

Voluntarism is the Essential element of Sustainable Community Development in Bangladesh

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to examine that building safe, stronger, healthier and sound communities is exhilarated by the process of sustainable community development work of which voluntarism is the integral part. In the key concepts to be discussed, this also emphasises on the significance of the indefatigable voluntary actions in all levels of policy making procedures for the sustainable community development in Bangladesh. This paper has been divided into Four (04) key points:

1. The social, economic and environmental values and the desire of a sustainable framework for the community development in Bangladesh.
2. The significance of voluntarism towards the community and local development of Bangladesh.
3. Recorder histories that showcase the contribution volunteers are making to meet the goal for local and community development.
4. According to the policy relevance; the current scenario of voluntarism for community development.

Arguably, the most significant outcome that comes through voluntarism is enhancing the relationship through networking and having positive outcomes. Volunteers are not always service provider only; sometimes they try to develop social capital, human capital, physical capital or cultural capital

Moreover, poverty alleviation, remedial process of illiteracy, health and sanitation, water and resource management, environmental issues, disaster readiness and the sense of good governance through the dedication and continuous effort of the volunteers have been highlighted to ensure the ultimate sustainable development of Bangladesh.

Introduction

Bangladesh has a glorious and long history of Voluntarism. After a lingering colonial rule and twenty five years Pakistani rulers, this delta-shape country has been at liberty since 1971 through an armed struggle. With the change over time, some changes and developments have also hitherto been occurred in all sectors of the state. But the issue of governance, pertinent to sustainable development, faces questions from donor agencies, members of civil society and funding agencies, has been gaining importance among various stakeholders involved in development programmes. That is why governance in general and good governance in particular has been gaining momentum in Bangladesh.

The concept- Voluntarism: Voluntarism is a school of thought that regards the will as superior to the intellect and to emotion (Wikipedia). This description has been applied to various points of view, from different cultural eras, in the areas of metaphysics, psychology, sociology, and theology.

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The term voluntarism was introduced by Ferdinand Tönnies into the Philosophical literature and particularly used by Wilhelm Wundt and Friedrich Paulsen. The etymology of the word is from Latin (*voluntas*: the will, the desire; also: arbitrariness).

Voluntarism is sometimes used to mean the use of, or reliance on voluntary action to maintain an institution, carry out a policy, or achieve an end. Here the word voluntary action means action based on free will, which in turn means action which is performed free from certain constraints. The constraint of (government) coercion is often considered in this context, where it remains the question what constitutes coercion.

Volunteering is generally considered an altruistic activity and is intended to promote goodness or improve human quality of life. In return, this activity can produce a feeling of self-worth and respect. There is no financial gain involved for the individual. Volunteering is also renowned for skill development, socialization, and fun. Volunteering may have positive benefits for the volunteer as well as for the person or community served. It is also intended to make contacts for possible employment. It is helping, assisting, or serving another person or persons without pay. Many volunteers are specifically trained in the areas they work, such as medicine, education, or emergency rescue. Others serve on an as-needed basis, such as in response to a natural disaster.

Theoretically five categories of volunteering

(1) Self-help and mutual aid- people with shared problems, challenges and conditions working together to address or ameliorate them.

(2) Philanthropy and service to others- It typically involves an organisation recruiting volunteers to provide some kind of service to others and is the type of activity which most people recognise as volunteering.

(3) Governance- volunteers who provide leadership and direction to groups or organisations.

(4) Advocacy or campaigning- collective action aimed at securing or preventing change which includes campaigning against developments seen to be damaging to the environment.

(5) Expressive Behaviours- expressing their interest and passion in a particular field through volunteering (Ellis et al. 2010).

A sustainable community development framework must offer a clear structure around which volunteering can be positioned and recognised, as a way of achieving sustainable community development. It is important that people are given the opportunity to ‘identify their own needs and aspirations’, to take action to exert influence on the decisions. The significance, value and contribution that volunteering makes to sustainable community development which affect them and to be facilitated to find ways to improve the quality of their own lives, the communities in which they live, and societies of which they are a part. Experience has shown that the most effective and sustainable community development programmes are those which involve local people at all stages. The times of ‘parachuting people’ into communities, especially paid staff to do things to a community rather than support them to do things for themselves has shown to be an ineffective model. Local people are more likely to invest in a programme of work and be

actively engaged with it if they are given ownership and meaningful ways of being involved. Volunteering research supports this view that attracting and retaining people to volunteer is more successful when people are offered opportunities to carry out meaningful roles which suit their interests and skills.

