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Local government training in Bangladesh

INTRODUCTION

The recently created Local Government Engineering Bureau (LGEB) 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 LGEB training programme are described at the end of this paper.

TABLE 1: GOVERNMENT POSTS IN LGEB

Nr.	Designation
<u>HQ</u>	
1	Engineering Adviser (Chief Engineer)
4	Superintending Engineers
2	Executive Engineers (XEN)
4	Assistant Engineers (AE)
4	Sub-Assistant Engineers (SAE)
42	Support staff
	Other staff provided under individual projects
<u>District</u>	
1	XEN
1	SAE
4	Support staff
	Other staff provided under projects (in some cases)
<u>Upazila</u>	
1	Upazila Engineer (UE) of AE rank
3	SAE
1	Draftsman/Estimator
1	Surveyor
4	Work Assistants
4	Mechanics (for rural water supply)
1	Electrician
13	Support staff
	Other staff provided under projects (in some cases)

Training courses are given to both officials and members of the public involved in LGEB construction. Courses for LGEB 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 LGEB are shown in Table-2.

Since 1984 LGEB 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 LGEB. Training for DPHE staff is largely performed with the assistance of a UNICEF project. At the same time as the LGEB

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

Year	Programme				Total Trainee Days
	SPWP	IRWP	ZRMI	CARE	
1980-81	1,554	-	-	-	1,554
1981-82	2,164	135	-	-	2,299
1982-83	1,506	2,604	-	-	4,110
1983-84	2,149	4,052	1,920	4,461	12,582
1984-85	5,991	16,847	1,584	4,410	28,832
Planned:					
1985-86	-	34,656	465	-	35,121

Training Unit is acquiring the capability to give training in rural water supply and sanitation, 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 accommodation 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.

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, assimilation, 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" when it is given in their district. Similarly the TOT course is largely designed and 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 confidence to adopt new methods and standards, it is necessary to practise 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 assisted 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 WPW 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; salaries 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 re-organisation 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 parishads (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 1982. 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

Tier	Nr.	Typical Population
National	1	100 million
Division	4	25 million
Zila (district)	64	1.5 million
Pourashava (municipality)	78	50,000
Upazila	460	250,000
Union	4,472	25,000
Village	85,650	1,200

control embankments, small sluice gates, rural markets (previously WPW).

At district level LGEB is 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 DPHE 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 LGEB'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 (NIRDP) 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/WPW/LGEB 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.

LGEB 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 WPW
- 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 WPW 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 LGEB 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 LGEB 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 LGEB HQ staff (Government officers, local TA staff and expatriate advisers) jointly funded by IRWP, SPWP and ZRMIP. Technical training courses were run by LGEB for the upazila staff of the Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation who implement the Food for Work Programme of rural road construction.