Local government training in Bangladesh

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INTRODUCTION

The recently created Local Government Engineering Bureau (LGB) has an establishment of 13,317 staff, with 525 offices (see Table-1). It has been formed by combining the upazila staff of three departments: Works Programme Wing (WPW), Department of Public Health Engineering (DPHE) and Public Works Department (PWD). Its staff are responsible for all engineering works by the local government bodies, including rural water supply and sanitation. It has a Training Unit which is largely funded under foreign aided programmes. The detailed context and history of the LGB training programme are described at the end of this paper.

TABLE 1: GOVERNMENT POSTS IN LGB

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nr.</th>
<th>Designation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HQ</td>
<td>Engineering Adviser (Chief Engineer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Superintending Engineers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Executive Engineers (XEN)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Assistant Engineers (AE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Sub-Assistant Engineers (SAE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Support staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Other staff provided under projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(in some cases)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>XEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Support staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Other staff provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>under projects (in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>some cases)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Upazila</th>
<th>Upazila Engineer (UE) of AE rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>SAE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Draftsman/Estimator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Surveyor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Work Assistants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Mechanics for rural water supply</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Electrician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Support staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Other staff provided under</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>projects (in some cases)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Training courses are given to both officials and members of the public involved in LGB construction. Courses for LGB staff cover the basic engineering skills involved in planning, feasibility, site investigation, design, construction and maintenance, the socioeconomic factors related to rural works, plus government rules and procedures and management topics. Practical training is also given to project implementation committees and labourers in order to improve construction standards and reduce misuse. Specific training courses are run by the individual programmes, such as training for groups of labourers in manufacturing culvert pipes and construction of culverts, as an employment generating activity. The total numbers of trainee course days provided under LGB are shown in Table-2.

Since 1984 LGB Training has been coordinated and carried out by a donor-assisted Training Unit. The Training Unit consists of a small HQ unit in rented accommodation, and a District Training Officer (DTO) to assist the XEN in training matters in the district.

The PWD & DPHE both have their own training institutes (but no posts specifically for training), which have not been transferred to LGB. Training for DPHE staff is largely performed with the assistance of a UNICEF project. At the same time as the LGB

TABLE-2: GROWTH OF LGB TRAINING COURSES: ANNUAL TRAINEE DAYS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Programme</th>
<th>Total Trainee Days</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SPWP</td>
<td>IRWP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980-81</td>
<td>1,554</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981-82</td>
<td>2,164</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982-83</td>
<td>1,506</td>
<td>2,604</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983-84</td>
<td>2,149</td>
<td>4,052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984-85</td>
<td>5,991</td>
<td>16,847</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planned</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985-86</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>34,656</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Training Unit is acquiring the capability to
give training in rural water supply and sanita-
tion, it is availing itself of UNICEF's
assistance. UNICEF is continuing the
training to the same staff, but now under the
new department, LGEB.

TRAINING METHODS

The training courses are practical, 'hands-
on' and job-orientated. Where possible,
after trainees are given a brief introduction
to the topic by a trainer, the major activity
is to carry out that activity under realistic
field conditions. For example a group of 5
SAEs with an AE as trainer, will be taken to
a site in a road requiring a small bridge or
culvert, and will be given one week to survey
the site, investigate soil conditions,
calculate the design flow and structure size,
select a suitable standard design, modify it
to fit the site, prepare full working
drawings, estimate quantity and cost of all
items and prepare tender documents and all
other items required before tender. Similarly
for a concrete slab a small group under a
trainer will check the reinforcement,
shuttering and materials, mix the concrete,
measure the slump, place the concrete and
compact it, take test cylinders and organise
curing. The emphasis is on learning by doing
the task correctly.

Initial priority has been given to training
the technical staff in rural works, and the
accounts staff. Wherever possible courses
are residential, and optimal course size is 35,
although courses of over 50 have been
successfully held. Optimal group size for
practical work is 5 with a trainer. Courses
are intensive and are limited to 2 weeks.
Each course has the DTO and XEN as 'top
trainers' monitoring the performance of each
group and ensuring that trainees do things in
the correct way. Courses are held at the end
of the monsoon, when staff can be spared from
their routine duties as project preparation
and construction work are not yet under way.
This has not proved a limiting factor in
practice. Training is performed with the same
types of equipment as the trainees have in
their upazilas. Staff are gathered together
from all upazilas in a district for a training
course; they are provided food and accommo-
dation and a daily allowance. Participants
are provided with a printed copy of course
materials for future use. Each participant's
course file is also returned after scrutiny.

