

Mapping Good Governance in Service Delivery: A Study on Some Selected Upazila Land Offices

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Abstract

Land is an indispensable instrument of human survival. In Bangladesh, Upazila Land Offices are designated to provide land related services to the people. As a part of improving the state of public service delivery, government plans to extend the National Integrity Strategy networks to Upazila Levels. Hence, it deems necessary to know the current status of governance in Upazila Land Offices and the factors affecting it. The study tried to gather the respondents' perception on institutional and operational capacity, legal framework, participation and trust on Upazila Land Offices. Besides, a statistical model was developed based on the assumption that good governance is a function of 'political commitment, efficiency of the service providers, peoples empowerment and digitization'. The findings suggest that inefficiency and insincerity of the staffs are serious concern; but the trend shows slower progress in different components. Performance of the civil society members in different land related committees is not satisfactory and trustworthy to common populace; hence participation or empowerment is not a concern to them. However, political commitment, efficiency of the service providers and digitization significantly affect the level of good governance in Land Offices. The current state of good governance practices in the land offices is depressing and suggests policy intervention.

Keywords: Upazila Land Office, Governance, Service Delivery, Empowerment, Political Commitment

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1.0 Introduction

Land is very important for any nation since it is related with birth, survival and death of all its species and development of the human society. Government of Bangladesh has also given adequate importance on our land administration and management system. But unfortunately the land administration and management system in Bangladesh has not attained the expected momentum; it is still characterized by inefficiencies and corrupt practices. People experience harassment, maltreatment

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and non-cooperative attitude from the service providers in the Upazila Land Offices (ULOs). The Government of Bangladesh has already undertaken efforts to provide quality land related services to people through improved land administration and management system. Although there are signs of improvement, land governance suffers from challenges such as poor institutional and operational capacity, dearth of concrete rules and regulations, non-accommodating attitude from service providers, inefficient and inadequate resources or logistic supports.

1.1 Statement of problem

Land is the most important endowment for economic growth. The service delivery system in land offices is conventional, manual and time intensive. Poor quality of land record and land management is the principal obstacle to improving public service delivery. Complicated and ambiguous land records creates tenure related dispute and incite malpractices (Hossain 2015). As a result, the government is deprived of land revenue and land ‘grabbers manipulate ownership through forged documents’ (Barakat 2001). Citizens find land related law, rules, regulations and official procedure as complex, confusing and the minute formalities act as a repulsive force to keep them away from land office. Hence, access to land related service has become complicated, middlemen dependent and bribery oriented. Different studies detected lack of institutional and operational capacity, lack of clear cut rules and regulations, lack of trust and lack of effective participation of service seekers are the main impediments for promoting quality land related services to citizens in Bangladesh.

1.2 Significance of the study

Good governance in service delivery of land offices is important for efficient and effective land administration. As an endeavor to improve public service delivery (PSD), the government plans to extend the National Integrity Strategy (NIS) networks up to Upazila Levels. For better intervention and policy making, it is imminent to understand the present status, the loopholes, the bottlenecks and potentials (Besley and Ghatak 2007) beforehand. The findings, based on the perception of the respondents, put some light on the existing realities of land governance and might suggest appropriate policy intervention.

1.3 Scope of the study

Poor performances of service delivery in the ULOs are widely criticized. Improvement of service delivery is the ultimate outcome of good governance. Simplified and efficient public service delivery has far reaching impact on poverty alleviation (Besley and Ghatak 2007). However, there has been a paucity of studies on governance and service delivery related issues in ULOs. So, knowing of the prevailing condition helps in effective intervention. In order to keep the study simple and doable only four ULOs were selected purposefully from two Divisions.

1.4 Objectives of the research

Compared to overall scenario of PSD across the government, land offices rank lower. Hence, the study aims to (a) make an assessment of the status of Governance in service delivery of land offices; (b) identify factors that affect good governance in service delivery of land offices; and (c) suggest measures for improving service delivery in the land offices.

1.5 Limitations

The most important limitation is the sample size as it is not representative enough to generalize the observations for whole of the country. In fact, it could not cover adequately representative number of ULOs in assessing the problem of good governance in service delivery in the Upazila Land Offices (ULO). Respondent's bias is another important limitation of the study. Some respondents may agree with all the questions/statement. In order to address the respondent's bias 'repetition' of asking questions has been maintained.

