size is less important (Kumar 2011). Likewise, Creswell (2007) as well as Pandey and Pandey (2015) affirm that a small sample size is sufficient like four to ten in any inductive qualitative study. Kumar (2011) also opined that purposive sampling approach is the most pertinent in the qualitative research. Therefore, purposive sampling technique has been followed in this study. Hence, as the key informant interview with four top level officials (both from district administration and Cabinet Division) and for semi-structured questionnaire thirty service receivers have been selected as sample. The researcher selected five districts of Dhaka Divisions as a study area which includes Narsingdi, Mymensingh, Tangail, Gazipur and Narayanganj. Among the five selected districts as a case study, researcher visited the Narsingdi district administration to collect data. Narsingdi is the nearest to the capital city of Dhaka and peoples of this district are mostly involved in different business activities and working abroad. Moreover, this district has diversified geographical character with char land. As a result, district administration faces multidimensional problems and has to resolve various complaints. Importantly, no research on implementation of online GRS was conducted in this district before. In this context, researcher selected the Narsingdi District as a study area.

DATA ANALYSIS

Examining the implementation status of GRS was the core focus of the study. The collected data have been analyzed by using simple and appropriate mathematical tools like tabulation, percentage etc. Furthermore, thematic analysis has been carried out. Basically, the indicators have been selected based on citizen's satisfaction regarding service delivery and the effectiveness of the ongoing GRS in the selected government offices.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The intention of this chapter is to assess and critically analyze the qualitative data collected through semi-structured questionnaire, in-depth interviews, KII, direct observations and FGD. Furthermore, it clarified the findings unveiled from the study in connection with review of literature. Thus, the major findings have been presented below with thematic analysis.

Status of implementation of grievance redress system

Mode of grievance submission

According to the GRS guidelines, an aggrieved person can lodge complaints through direct login into the webpage i.e., www.grs.gov.bd, sending email, by physically present at the front desk and by postal service utilizing prescribed form. Applicants then receive a tracking number through SMS who submit complaints through website. In the fiscal year 2021-2022, total 648 grievances were submitted in the five-district administrations (Figure 1). Among them 245 (38%) and 403 (62%) grievances were submitted by means of online and offline respectively (Figure 2), where offline system was found preferable than online system. It might be that peoples were short of skills to use electronic devices or problem of internet facilities. Ranganathan (2008) underpinned that the marginalized or poor people may lack the potentialities and link to approach formal systems. They also might be geographically very isolated or due to time-constrained formal registration and follow-up of their complaints cannot be possible. Moreover, during observation it is disclosed that citizens were accustomed to submit complaints through informal system like computer composed application. It is also acknowledged by the GRO of Narsingdi district administration that every year on an average more than thousands of complaints submitted by the citizens in the informal way of computer composed application. So, it is indicated that online grievance redress system is yet to be properly publicized and institutionalized in the district level government offices.

Figure 1 & 2: Mode of grievance submission in the district administrations (July 2021-June 2022)

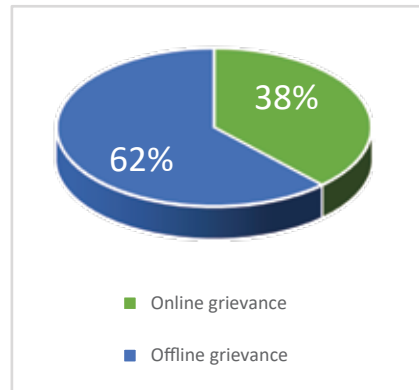
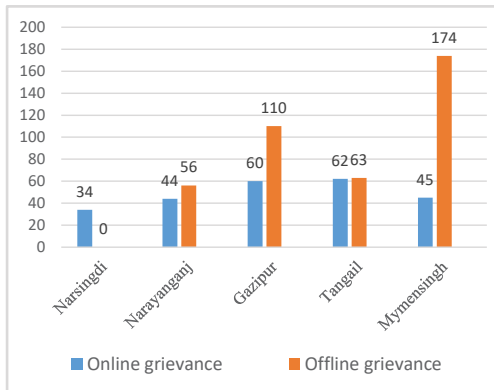


Figure 1: Mode of grievance submission in numbers

Figure 2: Mode of grievance submission in percentage

Data sources: Online GRS dashboard of Cabinet Division (online grievances) and field survey data (offline grievances)

Status of Online Grievance Redress

It is revealed that during the period of one year (From July 2021- June 2022) only 245 complaints received by the five Deputy Commissioners’ offices through online. Average redress rate was only 24% and most of the grievances (76%) were found unredressed and remained pending for long time. In specific, among the pending complaints 66% of them found crossed the stipulated time schedule of redress (Table 1). Generally, within 40 days of complaints submission GRO has to resolve it. However, if there is any matter to further investigate, then GRO will be allowed to complete the task within additional 20 days’ time-frame (Cabinet Division 2018). Nevertheless, the redress rate of some of the offices was found satisfactory (80.64%) indicating that some government officials were capable or trained or accountable to the higher authority to redress the grievance. However, it is opined by the key informants of the Cabinet Division that most of the district level government offices did not follow the GRS guideline properly. Research by Hossain & Islam (2020) also supported that majority of the government offices in Bangladesh do not usually follow GRS. It is also disclosed from the statement of key informants that having no dedicated GRO and lack of monitoring were other causes of ineffective GRS. During FGD most of the GRO acknowledged that they did not undergo training on GRS and were not completely aware about the system, whereas, some of them opined that the existing online system was frequently found dysfunctional. Moreover, most of the GRO claimed that lack of

manpower; excessive workload and having no adequate institutional set-up were the main constraints of GRS implementation (Table 1).

Table 1: Status of online grievance redresses in the five district administrations since July 2021-June 2022

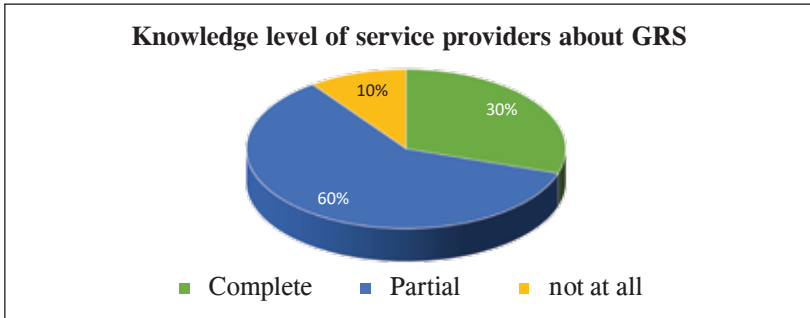
SL No.	Name of districts	Lodged grievances	Within time limit	Out of time limit	Unredressed	Redressed	Redress rate(%)
01.	Narsingdi	34	4	30	34	0	0
02.	Narayanganj	44	6	38	44	0	0
03.	Gazipur	60	5	55	60	0	0
04.	Mymensingh	45	6	30	36	9	20
05.	Tangail	62	3	9	12	50	80.64
Grand total		245	24	162	186	59	24%
Percentage			8%	66%	76%	24%	100%

Data source: Online GRS dashboard of Cabinet Division

Knowledge level of service providers about GRS

During FGD with district level Grievance Redress Officers it is revealed that only 30% of the officials had proper knowledge of GRS, however, majority of them (60%) possessed very poor knowledge. In this context, respondents opined that they were not provided training and they were busy with other activities as functions of the GRO was their additional responsibility. Regarding this issue, key informants opined that most of the district level officers were not properly sensitized and did not follow the GRS guidelines. In addition, during observation, researcher found out that lack of motivational training and frequent changing of GRO were liable for ineffective implementation of this tool. Similarly, Research by Rahman et al. (2020) stated that service providers were not intimate with the goals, philosophy and key features of GRS and were not stimulated to receive the new initiatives. Similarly, Post & Agarwal (2012) affirm that effective implementation of GRS greatly depends on the understanding level of the GROs (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Knowledge level of service providers about GRS in district level

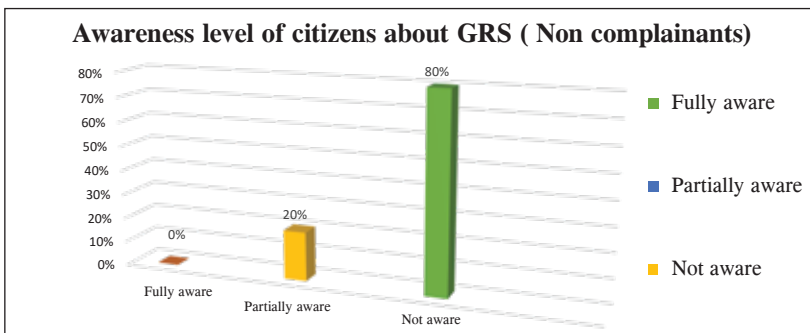


Data source: Field data

Awareness level of citizens about GRS

The researcher conducted a semi-structured questionnaire and in-depth interview of 30 service seekers in the premises of the DC office of Narsingdi to assess their attitude and awareness level about GRS. It has been disclosed that 80% of them were not totally aware about GRS and only 20% were found partially aware (Figure 4). However, some of the respondents also told that for the first time they have heard about this system from the researcher. Findings of the research conducted by Alom (2021) supported that people were less aware of the prevails of grievance redress system. Again, Research by Seneviratne & Cracknell (1988) also found that 58% of service recipients were totally ignorant that their local service provider entity having a system of grievance redress. Importantly, most of them, however, also said that they have had their grievances and applied for remedy by means of informal system with computer composed papers. During in-depth interview many of them opined that huge publicity is needed for raising people’s awareness about this system (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Awareness level of citizens about GRS (Non-complainants)

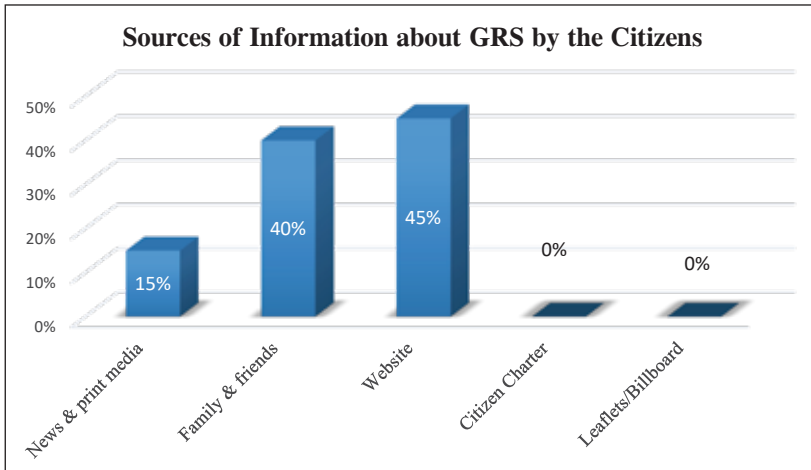


Data source: Field data

Publicity and Sources of Information of GRS

It is disclosed from the study that most of the service seekers (45%) were informed about the GRS through official website while 40% by family and friends and 15% by news and print media. It was also found that none of them was informed through Citizen Charter and/or leaflets/billboard (Figure 5). Moreover, researcher came to know by FGD that none of the field level offices used leaflets or billboard for the publicity of GRS. According to the instruction 9(l) of the GRS guidelines, it is the responsibility of the head of the respective offices to raise public awareness through wide publicity by means of printing leaflets, books and media coverage. It was also found that lack of public awareness was the main weakness of implementation of GRS. Moreover, Alom (2015) also supported this argument that government service provider entities of field level did not undertake proper publicity program to raise awareness about GRS. Lack of publicity, therefore, might be one of the key reasons for small number of complaints submission through online GRS platform in the field offices.

Figure 5: Sources of Information about GRS by the Citizens



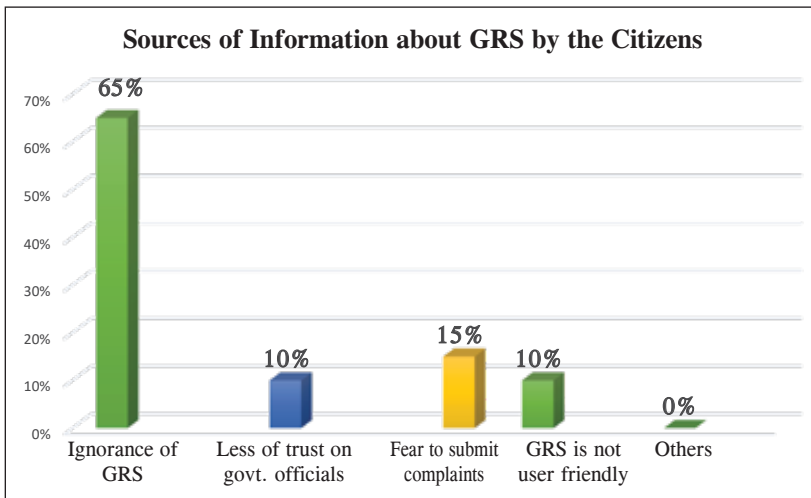
Data source: Field data

Reasons of small numbers of complaints lodged by the citizens (complainants view)

It was disclosed from collected data that number of grievance submission through online was found significantly low. Specifically, during the period of one year (From July 2021- June 2022) only 245 complaints were received by the five Deputy Commissioners’ office which was not usual. Research by Oren (1992) also stated that most of the dissatisfied customers do not complain because they do not know how or

to whom complaints can be lodged. Similarly, Brennan and Douglas (2002) mentioned that significant number of consumers do not submit grievance simply because they “do not think it would do any good”. During study, majority of the respondents (65%) opined that ignorance of GRS is one of the main causes of a smaller number of complaints submission by the aggrieved citizens. Other causes were also cognizable namely “fear to submit complaints” (15%), “GRS not user friendly” (10%), and “less trust on officials” (10%). Importantly, while interviewing, one of the complainants claimed that “one of my friends had valid complaint and he was familiar with online GRS but he did not file complaints because he thought that it will bring no result as opponent is powerful”. Some of the respondents opined that for convenience of the people of all walks of life, mobile phone friendly complaint submission system can be introduced. From this data, it can be concluded that there were various reasons involved with small number of complaints submission but main cause was found ignorance of GRS. One of the key informants opined that peoples have trust issues. So, approach and attitude of the service providers should be much more positive so that people can build trust on them and receive satisfactory service delivery.