Training

The UE trainers have all attended a Training
of Trainers course; 1 week to become familiar
with the contents of the course which they
will teach, and 3 days grounding in teaching
methodology (preparing objectives, processes
of learning, communication, motivation,
asassilation, feedback, testing, preparing
lessons) followed by 3 days in which each UE
prepares and gives a short lesson to his
group of 10 UEs. The course acts as a model
of how the lessons may be given, both when
they are learning in the 'technology' week
and when they observe the practice lessons
of their fellow participants. A major aim is
to break the pattern of "talk and chalk"
lectures and replace it with practical field
work.

The Project Preparation and Implementation
field course for technical staff (PPIC) is
prepared by DTOs and TSs. This ensures that
the experience of past courses and on-the-
job training is fed back into improved and
relevant course design. It also provides an
incentive to the DTOs to ensure the success
of their PPIC course while it is given in
their district. Similarly the TOT course is
largely designed end run by the Training Unit
and it is focussed on teaching the PPIC
contents; which again enlists the commitment
of the Training Unit to its success. Equally
important, the courses are being prepared by
local officials (not foreign expatriates),
which minimises problems of communication
and means that the Training Unit becomes self
sufficient and able to produce its own
training courses without external assistance.

As well as formal courses, DTOs and UEs are
encouraged to assist the technical staff to
perform their routine duties in the same way
as they have been taught on the courses.
This 'on-the-job' training takes place during
the project preparation and implementation
seasons. By acting as trainers, the UEs have
a detailed knowledge of the course contents
and a commitment to ensure the staff adopt
them; it provides the DTO with feedback on the
effectiveness of the courses.

For the technical staff to have the confi-
dence to adopt new methods and standards, it
is necessary to practice using these methods
under realistic conditions; description and
understanding are often not enough to change
long-standing working practices. Examples of new techniques are: compaction of earth
works, detailed site surveys by levelling
instrument and field classification of soils.

The professional development of the UE is
associated by the training activities. Most
UEs are either promoted diploma engineers or
fresh graduates. There is often no other
engineer in the Upazila with whom the UE can
discuss engineering matters; status inhibits
admitting ignorance to subordinate staff,
most upazilas have poor road or telephone
connections to the outside.

Training has been largely funded through a
bank account, is replenished directly by the
donors and operated by Government Officers.
It has proved very rapid and flexible.

PROBLEM AREAS

Ironically, perhaps the greatest problem in institutionalising a mechanism for achieving change (which is surely the ultimate goal of a training unit) is the uncertainty and change in its environment. As the parent organisation metamorphosed from RWP to WP to LGEB (see below), the role of training unit has had to be adjusted. Naturally one needs to observe how things will work in practice before rushing into creating posts and approving budgets. This is particularly true when it is a function which has not existed before. The donor agencies are keen that Government should follow its recognition of the need for training in the Strategy and Policy, by assuming the responsibility and establishing posts. Government has indicated its intention to do so.

Projects and even donors have their separate identities, their peculiarities, obsessions and constraints; and they rise and fall. Donor-aided programmes are invaluable for trying out and refining an institution because they do not have the same constraints of universality, rule and precedent. But it is difficult to coordinate a jigsaw of donor inputs to give a unified and continuing national training programme. It is also not simple to transfer from TA funding to Government; salaried and service rules often mean that individuals will not transfer, it is anomalous to have TA and Government officers filling identical posts in different places, the TA funding mechanisms which operated successfully can rarely be matched within the Government system. The LGEB Training Unit is still finding its way through these problems.

The purpose of training is to improve the performance of the LGEB, as measured in the quality of the infrastructure that it constructs and maintains, and the socioeconomic development that it makes possible. However, training is only one input into the complex system within which the LGEB engineers operate. It is not enough to alter people's skills, knowledge and attitudes, if they cannot alter their behaviour because of factors outside their control. These factors are such diverse elements as the lack of adequate staff numbers, appropriate status and conditions of service, financial and administrative powers, transport and running expenses, equipment and office supplies, appropriate administrative procedures, timely finance, local leaders who will act on technical advice, the willingness to innovate or take risks that accompanies insecurity and poverty, standard designs and specifications, skilled contractors and artisans, suitable forms of contract. Fortunately, progress is being made on all these and many other fronts.

For these reasons, it is difficult as yet to evaluate the impact of training on behavioural change and improved infrastructure.

INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

Local Government in Bangladesh is principally at the union, upazila, zila (district) and pourashava (municipality) levels (Table 3). This system results from a comprehensive reorganisation of the administration carried out from 1982–84 which devolved power to the upazila (previously called a thana) and replaced 71 sub-divisions and 22 old districts by a single tier of 64 new districts.