1.6 Structure of the paper

The paper comprises six sections. Second section incorporates a precise description of relevant literature. Third section outlines the methodologies used in the research. Information collected during the field study is presented in fourth section and analyzed as well. Fifth section presents some policy recommendations. And last but not least, the final chapter concludes the report based on the findings of the study.

2.0 Literature review

Governance is defined "as the exercise of political, economic, and administrative authority to manage a nation's affairs (UNDP 2002). It is the complex mechanisms, processes, relationships and institutions, through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their rights and mediate their differences. Kettani (2009) identified eight indicators of good governance such as participation, rule of law, effectiveness and efficiency, equitable and inclusiveness, responsiveness, transparency, accountability and consensus orientation.

Delivering public services efficiently and effectively is a great challenge Worldwide. Public Services are 'delivered by a nexus of relationships between beneficiaries, politicians and service providers' (Besley and Ghatak 2007). Goetz and Gaventa (2000) propose supply side (better equipment, improvements in quality, staffing and user charges) and demand side approaches for its improvement. Mehrotra (2006) identifies poor quality, low performance, limited responsiveness and weak accountability as the systematic problems of effective service delivery. These malpractices do not result from financial resources constraints and allocative inefficiencies alone, but also from bureaucratic and organizational context. The

study also argues that deep democratic decentralization i.e. political commitment leads to effective service delivery. Fiszbein et al. (2011) emphasize on appropriate diagnosis of shortfall to focus on key problems.

White (1996) uses participation as synonymous to ‘empowerment’. Because, participatory governance improves efficiency and sustainability of public service delivery, empowers citizens and deepens democracy through holding the service providers or public officials accountable (Hickey and Mohan 2004). Speer (2012) found mixed benefits of participatory governance. He suggests strong motivation of public officials rather than participatory governance for improvements in performance, service quality and well-being. However, Transparency and Accountability Initiatives (TAIs) are very important in this regard (Joshi 2013). The idea behind the grassroots approach is that community members are the people who benefit from a successful program and so may have better incentives to monitor than disinterested central government bureaucrats (Stiglitz 2002). However, grassroots monitoring may also be prone to capture by local elites (Bardhan and Mookherjee 2006). Sen’s (2005) ‘rights and capability approach’ tells that people should be free to choose what they want to do, have the functional ability to put those choices into action, and have an enabling environment that allows them to actually perform those actions. Thus community participation controls directly the quantity and quality of services provided (Joshi 2010; McGee and Gaventa 2010).

Trust is a better and humane tool for managing organizational life than the hierarchical authority or direct surveillance (Sydow 1998). It develops out of commonly shared norms among the members of the community and act as lubricant for smooth functioning of the society (Fukuyama 2000). The more the actors trust each other, the better they cooperate (Hardin 2006). In this study *trust* is explained in terms of cooperative behavior and positive attitude from service providers and satisfaction from service recipients in respect of service delivery. Establishment of better relationships among the players is essential for strengthening institutional capability. Trust and better relationship promotes customer satisfaction. Satisfaction, in turn, emanates from ownership, information sharing, competence, openness, dependence, communication, trust and respect on two parties concerned (Sanzo et al. 2003 cited in Tuladhar and Molen 2003). Echoing almost the same Knutson (1988) mentions that cleanliness and comfort, security and value for money i.e. prompt service and courtesy of the staff influence the human side of customer satisfaction.

TIB (2015) study identifies lack of strong political will, coordination gaps, inadequate budget, poor accountability, lack of digitization and poor records maintenance as the main challenges of land governance in Bangladesh. It also recommended training for the officials, one-stop service, public hearing and educating people on land related laws and procedures for improved service delivery. In addition lack of trust, reluctance of the service provider, lack of awareness about rights and low demand of redressal for unruly behavior and low bargaining power are the main obstacles to service delivery in rural Bangladesh (Aminuzzaman 2013).

There has been a dearth of studies on good governance in respect of land service delivery in Bangladesh. Most studies are mainly concerned with public sector governance policies, regimes, reality and performance. However, the literature reveals that lack of political will, fragile participation, poor accountability, inadequate budget, poor land records, lack of coordination among departments involved in land services are the main challenges of good governance in service delivery.