Figure 6: Reasons of small numbers of complaints lodged by the citizens



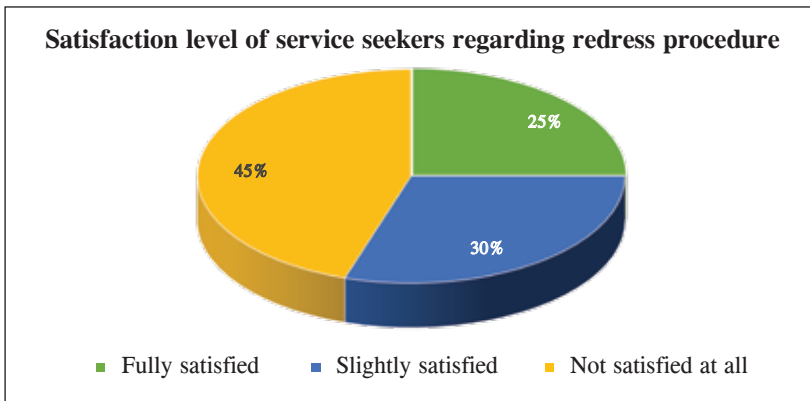
Data source: Field data

Satisfaction level of service seekers regarding redress procedure (complainants’ view)

Effective and efficient redressal of grievances is decisive to ensure satisfactory level of service delivery. To assess the satisfaction level of the complainants, this question was asked: to what extent they were satisfied regarding mitigation of their complaint

lodged. Study revealed that only 25 % of the respondents were fully satisfied, 30% of them slightly satisfied and 45% were not satisfied at all (Figure 7). The dissatisfaction level of service recipients has been captured in a thematic sense in the following manner:

Figure 7: Satisfaction level of service seekers regarding redress procedure (complainants' view)



Data source: Field data

Indifferent responsibility

While interviewing, some of the respondents claimed that in many cases grievance was disposed without taking any action and they did not get actual remedy against their complaints. One of the respondents uttered with sorrow: “despite the scope of disposal by himself, however, most of the time GRO forwarded the complaints to the subordinate office without valid ground and GRO of sub-ordinate offices did not take attempt to redressal on time which caused unwarranted delay and harassment of the citizens, which is apathetic behavior of service provider”. Similarly, some of the respondents claimed that they were not satisfied with the remedy because of taking long time by the GRO to redress the simple grievance. Moreover, some of the complainants alleged that in many cases GROs were found busy with other functions instead of grievance redress and in some cases their behavior was uncourteous which made the citizens dissatisfied.

Uncourteous behavior

Unprofessional behavior of service providers was another cause of dissatisfaction of the service receivers and some of them claimed that service providers did not behave well and not receiving the phone calls which was not desirable. Moreover, some respondents opined that in many occasions service providers did not provide any

updates of lodged complaints and also did not inform about the final result of grievance redressed. However, few respondents acknowledged that they got proper remedy of their complaints and they were satisfied.

Unavailability of GRO

Many of the respondents claimed that most of the time GRO were found unavailable at office to meet and talk. As a result, it was required to visit the office again and again which was embarrassing and painful. It might be that there were no dedicated GRO and all of them working as GRO on their additional charge. So, proper staffing is required to make the system effective in real sense.

Effectiveness of online grievance redress system (Complainants’ view)

In order to assess the degree of effectiveness of GRS, the respondents were asked to give their opinion whether they agreed or disagreed against provided statements using Likert scale. It is revealed that almost all of the respondents (18 out of 20) disagreed with the statement that the publicity of GRS was adequate and majority of the respondents (15 out of 20) disagreed with the statement that complaints resolved within time limit. Moreover, most of them (14 out of 20) showed their disagreement with the statement of ‘GRO informed the final decision of grievance timely’. Again, majority (11 out of 20) disagreed with the statement that attitude of GRO was positive. However, many of them (13 out of 20) agreed that existing online GRS were user-friendly and easy to submit complaints (Table 2). Research by Akanda (2016) found that friendliness and punctuality of the service providers might be in charge of satisfaction of the service seekers and this satisfaction could lead to the trust on service providers and government organizations.

Table 2: Effectiveness of online grievance redress system (complainants’ view)

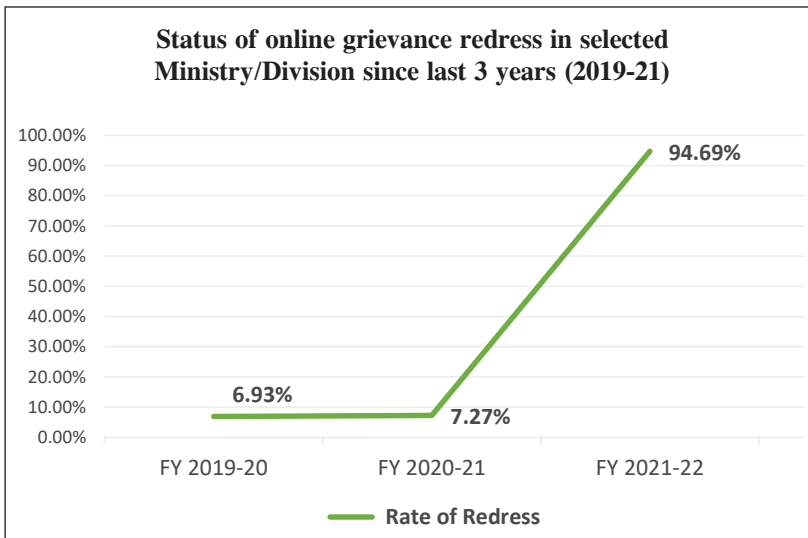
Statements	Degree of agreement of effectiveness		
	Agree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree
1. Online GRS user friendly	13	7	0
2. Attitude of GRO is positive	6	11	3
3. Publicity is adequate	2	18	0
4. Website is updated	4	13	3
5. Internet is speedy as required	3	15	2
6. Complaints resolved within time limit	3	15	2
7. GRO inform final decision timely	4	14	2

Data source: Field data

Online Grievance redressal scenario in selected Ministries/Divisions

Secondary data of six related ministry/division were collected from the Dashboard of Cabinet Division to understand the grievance redress status. It has exhibited that in the ministry/division level online grievance redress rate dramatically increased in the year of 2021-2022 which was 94.69%. However, it was only 6.93% in 2019-2020 and 7.27% in 2020-21(Figure 8). Importantly, in the year 2020-21 performance of GRS was integrated with the evaluation process of Annual Performance Agreement (APA) with the allocation of 4 marks for GRS. According to the key informants of Cabinet Division, the recent trend of highest rate of grievance redress in the ministry/division level was the direct impact of integration of GRS in the evaluation process of APA. However, according to key informants, last year serious measures have been taken by the Cabinet Division for strengthening the GRS in the ministry/division level including formulation of detailed workplan for GRS, conducting training for GROs, ensuring monthly and quarterly report to the Cabinet Division, continuous monitoring and conducting several seminar/workshops also had impact on such performance.

Figure 8: Online grievance redressal status in Ministry/Division since last 3 years (2019-21)

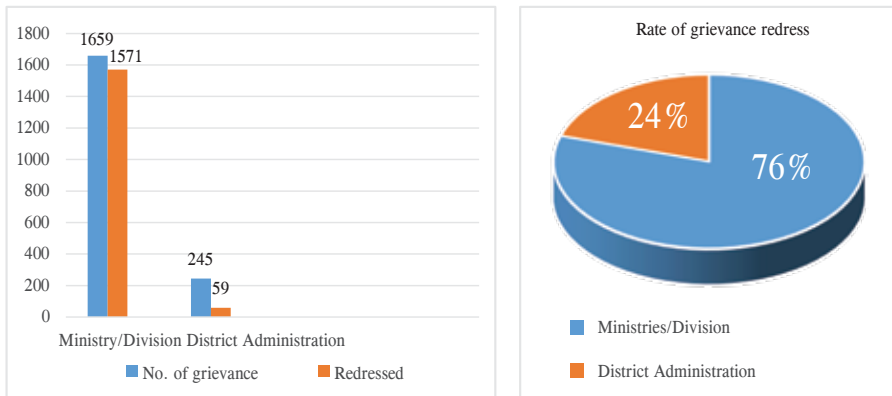


Source: Online GRS dashboard of Cabinet Division

Comparison of grievance redress between Ministries/Divisions and District level offices

From the analysis of the secondary data collected from the GRS website of Cabinet Division, it is revealed that in the last fiscal year (2021-22) five district administrations received only 245 complaints through online GRS and rate of redress was only 24%. On the other hand, selected six-line ministries/divisions received 1659 complaints and disposal rate was 94.69%. It was clear that number of complaints received and redressal rate was significantly higher in the ministry level than district level sub-ordinate offices. It is indicated that district level offices were clearly lagging behind in implementing GRS. In other words, grievance redress mechanism found less institutionalized in the district level. In this regard, during interview, top management of Cabinet Division opined that mammoth awareness building program both for service providers and seekers, strict monitoring and continuous feedback by the line ministry/division must be ensured. Hence, it can be said that lack of proper monitoring and evaluation was one of the key causes of poor implementation of GRS in the district level (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Comparison of grievance redress between Ministries/Divisions and District level government offices (2021-22)



Source: Online GRS dashboard of Cabinet Division

Findings of Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

To explore the implementation status and its potential challenges the service providers’ views were gathered through FGD. According to the participants of focus group, there were many challenges and bottlenecks associated with the effective implementation of GRS, which were captured in a thematic manner:

Lack of awareness of citizen

It is disclosed that general people were not aware enough about the GRS because of inadequate publicity. Though websites of district administrations were found updated with detailed know-how of GRS but the websites of other district level offices were not updated and found dysfunctional as the GRS service box was incomplete. Online linkage among the departments and sub-ordinate offices also found very weak.

Lack of capacity of service providers

Most of the GRO of district level government offices did not undergo training and orientation about GRS. As a result, majority of them actually had poor knowledge and mostly incapable of handling the GRS perfectly. Frequent changes of GRO due to transfer also found one of the key reasons of weak management of GRS.

Institutional incapacity

Excessive workload and having no dedicated GROs and slow internet were found big challenges. Front desk of the concerned offices did not function properly as of GRS guidelines. Coordination gap among the government organizations, weak monitoring and evaluation also other hindrance should be addressed to make GRS effective.

Findings of the Observations

As a case study, researcher visited the Narsingdi Deputy Commissioner's office to observe the real scenario of GRS implementation process. Web portal of district administration of GRS was found up-to-date. However, it was found that website of the most of the district level offices was not up-to date except district administration and almost all of the offices did not have GRS service box in their portal. It was also found that implementation of GRS agenda was not included in the monthly coordination meeting though it is a mandatory option in the GRS guidelines. It was also observed that as district administration deals with diversified public functions and assigned GRO had a huge workload as a result he could not manage time for grievance redress. It was also disclosed that slow internet was a big problem for timely online grievance disposal.

Findings of Key Informants Interviews (KII)

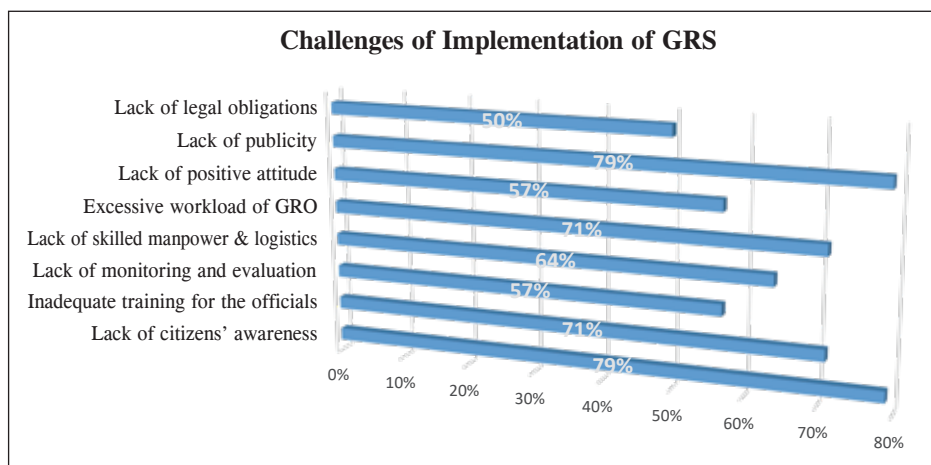
In order to gain overall insight of GRS implementation researcher collected views from concerned senior officials of Cabinet Division as key informants by means of KII. The major findings of KII includes- having no dedicated GRO and frequent changes of them was a big problem of GRS implementation; district level offices were not properly sensitized and did not properly follow the GRS guidelines; GRS activities of district level

sub-ordinate offices were not properly monitored by the concerned line ministry/division; presently, marks allocation for GRS is only 4 in performance evaluation of APA which is not sufficient; however, it can be increased reasonably for sustainable outcome of GRS. Performance of GRS of sub-ordinate offices did not take into consideration while evaluating the performance of the GRS of ministry/division for APA; coordination gap amongst the different govt. officials was also found a problem; Union Digital Centers can be included for the convenience of online grievance submission by the rural citizens; only one branch of Cabinet Division looks after the GRS of whole country which is impossible in real sense. During interview most of the top management of GRS opined that for strengthening the monitoring and effective implementation of GRS, institutional capacity should be increased and it can be done by establishment of separate GRS directorate or division or wing under the Cabinet Division.

Challenges of Implementation of GRS (views of service providers)

To find out the challenges of GRS, opinion of the service providers has been taken into consideration. According to the views of the respondents, lack of awareness of citizen (79%), inadequate training for officials (71%), lack of monitoring and evaluation (57%), lack of skilled manpower and logistics (64%), excessive workload (71%), lack of positive attitude of service providers (57%), lack of publicity (79%) and lack of legal obligations (50%) were found major challenges (Figure 10). Research by Rahman et.al (2020) stated that service receivers were not aware about the GRS. Here, it should be mentioned that multiple responses were provided by the respondents on same statement.

Figure 10: Challenges of Implementation of GRS (views of service providers)



Data source: Field data

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The concept and practice of online Grievance Redress System in government offices of Bangladesh is not very old. The implementation status of this system was not satisfactory in the field level government offices and in many considerations, it was found dysfunctional in terms of grievance received and rate of redress. However, it is found that this system is functioning in the ministry/division level more efficiently and effectively than district level. The study has disclosed that the number of online grievance submission by the citizen was significantly low and the rate of redress was also very dissatisfactory as many of the complaints were found not mitigated within the time schedule of redress. It was an indication that service seekers were not aware enough about GRS and the service providers, however, were reluctant to implement and expedite the Grievance Redress system. It is also evident from the study that inadequate public awareness as well as lack of institutional capacity and incapacity of the officials were the leading causes of poor implementation of GRS. Similarly, inadequate publicity, lack of positive attitude and accountability of the service providers, inadequate linkage with all district level government offices, lack of proper monitoring and evaluation, were other causes of weak implementation. For addressing the challenges and limitations the study came up with some policy interventions which include undertaking mammoth awareness building program, continuous training program for capacity development of the government officials and result-based monitoring and evaluation. The main objectives of introducing GRS were to ensure quality service delivery, enhancing trustworthiness and accountability in governance. Therefore, strengthening the implementation process of grievance redress system is crucial for establishment of rights of the citizens as well as good governance.