Voluntary provision of services to religious, civil, medical, educational and environmental and other private or governmental organizations doubtless has a long history. Such volunteer efforts keep expenses down for non-profit and philanthropic organizations empower individuals and groups to help others, and make volunteers feel needed. If we focus Voluntarism in brief; we will find the existence of these:

Volunteering: It means doing work willingly and without payment for benefits of community or society or other individuals.

Volunteer: A person of age 15 years & above doing work willingly and without being paid for it.

Formal volunteering: Volunteering through or for an organization.

Informal volunteering: Volunteering not through or for an organization. It is spontaneous and sporadic helps to individuals or group of individuals.

Nonprofit Institution (NPI): These are economic units producing goods or services but profits earned not being distributed among those managing, controlling, or financing them.

Nonprofit Institution (government): These are NPIs financed and controlled by government.

Household: Means a small group of persons sharing the same living accommodation, pooling some, or all, of their income and wealth and eating in one mess (same cooking arrangement). There can be one person household also.

Defining Sustainable Community Development: The term “sustainable communities” has various definitions, but in essence refers to communities planned, built, or modified to promote [sustainable living](#) (Wikipedia). Sustainable communities tend to focus on environmental and economic [sustainability](#), urban infrastructure, social equity, and municipal government. The term is sometimes used synonymously with “green cities,” “eco communities,” “liveable cities” and “[sustainable cities](#).” Different organizations have various understandings of sustainable communities; the term’s definition is contested and still under construction. For example, [Burlington, Vermont](#)’s Principles of Sustainable Community Development stress the importance of local control of natural resources and a thriving non-profit sector to a sustainable community. The [Institute for Sustainable Communities](#) outlines how political empowerment and social well-being are also part of the definition. Additionally, referring to communities in Shanghai and Singapore, geographer LilyKong has paired concepts of [cultural sustainability](#) and [social sustainability](#) alongside environmental sustainability as aspects of sustainable communities. Meanwhile, the UK’s 2003 [Sustainable Communities Plan](#) often abbreviates its definition of sustainable communities as “places where people want to live and

work, now and in the future”. Addressing the scale of sustainable communities, political scientist Kent Portney points out that the term sustainable communities has been used to refer to a broad variety of places, ranging from neighbourhoods to watersheds to cities to multi-state regions. Etymologically, the term “sustainable community” grew out of the related discourses of “sustainability” and “[sustainable development](#)” that gained widespread use among local, national, and international politicians and policymakers in NGOs starting in the late 1980s. The term originally referred to environmental concerns and was later applied to cities.

Examples of Sustainable Community: Sustainable community initiatives have emerged in neighbourhoods, cities, counties, [metropolitan](#) planning districts, and watershed districts at different scales pertaining to community needs. These initiatives are driven by various actor groups that have different methods of effectively planning out ways to create sustainable communities. Most often they are implemented by [governments](#) and [non-profit organizations](#), but they also involve community members, academics, and create partnerships and [coalitions](#).

Non-profit organizations help to cultivate local talents and skills, [empowering](#) people to become more powerful and more involved in their own communities. Many also offer plans and guidance on improving the [sustainability](#) of various practices, such as land use and community design, [transportation](#), energy efficiency, [waste reduction](#), and climate friendly purchasing. Some government groups will create partnerships where departments will work together using [grants](#) to provide resources to communities like clean air and water, [community planning](#), [economic development](#), equity and [environmental justice](#), as well as [housing](#) and transportation choices. [Social movements](#) have gathered momentum, spreading sustainable community ideas around the world, not only through example, but also by offering classes and training on [sustainable living](#), [permaculture](#), and [local economics](#).