This study focuses on institutional and operational capacity, regulatory framework, and participation and trust to assess good governance in service delivery of ULOs. Therefore, the proposed study can be of great use to fill the existing gaps in the literature of good governance and service delivery in ULOs from the perspectives of both service providers and service recipients in Bangladesh.

3.0 Research methodology

It is estimated that almost 76.58% (Barakat and Roy 2007) of court cases in Bangladesh are originated out of land litigation. Hence, Upazila land office is an important frontline service providing public office. Hence, the study aims to know-

- a. What is the current status of good governance in ULOs?
- b. What factors contribute to good governance (in terms of efficient service delivery) in ULOs?

In order to focus on key issues, the number of independent variables was restricted into those four namely institutional and operational capacity, concrete and simplified legal framework, active and positive participation of the stakeholders, mutual trust between service recipients and service providers against dependent variable 'good governance' which ultimately signifies the level of 'improved service delivery'.

3.1 Description of model

It is assumed that good governance³ is a function of political commitment, efficiency of the service providers, citizen empowerment and digitization of the services of the ULOs.

So, it can be formulized below-

$$GG_i = f_{i=1}^{50} (pol_com, efi_sp, p_emp, digit)$$

$$\text{Or, } GG_i = \alpha_i + \beta_{1i} pol_com + \beta_{2i} efi_SP + \beta_{3i} p_emp + \beta_{4i} digi + \delta_i$$

Here, α = constant term

GG = Good Governance

pol_com = Political Commitment

3. Good Governance has eight well-recognized indicators (Kettani 2009). However, depending on the context and target of this study the above mentioned four variables/indicators are used to fathom the status of good governance in ULOs.

efi_SP= Efficiency of the Service Providers

p_emp=Empowerment of Citizenry

digi=Digitization of the services in the Upazila Land Office

δ =Error term

In order to run the regression on the above mentioned model, the respondents' perception on good governance in the land offices and how far the selected independent variables affect the dependent variable was measured at a scale of five. From the literatures consulted, it is assumed that all the independent variables individually affect the dependent variable positively. However, the small sample size and scale could be insufficient; hence there is possibility of some sort of biasness or statistical problem influence the result.

The hypothesis here is (holding all other things constant)

$H_0: \beta_1 = \beta_2 = \beta_3 = \beta_4 = 0$ (the independent variables have no effect on dependent variable)

$H_1: \beta_1 = \beta_2 = \beta_3 = \beta_4 \neq 0$ (at least one of the independent variables affects the dependent variable)

3.2 Sample and data

The study basically focuses on first hand data from the field. For harnessing the better result, one of the best and one of the weak performing ULOs from Rangpur Division and the same from Khulna Division were selected for the study and a total of 50 respondents were interviewed by using a semi-structured questionnaire. For service recipients, different classes were focused to capture the maximum diversity in opinion.

Only 10% of the respondents were female and the rest of them were male. Most of those females were service providers. It is evident that very low number of women, as service recipient, visits ULOs. Minimum age of the respondents was 27 and the maximum was 71 years with an average of almost 46 years. Around 62% of them having at least graduation degree and about 20% of them had SSC or lower educational qualification. By profession, 48% of them were in public service and the rest were from diverse background ranging from elected representatives, teacher, farmer to housewives.

A mixed approach of qualitative and quantitative had been used to interpret the data. For quantitative analysis correlation and simple/multiple linear regression were run by using SPSS and STATA 13.

4.0 Data analysis and findings

4.1 Institutional and operational capacity

Institutional and operational capacity is explained in terms of human resources, efficiency of staff, citizen charter, budget allocation and management style of Upazila land offices.