Recommendations

From analysis of the literature review and research findings it is disclosed that many problems were associated with implementation process of GRS where policy action is required. It is also perceived by the researcher that any single intervention would not be sufficient for addressing the multidimensional challenges. Therefore, following specific potential policy options have been made out for making the GRS effective.

1. Institutionalized awareness-building campaigns are needed for understanding of GRS
2. Strengthening the institutional capacity by revitalizing the existing monitoring and evaluation system
3. Capacity development of the officials by ensuring regular training and motivation
4. Establishing a separate legal Authority of GRS under Cabinet Division

5. Development of a mechanism to reflect performance of sub-ordinate offices' GRS in APA performance evaluation of concerned ministry/division.
6. Union Digital Centers (UDC) across the country can be involved for the convenient of online grievance submission by the local people.

Action plan for implementation of the recommendations

Sl. No.	Action required	People/Organization involved	Time-line	Resource required
1. Institutionalized awareness-building campaigns	I. Holding workshop/seminar ii. Communication campaign through leaflet, booklets, bill-board, poster, radio, television and print media iii. Set agenda in monthly coordination meeting	Concerned line ministry, Ministry of information, Cabinet Division, Divisional & District administration, representatives of print & electronic media, civil society and local government representatives	i. 6 months ii. 2 years iii. 1 month	Budget Administrative support, engagement of all stakeholders, Policy support.
2. Strengthening the institutional capacity by revitalizing the existing M&E system	i. Establishment of separate GRS monitoring cell in the ministry level ii. Ensure monthly redressal report iii. Facilitating logistics support and increase manpower v. Ensuring citizens feedback through front desk vi. Strengthening coordination v. Updating website	Concerned line ministry and Local administration, all district level govt. offices, ICT division	1-2 years	Budget, Administrative support Policy support
3. Capacity development of the officials ensuring regular training & motivation	I. Arrangement of quarterly training program, workshop etc. ii. Reward for better performance	Head of the concerned office, Cabinet Division, ICT Division	2 years	Budget needed Training module & policy support
4. Establish a separate legal Authority of GRS under Cabinet Division	Preparation a draft for organogram with function and produce in the cabinet meeting for approval	MOPA Law ministry Cabinet Division Finance Division	18 months	Budget needed, Administrative & Policy support
5. Development of a mechanism to reflect performance of sub-ordinate offices GRS in APA evaluation.	Modification of existing indicators of GRS evaluation format	Concerned line ministries and Cabinet Division.	1-2 year	Administrative support Development of action plan, Restructuring existing format of evaluation
6. UDC involvement for the convenient of online grievance submission by the local people	Issue a circular from Training for the entrepreneurs' of UDC Training schedule formation	ICT division Cabinet Division District Administration, Local govt. organizations	2 years	Budget, Administrative & policy support

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Maritime Non-Traditional Security Threats against the Blue Economy: Collaborative Approach of Maritime Agencies in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

Human-induced non-traditional security threats (NTS) faced in the maritime domain have been a prime concern for the growth of the Blue Economy in Bangladesh. The identified threats range from illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing to maritime terrorism, drug trafficking, piracy, armed robbery, human trafficking, and pollution. There are a number of agencies (Bangladesh Navy, Bangladesh Coast Guard) involved in ensuring security in the Bay of Bengal (BoB). But still, the occurrence of NTS threats is on the rise. Therefore, this study aims to identify the limitations of the existing security measures in Bangladesh against maritime non-traditional security threats in the BoB. In addition, the study explores the 'Ways and Means' for a prolific collaborative approach of maritime agencies combating maritime NTS threats in BoB against BE of Bangladesh. An interpretive approach has been adopted in this study. Data has been collected from the fisherman communities of Cox's Bazar, Teknaf, and Inani, as well as from the Bangladesh Navy, Bangladesh Coast Guard, BSMRMU, BORI, and renowned maritime security experts. The findings of the paper reveal the existing gaps and challenges in maritime security, the lack of preparedness and coordination among maritime agencies, the need for inter-agency cooperation, and targeted interventions. The research findings also suggest adopting a comprehensive and collaborative approach to enhance maritime security through a multi-agency model adopted by various countries around the world. This includes strengthening security measures, improving coordination among maritime agencies, establishing dedicated marine authorities, enhancing preparedness for marine accidents, and addressing the challenges posed by NTS threats at BoB.

Keywords: Non-Traditional Security Threat, Bangladesh, Maritime Security, Multi-agency, Blue Economy

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INTRODUCTION

Background

Bangladesh now possesses a maritime territory of 1,18,813 square kilometers after the resolution of maritime border delimitation disputes with Myanmar and India in 2012 and 2014, respectively. The area equals 81% of the land territory of Bangladesh (Hossain 2018). These resolutions have almost doubled the total area under the sovereign rights of Bangladesh. Since 2014, the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) has started discussions with stakeholders to integrate the idea of a blue economy into pertinent policies and programs (Rahman 2018). With increasing maritime activities, security challenges have also increased manifolds and are likely to further aggravate. Although there have been several studies about Bangladesh's Blue Economy (BE) prospects, no comprehensive assessment of the security issues that may arise has yet been conducted. As a result, the struggle over National Blue Economy Initiative (NBEI) security issues has never received much attention (Rahman 2018). Particularly, maritime non-traditional security risks have emerged as a major worry and difficulty for the NBEI.

Non-traditional maritime security threats include illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, maritime terrorism, drug trafficking, acts of sea piracy, armed robbery, illegal human trafficking, etc. (Hossain 2017). As the booming economy of Bangladesh is highly dependent on maritime trade, the security of maritime assets and elements from NTS threats becomes paramount to ensuring economic development. The FDMN crisis, the alarming increase in fisherman deaths due to piracy, or the smuggling of Yaba through the nation's southeast border with Myanmar have proved the issue of resolving NTS threats very urgent (Nabi 2019).

Under the National BE Initiatives, GoB has selected BN as the "Lead Organization" for all marine security concerns (AFD 2018). The Bangladesh Navy (BN) and Bangladesh Coast Guard (BCG) can perform a number of tasks with various legal frameworks as part of their ocean monitoring and surveillance missions. It includes monitoring, surveillance, and enforcement of illicit operation and fishing regulations as well as applying significant penalties for infractions. However, the necessity of a coordinated and collaborative effort is felt to engage all maritime stakeholders in combating NTS in the BoB. Without the intelligence and information of the concerned stakeholders, it becomes difficult to ensure security proactively.

The strategic advantage of a multi-agency collaborative approach lies in its ability to pool diverse expertise, resources, and jurisdictional authority. Maritime security is a multidimensional undertaking that demands the involvement of various

stakeholders, including naval forces, the coast guard, customs, environmental agencies, intelligence services, and law enforcement bodies. Collaborative efforts leverage the unique strengths of each agency, enabling a holistic comprehension of threats and the formulation of nuanced strategies for their mitigation. The purpose of this research is to create a foundation for planning, organizing, and developing a sustainable collaborative working model inclusive of concerned maritime agencies in Bangladesh to suppress maritime NTS threats in BoB.

Problem Statement

Promoting the Blue Economy (BE) is now a top priority for the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) to attain the status of a developed country (Hasina 2019). In the context of Bangladesh, the rapid growth of the BE has raised a pressing need to address maritime non-traditional security threats that jeopardize its sustainable development. Many strategic installations (Power plants, EPZs, offshore oil and natural gas rigs, oil reserves, tourism hotspots) of many coastal countries are located along the seacoast. Bangladesh is no exception. Major ports and harbors handle maritime trade, which requires round-the-clock surveillance and protection for their sustainability. Besides, disturbances in fishing, piracy in maritime trade, drug trafficking, and arms smuggling—any breach of security in the maritime arena—will have a shattering effect on the country's national economy (Das 2013).

Maritime non-traditional security threats, encompassing issues such as illegal fishing, piracy, smuggling, marine pollution, and transnational organized crime, constitute a multifaceted array of challenges that intersect and overlap. The conventional singular-agency approach, which often operates in isolation, faces limitations in effectively addressing these multifarious threats. The need for a coordinated and synchronized response becomes paramount to counteract the complexity and transboundary nature of these challenges.

Hence, a multi-agency approach is necessary to engender situational awareness, swift information exchange, joint patrolling, and optimized resource allocation. These factors synergistically fortify the nation's ability to detect, deter, and respond to diverse security challenges. Unfortunately, in the present national maritime security architecture, there is no joint collaboration initiative to suppress the maritime non-traditional threats in the BoB (Hossain 2017). However, the collaborative approach of the internal maritime agencies has been adopted by many countries around the world and has seen success in combating NTS threats. In Bangladesh, the absence of such a collaborative approach will expose the opportunity for maritime crimes, fail to ensure national maritime security, and endanger future blue economic endeavors.

Research Objective

The key objectives of this study are:

- a. To identify the limitations of the existing security measures in Bangladesh against maritime NTS threats in BoB.
- b. To explore the ways and Means for a prolific collaborative approach of maritime agencies combating maritime NTS threats in BoB against BE of Bangladesh.

Rationale

The findings of this study may help future policymakers understand the limitations of the present security arrangement in Bangladesh to combat the multi-dimensional facets of maritime NTS threats in BoB. Furthermore, it will provide a foundation step for planning, organizing, and developing a sustainable collaborative working model inclusive of concerned maritime agencies in Bangladesh to suppress maritime NTS threats in BoB.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous studies underscore the multifaceted nature of non-traditional maritime security threats. Authors such as Alom (2017) emphasized the intricate relationship between economic prosperity and security, highlighting how challenges such as piracy and illegal fishing can erode the benefits of the blue economy. Similarly, Ahmed (2019) analyzed the interplay between maritime security and sustainable development, shedding light on the potential consequences of unchecked threats on the livelihoods of coastal communities.

Bhattacharyya (2019) discussed issues such as transnational organized crime, smuggling, and terrorism, which pose threats to the blue economy of Bangladesh. The research emphasized the importance of enhancing naval capabilities, fostering regional cooperation among Bay of Bengal littoral states, and improving intelligence sharing to mitigate these non-traditional security challenges effectively.

Farook (2016), in his study, critically examined the necessity of comprehensive policies, legal frameworks, and international cooperation to combat these threats effectively and ensure the sustainable growth of Bangladesh's blue economy. Das et al. (2012) emphasized the need for comprehensive approaches that integrate maritime security, law enforcement, and regional cooperation to effectively address these threats and protect Bangladesh's maritime interests.

According to Nabi (2019), military approaches alone will not solve the

difficulties of maritime security. Although naval forces play an essential role in enhancing and improving maritime security, there must be a collaborative and coordinated effort that spans different sectors and transcends international borders. Nevertheless, the author left scope to develop a collaborative approach model to combat maritime NTS threats.

In terms of collaborative approaches, Keter (2022) stressed that maritime security and blue economy legislation, policies, frameworks, and strategies ought to adopt a multi-stakeholder approach to enhance coherence for effective implementation and success. Additionally, Coelho (2013) explored the role of intelligence-sharing mechanisms in bolstering collective efforts against security threats, suggesting that information exchange is pivotal for preemptive action in Africa.

Hasan (2017) carried out a study on enhancing coastal security to support the blue economy. Though he mentioned sharing information on inter-agency platforms, his study was centered on the challenges and options for the Bangladesh Navy in particular. Alom (2017) studied the interoperability amongst the maritime agencies to capitalize on the blue economy, focusing on the role of the Bangladesh Navy. But the overall planning regarding the development of the security domain was left open for elaborative study in the future.

Many countries in the world have already adopted a multi-agency collaborative approach against maritime NTS threats. Among them, Singapore responds to challenges to marine security by using a "whole of government" strategy (Ho 2012). Singapore has introduced an inter-agency Navy-led Maritime and Port Security Working Group at Changi C2 Centre with three functional groups. In addition, the Information Fusion Center (IFC) is responsible for multilateral cooperation to resolve maritime issues. It was found that the multi-agency approach significantly deterred piracy, illegal smuggling, and other maritime security challenges, contributing to Singapore's reputation as a secure maritime hub (Hossain 2017).

In the Indian Maritime Security (MS) Model, the Cabinet Secretary chairs the National Committee for Strengthening Maritime and Coastal Security (Rahman 2019). The National Command, Control, Communication, and Intelligence (NC3I), located in Gurgaon with the Information Management and Analysis Centre (IMAC), is the nerve center. The Indian structure is linked with the Shipping Hub, State Fishery Monitoring Centre, Automatic Identification System, RADAR, Vessel Traffic Management System, Coastal Database, Ships at Sea, etc. (Rahman 2019).

The maritime security apparatus of the United States is a multi-agency effort that incorporates major actors from multiple departments of the government. The Departments of Defense, Commerce, Homeland Security, Energy, State, and Transportation all have major responsibilities and key roles in executing the maritime

security national strategy (Herzinger 2021). The author noted that this cohesive approach facilitated swift decision-making and resource allocation during emergencies.

Udochukwu (2022) explored a suitable strategy for Nigeria's Deep Blue Project (DBP) for ensuring maritime security in a multi-faceted and challenging environment. Highlighting the examples of the USA, Somalia, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore, the author recommended cross-agency information sharing, coordinated search and rescue missions, and joint monitoring of maritime activities. The study underscored why countries with a multi-agency approach could combat the unique challenges while successfully promoting sustainable resource management and security.

These examples underscore the efficacy of multi-agency collaboration in countering maritime threats across diverse geographical and geopolitical contexts. The reviewed literature consistently demonstrates that integrated strategies, joint training, information sharing, and coordinated operations significantly enhance a nation's ability to address multifaceted maritime challenges. While each country's circumstances are unique, the common thread is the recognition that a collaborative approach is key to achieving comprehensive maritime security and maintaining the integrity of their maritime resources.

The literature reviewed on different countries' approaches highlights the importance of maritime security and multi-agency collaboration. Researchers highlighted the importance of such a strategy in the context of Bangladesh as well. However, research gaps persist in finding the limitations of existing measures and developing such a collaborative multi-agency model from Bangladesh's perspective. Addressing these gaps through empirical research would contribute to a more nuanced and context-specific understanding of maritime security challenges and enhance Bangladesh's capacity to safeguard its blue economy effectively.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

By gaining knowledge in a dynamic context from several points of view, the researcher intends to comprehend reality (Lincoln & Guba 2000). Hence, interpretivism is used in this study. Because the study attempts to examine the limitations of existing security measures against maritime NTS threats from multiple points of view, the researcher also wants to discover the prolific collaborative approach of maritime agencies combating maritime NTS in Bangladesh.

Interpretive study helps in gaining understanding of the phenomenon under consideration and is adaptable in that it aids in locating the missing piece of what is unknown or only partially understood (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2005, pp. 202–204). This study uses an interpretive research approach to address its research objectives. In this

type of research, unstructured and semi-structured interviews as well as questionnaires can be used to gather data (Ghauri & Grönhaug 2005, pp. 112–113). According to some, this research is more pertinent in the context of discovery and will allow access to previously unknown information.