National Initiatives: The Partnership for Sustainable Communities is an interagency partnership between the [Department of Transportation](#), [Environmental Protection Agency](#), and the [Department of Housing and Urban Development](#). These departments work together with a mission to “improve access to affordable housing, increase transportation options, and lower transportation costs while protecting the environment”. All three bureaus offer funding opportunities to support communities in areas of clean air and water, community planning, economic development, energy efficiency, equity and environmental justice, as well as housing and transportation choices. The partnership incorporates six principles of liveability into its grant-making and program development. It offers:

- Provide more transportation choices
- Promote equitable, affordable housing
- Enhance economic competitiveness
- Support existing communities
- Coordinate policies and leverage investment
- Value communities and neighborhoods

Along with working collaboratively, these government agencies also have their own initiatives. The Department of Housing and Development has an *Office of Sustainable Housing and Communities* which features a Sustainable Housing Initiative, aiming at “supporting the construction and rehabilitation of green affordable housing” and does this through programs that retrofit or construct energy efficient homes. They also work to standardise energy efficiency

standards across federal agencies, as well as expand the availability of financing for home energy improvements and multifamily housing.

The Environmental Protection Agency has a *Smart Growth Program* which conducts research, publishes reports, showcases outstanding communities, and works with communities through grants and technical assistance. They also have a Green Communities Program which provides communities with a tool kit of information to help them reach sustainable goals. The tool kit is arranged in a five-step program which allows communities to:

- Develop **community assessments** of their current conditions
- Formulate **trend analyses** that answers the question “Where are we going?” in the face of no intervention
- Create **vision statements** of where the community sees itself in the future
- Establish **action plans** about what programs and initiatives will help the community reach its goals
- Access tools to **implement** action plans

The Department of Transportation has a *Liveability Initiative* which issues “grants to eligible recipients for planning, vehicle purchases, facility construction, operations, and other purposes”,¹¹²¹ with numerous goals, including the improvement of surface transportation, providing public transit on Indian reservations, providing access to disadvantaged communities, etc.

Why defining volunteering is important for Social development as it is the fourth Sector:

Voluntary or community-based organizations are called the fourth sector of development enterprise. UNV Chief (2003) said in the World Summit on Sustainable Development-”Voluntary action is fourth cornerstone of sustainable development”. Like other cornerstones, sustainable development must be encouraged, understood and facilitated because in this era of globalization turning into global village, the need for voluntary actions calls for much attention of policy-makers, stakeholders and community members for sustainable development of the country. Sustainable community development and good governance moves parallel. It is not possible to gain one with the absence of other’s. Here the civic senses as well as the voluntary sense play an important role to change the total scenario in a more befitted manner. Achieving sustainability through the voluntarism is a very common issue in many developing and underdeveloped countries. All people’s participation in the socio-developmental work is

It has only been in more modern times that definitions have been used to describe activities such as volunteering and the process of community development as contributing to positive and sustainable changes in communities, particularly the most deprived communities around the globe. For many significant reasons, defining voluntarism is so important, not least because since the 19th century, volunteering as an activity has developed into a highly dynamic and varied form of civic engagement, as Ellis et al. (2010) categorisation attests to. Furthermore, identifying people as volunteers is important because it recognises people for the work that they do and helps build solidarity between people working towards achieving a common goal. Volunteers are uniquely different from paid workers and this should be recognised, they are different in the sense that they are not being financially remunerated for the work they do and are therefore first and foremost motivated by desire to contribute to social need, build up skills and / or connect with others. Identifying volunteers also means that they can more easily access support and guidance from the volunteering infrastructure

with regards to recognition and effective volunteer management i.e. recruitment, selection, support, management and dealing with legal issues around involving volunteers.

The Statistics of Volunteering in Bangladesh:

Indicators	Number	Percentage (%)
1. Volunteers (thousand):		
Total	: 16,586	100.0
Male	: 12,660	76.3
Female	: 3,926	23.7
Rural	: 12,546	75.6
Urban	: 4,040	24.4
2. Volunteer rates: (percentage of population with age 15 years & above)		
Total	:	17.5
Male	:	26.6
Female	:	8.4
3. Volunteer rates by division:		
Barisal	:	25.4
Chittagong	:	20.4
Dhaka	:	19.4
Khulna	:	20.3
Rajshahi	:	10.8
Sylhet	:	13.6
4. Volunteers engaged in (thousand):		
Total	: 16,586	100.0
Informal volunteering	: 14,729	88.8
Formal Volunteering	: 1,608	9.7

Both formal and : 249 1.5
 informal volunteering

5. Percentage (%) formal volunteers by type

Total : 100
 Non-government NPI : 72.0
 Government NPI : 9.9
 NGO : 4.3
 Others : 13.8