4.1.1 Human resources

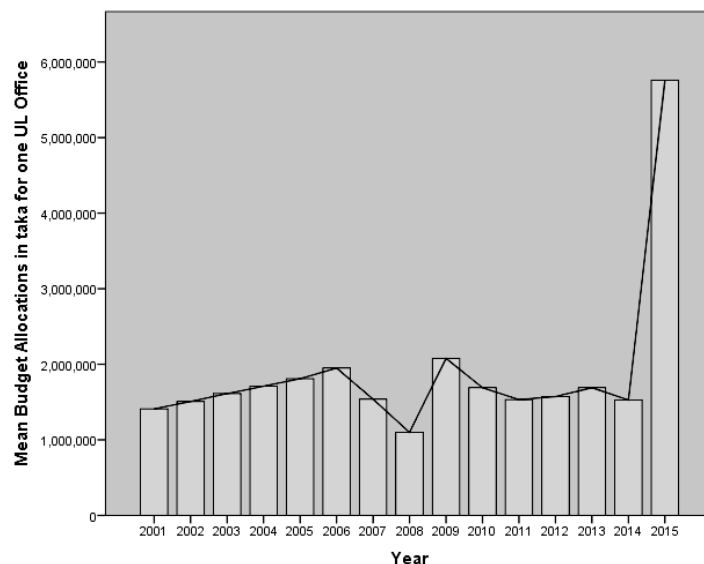
Human resource is an important area for ‘measuring the quality of governance’ (Fiszbein et al. 2011). The information of the ULOs indicates presence of adequate manpower against the sanctioned posts. But the Service Providers find existing manpower set-up insufficient to cope up with the increasing work load in the recent time. Thus, the responses push for the right sizing of the prevailing human resources set-up in the ULOs.

4.1.2 Efficiency

Efficiency of the officers and staffs of ULO play pivotal role in improving governance through rendering quick, quality and reliable services. Majority of the respondents (58%) evaluated the level of efficiency of the staff as moderate; whereas only 30% claimed it as good. However, it varies considerably in two Divisions. Interestingly, around 36% of the Service Recipients mention the efficiency of the Service Providers as very good whereas for the Service Providing respondents, it is only about 4.5%. It is encouraging that service providers evaluate themselves hard and feel the necessity of improvement. About 96% of the responses are in favour of need of training for the ULO staffs for improving their knowledge, skills, efficiency and professionalism.

4.1.3 Budget

Need-based budgetary allocation is an important component for promoting good governance in service delivery (Besley and Ghatak 2007). Around 81% respondents opined that allocated budget for ULOs was insufficient. The following graph explains the trend of budget allocation in one Upazila land office.



Graph 1. Trend in Budget Allocation in a ULO

Financial resource is an important component for improved basic services delivery (Joshi 2006). Insufficient budget allocation restricts the ULOs to introduce best practices, innovations and new style of management. The budget allocation shows an upward trend since 2001 to 2006 and falls to lowest during the non-party caretaker government in 2008. After 2009, it shows decreasing tendency till 2014. However, in 2015 budget allocation had a jumping increase to keep pace with the countrywide innovation, refurbishment and improved service delivery campaign.

4.1.4 Use of ICT tool

Use of ICT tools produce quality public services by reducing time, cost and visit and promote innovation, convenience, responsiveness. In this context ULOs of Khulna Division are in a better position by offering at least one digital service to the clients. It points to the requirement of policy intervention, budget and skilled manpower in promoting digitization.

4.1.5 Citizen charter

Citizen Charter informs the clients about documents, time and fees required for the services, and process as well. The ULOs set the citizen charter, with standard features, in visible places. However, only in 46% cases stipulated time limit is followed and in almost 52% cases it is not or rarely followed. It indicates that the spirit of citizen charter has not been properly upheld in delivering services.

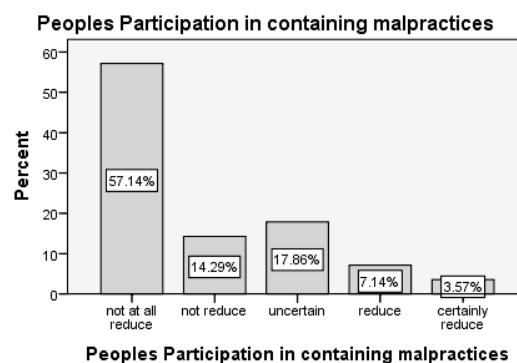
4.2 Legal framework

Legal framework includes the relevant laws, rules and regulations, circulars, orders etc. by which the ULOs are guided. Strict compliance of a sound legal framework ensures transparency and strengthens accountability through dissemination of information to citizens about their rights, service standards and performance (Fiszbein et al. 2011). About 44% respondents claimed that the existing rules and regulations are inadequate to provide effective and efficient service delivery. Although 42% respondents find the land related rules and regulations are easily accessible, 58% demand simplification. However, about 82% respondents emphasized on the publication of simplified version of commonly used rules and regulations in a compendium form for accelerating easy and comfortable access.