Conceptual Framework

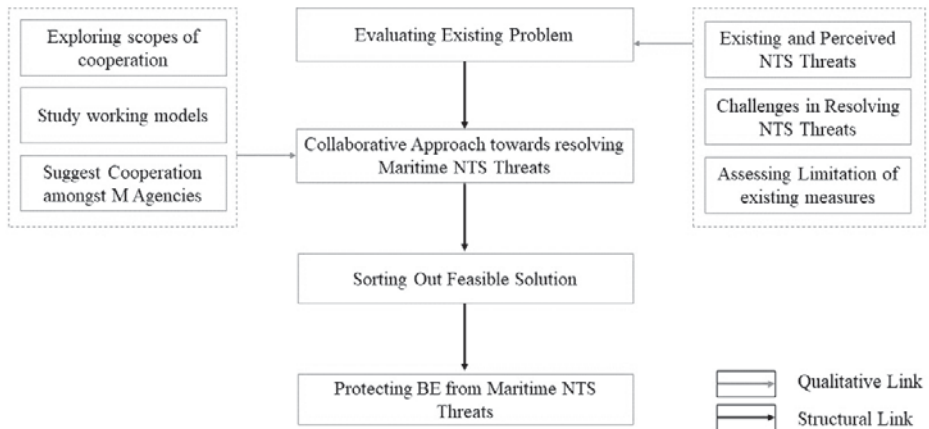


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of this Research (Author’s Own Construct)

Source of Data and Data Collection Technique

In this research, data were collected from both primary (KII and FGD) and secondary (document Study and Desk Research) sources. The researcher conducted narrative and phenomenological research in order to gather data from the local fishermen and coastal dwellers in Teknaf, Inani, and Cox’s Bazar through FGD. Attempts were made to analyze a few case studies that were collected through desk research, research articles, dissertations, web pages, books, journals, reports, and policy documents of the Government of Bangladesh. FGDs and secondary data were used to identify the limitations of the existing security arrangements in Bangladesh against maritime NTS as well as different working models related to maritime security around the world. KII was carried out to generate a broad range of perspectives on developing a proficient Collaborative Approach regarding the maritime security of Bangladesh.

Interviews were carried out with the maritime security experts of Bangladesh and responsible dignitaries of the concerned maritime agencies of the security domain (namely the Bangladesh Navy, Bangladesh Coast Guard, BORI, BSMRMU, and many more). Nonetheless, few statistics and data were represented from the literature and secondary sources to conceptualize the problem and fulfill the objectives.

Data Analysis Technique

Thematic data analysis techniques have been used in this research. The researcher coded and transcribed the collected data and material from various sources. To ensure accuracy, the transcribed data were then read and reread multiple times. The researcher tried to establish relationships between themes that were relevant to the research objective.

Sampling and Sample Size

This study uses a non-probability sampling strategy and a technique called purposeful sampling. A sample taken with a particular goal in mind is known as purposeful sampling. According to the literature, this sampling aims to choose knowledgeable and typical population members. The theoretical framework of the study, which supports the research objective from the outset, serves as the foundation for sample selection. For the sake of this study, deliberate sampling that is informed a priori by a body of social theory that the research questions are based on is ideal (Miles and Huberman 1994; Curtis et al. 2000).

The sample size for this research is 83. Out of 83 respondents, 73 were local fishermen and coastal dwellers dependent on the sea, and the remaining 10 were representatives of the concerned maritime agencies in the security domain. They were interviewed using a semi-structured questionnaire. A total of 3 FGDs, comprising 73 respondents, were conducted in the Inani, Teknaf, and Cox's Bazaar areas.

Table 1: Description of Respondents

Types of Respondents	Study Sample	Instrumentation
Fisherman from Teknaf	24	FGD (FGD 1)
Fisherman from Inani	33	FGD (FGD 2)
Sea-dependent Dwellers from Cox's Bazaar	16	FGD (FGD 3)
Maritime Security Experts and Representatives from Maritime Agencies	10	KII
Total Respondents	83	

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Perceived Non-Traditional Security Threats

According to Hossain (2017), three major categorized NTS threats exist to the security of the marine environment. The first is unauthorized maritime activity. The second category is the illegal exploitation of maritime resources and pollution. Among those, the pertinent issues are smuggling of weapons and drugs, human trafficking and illegal

immigration, hijacking of ships and maritime terrorism, and illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing (IUU fishing). The third category is sourced from the ocean itself, in the form of tsunamis or tropical cyclones. This paper concerns only the first and second types of threats, which are mostly human-induced. Azad (2009) depicted the existing non-traditional security threats in tabular form. This represents the what, Who, and where of the threats and their impact on national security.

Table 2: Maritime Security Threat Matrix (Azad, 2009)

Category of Threat	Source	Zone of Occurrence	Security Implications
IUU fishing, poaching, natural Resource exploitation	Internal and external	Inshore and territorial waters, waters in non-delimited zones between the neighboring littorals	Conflict between Stakeholders in inshore and territorial waters, and conflict between neighboring littorals
Deliberate pollution of marine environment	Mostly internal, also external	All segments of maritime Zones	Threat to ecology, marine health and life
Ordinary theft, armed robbery, piracy	Internal and external	All segments of maritime Zones	Violent and bloody confrontation, loss of life, impact on maritime trade and commerce
Illegal trafficking of arms, drugs, and humans	Internal and external	Shore to High Seas to Shore abroad	Threat to internal security, health and human security, and international relations
Terrorism	Internal and external	All Zones	Threat to ocean peace and stability
Mercenary operations, maritime insurgency, hijacking, etc	Limited to the parties concerned	Normally, zones beyond EEZ	Foments international terrorism, supports separatist movements, and destabilizes regimes

The annual report 2022 on piracy and armed robbery against ships in Asia published by ReCAAP ISC revealed that the increase in incidents in 2022 occurred in the Singapore Strait, Bangladesh, Malaysia, and the South China Sea. In Bangladesh, five incidents (four actual and one attempted) were reported in 2022, compared to none in 2021.

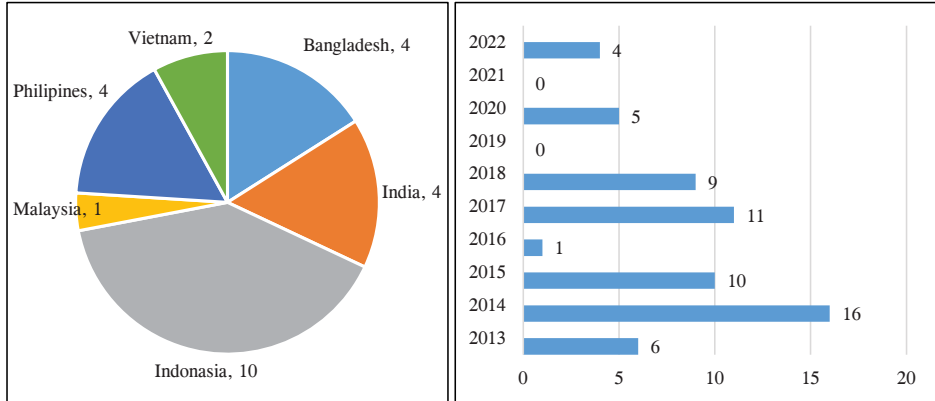


Figure 2: Statistics on Armed Robbery and Piracy in Different Countries in 2022 (Left) and Bangladesh in 2013-2022 (Right) (ReCAAP 2023)

The above statistics indicate that the maritime area of Bangladesh is prone to armed robbery and piracy incidents despite the active participation of various law enforcement agencies. This drives a plan for developing the existing security measures.

A few case studies reveal present Gaps

Case Study 1: Murder of 10 Fisherman in Cox’s Bazar

From the respondents of local dwellers of Cox’s Bazar (FGD 3), the murder incident of 10 fishermen was informed. The discovery of 10 decomposed bodies on a trawler on April 23, 2023, off the Nazirtek beach in Cox's Bazar is one of the most ruthless and brutal examples of armed robbery and maritime domain in recent times. The bodies inside the trawler were inside a freezer in the trawler and received as decomposed.

The case has prompted an investigation focusing on maritime security threats. Initial inquiries are exploring the potential connections between the incident and issues such as fishing dominance, drug trafficking, and conflicts between fishermen and robbers in the region. The case has highlighted concerns surrounding maritime criminal activities, emphasizing the need for robust security measures and enforcement in the Bay of Bengal region.

Case Study 2: 1.1 Million Liters of Oil Spillage in Meghna River

On December 25, 2022, 1.1 million liters of oil spillage were observed in the Meghna River. Since 2014, Bangladesh has suffered from five spillage incidents totaling 1.77 Million liters of oil into the Karnaphuli, Meghna, and Shela rivers. The failure and

lack of preparedness of the National Committee on Oil and Chemical Spillage (NOCS) were uncovered in responding to the oil spill in the Meghna River in Bangladesh (Yousuf 2023). The spill exposed the committee's apathy, lack of coordination, and unawareness of its responsibilities, even though it had been formed two years prior. Instead, the Bangladesh Coast Guard took the lead in responding to the spill. The NOCS met 10 days after the incident, and officials from the Department of Environment arrived 24 hours later. However, it was deduced that no command structure was established, no technical mechanism was ensured, and no financial support was sought for the recovery operation.

The mentioned case clearly demonstrates the absence of a dedicated marine authority and a lack of preparedness, coordination, and cooperation among maritime agencies in addressing maritime security threats and effectively managing marine accidents in Bangladesh.

Case Study 3: Escalation of Drug Trafficking in BoB

The BoB is located at the crossroads of three drug-producing regions: Bangladesh is a transit country for drugs produced in the Golden Triangle and, to a much lesser degree, the Golden Crescent (UNODC 2005). Having direct air, sea, and road communications with all regional drug-producing countries, Bangladesh is now facing a massive domestic drug addiction problem as a spillover effect. Aside from the socio-economic harm, drug trafficking has also been linked to terrorist funding (Azad 2009). Drug peddlers keep changing their routes constantly. The smugglers use sea routes for smuggling Yaba and other drugs. In Bangladesh and Myanmar's case, the bulk of drug trafficking happens through the Bay of Bengal and the land points of transit between Bangladesh and Myanmar (The Business Standard 2021).

The above case represents that the constant change in drug peddlers' routes and the use of sea routes for smuggling drugs, particularly Yaba, further complicate law enforcement efforts. The Bay of Bengal and the land transit points between Bangladesh and Myanmar serve as key locations for drug trafficking activities in the region. Efforts to address this issue require robust maritime security measures, inter-agency and transnational cooperation, intelligence sharing, and targeted interventions to disrupt drug trafficking networks and prevent the smuggling of drugs through these routes.

Limitations of Existing Measures

Presently, a number of organizations are directly involved in ensuring security against NTS threats in the BoB. But they lack the required intelligence and information from the lead directorates or bodies in the concerned field. When interviewed on June 4, 2023, a Senior Scientific Officer of Bangladesh Oceanographic Research Institute (BORI), said:

The primary limitation of security measures against maritime NTS threats is that law enforcement agencies do not have any information or traces of the sea users. If we do not know, trace, or control who is going to the sea, staying for how many days, what they are doing, when they are returning, in which area they are operating, and which routes are being used, it is impossible to think about the protection of maritime resources and people.

The above quotation points out that the lack of information and traceability among sea users is a significant limitation in addressing maritime non-traditional security threats. Without knowledge of who is accessing the sea, their activities, and operating areas, it becomes challenging to implement effective security measures. This limitation hinders the identification of potential threats, comprehensive surveillance, risk assessment, law enforcement efforts, and the development of maritime domain awareness. To overcome this limitation, it is essential to enhance information sharing, strengthen national inter-agency cooperation, establish registration systems, and utilize advanced technologies. Improved traceability of sea users will enable a better understanding of maritime activities, the detection of threats, and the implementation of targeted security measures to protect maritime resources and ensure the safety of people.

Both the fisherman communities at Teknaf (FGD 1) and Inani (FGD 2) supported the issue regarding the lack of information and traceability of sea users and agreed that they do not record adequate information about their activities at sea anywhere. When asked why no one informs the concerned authority about their whereabouts at sea, one respondent from the fisherman community of Inani (FGD 2) expressed the following view:

We do not know that informing someone of our whereabouts is required. No one from the government or law enforcement agencies asked this. We casually inform someone that we are going fishing. Staying in the sea depends on the fish catch. If the amount is good, we return to the shore after one or two days. If the amount is not good, it may last for 8–9 days.

The above account reveals the lack of general awareness of the fisherman and the necessity of the practice of informing the concerned agencies about the fishing trip and the duration of stay. It is understandable that the duration at sea may depend on the fish catch and can vary from one to several days. However, from a maritime security perspective, having mechanisms in place to communicate and share information about fishing trips can be beneficial to enhance safety, enable better coordination during emergencies, and contribute to overall maritime domain awareness. One of the resource persons revealed for this study that the fishing boats do not have any communication devices other than mobile phones. Those become useless without network coverage. Moreover, they do not have any GPS, AIS, or other kinds of location-positioning devices. So, they become untraceable. While it may not be currently enforced or mandated, encouraging the adoption of voluntary reporting

mechanisms or initiatives to promote communication among fishermen and relevant authorities could be considered to improve safety and security at sea.

While interviewing on June 6, 2023, an important limitation was revealed by the Station Commander, Teknaf, Coast Guard (East Zone), which concerns resource limitations of the force and duplication of effort. He asserted:

BCG operates in Teknaf with a limited number of resources for combating NTS threats across the maritime boundary. The infrastructure, personnel, and technology are not enough for carrying out operations effectively. Besides, sometimes it is observed that the informers (sources of intelligence against trafficking) provide information to us, the RAB, and also the BGB. So, unknowing each other's course of action, all the forces carry out operations. This results in duplication of effort.

An important conclusion can be derived from the above statement. The resources of the GoB are shared amongst the law enforcement agencies. If there had been information sharing amongst the agencies or a joint cooperation center, both the challenges regarding 'shared resources' and 'duplication of effort' could have been eradicated. In addition, the concentration of force, knowledge, and working experience of multiple agencies would contribute to the joint effort.

Ways and Means for a Prolific Collaborative Approach

National BE initiatives involve a significant number of ministries, organizations, and law enforcement organizations. The Bangladesh Navy oversees safety and order at sea jointly with the Coast Guard of Bangladesh. The legal elements are handled by the Bangladesh Police, BCG and RAB. Through their economic activities, port authorities, Bangladesh Shipping Corporation, marine fisheries, Petrobangla, shipyards, ship breaking yards, and similar companies directly support BE. All these organizations work relentlessly with their individual efforts. Coordinated involvement of all these stakeholders will enhance the BE achievement for Bangladesh (Rahman 2019).

