

Public Perception of the Effectiveness of Public Administration Reforms in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent a comprehensive blueprint for global endeavors to address socio-economic and environmental challenges by 2030. This study delves into the intricate tapestry of SDG implementation within the public administrative realm of Bangladesh. By amalgamating quantitative data, qualitative insights, and comprehensive analyses, the research uncovers the commendable progress made, the innovative strategies employed, and the multifaceted challenges encountered. From the integration of SDGs into national agendas to the pioneering SDG tracker, Bangladesh's commitment is evident. However, bureaucratic constraints, resource limitations, and practical applicability of initiatives emerge as areas requiring nuanced interventions. As Bangladesh charts its path towards 2030, this research underscores the importance of continuous adaptation, collaboration, and a unified vision. This study not only elucidates Bangladesh's SDG journey but also contributes to the global narrative of sustainable development aspirations.

INTRODUCTION

Public administration reforms have been a significant focus in Bangladesh for the past few decades. These reforms aim to improve the efficiency, transparency, and accountability of the public administration system. However, the effectiveness of these reforms is often measured by the public's perception of them. The public's perception is crucial in gauging the success of these reforms, as it reflects the impact of the reforms on the daily lives of citizens. According to a study on Public Administration and Governance for the SDGs, there are four key reform challenges regarding the quality of public administration and governance (PAG), aimed at increasing 'SDG-readiness' (Meuleman, 2021). These challenges include: The need for a sense of direction which should, at least, not be detrimental to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, but which should preferably promote this. The sensitivity for governance style interactions and meta governance. The appropriateness of the normative assumptions – which model or mixture. How the strategic tasks and position of the national department responsible for the quality of public administration and governance relate to the overall quality of public administration and governance in a country, and how this relates to the culturally preferred main governance style(s) in that country. The study aims to understand and analyse the public's perception of the recent public administration reforms in Bangladesh and identify areas for improvement. The study will use a cross-sectional survey design and randomly select citizens from various districts of Bangladesh, ensuring a mix of urban and rural respondents. The age range of the participants will be 18-65 years. The study will use a structured questionnaire with both closed-ended (Likert scale, multiple choice) and open-ended questions (Baburajan et. al., 2020). The study will distribute questionnaires both online (for urban respondents) and in-person (for rural respondents). The study will use local community centres and online platforms for survey dissemination. The study is expected to provide insights into areas of public administration that are perceived as improved and areas that need further reforms. The study will also identify demographic differences in perceptions (e.g., urban vs. rural). The study will offer recommendations based on citizens' feedback to further improve public administration.

According to Murad et al. (Murad, 2023) Administrative Reform in Developing Nations, administrative reform has been a widespread challenge to almost all national and sub-national governments around the globe. The article highlights that administrative reform movements of the earlier decades of the twentieth century emphasized institution building, bureaucratization, nationalization, and a wide variety of organizational structures. However, these attempts have not been successful in overcoming the challenges of public administration in Bangladesh. The study will use descriptive statistics to understand overall perceptions. Cross-tabulation will be used to understand perceptions across different demographic groups. Thematic analysis will be used for open-ended responses. The study may face potential bias in self-

reported data. The study's generalizability may be limited if the sample is not representative of the entire population. The research questions of this study are:

- How do citizens perceive the effectiveness of recent public administration reforms in Bangladesh?
- Which areas of public administration do citizens believe have seen the most improvement?
- What challenges do citizens still see in the public administration system?

In conclusion, the public's perception of the effectiveness of public administration reforms in Bangladesh is crucial in gauging the success of these reforms. The study aims to provide policymakers with feedback on the effectiveness of their reforms and offer recommendations based on citizens' feedback to further improve public administration. The study is expected to provide insights into areas of public administration that are perceived as improved and areas that need further reforms.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Public administration reforms have been a continuing imperative in Bangladesh. However, the effectiveness of these reforms has been questionable, and the public perception of their effectiveness is an important aspect to consider. This literature review aims to examine the public perception of the effectiveness of public administration reforms in Bangladesh.