4.3 Participation

It is assumed that participatory governance improves the ‘efficiency and sustainability of public service delivery as well as the match between public services and beneficiaries’ preferences’. For this to happen, citizens are incorporated in committees when it is required by relevant circulars and policies. Almost 16% respondents do not know about the civil society representation in different land

related management committees. Performances of the civil society members' in different land related committees were not visible and hence almost 32% of the respondents were uncertain whether this inclusion benefits the general people or not. About 52% respondents pronounced that draft rent-roll is not displayed for stakeholders' opinion, before finalization. Only about 24% respondents opined that it is shown to somebody only if he wishes. The overall scenario of public hearing, as a tool of participation, is gloomy. Although 62% of the respondents confirm commencement of public hearing on land related issues, around 28% respondents do not even know about it. Although 56% service providing respondents nodded that people's participation reduces malpractices in ULOs, around 57% of the service receiving respondents think opposite.



Graph 2: Service recipients view on people's participation in containing malpractices

This finding, in fact, goes against the established norms of participation. Usually the local elites (political or otherwise) are included in the committees. The service recipients fear that those elites might capture land offices in the name of people's participation, bias the public officials and dominate the process of service delivery. This phenomenon can be described as 'elite capture'⁴ phobia.

4.5 Trust

For mapping the trust of clients, perception about behaviour and sincerity of the service providers and customers' satisfaction were considered. It is believed that equal, fair and just treatment and credible service delivery in time promotes citizen's confidence on service providers. Patient hearing to the service recipients is an

4. Elite capture is a process whereby resources or the benefit designated for the larger population are usurped by a few individuals of superior status—be it economic, political, educational, ethnic, or otherwise. Individuals or groups take advantage of government programs aimed at distributing resources or funds to the general public by using their elite influence to direct such assistance in such a way that it primarily benefits the elite group.

important ingredient in this regard. About 54% of the service receiving respondents experienced adequate allotment of time from the officer for resolving their issues whereas around 46% respondents opined negative. About 82% respondents replied that the service recipients were allowed to submit the required documents later on or during the hearing of mutation case.

Table 1. Managing the Mutation case disposal

| Mutation Case | Percentage of responses |
|--|-------------------------|
| Disposed on application serial | 38.0 |
| Urgency of the Service Recipients considered | 40.0 |
| On report from ULAO | 4.0 |
| Mutation Assistant/ KGO determines | 12.0 |
| No serial maintained | 6.0 |

Government has the instruction to dispose the mutation cases based on the serial number assigned during submission of application. However, there is always urgency to meet. About 38% mentioned about compliance of the above instruction whereas in around 40% cases the urgency of the service recipients were considered as well. The results demonstrate that service recipients experience a balanced mixture of strict adherence to the rule and sympathetic treatment as well. About 74% respondents evaluated the service providers as moderately sincere to sincere against a considerable 20% not sincere. In this connection, about 78% respondents advocated for training to bring a positive change in the attitude and mindset of the service providers. The higher the satisfaction level of the service recipients, the higher is their confidence on service providers. Astonishing 61% service recipients are not satisfied with the service provided by the ULOs against a mere 32% satisfied respondents. This finding calls for more meaningful and objective policy intervention for improving satisfaction level of service recipients through improved service delivery.

4.6 Inferential analysis

For quantitative analysis of the factors that affect good governance (the dependent variable), the study selected four independent variables namely political commitment, efficiency of the service providers, people's empowerment and digitization. Respondents' perceptions, on how those factors influence the dependent variable, were gathered at a scale of five. A pair wise correlation at 5% significance level shows that the dependents and independent variables were significant and positively correlated.

Table2. Pair wise correlation between Good Governance and other independent variables

| Good Governance (independent variable) | 'r' |
|---|---------|
| Political Commitment | 0.6833* |
| Efficiency of service Providers | 0.7979* |
| People's Empowerment | 0.7187* |
| Digitization | 0.8044* |

* Significant at the 5% level.

Source: Field data using SPSS.