Currently, Bangladesh's BE security issues are directly monitored by the Directorate of Naval Operations (DNO) and the Directorate of Blue Economy (DBE) at NHQ. In contrast, DBE directly supports the Blue Economy Cell within the Ministry of Power, Energy, and Mineral Resources (MPMER) to guarantee security and long-term growth in terms of BE activities in the BoB. Armed forces will augment maritime security agencies in need of a quick emergency response. Presently, BN and BCG maintain regular patrols at sea and in coastal areas. Yet, it is not possible to maintain a presence everywhere and effectively monitor the 1,18,813 sq km of sea area (Hossain 2017). Hence, the participation of all the maritime stakeholders (Port Authorities, Bangladesh Shipping Corporation, Marine Fisheries, Directorate of Narcotics Control, etcetera) is necessary.

Bangladesh can create a comprehensive national maritime security framework using the building block method, allowing it to lessen maritime security risks and strengthen maritime security. For this, Bangladesh must first develop self-capacity, which entails having a solid data base, appropriate surveillance coverage, a well-equipped operations center with representation from relevant stakeholder groups, and an extremely powerful national marine apex organization. Thinking broadly while beginning modestly might be the idea (Chew 2016). The National Maritime Surveillance System and National Maritime Data Bases are two examples of how an information sharing network or model can be considered. But in the case of Bangladesh, neither of these applies (Haq 2014). By developing these, the effectiveness of NTS threat response across the maritime boundary can be improved. Additionally, this would allow her to interact on a sub-regional or regional level. Bangladesh's national organizations can connect with sub-regional organizations, which in turn could connect with regional organizations, using this building block technique. In our situation, smaller regional umbrella groups like ReCAAP, ISC, or IFC might be a source of support for smaller local organizations (Hossain 2017).

Bangladesh must approach the subject of enhancing marine security from all angles, much like Singapore or India do. To begin with, at the national level, the necessary stakeholder activity needs to be brought under some sort of common umbrella in order for maritime affairs to run optimally and smoothly. An apex body at the ministerial level would provide a platform for policy formation based on the strategic direction provided by the government to plan, direct, coordinate, and manage marine activities. Rear Admiral Musa (2023) opined that under the Prime Minister's Office, a top-level institution called the National Maritime Division (NMD) may be created, which will be the governing authority for all maritime issues. Both Malaysia and Brunei already employ this type of system. An NMD has previously been discussed in the draft national maritime policy (Hossain 2017).

A common marine working hub at the functional level can be established in order to coordinate maritime security surveillance and on-field activities. A maritime security headquarters can be established to oversee all marine activities across the country in times of emergency or conflict. The Joint National Maritime Operations Center (JMOCC) can be a possible name for this (Hossain 2017). This will make collaboration and communication between organizations easier. Additionally, this will coordinate field operations and information exchange between many authorities and organizations, including the police, customs, and ports. In this regard, a respondent mentioned the hub and Spoke method:

One integrated network can be created to infuse all the agencies' current monitoring capabilities. A hub-and-spoke strategy, which can be used to maximize each person's contributions, may be used. According to this concept,

each organization will be in charge of its own capabilities and serve as a focal point for internal coordination. The remote stations and outposts where the agencies conduct their monitoring and surveillance operations would be the spokes. There will be a shared working linkage between the spokes.

As demonstrated by the case studies, it is crucial that the proposed security model include a comprehensive marine picture compilation infrastructure that covers the entirety of our coastline and maritime area. Satellite, Maritime Patrol Aircraft (MPA), Automatic Identification System (AIS), RADAR, and surface ship coverage are required for this. An Integrated Coastal Surveillance System (ICZM) would make this possible in Bangladesh (Hossain 2017). Such a database or infrastructure does not exist at the present time. Utilizing tools and systems like the Long-Range Identification and Tracking (LRIT), Automatic Identification System (AIS), and Fishermen's Database, the information sources for this database would be acquired (Bhuiyan 2017).

So, how should the functional components of the previously described proposal be implemented? While interviewing on June 6, 2023, one of the resource persons and a maritime security expert expressed his view:

As a functioning modality, or at the field level, the deployed forces on-field would conduct surveillance, collect information, and produce a maritime image. The JMOCC and the service operation's rooms, respectively, would be used for processing and area-level collation. Then, operational decisions would be made at both this level and the upper level, which is NMD, or the main hub. Services HQ would be an element of NMD as well as a working hub.



Figure 3: Maritime Security Structure of Bangladesh (Hossain 2017)

Bangladesh would be able to efficiently monitor the vast sea region using an integrated coastal surveillance system that could be developed from the envisioned maritime security architecture. As a result, any anomaly would be discovered, matched with the database, and shared through the Information Sharing Center (ISC) with nearby countries.

In order to safeguard maritime security, the Navy and Coast Guard will be able to react swiftly to any potential threats. It's important to chalk out a SWOT analysis that would be considered in the specific context of the proposed multi-agency model for maritime security in Bangladesh, taking into account its unique characteristics and operational framework. The result has been generated based on the output of interviews with several Key Informants:

<p>Strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reduce redundancy and duplication of Effort ● Information Sharing ● Resource Pooling ● Specialized Expertise on various fields 	<p>Weaknesses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ego-centric stigma of agencies ● Varying Priorities of the agencies ● Communication and Information Management
<p>Opportunity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Enhanced Cooperation ● Integrated Technical Advancement ● Knowledge Sharing and Best Practices ● Scopes of Regional Cooperation 	<p>Threats:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Political and Organizational Dynamics ● Rapidly evolving Threats ● Jurisdictional Disputes

Figure 4: SWOT Matrix for Multi-Agency Approach against NTS Threat

The discussion shows that most of the countries apply multi-agency models of maritime security strategies to get the most out of them. Countries have different maritime policies, which lead them to apply a cooperative maritime strategy which subsequently contributes to blue growth. (Rahman 2019). The collaborative approach contributes to the cultivation of trust and synergy among maritime agencies. Overcoming traditional bureaucratic barriers and fostering a culture of inter-agency cooperation can substantially streamline decision-making processes, allowing for agile responses to evolving threats. Regular joint training exercises, intelligence sharing, and coordinated operations not only amplify operational efficiency but also reduce redundancy and duplication of efforts.



Figure 5: Ensuring Security Has a Direct Positive Impact on Blue Growth (Rahman 2019)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study sheds light on the human-induced non-traditional security threats (NTS) faced by Bangladesh in its maritime environment. The identified threats range from unauthorized maritime activities to illegal exploitation of maritime resources and pollution. The article emphasizes the need for comprehensive and integrated approaches to address these challenges effectively.

The study reveals the vulnerability of Bangladesh's maritime area to armed robbery and piracy incidents, as indicated by the increase in such incidents reported in the region. This highlights the urgency of developing and strengthening existing security measures to ensure the safety and security of maritime activities.

Case studies presented in the paper demonstrate the existing gaps and challenges in maritime security. The murder of fishermen in Cox's Bazar underscores the ruthless nature of maritime criminal activities and the need for robust security measures in the Bay of Bengal region. The oil spillage incident in the Meghna River reveals the lack of preparedness and coordination among maritime agencies, calling for the establishment of a dedicated marine authority and a coordinated response mechanism. Additionally, the escalation of drug trafficking in the Bay of Bengal highlights the importance of addressing this issue through enhanced maritime security measures, inter-agency cooperation, and targeted interventions.

Furthermore, the article highlights the limitations of existing measures, such as the lack of information and traceability of sea users, resource limitations, and duplication of effort among different law enforcement agencies. Overcoming these limitations requires improved information sharing, enhanced awareness among fishermen, technological upgrades, and strengthened coordination among agencies and stakeholders.

Meanwhile, the findings explore various maritime security strategy models employed by different countries, such as the multi-agency model, the "whole of government" strategy, and the establishment of central hubs or centers. These models emphasize the importance of information sharing, operational coordination, and collaboration among different stakeholders.

Based on the findings, it is crucial for Bangladesh to adopt a comprehensive and collaborative approach to enhance maritime security. This includes strengthening security measures, improving coordination among maritime agencies, establishing dedicated marine authorities, enhancing preparedness for marine accidents, and addressing the challenges posed by NTS threats at BoB. In conclusion, by addressing the identified challenges and adopting effective strategies, Bangladesh can enhance its maritime security capabilities, protect its maritime resources, ensure the safety of sea users, and promote sustainable development in the Bay of Bengal region.

In conclusion, the inexorable growth of Bangladesh's blue economy demands an adaptive and agile approach to safeguard maritime security. The mosaic of non-traditional security threats necessitates a paradigm shift from siloed agency efforts towards a harmonized and integrated strategy. The multi-agency collaborative approach may serve as a linchpin in this transformative shift, enabling the nation to protect its maritime resources, ensure sustainable economic progress, and uphold its sovereign interests in an increasingly dynamic maritime domain.

Recommendations

- To effectively pursue the blue economy, GoB may develop a practical maritime security strategy under the umbrella of an overall maritime policy and strategy. With the available resources, the approach should be primarily focused on preventing any undesirable activities associated with maritime security concerns.
- GoB may establish a 'National Maritime Division' to oversee maritime activities under Prime Minister's Office. The division should be guided by both maritime strategy and national security strategy in order to maintain effective maritime domain governance. This organization will also be able to ensure coordinated efforts by all maritime stakeholders, including maritime security and law-enforcing organizations.
- GoB may establish a Joint National Maritime Operations Center (JMOCC) under the National Maritime Division. Bangladesh Navy may be given the lead role in setting up and running this organization, where representatives from BCG, DoS, DNC, Bangladesh Police, Bangladesh Army, BGB, RAB, Port authorities, and related ministries, divisions, and organizations will be integrated.
- A National Maritime Database System may be developed under JMOCC for effective surveillance, information gathering, and collation from all the concerned agencies and sources.

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Social and Organizational Perception Towards Women Police: A Study of Metropolitan Police in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

This study has examined the societal and organizational outlooks toward female police currently working in the Sylhet metropolitan area of Bangladesh. As the social activity of women increases, societal attitudes toward them are changing, and as an institution, the police department has included several facilities over the years. Now the question is, are these things really happening? To better understand the actual scenario of women police in the Metropolitan area, this study has interviewed 13 field-level officials using purposive sampling from the Sylhet Metropolitan Area through a semi-structured questionnaire. This study found that society's mental inertia and behavioural attitudes toward women have significantly impacted the current situation of female cops in metropolitan police. The public still needs to comprehend women working in such outfits, who must face various struggles to join the force. They often face physical difficulties with tasks, and their male counterparts do not always accept them easily. Although organizational facilities have increased in many areas, there are some problems regarding daycare centres, maternal leave, and separate washroom facilities. Thus, this study recommends improving their facilities based on female cops' capabilities.

Keywords: Bangladesh Police, Metropolitan Police, Social attitudes, Women Police.

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INTRODUCTION

In contemporary discourse, the integration of women into law enforcement agencies stands as a critical emblem of societal progress, challenging historical gender biases and redefining the dynamics of traditionally male-dominated fields. The increasing representation of women within police forces worldwide has prompted scholarly interest in understanding the multifaceted interplay between social perceptions and organizational attitudes towards women officers.

The global push for gender equality and diversity has underscored the significance of women's participation in law enforcement, not just as a matter of equity, but also for enhancing policing effectiveness and community engagement. A seminal report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2018) emphasized the importance of gender-responsive policing strategies to build public trust and address the unique needs of diverse communities. Bangladesh, like many nations, is navigating a transformative period marked by evolving societal norms and increasing recognition of women's potential contributions to all sectors. Ahmed et al. (2020) study has discussed the broader implications of gender diversity in public service organizations, highlighting how a balanced representation can positively influence organizational culture and overall performance. However, these shifts are not devoid of challenges; traditional gender stereotypes, as noted by Kabeer (2005), can continue to shape perceptions of women's roles and capabilities in male-dominated professions.

The Police of Bangladesh is administered by the Ministry of Home Affairs of the Bangladesh Government. The journey of women in Bangladesh Police unofficially started in 1974. In 1976, a proposal was sent to the government to recruit female police personnel in the Dhaka Metropolitan Police, marking its official debut (Bangladesh Police Women's Network, 2022).

According to the Bangladesh Police Women's Network, as of July 2021, the total number of women working in different units is 13,004 - which is 7.10 per cent of the total workforce of Bangladesh Police. The first female police officer in Bangladesh was recruited into the cadre service in 1986 (Pervin, 2021). In 1999, eight women were recruited as Assistant Superintendents of Police by the 18th BCS, reopening the door for women to join the police cadre. With the increase in female police officers, their reputation and level of achievement also increased. Although female members have been serving in different units of the police force, female members have not been seen as traffic sergeants before. Members of the Bangladesh Police have been participating in UN peacekeeping operations since 1989, along with other forces (The Business Standard, 2021).

Studies have found that existing phased approach in subcontinent may be more responsible in strongly patriarchal settings, which have also posed some challenges to the aim of gender equity in police (Nataranjan, 2008). One of the largest projects on women police in South Asia was the study by Nataranjan (2008) performed on the female police of Tamil Nadu. She investigated that men and women were equally engaged in carrying out the complete spectrum of police duties and that there were no discrepancies in the tasks allocated to them during their service. Female officers have a unique perspective on police work, although they share some of their male colleagues' perspectives on preferred jobs and other topics (Fielding & Fielding, 1992). They have had to face various personal, social, and family problems while performing their duties at the field level. The insensitivity of a class of male officers to the issues of female police officers has made this problem even more apparent (The Daily Kaler Kantha, 2021). Due to such insensitivities, the proper responsibilities of female police are not being distributed (Quadrado, 1995). For instance, the Dhaka Metropolitan Police's Detective Branch, Crime Division, and Traffic Division currently have no female officers serving as deputy commissioners (The Business Standard, 2021). One equal opportunity measure, along with the creation of equity within the units and sexual harassment among the officers, is the inclusion of women on all selection and promotion panels (Rabe-Hemp, 2007). Police work has traditionally been a man's realm. Women have faced obstacles, resistance, and exploitation whenever they have entered traditionally "male" professions. However, few professions have faced more adamant opposition to entry on legal, organizational, informal, and interpersonal levels than law enforcement (Martin, 1980).

Police work is seen from an alternate viewpoint by female cops. However, they share some of the viewpoints of their male coworkers on chosen occupations and other subjects (Fielding & Fielding, 1992). Women are at extra risk for any job related to work overload, staff shortages, a lack of senior staff support, and poor communication. These are common drivers of stress in education (Cox et al., 1988), nursing, and management (Davidson & Cooper, 1983).

Objectives

The broad objective of the study is to understand the present social and departmental attitudes toward Women Police officers in metropolitan area. On the other hand, specific objectives are being accounted for to understand the present social and departmental attitudes towards female police in Bangladesh while analyzing the existing job environment of female police in Bangladesh. A review of the existing literature has identified variables such as job-centred complications, social attitudes toward female police officers, and personal factors under coverage related to police departments.