The Local Government Engineering Bureau provides the engineering staff to upazila parishad (councils) and districts. The headquarters is within the Local Government Division of the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development & Cooperatives. It has grown out of the temporary Rural Works Programme founded in 1962, which was reconstituted as the permanent Works Programme Wing (WPW) in 1962. In October 1984 WPW was again recast as the LGEB, combining all upazila technical staff previously provided under the older and larger Public Works Department (PWD) and Department of Public Health Engineering (DPHE).

At Upazila level LGEB has four functions:

- physical planning (previously WPW)
- rural water supply and sanitation (previously DPHE)
- public building e.g. offices, storage facilities, staff quarters (previously PWD)
- small-scale rural infrastructure e.g. rural and feeder roads, bridges, irrigation and drainage channels, flood

**TABLE 3: LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNITS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tier</th>
<th>Nr.</th>
<th>Typical Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Division</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zila (district)</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>1.5 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pourashava (municipality)</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upazila</td>
<td>460</td>
<td>250,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union</td>
<td>4,472</td>
<td>25,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village</td>
<td>85,650</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
control embankments, small sluice gates, rural markets (previously WFW).

At district level LGB was almost exclusively concerned with district and feeder roads and bridges. The XEN also has an advisory, supervisory and monitoring role to the UEs in the district. The PWD and DPE maintain a separate identity at this level.

The national headquarters monitors and assists the work in the lower tiers and performs the following functions:
- determining policy
- recruitment, posting, promotion
- distribution of central government funds including donor-aided projects
- technical guidance, preparation of manuals, standard specifications and designs
- monitoring and evaluation of upazila development activities
- special projects, action research, management of consultants
- promoting training activities at all levels

Several foreign aided projects have supported LGB's activities, notably the following have assisted with training: UNDP/ILO/Swiss Special Public Works Programme (SPWP), the SIDA/NORAD/DANIDA Intensive Rural Works Programme (IRWP), and USAID Zila Road Maintenance and Improvement Programme (ZRMIP), the DANIDA Noakhali Integrated Rural Development Programme (NIRDIP) and the USAID/CARE/WFP Food for Work Programme.

TRAINING SINCE 1980

The Beginnings
From 1980 until 1985 SPWP started a training programme for RWP/WFP/LGB staff in 4 old districts. This training made extensive use of expatriates: a Training Adviser and UN Volunteers. Courses were given annually to the technical staff of their districts and upazilas. From 1982 IRWP expanded this training into 6 more old districts and (after the completion of SPWP) took over its training activities in those 4 districts to ensure continuity. IRWP also provided a Training Adviser and carried out training on a common basis with SPWP. ZRMIP had a more restricted interest in the road-related activities at the district level, and so ran independent training courses under a Training Adviser in 3 of the 10 SPWP/IRWP districts. CARE provided teams which gave technical training courses in the remaining 12 districts in 1983 and 1984.

LGB Training Policy
In 1984 the Training Advisers prepared a "Long Term Strategy and Plan for Training in Works Programme Wing" which was accepted by Government and published as official policy. This unique document has been widely distributed to other departments. The strategy set out the way ahead on training matters, based on:

- coordination of all training activities within WFP
- conformation of all training built upon agreed training modules
- decentralisation of training: 22 District Training Officers (DTO) to organise training courses, using UEs as trainers for technical subjects
- a strong WFP HQ Training Unit as the overall policy maker and to design courses provide support and course materials to DTOs, run central courses and supervise training in the districts

Within 6 months the creation of LGB had made the strategy obsolete. The number of technical staff and disciplines and districts had all grown threefold. The Secretary of the Local Government Division has requested a new LGB Training Policy which is currently being prepared. It will continue in the same directions as the Strategy, with DTOs implementing a common decentralised training under an HQ Training Unit. It will also cover the wider aspects of staff development including a coherent policy for attending courses provided by others, both in Bangladesh and abroad.

Implementation of the Policy
IRWP and SPWP began to implement the Strategy by appointing DTOs in the 10 districts as Technical Assistance (TA). Government provided a Training Officer at HQ and IRWP supported him with TA staff. The DTOs were managed on a common basis by the Training Unit, preparing and running common courses for UEs, technical staff, accountants and project implementation committees (an alternative to implementation by contractors using public participation). Outlines were prepared for donors suggesting a form for the training component of prospective programmes. A management course was run for LGB HQ staff (Government officers, local TA staff and expatriate advisers) jointly funded by IRWP, SPWP and ZRMIP. Technical training courses were run by LGB for the upazila staff of the Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation who implement the Food for Work Programme of rural road construction.