Table 3: Regression result of inferential model (Good Governance is the dependent variable)

| Variables | Coefficient | Std. Err. | t | P> t | Test Diagnostics |
|-----------|-------------|-----------|------|-------|---|
| Pol_Com | 0.199 | 0.086 | 2.32 | 0.025 | No of Obs = 50 F (4, 45) = 32.33 Prob> F = 0.00 R-squared = 0.74 Adj R-squared = 0.72 |
| Ef_SP | 0.348 | 0.154 | 2.27 | 0.028 | |
| P_Emp | 0.012 | 0.121 | 0.10 | 0.922 | |
| Digi | 0.272 | 0.118 | 2.30 | 0.026 | |
| Constant | 0.907 | 0.319 | 2.84 | 0.007 | |

The coefficient for political commitment is 0.199 and P value for it is 0.025. The result indicates that political commitment positively and significantly affects good governance in the Upazila Land Offices of the study area. Service providers efficiency, when increases one unit, the good governance of the office also goes up for 0.348 units. Similarly, Digitization also has positive and significant effect on good governance, the dependent variable. Interestingly, Peoples empowerment has positive relationship with good governance but it is insignificant; meaning the null hypothesis for this variable cannot be rejected.

From the probability statics it can be cocluded that all the variables, except peoples empowerment, have significant impact on good governance. It means that the null hypotheses are rejected. We had the alternative hypothesis that at least one of the variables is significantly different from the null. From the result it is seen that three variables have significant impact on the dependent variable. Moreover, the R-squared value (0.74) and F-distribution value indicates the model is quite good.

5.0 Recommendations

The study suggests for some policy implications/recommendations for improving governance in service delivery of the Upazila land Offices (ULOs). In order to

provide efficient and effective services there should be an adequate manpower set up in the ULOs;

Enhancing efficiency of the officers and staff is the most important issue for improving good governance in service delivery of the ULOs. They should be provided with appropriate training for improving their efficiency so that they can render efficient, effective and quality services to the service recipients;

Budget is the most important component for implementing reform initiatives. There should be provision for adequate budget for the Upazila Land Offices to meet digital services. Digital services should be provided to reduce corrupt practices and bring transparency and accountability in service delivery of the land offices;

Simplification of cumbersome land rules and regulations is required for rendering better land services to the service recipients. There should be proper measures for making simplified version of rules and regulations available to the service recipients if possible in the form of compendium. A law centre/cell/corner should be there at the Upazila Land Office for easy access to land rules and regulation;

Attitudinal change of the service providers can create momentum in generating trust and satisfaction of the service recipients. The service providers should be trained with proper motivation to bring about some positive change towards their interaction with the service recipients;

Proper implementation of the Citizen Charter (CC) is required for delivering efficient, effective and quality services to the service recipients. There should be an effective Monitoring and Evaluation framework to monitor and supervise the service delivery of the Upazila Land Offices;

In fine, Political commitment is very important for bringing about change and innovation in service delivery of Upazila Land Offices. Political commitment can also help remove 'elite phobia' of the service recipients of Upazila Land Offices.

6.0 Conclusion

Quality of governance and efficiency of different end service providing offices have come under scrutiny in recent years. The study findings suggest that the manpower set-up needs revisit depending on the work load of the ULOs. Efficiency level of the staffs of ULOs shows a tendency from moderate to good at a scale of five. It becomes a matter of concern when only 4.5% of the service providing respondents termed it as very good in their self-evaluation. Budget allocation to such an important office was very insufficient; however it shows a huge jump in recent years. This demands better attention of government to ULOs. Although ULOs have visibly placed citizen charter including important features, it shows a slower progress towards introduction of digital services. Simplified version of frequently

essential land related acts, rules, regulations etc. should be made available in the form of a compendium or through establishment of a law corner. It appears that the performance of the civil society members in different land related committees is not visible and trustworthy to common populace. Hence, about 71% of the service recipients believe that participation of civil society members would not reduce the mal practices. This might be due to 'elite capture' phobia of the general mass. Although the staffs are moderately sincere, transparency and customer satisfaction are still big issues for ULOs. The attitude of the service providers need to be changed through rigorous training. Political commitment, efficiency of the service providers and digitization affect the level of good governance positive and significantly. Interestingly, the statistics for this study suggests positive but insignificant influence of peoples' empowerment on good governance which goes against the accepted norms. It is worth concluding that the level of good governance practices in the ULOs is in dismal state and suggests policy intervention.

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