6. Volunteering hours (million)

Total : 1,962 100.0
 Male : 1,478 75.3
 Female : 484 24.7
 Rural : 1,544 78.8
 Urban : 418 21.2

7. Formal volunteering hours (million)

Total : 418 100.0
 Rural : 303 72.5
 Urban : 115 27.5

8. Formal volunteering hours by type (million)

Total	:	418	100.0
Non-government NPI	:	233	55.7
Government NPI	:	108	25.8
NGO	:	37	8.9
Others	:	40	9.6

9. Value of volunteering (million taka)

Total	:	117,720	100.0
Informal	:	92,640	78.7
Formal	:	25,080	21.3

10. Full-time equivalent volunteers (000):

Total	:	1,022	100.0
Formal	:	218	21.3
Informal	:	804	78.7

11. Value of volunteering as % of GDP (FY 2009-10) **1.7**

Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics Survey on Volunteerism in Bangladesh 2010

Benefits for Career Development- The ultimate goal of Sustainable Community: When we said that it really is OK to consider what's in it for you when figuring out how and where to volunteer? This statement becomes even more relevant in the case of career or professional development.

Whether a person is currently unemployed, completing the degree or simply considering future career possibilities can be an ideal way to:

- A. *Develop new skills and competences.*
- B. *Apply for existing skills in new ways in new environments*
- C. *Explore new career paths*
- D. *Expand your personal and professional networks*
- E. *Get on the radar of hiring professional, giving them the opportunity to see you in action*
- F. *Give back while assessing of actively pursuing your next role.*

Iconic Examples of Voluntarism in Bangladesh:

Bengal famine: The organised form of voluntary organizations was first established in Bangladesh (Bengal) following the Bengal famine of 1943, which claimed the lives of three million people. Following the typhoon in 1970 that registered a death toll of 500,000 people in Bangladesh, the number of VOs increased (Ibid).

The 1991 Bangladesh cyclone: The cyclone of 1991 in Bangladesh was the deadliest tropical cyclones on record. On the night of 29 April 1991 a powerful tropical cyclone struck the Chittagong district of south eastern Bangladesh with winds of around 250 km/h (155 mph). The storm forced a 6 metre (20 ft) storm surge inland over a wide area, killing at least 138,000 people and leaving as many as 10 million homeless. Thousands of Volunteers started working with the Helping agencies from home and abroad to mitigate the disastrous after effect.

Rana Plaza Collapse: On 24 April 2013, Rana Plaza, an eight-story commercial building, collapsed in Savar, a sub-district in the Greater Dhaka Area, the capital of Bangladesh. The search for the dead ended on 13 May with a death toll of 1,129. Approximately 2,515 injured people were rescued from the building alive.

It is considered the deadliest garment-factory accident in history, as well as the deadliest accidental structural failure in modern human history.

Voluntary Organizations: The Fourth Sector: Voluntary or community-based organizations are called the fourth sector of development enterprise. UNV Chief (2003) said in the World Summit on Sustainable Development-“Voluntary action is fourth cornerstone of sustainable development”. Like other cornerstones, sustainable development must be encouraged, understood and facilitated because in this era of globalization turning into global village, the need for voluntary actions calls for much attention of policy-makers, stakeholders and community members for sustainable development of the country. Voluntarism can also be defined as a will of free service leaving out the question of paid or unpaid, where the service is given to promote social welfare and also to help the people of the locality to undertake activities in a self-reliance manner, partially or wholly, to satisfy their felt needs.

Voluntary organizations are the major vehicles for social development. The people involved in the voluntary organizations provide financial support and required services thorough their free will. Voluntary organization, in this paper stands for, nonprofit groups formed by the people of any community to accomplish some developmental goals. These local voluntary or community based organizations may also be called development agencies, or self-help organizations, which are run, financed, established and organised by the people of respective community whereas an NGO is established, organised and financed by people outside the community where it functions.

Voluntary works through voluntary or community-based organizations can bring a change among local people where they can play a vital role for sustainable development. Voluntary organizations can be good development partners of the government to lead the country for sustainable development.