METHODOLOGY

This study has been carried out through applying an exploratory qualitative research approach. A qualitative approach allows us to learn more about the existing perceptions towards female police officers among the police officers in Metropolitan Police, Bangladesh. All the non-cadre female police members of the Sylhet metropolitan area are the population of the study. For conducting in-depth interviews, all the field units of Sylhet Metropolitan Police (SMP), such as the Detective Branch (DB), Special Branch (SB), Criminal Investigation Department (CID), and Thana (police stations) from Sylhet Metropolitan Police, were included in the study. The 13 respondents were selected using the judgmental/purposive sampling method. Female police officials are not available in every unit of the police department. So, purposive sampling has been used to conduct the study. Sylhet Metropolitan Police has a small number of female employees on their board; the researcher tried to reach as many respondents as possible, but whenever data came out repeatedly, the researcher stopped interviewing.

Data was collected through in-depth interviews. Interviews were taken using a semi-structured questionnaire. The independent variables were used to create a checklist. While collecting data from the field units, the researcher noted the issues related to departmental factors associated with female police officials. The researcher's handwritten notes were used to identify the issues addressed in the findings. After transcription of the audio and field notes, several themes and sub-themes were generated based on the research objectives of this study. So, the data collected from the police officials have been analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was used to examine women's responses and identify the significant themes in their responses. The analysis began with numerous readings of the interview transcripts, which were then highlighted to find the initial codes relevant to the critical focuses mentioned in the literature review. Following the coding stage, the codes were organized into highly plausible themes.

The Sylhet Metropolitan Police gave official permission for the study to be carried out. Due to the study's focus on female police officers in Bangladesh, the respondents were asked several extremely sensitive and private questions, some of which would have been harmful to their future employment prospects. Their identities were kept completely confidential to protect the respondents' privacy and job security. According to the convenience of the respondents, the interview location and time slot were set. All of the data was properly gathered and thoroughly examined. To conduct the study, necessary ethical issues have been maintained properly. However, one of the limitations of this study is a small sample size as the number of women police is not available in the Sylhet Metropolitan area.

RESULT/FINDINGS

Thirteen in-depth interviews were conducted with the female police members of Sylhet Metropolitan areas, and the data were analyzed based on the objectives of this study. Women police officials have emphasized various aspects of challenges during their career life. Most of the female members remain unsatisfied with maternity leave; however, they are satisfied with other aspects of their careers, such as social dignity, economic autonomy, and family development. Although women face various challenges in inter-departmental relations, the progress of women is praiseworthy as compared to earlier. The participation of women in the police was significantly less in the past. On the other hand, they faced various struggles and hurdles to continue their job in Bangladesh.

Issues need to be addressed	
Job centered complications	Duty centered difficulties
	Existing facilities within the department
	Presence of Women Officials in police units and posts
Social attitude and Personal factors	Motivation
	Diverse perspective
	General people’s attitude
	Physical capacity
	Family support

The interview results have been organized into three sections. The first section describes the job-centered complications of women police officers. The second section states social attitudes toward women police. The third section has analyzed the personal factors of women police, physical capacity-related difficulties and the sacrificing features of female cops are thoroughly reviewed here.

Job centered complications for Female police officials

Job centered complications for Female Police Officials	Sentry duty of the constables
	Day-care facilities
	Maternal leave
	Toilet facilities during menstrual period
	Ratio of Female Officer-in-charge

Sentry duty appears to be frantic for lady constables

A person who is employed at the gate of the police station or unit is called a sentry. Generally, more than one constable performs this duty for 2 hours by getting rest for 4 hours of every 24 hours duty schedule. This task appears hazardous and unsuitable for women police as it seriously affects the healthy life. A female constable in this research said:

Sentry duty puts a lot of pressure on our body. When I go to rest after finishing my duty, my tension works so much that I must go back to work after a while.

Many officers in this research urged against imposing this type of duty on a woman as it is hardly bearable for them. Sentry duty seems very stressful for women police as they have little time for rest, and they have to spend very worried time because they think that they need to return to duty shortly. So, most of the respondents in this study expressed that it is better not to have sentry duty for women.

Scarcity of daycare facilities

Daycare services are important for female members with children; however, most police stations or units lack daycare centres. They seem unable to engage in their duties because of the lack of daycare facilities and tend to be always anxious. Due to the lack of daycare facilities, many female members placed their children with relatives. Parents or sisters should be brought from their homes to care for their children.

In this context, a constable revealed her concerns:

Most of the female police need to bring their sister and mother to look after their house. So that they can leave their baby with them. Nobody wants to bring mother or sister from the outskirts, but they have to do so because there is no daycare center.

Many mothers bring their children to duty and nurture the kid there. They would not have to take their child to the duty post if there were a daycare facility. They could have done their duty with more relaxation if they had benefited from daycare services.

Unsatisfactory maternal leave

According to the prevailing rules of the Government of Bangladesh, all female government employees are supposed to get maternity leave for six months. Female members of the police are no exception. However, nearly all police officers have stated that the six-month vacation is insufficient. Police members must be on-duty 24

hours a day, so it is often seen that pregnant policewomen take leave earlier due to the pressure of duty. In this case, their leave is inadequate after the birth of the child. Many people can be heard leaving their children at home at a young age and doing their duty. However, since the police job is more exceptional than other jobs, the child cannot get enough affection from the mother. Maternity leave for police officers has been curtailed in several ways. In this regard, one Constable said:

I had to do my duty with a baby in the womb, I had to take the promotion test then. I didn't take the leave earlier. I also had to leave the baby while breastfeeding and come to duty after maternal leave. If I have 6 months off, the baby is at most 6 months old, but it is very difficult to feed my baby.

Although women officials have claimed they do not have to face any administrative complications to get maternity leave, senior officials cooperate to get it easily. Nevertheless, most female officers want maternity leave to be increased. Most research respondents said it would have been better if maternity leave was one year. Many are seen not going on vacation at the right time to spend more time later, but many get sick in this scenario. So, it would have been nice if the leave was one year instead of 6 months.

Toilet-centred troubles during menstrual period

Many police units need separate toilets for men and women. Although the situation is different now, distinct toilets for men and women are visible in more units than before. However, there still needs to be more efficiency in this concern. Separate toilets are an important issue for women during the menstrual period. This facility is only available sometimes when working inside the police station or unit; again, the toilet becomes a major concern for women police while outside duty. The toilet crisis is a big problem. Sometimes women officials need to use other departmental toilets for urgency.

The dearth of female Officer-in-Charge (OC)

The officer in charge, abbreviated as OC, is the person in control of a police station. Although the presence of women police officers in various police positions, large and small, is visible, Bangladesh has a tiny number of female OC. Respondents point out that they have never had the experience of working under a female OC. There are many reasons for this. Senior officials generally do not want to give the responsibility of an OC to a woman because they are yet to be capable of a stressful job like performing such stressful duties. It has been seen that the women inspectors themselves want to avoid taking charge of the police station. One of the constables told her way:

I have worked under the female inspector; I have seen the inspector(investigation), but I have not found the female OC yet. Inspector(investigation) sir didn't want to be OC because of her family. It is often seen that women do not want to take the responsibility of OC.

The role of the officer in charge (OC) entails overseeing a police station's operations. While women police officers hold various positions across different levels within the police force, the number of female OCs in Bangladesh remains notably small. Respondents reveal that they have not encountered working under a female OC. Several factors contribute to this situation. Higher-ranking officials typically hesitate to assign women to the OC role due to concerns about their ability to handle the demanding and stressful responsibilities associated with it. Additionally, some female inspectors themselves express reluctance to assume OC duties. This phenomenon reflects a common trend where women are often disinclined to take on the OC's responsibilities.

Social attitudes towards Female police officials

Social attitudes towards Female police officials	Motivation to become a police official
	Diverse perspective towards women police
	Sexual harassment
	General people's attitude

Motivation for becoming a female police officer

The road is smoother for women than for men to join the police. Family and society do not yet consider police jobs to apply to women. The patriarchal structure of society is the biggest hindrance in this case. So, women must carry different barriers to come to the police. In many cases, it is seen that women must come to the police with various struggles, contumacy, and love for the country. A respondent expressed her perseverance to come to the police,

No one supported me in coming to the police. I have insisted on myself. My uncle served in the army, but he stopped talking to me, and my father stopped talking. I didn't eat for 15 days; I didn't eat anything. Later, everyone was forced to agree.

Many constables, alongside other field-level officials, caught that while it is easy for men to get a job, it is difficult for women. Many of them articulated that, no matter what men do, the family does not care so much. However, in the case of women, one must consider society; they need to think about what people will say. Women used to

represent just a tiny percentage of the police force. The situation is steadily improving, and women are increasingly joining the police force. Rising participation of women in police department will surely increase as the country's women eventually triumph in every sector.

Seeing women from a diverse perspective

Women's presence in the workplace once was scarce. Women are gradually gaining prominence in all sectors because of this predicament. However, due to the patriarchal social structure, women are not treated with respect in many areas of society, and various remarks about women are heard even among the public. Women officers have similar experiences inside the police agency. Certain people have complained that male police officers do not pay female authorities adequate respect on many occasions. In this regard, an Assistant Sub-Inspector said:

All male colleagues will not be the same for you. Some of the male constables used to look at me with cold stares, I got promotions earlier than them and later they didn't want to address me as sir.

The male colleagues and their perceptions towards women police are a challenge because a male constable doesn't want to call female police sir because of being a woman; such incidents are seen in many cases. Again, it cannot be asserted that women are treated differently in every circumstance. Many female members report that their colleagues and bosses pay close attention to their welfare. Senior officials are always sincere when it comes to approaching them on any issue.

The stink of sexual harassment

According to the literature analysis, sexual harassment of female police officers is not unusual in developing countries. According to an internal report of The Police Department, about 40 per cent testified that female police members get harassed within the department (Ajker Patrika, 2021). Many respondents just mentioned the issue of sexual harassment, but they no longer prefer to talk. When it comes to sexual harassment, respondents no longer want to talk about it. As a result, it reeks of sexual harassment.

The female members have maintained the utmost level of secrecy on this matter. Most female members report that sexual harassment exists, but no one speaks specifically about it. A female constable said:

There is the existence of sexual harassment, it happens in many ways in many places. But never with me.

Although many respondents alluded to the presence of sexual harassment, they often refrain from discussing it openly. The topic of sexual harassment has become a sensitive and avoided subject. Consequently, a sense of pervasive sexual harassment pervades the environment. Female police members maintain a high level of secrecy around this matter. While most acknowledge the existence of sexual harassment, they tend to avoid providing specific details. A female constable expressed this sentiment, stating that while sexual harassment is indeed present and manifests in various forms and places, she personally has not experienced it.

General people's attitude toward women police uniforms

Because the police are a law enforcement agency (The Police Act, 1861), they must wear specific uniforms while performing their responsibilities. Police uniforms are an exception to the norms for traditional women in Bangladesh, and in many circumstances, they are considered unsuitable by the public. Many female members claimed to have encountered various challenges due to their outfits. In this topic, an Assistant Sub-Inspector said:

There is a lot of trouble with clothes, the public is abusive. Someone from the general people told me nastily, 'How can a woman be a cop? See her outfit!' People cannot accept that we work with shirts and pants as a girl. People look at us very badly.

Although there are some general problems, the female members are still happy with their clothes even though the general people are criticizing them for wearing shirts and pants. They're happy with their outfit because they think it simplifies their assigned work and duty. A female constable said:

If you don't have such clothes, you can't work properly. You can't run around wearing a saree, this is the right dress for you to run and move.

In a Muslim-majority country, women members may wear the hijab with their certain clothing by getting permission from higher authority. In addition, women working in the police station get a saree; they can wear it for different duties. So, all in all, the women members are satisfied with their outfits.

Personal factors of Female Police

Personal factors of Female police	Difficulties related to physical capacities
	Sacrificing amenities for the family

Difficulties related to physical capacity

Police members ought to perform various duties regularly. They must perform everything from patrol duty to sentry duty. Police members are not allowed to enjoy any weekly leave and must be available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Although the male members are physically able, the females are slightly behind in this courtesy. The confession was heard from a female constable:

If you talk about our physical ability as compared to men, then as a girl I am lagging behind in many ways because of my physical ability. The work that men can do quickly or easily will not be so easy for me.

Police officers are tasked with a range of responsibilities that span from regular patrols to sentry duties. Their commitment extends to being available round the clock, without the luxury of weekly leaves. This demanding schedule applies equally to both male and female police members. However, there's a recognition that while male members are generally more physically capable, female members might face some challenges in this aspect. Several aspirants, however, have stated that senior officers assign them to duty, considering their physical fitness and ability.

Sacrificing amenities for family

For police officers, there are prospects for advancement and missions. One must complete the exam to take advantage of these benefits, and only qualified candidates are given the mission and promotion. So many times, despite having credentials and chances, female police officers are denied benefits because they are concerned about their families. Sometimes people think of obstacles as simply being women in the family. They are uncomfortable because of their husband or family. An Assistant Sub-Inspector said that despite the qualifications, talent, and hard work, the results were not forthcoming:

I passed the test for UN Mission for the very first time. But my husband didn't let me go, he was worried about me. What to do there or how to run everything - do not let so much to think.

Opportunities for advancement and assignments exist within the police force, typically requiring candidates to pass exams for eligibility. However, access to these benefits is selective, and only those who meet the criteria are offered promotions or special assignments. Unfortunately, female police officers often face denial of these opportunities due to concerns related to their families. The perceived obstacles sometimes stem from traditional gender roles within the family. Family-related discomfort, particularly concerning husbands or family dynamics, can hinder female officers from pursuing these avenues.

DISCUSSION

The study's findings convincingly demonstrate how several complex elements influence social and organizational perceptions of women police in Bangladesh. In the Bangladesh police, women began their journey in the white dress, and they have come a long way since starting their journey. They now hold a relatively stronger position and greater competence both within the police force and across the country. The percentage of female employees in the police department increased from 4.63% in 2013 to 7.1% in 2022 (Bangladesh Police Women's Network, 2022). So, the gradual rise in the number of women working in the police force in Bangladesh certainly demonstrates the stronger position of women in that country.

Women in Bangladeshi society always accept sacrifices more readily than men. There is no exception in the case of women members of the Bangladesh police. Due to the family and social context, they must make many sacrifices, and it is not always possible for them to take advantage of institutional facilities for their family concerns. All these legacies are indicated in a different report on the context of India (Nataranjan, 2008). Women have had a difficult time since joining the police because the social context is not used to seeing women in the police force. At the same time, the country's society and people have not grasped the concept of accepting women's police uniforms. Overall, society continues to see women police from a diverse set of perspectives. A study conducted by Bell (1982) showed a different aspect in this context: society usually supports female cops.