Recommendations:

For Bangladesh, we are proposing the following recommendations to recognise this as fourth sector:

- Reforming the Existing Policies.
- Somewhat of a compulsory voluntarism for the specific time span.
- Establishing National Voluntarism wing.
- Voluntarism as a part of internship.
- Bridging between the Government and non-Government sectors.
- Structured Voluntarism studies in the elementary education.
- Establishing voluntarism quota for higher education and job.
- Connection between voluntarism and the entrepreneurship through social business platforms.
- Categorization in voluntarism for grooming the leadership.
- Allocation in National Budget for the volunteers.
- Motivating the voluntarism by providing noncash service.
- Young scholars/students should go for internship in the government sector.

Concluding Remarks: Local governance is a key issue in developing policy for human settlements. In addition, in many countries especially those of Latin America the transition from authoritarian regime toward democratic governance have increased people's involvement in local decision-making. Under the aegis of local governance, innovative participatory budgeting and planning practices have emerged in a wide variety of contexts. The aim of these new practices is to contribute to local sustainable development through developing a joint vision and strategy for the future. For a long-time in recent past, Bangladesh remained under authoritarian rule owing to colonialism and military dictatorship. During this time, concessions at the local level were often used to legitimise authoritarianism at the national level (Siddiqui, 1994). Even when democracy was ushered in, problems remained the same due to patron-client relationship, gender

discrimination and other drawbacks. Participation is primarily seen in terms of empowerment of the disadvantaged, since powerlessness is considered the main reasons for their exclusion from development benefits. In the context of Bangladesh, it would demand that the poor and the women, who constitute the majority have been generally left out of the decision-making and implementation process, actually become an active part of the same through mobilization. Moreover, Bangladesh is still in the list of some aid depended countries, where development related policy-making is considerably influenced by donor conditionality. And thus, good governance has been a buzzword in the donor-prescribed development initiatives. Most donors now include good governance as a condition of their aid performances. So in this case criticism can be made on the failure of ensuring good governance at local level on the governmental initiatives. Good governance is a sine qua non for sustainable development and freedom of choice is a key to good governance. If people's effective participation is established, it can help establish good governance, characterised by efficiency, transparency and accountability (Ahmad and Ahmed,2002).

Furthermore, Voluntarism is a part of our cultural heritage.

The people of Bangladesh have a tradition of involvement in different forms of voluntary activities. The major growth in the voluntary organizations in Bangladesh, however, primarily followed the failure of the government in meeting the needs of the people (Hassan 1999). Voluntary organizations as partners of the government can take major initiatives to eradicate poverty, develop skill of the people through training programmes, and provide health care to the people in the adjoining areas, whereas government organizations have failed to achieve these above objectives for the people. So in this regard, the government should take the following measures to encourage the participation of voluntary organizations and strengthen people's participation in decision-making at local level for sustainable development.

And these measures are to:

- Take policy and institutional frameworks needed for the people to make their choices count in governance.
- Establish good governance, which refers to the transparency, accountability, and the rule of law to prevent crime and corruption and ensure distributive justice for progress towards sustainable development.
- Take initiatives for effective governance at all levels of society with an aim at establishing decentralised governance for identifying local problems and ascertaining the felt-needs and aspirations of the people.
- Make the best possible framework for promoting local people's participation in governance and development process as well as for articulation of local needs and mobilization of local resources (Ahmad and Ahmed, 2002).
- Organise, assist and encourage the spirit of people for voluntarism highlighting their roles and importance in different aspects of sustainable development of the country.
- Make easier way for voluntary organizations to work with the people without any bar so that they can take part in development process.
- Bridge the gap between male and female for establishing a viable society and equal social justice to reach the goal of the new millennium.
- Take initiatives to mobilise local people and resources, especially voluntary labour for sustainable development, and thus facilitate monitoring the implementation process.

Unless the voluntary organizations become a part of the overall development process of the country concerned, the voluntary organizations will lose enthusiasm and ultimately may fade away, and a potential vehicle for undertaking local-based sustainable development may be destroyed (Hasan 1999). The local and national governments in Bangladesh should come forward to accept voluntary organizations as development partners of the country. And the involvement of the local voluntary organizations in development process also ensures good governance in the country. Furthermore, mainstreaming popular participation and encouraging voluntary actions will ensure good governance at local level leading to sustainable development.

So, Voluntarism need to be recognised as the fourth Sector in terms all aspect's development not only in Bangladesh but also in the other Developing and under developed countries.

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