No police station in Bangladesh has a woman officer-in-charge (OC) yet. In the history of women police, Bangladesh has not yet seen a woman OC, which is undoubtedly institutional incompetence. There are insufficient daycare centres, and female employees are dissatisfied with their maternity leave. Another study by Prenzler (2010) found similar evidences regarding maternal leave. There is also a negative attitude among the women members regarding sentry duty. But a study by Belknap (1996) showed that women used to have administrative duties like deskwork, indicating a diverse situation with the present study. All these problems create an unfavourable situation for women police institutionally. Approaches to sexual harassment of female members are unclear; they are hesitant to discuss it as it is not considered positive in society. A study by Martin (1980) found similar results when looking for sexual harassment in female police officers.

Negative perceptions of women police are socially created; however, such perceptions are not recognized by the existing social norms and values. It is a matter of hope that the perceptions have changed positively. Therefore, the number of women police and their activities has developed.

This study indicates that there has been a progress in the position of women

within police departments. However, various factors mentioned in this study hinder the better working condition of female police officers. The following suggestions may improve the working conditions of female police:

- Proportionate recruitment of women in every police unit and the presence of all posts is desirable so that the representation of women police in each unit will be enhanced.
- The duration of maternity leave should be increased from 6 months to 1 year. As a result, women police officials will get more time to look after their children.
- Every unit should have a daycare facility. Mothers do not have to worry about their kids while working if the daycare facilities are adequate.
- Having separate bathroom facilities for men and women in each unit is highly desirable.

Addressing these critical concerned issues could significantly contribute to the improvement of working conditions and job satisfaction for women in the police force.

CONCLUSION

The study shows that women in police departments are in a better position than previously. But for many factors, female police cannot continue focusing on their work. In that situation, certain details can be highlighted. The respect and attention that female police officers have for their work will significantly grow if the authorities pay strict attention to all these issues. Women are equally skilled at indoor and outdoor employment; the most notable proof is the respectable stride of women police. Women police officers are always working to uphold the rule of law equally with males. As a result, women are increasingly contributing to the Bangladesh Police in all areas. In some situations, women need more particular treatment than males. These amenities are frequently only deemed sufficient in some flats. The appeal and passion for women working in law enforcement will rise if all these needs are addressed to the greatest extent possible. Additionally, the equal rights of women and men should remain intact within the Bangladesh Police by implementing a few policies, such as day-care facilities in every unit, rotational duty hours for every employee and increasing maternity leave for women and creating a separate manual for women police.

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A Study of the Voluntary Return of the Bangladeshi Migrants from Libya: Factors for Migration and Risks

Laila Muntajeri Deena⁶

ABSTRACT

This study examines the motivational factors behind the migration of Bangladeshi migrants to Libya and identifies the risks and challenges faced by the migrants associated with their voluntary return to their home country. Incorporating this evidence from the literature reviews and the key informants' interviews, this research demonstrated lack of fixed source of income is the main push factor for migration followed by social and community level pressures for better income generation and higher income opportunity is the main pull factor for migration followed by the aspiration to settle down in Europe, especially in Italy as the final destination. It is also observed that the magnitude of difficulties and challenges experienced by the Bangladeshi migrants in Libya are higher than the driving forces for migration, leading to the voluntary return to their home country. This phenomenon of the voluntary return of the Bangladeshi migrants from Libya must be addressed through a combination of adequate reintegration support, building social awareness, pertinent counselling for the returnees, proper coordination among the parties involved in the repatriation and reintegration process and appropriate policy intervention with a view to discourage the unplanned migration for the potential migrants.

Keywords: Migrants, Voluntary return, Factors, Motivations, Risks

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INTRODUCTION

Background

The phenomenon of migration has been a part of human history for a long time. People have been moving from one place to another aspiring for better opportunities for jobs, health care, education as well as a comfortable standard of living. Evidences reveal that many Bangladeshi workers migrate abroad for better living and work opportunity (Hasan 2023; Rahman 2011a; 2011b). They are mainly driven by a lack of job opportunities. However, because of vulnerabilities and human traffickers many Bangladeshi nationals return to their home country. This research deals with the expectations and perils experienced by the Bangladeshi migrants who are destined towards Libya and voluntarily return due to some common reasons, such as: the feeling of insecurity, limited legal protection, joblessness, victims of human trafficking, confinement in detention centers, intercepted at sea while crossing the Mediterranean, boat capsized etc. The fate of Bangladeshi migrant workers, taken to Libya on false promises, is one of gross human rights violations. Those are lucky who are able to come back to Bangladesh, although heavily indebted. The fate of others, who are still trapped, is less certain. According to the Labor Counsellor of the Bangladesh embassy in Tripoli, an estimated 20,000 Bangladeshis are still in Libya, either waiting to return home or cross the Mediterranean to reach Italy (The Daily Star 2017). From the deception used by brokers in Bangladesh to traffic these individuals, to the torture and extortion, every aspect of this gruesome trade is criminal (The Daily Star 2017). As a contemporary phenomenon in the Italian maritime system, the upsurge of Bangladeshi nationals travelling irregularly into Italy crossing the Mediterranean was brought to the attention of the world in the middle of 2017 (Mannan 2017). According to a report published by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) 15,228 migrants from Bangladesh entered Italy over the Central Mediterranean Route (CMR) in 2022, with the bulk passing through Libya in transit. Bangladeshi immigrants made up slightly more than 14% of all immigrants who arrived in Italy, making them the third most common nationality (IOM 2023).

Problem Statement:

In the context of migration, "push factors" and "pull factors" are two categories that usually explain the reasons why people choose to leave their home country (push) or move to another country (pull) (Ferwerda & Gest 2021). Push factors refer to the conditions or circumstances in a person's home country that motivate them to depart (Urbański 2022). These factors can include political unrest, economic deprivation, insufficient job opportunities, natural disasters, oppression, or conflict (Djafar 2012). Pull factors, on the other hand, are the desirability or opportunities in a different

country that motivate individuals to relocate (Humera & Fatima 2017). These factors can include better scope of job, commendable wages, quality education, political stability, upgraded quality of life, family reunification, or better social services. The pattern of migration depends on both push and pull factors and the balance between them can differ on the basis of individual cases and the particular context of migration.

Many Bangladeshi nationals migrate abroad due to some considerable reasons, such as: insufficient income, low salary, unemployment, aspiration for higher income abroad, family encouragement, vulnerable economic condition at home country (Kibria 2008). Most of them sell their valuables, assets, land, properties, last resorts or borrow money on high rate of interests to gather money for migration to their desired destination. Among them, many international migrants return to Bangladesh every year. The process of returning to home country is not considered to be a smoother one since the returnees are confronted with several difficulties. Voluntarily returned migrants most often experience discrimination upon their return, wrongly offended as deported criminals which can lead to the feelings of frustration and stress in returning migrants (Islam 2018; Mamun & Hoque 2022). Along with the financial challenges these migrants face, the crisis situation frequently causes psychological trauma and, in some cases, bodily harm. Given their familiarity with the culture and environment, migrants returning to such impoverished conditions are eager to migrate again (typically back to the nation they fled), unknowing of the repercussions of doing so in a place that has recently seen civil war or political instability (Kelly & Wadud 2012). The factors that motivate people to migrate from Bangladesh to middle-east (especially to Libya) and the risks that often push migrants back to Bangladesh remain underrepresented in the current literature. This research aims to address this gap and provide an understanding of the issue associated with those factors and risks, taking Libya as a case.

Research Question and Objectives:

This study set out to explore the factors and risks associated with labor migration to and return from Libya. The research questions are –

- (i) what are the motivating factors for Bangladeshis to migrate to Libya
- (ii) what are the risks that force many migrants to return from Libya to Bangladesh?

Based on these questions, this research aims to achieve the following objectives:

- To identify and examine the factors that motivate Bangladeshis to migrate to Libya
- To explore the risks that force migrants to return to Bangladesh from Libya

Justification of the Study:

Despite an increase in violence against Bangladeshi migrants, there has been no discernible decrease in the number of Bangladeshis trying to migrate. Since remittances play a significant role in the GDP growth of the country, migration is still regarded as being important for both the state and for individuals (Ranjan 2016). In 2019 US\$ 18.32 billion was remitted to Bangladesh (BMET 2020), contributing to 40% of Bangladesh's total foreign exchange earnings and making the country the third highest recipient of remittance in South Asia (World Bank 2020).

This study is significant because it focuses on the experiences of the Bangladeshi migrant workers during their repatriation from Libya back to Bangladesh. This study is also important as it helps different agencies, International Organizations and the Government of Bangladesh to fix up their roles when they will deal with the issues regarding the voluntary return of the irregular migrants, specially from Libya. While there is a body of research on refugee return and a well established literature on how migrants decide whether and where to relocate, there has been far less study on why migrants decide to return. It is logical to assume that some of the factors that explain the decision to migrate may also explain the decision to return, such as the comparison of opportunities at home and abroad and the likelihood that it will be incorporated into broader family strategies (Koser & Kuschminder 2015). In this connection, this study adds to the existing body of knowledge on migration patterns, factors influencing migration decisions, and the risks migrants face during their journeys, particularly regarding the case of migration cases of Libya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In many places of the world, forced migration and displacement continue to be serious problems. Millions of people who have been forcibly displaced within their own countries- from Rwanda to Colombia and Sri Lanka- as well as generations of Palestinians in the Middle East- remain in a precarious situation, unsure of whether to choose integration into a new environment (when permitted by the authorities) or to wait for a chance to return to their home countries (Stefanovic, Loizides & Parsons 2015). If the 1990s were considered as a decade of repatriation, the previous 10 years are best defined as “a decade of protracted emergencies”. Intense conflict in Burundi, the Central African Republic, Iraq, Nigeria, South Sudan, Syria, Ukraine and Yemen has resulted in the creation of millions of new refugees. Meanwhile, protracted hostilities have persisted in nations like Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar, Somalia and Sudan (Crisp & Long 2016).

Several actors, including host nations, international agencies, non-governmental organizations, diasporas and civil society organizations and origin countries are involved in the enormous industry of return migration (Kuschminder 2017). For persons who want to go back to their home country, the UK has a number of assisted voluntary return (AVR) program. The most significant is the Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Program (VARRP), which is available to all applicants for asylum and those who have been denied, but there are other programs for specific nations, most notably Afghanistan (Black, Koser, Munk, Atfield, D'Onofrio & Tiemoko 2004).

Through the EU-IOM Joint Initiative coined as “Voluntary Humanitarian Return” (VHR) program, more than 106,700 migrants have been repatriated since 2017 from nations in North Africa, the Horn of Africa, the Sahel and the Lake Chad region to at least 46 countries of origin in Western, Central and Eastern Africa as well as Central, South and South-East Asia. IOM data shows that Nigeria, Mali, Niger, Bangladesh, Guinea, Sudan, The Gambia, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Senegal are the top 10 countries of origin for migrants repatriated from Libya through the VHR program (United Nations Human Rights 2022).

Because of the geographical location at the center of the North African Coast, Libya has extensively been used as a gateway by the migrants to reach Europe, specially Italy by boat (Morad & Gombac 2018). Due to its sizable informal economy and government policies that welcomed irregular migration along with regularization plans as a strategy to meet labor market demand, Italy has attracted irregular migrants (Castles, Cubas, Kim & Ozkul 2012). On the other hand, in comparison with the Middle-Eastern and South-East Asian countries, Europe has conventionally been regarded as a suitable destination for Bangladeshi migrants, especially for those who planned to settle down abroad for pretty long time. It is also found through research that specialized job opportunities, better health care system, ample opportunities for the realization of migrant's talent and potentialities, better scope of education for children etc. acted as the motivational forces for the long-term Bangladeshi migrants to opt for Europe and North America (Morad & Gombac 2018).

The goal and desire to migrate is a significant essential factor that interacts with various outside forces that influence migration to create the ultimate decision to actually relocate (Castelli 2018). The Bangladeshi people are instigated by their friends and family who have successfully travelled to Europe with the aid of brokers, known as “dalaals”, using the route with stops in Turkey or Tunisia (Middle East Eye 2020). The migrants from Libya to Bangladesh claimed that they had no plans to leave Libya, where they were employed regularly and were paid well. But they faced the difficulty to send remittances to Bangladesh through the Libyan system. Moreover, they were

concerned for their security because of the ongoing upheaval in the nation. They were forced to consider alternatives due to war, strife, and political unrest, and Italy was considered as a potentially simpler and closer location (Mollick 2016).

Since the Mediterranean emerges as an integrated path for the illegal migrants to be transported by sea, it is quite evident that migratory flows are constantly being adapted to the availability of opportunities and crossable routes. Taking into consideration, it appears that the functional expertise developed in the field of illegal maritime crossings from Libya has been occurred by organizational changes in the market taking place at a higher level, on a Mediterranean scale (Monzini 2007).

According to a Report on Trafficking in Persons: Libya, all migrants in Libya, including those looking for work there or passing through on their way to Europe, are especially vulnerable to sex and labor trafficking. In order to smuggle and traffic migrants into and through Libya, numerous armed groups, criminal gangs and networks, tribal organizations, smugglers, and traffickers conspire and compete. At the same time, they commit grave human rights abuses and violations against migrants, including torture, sexual abuse and exploitation, rape, extortion, ransom demands, theft, and forced labor (United States Department of State 2022).

Literature review found that many migrants in Libya are being sent back to the same unsustainable conditions that may have led them to leave in the first place, such as extreme poverty, ongoing food insecurity, including as a result of climate change, a lack of access to dignified jobs, health care, and education facilities, family separation, subpar living conditions, and refusal of access to the right to development. In addition, they are dealing with additional psychological, financial, and personal hardships as a result of their unsuccessful migration attempt and the traumatic experience they had in Libya (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 2022).

There is no denying the fact that returned migrants inevitably face acute difficulties of reintegration, starting from unemployment and social maltreatment to apathy and frustration. The absence of institutional support for reintegration is one of the biggest issues that the migrants encounter upon their return (Siddiqui 2003). Reintegration must take place in all three areas-economic, socio-cultural and safety and security-underscoring the significance of each area in the process of total reintegration and sustained return (Kuschminder 2017).

Notably, the issue remains in the public discourse due to continuous investigation from media and concerned non-government organizations. The government also remains answerable to these institutions. However, not many recent academic studies

have examined the issue to provide a comprehensive understanding. This research aimed to address this knowledge gap.

METHODOLOGY

This research aimed to explore and understand a real-life situation. Considering this objective, this study adopted a qualitative approach to address the research questions. A qualitative research method has been adopted in this research as it is easier to understand and carry out with one respondent at a time. This method is considered as more communicative and descriptive (Vaismoradi, Turunen, and Bondas 2013). Qualitative research methods provide insights into the experiences, perspectives, and beliefs of individuals in a specific context (Creswell and Poth 2018). Since this study aimed to identify, explore and examine various factors involving human participants in a real-life situation, using qualitative domain was deemed used to generate rich data and valuable insights. Interviews are useful method to apprehend participants experience and views (McIntosh and Morse 2015). The study has collected data from primary and secondary sources, including government documents, academic literature, and interviews with key stakeholders such as government officials and irregular migrant workers. Data was collected through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) method. KIIs are particularly significant because they allow researchers to gather in-depth information from key stakeholders who have unique knowledge and perspectives about a particular issue or topic. By conducting KIIs, researchers can point out respondents' real experiences and perspectives, which can help inform program planning or policy decisions.

For data collection, in-depth interviews have been conducted with 10 government officials (relevant embassy officials, officers from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Expatriate Welfare & Overseas Employment), two employees of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and 10 Bangladeshi migrant workers who voluntarily returned from Libya. These 22 interviews allowed the participants to share their experiences and perspectives on the topic. Purposive sampling method has been employed and a snowball technique was used. Informed consents were obtained in all cases. Each interview was guided by a questionnaire and lasted about an hour. The thematic areas were selected from literature reviews and the objectives of this research. The data was thereby analyzed by using thematic analysis.

One of the key limitations of this research is that it relied on data collected from a relatively small number of interviews. The results may not be comparable to other countries' contexts.

Data Analysis

To address the research questions, a thematic analysis method was applied. This analysis allowed the researcher a lot to organize and interpret the data and identify important trends, issues, or topics. The purpose of thematic analysis is to comprehend the patterns of meanings emerging from data on lived experiences (i.e. the informants' descriptions of experiences pertinent to the research topic in, for example, interviews or narratives). Data that must be textual in nature are used as the starting point for the analysis, which seeks to group meanings into patterns and then themes. In a thematic analysis, the researcher aims to comprehend the meanings that are ingrained in experiences and to textually convey these meanings while completing the analysis (Sundler, Lindberg, Nilsson, & Palmér 2019). This thematic analysis method was used to work out the meaning behind the words people used. This was realized by discovering repeating themes in text. These themes revealed key insights into data and can be quantified.

RESULTS/FINDINGS

To bring the findings, the adaptation one-to-one interviews (KII) have been done precisely. Based on the informants' views and opinion, several thematic areas were identified. Some of the identified thematic areas which acted as the driving forces for the Bangladeshi migrants to migrate to Libya and the sufferings they undergo and the difficulties faced by them compelled them for their voluntary return to the home country, which are discussed below:

Thematic explanation for understanding the factors for migration

Unemployment and inadequate income

Data from the respondents revealed that unemployment and having limited access to income opportunities are the main driving forces for migration to other countries including Libya. It was also found that Bangladeshi migrants who returned from Libya were facing either employment crisis or did not have any fixed source of income in their home country before they started for Libya. Most of them were earning their living by working in the agricultural fields of others, in the grocery shops, on a daily basis, as a salesman, as mason, as taxi driver etc. A newspaper Article delineates a survey report by the IOM on more than 11,000 prospective migrants in 64 districts of Bangladesh. The report shows that 73% of the respondents chose to migrate in order to grab better employment and income opportunities. There were some other common reasons, such as, 13% of them opted for migration because of their financial hardship while 11% wanted to go abroad to upgrade their social status (The Daily Star 2023).

Social and community level pressures

The data derived for this study purpose indicated that the insufficient extent of income generation is more compounded with social and community level drivers/pressures in some districts/regions like Madaripur, Shariatpur, Faridpur, Gopalganj, Narshingdi, Sylhet, sunamganj, Habiganj, Kishoreganj, Cumilla, Noakhali, Brahmanbaria, Gazipur, Jamalpur, Mymensingh, Satkhira, Barguna, Chandpur, Kurigram, Manikganj and Munshiganj etc. where a good number of migrants are out of the country. These driving forces have demonstrated effect to the individual families to migrate their young family members to outer world including Libya by adopting whatever means, mostly by irregular channel/pathway.

Particular age group as motivators

Bangladeshi migrants to Libya generally belong to the youth age group ranging from 25-30 years old. Most of them get inspired by their friends, peers and relatives. Literature in this regard suggests that besides the individual-level decisions, young people's decision-making process to migrate can also depend on the factors like the overall macroeconomic condition, access to labor market, and institutional environments in the home country (Milasi 2020). Feedback from the respondents also reveals that young people of this particular age group are motivated by themselves since they have insufficient access to job market in the home country and are mostly influenced by the same age group who had already migrated to Libya with a view to reach Italy as their final destination.

Aspiration to settle down in Europe

Libya had been considered as hotspot being it a transit point, from where Bangladeshi migrants along with nationals from other countries had been facilitated by smuggler group to send by boat to Europe, particularly Italy as a popular destination for migration over the years. According to the Annual Statistics Report published by the EU's border agency Frontex, around 8,667 Bangladeshi Nationals entered the EU block in the year 2022 irregularly. Among the group of people, 7,574 approached through the central Mediterranean route, 604 through the eastern Mediterranean and 437 through the western Balkans. The Frontex Statistics also reveals that majority of the Bangladeshi migrants' final destination was Italy who reached EU irregularly in 2022. In the same report, it shows that approximately 150,000 Bangladeshi migrants live in Italy engaged with different sectors/jobs as per the information received from the Bangladesh Embassy in Italy. This number of Bangladeshi nationals in Italy is higher than the number of Bangladeshi nationals in any other EU country. It may be because of the lenient attitude of Italy towards the foreigners and the occasional

legalization procedure of Italy for the irregular migrant workers (The Business Standard 2022).

Desperate urge to improve the existing socio-economic condition

Respondents shared that the impulses for migrants to make the journey across the Mediterranean are often driven by a combination of factors, including economic hardship. Many migrants hope to find better opportunities for themselves and their families in Europe. However, the journey itself is often incredibly dangerous and risky, particularly for those who are being smuggled or trafficked by criminal organizations.

Alluring promises of the middlemen or “Dalals” for better work opportunity abroad

Data pointed to the fact that most of the migrants had to go through a chain of middlemen (across the country) to reach Libya with false promise that they would be ended up to European country, particularly Italy with better income opportunity and hence would have a better life. For this, they give the ‘Dalals’ 4 lakh taka to 16 lakh taka to go to Italy. In such cases, they mostly migrate through irregular channel without signing proper papers/documents. The Bangladeshi migrants are not even provided with the same jobs as they were promised before migration.

Associated risks leading to voluntary return

Human rights abuses and exploitation

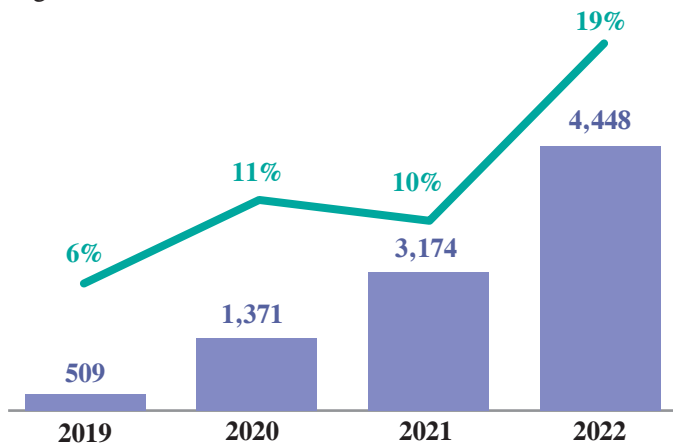
Bangladeshi migrants in Libya are often vulnerable to human trafficking and exploitation. Respondents shared that human traffickers often lured migrants with false promises of work and a better life in Europe. However, Bangladeshi migrants have mostly been sold or traded by the authorities to the traffickers. Some traffickers may target migrants who are in detention centers or otherwise vulnerable. The lack of effective governance and the presence of armed groups and criminal networks have made it difficult to protect the rights and safety of the migrants.

The untold sufferings to perform the “Game”:

There is a popular term used by the mafia/smugglers group as ‘Game’ by trying to send migrants to their destination, here in case Italy by rickety/un-seaworthy boat. In many cases, incidences of boat capsizing happened. Many of them lost their life, while only a handful of can be rescued.

The following graph shows the number of migrants from Bangladesh intercepted and returned to Libya and percentage it represents of the total number of migrants returned by year. In 2022, a total of 4,448 migrants from Bangladesh were intercepted and returned to Libya while crossing the Mediterranean Sea. As figure 1 shows, the percentage of migrants from Bangladesh that are prevented to cross the Mediterranean and are deported back to Libya has also increased since 2019 (IOM 2023).

Figure1: Migration Data



Source: International Organization for Migration, March 2023

Lack of legal status

Interviews with respondents revealed that many Bangladeshi migrants in Libya are undocumented and have no legal status, making them vulnerable to arrest and detention by authorities. They are often unable to access basic services such as healthcare. They may also face legal challenges, such as being detained or deported, and may struggle to access basic services such as healthcare. Migrants who are rescued from the Mediterranean or who are victims of trafficking may lack legal protection, which can make them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

Predicament of oppression by “Mafia”

Data revealed that migrants become stranded at Libya without having proper documentation and ended up in detention centers or at the hands of smugglers group called “Mafia” - a criminal gang, who works under transnational smuggling group. Migrants’ passports are taken away by the smuggler to make them more vulnerable and migrants’ loose authority to themselves. Migrants are tortured and abused by the

smuggler to persuade their family members at home country to send more money for their safety of life otherwise their life will be endangered.

Troubles in sending Remittance

Respondents shared that the difficulties faced by Bangladeshi migrants in sending remittances from Libya reflect the broader challenges faced by migrants in the country. The ongoing conflict and instability, combined with the lack of access to financial services, make it difficult for migrants to send money home and support their families.

Dire financial situation after return

Respondents shared that returnees face unavoidable economic challenges upon their return, as they have spent significant amounts of money on their migration journey and have lost their sources of income in Bangladesh. This makes it difficult for them to reintegrate into society and support themselves and their families.

Traumatized migrant workers

Data indicated that those who are rescued from the Mediterranean or who are victims of trafficking to Libya become traumatized and carry through a terrible experience struggling with physical and psychological injuries.

Perils in the Detention Centers

The Officials in the Bangladesh Embassy in Libya informed that many Bangladeshi migrants in Libya are detained in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions, sometimes for extended periods of time. The situation for Bangladeshi migrants in Libya, including those who are in detention centers, is very challenging and difficult. The migrants in detention centers in Libya face a range of abuses, including torture and extortion. The exact number of Bangladeshi migrants in detention centers in Libya is difficult to determine, as many are held in unofficial and unregulated facilities. The number of migrants from Bangladesh present in detention centers in Libya also remained high.

Lack of support networks and social ties

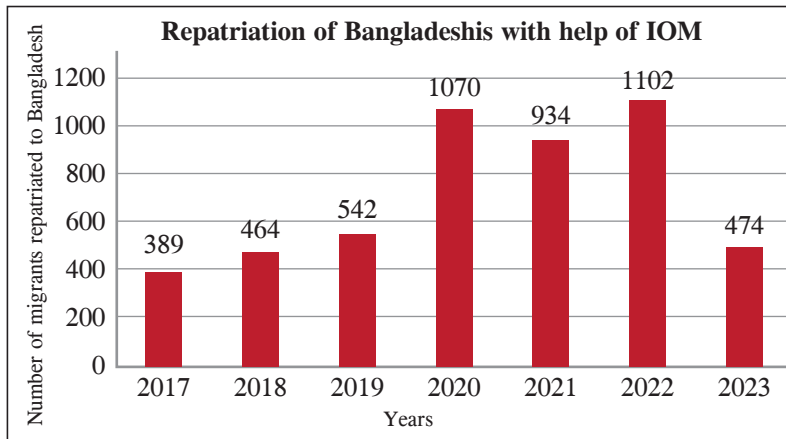
Data revealed that the absence of robust support networks, including family, friends, or community connections; make the experience of migration even more challenging. The feeling of isolation and longing for familiar surroundings and support is also considered to be a significant factor in their decision to return.

DISCUSSION

Through the thematic and narrative analysis of this study, it is revealed that the extent of risks experienced by the Bangladeshi migrants in Libya leading to the voluntary return to their home country, are much higher than the motivating factors for their migration. The Bangladesh Embassy in Libya has been working to facilitate the voluntary return of Bangladeshi migrants who wish to return home voluntarily. The Embassy has been providing legal assistance to Bangladeshi migrants in Libya, including issuing travel documents and providing other necessary support. The Embassy has also been working closely with international organizations such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to facilitate the voluntary return of Bangladeshi migrants by arranging repatriation flights for them who wish to return home. These flights are often organized in coordination with the IOM Libya. It is also obvious from the data derived from the Bangladesh Embassy in Libya regarding the increasing number of repatriated Bangladeshis from Libya that the difficulties and sufferings faced by the Migrants are too much to endure compelling them to return to the home country. As such, the Embassy has been engaging in diplomatic efforts with the Libyan government and other stakeholders to improve the situation of migrants in the country and to facilitate the safe and voluntary return of Bangladeshi migrants.

The following graph shows (Figure 2) the number of year-wise repatriated migrants to Bangladesh with the help of IOM. It reveals the fact that compared to the previous three years (2017,2018,2019), in the next consecutive three years (2020,2021,2022) there is a conspicuous increase in the number of Bangladeshi migrants repatriated to Bangladesh from Libya with the help of IOM:

Figure 2: Data of repatriation



Source: Bangladesh Embassy, Tripoli, Libya, May 2023

CONCLUSION

When deciding whether to move or stay, a particular person's ethnic background and the financial and social support of their family play a major role (Castelli 2018). Many Bangladeshis want to escape poverty by undergoing a perilous journey organized by the traffickers because of their limited employment opportunities in home country. After examining the various factors for migration, it can be concluded that several push factors acted as the motivational agents for the Bangladeshi migrants to migrate to Libya, which include limited job opportunities, poverty, lack of economic development, low wage, family instigation, peer pressure. Pull factors, on the other hand, include better livelihood, higher wages, aspiration to go to Europe, especially to Italy as the destination. However, Bangladeshi migrants in Libya are often vulnerable to human trafficking and exploitation. Sometimes, they are the victims of untold sufferings in the detention centers. These perils are aggravated when the Bangladeshi migrants are intercepted and returned to Libya, failing to cross the Mediterranean to reach Italy as their desired destination. In this dire situation, migrants are returned to their home country voluntarily bearing with the grim experiences of physical and psychological wounds. Returning migrants often face various reintegration problems when they come back to their home country which may include economic difficulties, social discrimination, loss of social networks, psychosocial challenges, lack of access to support services etc. Therefore, it is extremely important to arrange for counselling, debriefing and reintegration for the returning migrants (Chy, Uddin & Ahmmed 2023). Moreover, proper legal framework for migration is utmost important. Without a significant increase of legal migration procedures, irregular migration is likely to continue due to the ability of individuals involved in moving migrants to quickly shift their routes and the ease with which globalization makes this feasible (Fakae 2019). A comprehensive approach involving government agencies, civil society organizations, and community support is crucial to address these reintegration problems to keep away from the precarious migration trend of the potential migrants of the country.

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