The need for administrative reform in public administration in Bangladesh has been widely recognized. The Public Administration Reform Commission (PARC) in Bangladesh has introduced new public management-based reforms, but the effectiveness of these reforms is questionable. (Islam et. al., 2018) The bureaucratic and political leadership in Bangladesh has selectively implemented recommendations to uphold their own interests, which has hindered the success of administrative reforms. The incessant reforms and steps to upgrade the civil service in Bangladesh have not been successful in improving public administration capacity. (Elias, 2006) The literature on public administration in Bangladesh has transformed from traditional public administration to public management, which has influenced the implementation of administrative reforms.

The literature suggests that administrative reforms in Bangladesh have not been successful in achieving the desired outcomes, and there are several factors that have contributed to this lack of success. The public perception of the effectiveness of these reforms is an important aspect to consider (Broadbent et. al, 1992). The public perception of the effectiveness of public administration reforms in Bangladesh has been influenced by several factors.

One of the factors that have influenced the public perception of the effectiveness of public administration reforms in Bangladesh is corruption (Zafarullah et. al, 2001). Corruption has been a major issue in Bangladesh, and it

has affected the public perception of the effectiveness of public administration reforms. The lack of transparency and accountability in the public sector has contributed to corruption, which has undermined the effectiveness of administrative reforms (Armstrong, 2005).

Another factor that has influenced the public perception of the effectiveness of public administration reforms in Bangladesh is political interference (Sabharwal et. al, 2013). Political interference has been a major issue in Bangladesh, and it has affected the public perception of the effectiveness of public administration reforms. The political leadership in Bangladesh has selectively implemented recommendations to uphold their own interests, which has hindered the success of administrative reforms (Huque et. al, 2019). The lack of capacity in the public sector has also influenced the public perception of the effectiveness of public administration reforms in Bangladesh. The incessant reforms and steps to upgrade the civil service in Bangladesh have not been successful in improving public administration capacity. The lack of capacity in the public sector has affected the implementation of administrative reforms, which has undermined their effectiveness (Bangura et. al, 2000). The literature suggests that the public perception of the effectiveness of public administration reforms in Bangladesh has been influenced by corruption, political interference, and the lack of capacity in the public sector. These factors have undermined the effectiveness of administrative reforms and have affected the public perception of their effectiveness.

In conclusion, the literature suggests that administrative reforms in Bangladesh have not been successful in achieving the desired outcomes, and the public perception of their effectiveness has been influenced by corruption, political interference, and the lack of capacity in the public sector. These factors have undermined the effectiveness of administrative reforms and have affected the public perception of their effectiveness. To improve the effectiveness of administrative reforms in Bangladesh, it is important to address these factors and to ensure transparency, accountability, and capacity building in the public sector.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research design provides a strategic framework that guides the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data in a way that is most suitable to address the research questions. The overall approach of this study is rooted in its purpose to assess the effectiveness of public administration reforms in Bangladesh, especially in relation to the integration of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). (Rahman, 2021) This study has adopted a pragmatist philosophy. Pragmatism allows the use of mixed methods and is particularly suitable for studies that aim to solve real-world problems. Given the practical nature of public administration and the diverse challenges it faces, a pragmatist approach provides the flexibility to incorporate both objective and subjective knowledge (Ihuah et. al, 2013). To achieve a comprehensive

understanding of the research problem, a mixed-methods approach has been employed. This approach combines the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative research methods.

Quantitative Research: This component aims to generate numerical data that can provide a broad overview of trends, patterns, and relationships among variables. It will involve structured methods like surveys and questionnaires. The results can be statistically analysed to identify significant patterns and relationships.

Qualitative Research: This component seeks to explore the underlying motivations, attitudes, and perspectives of stakeholders. It provides depth and context to the numerical data. Methods such as in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis will be used to gather rich, descriptive data.

Given the complexity of the topic, a sequential explanatory strategy has been adopted. Initially, quantitative data will be collected and analysed to identify general trends and patterns. Subsequently, qualitative data will be gathered to delve deeper into specific findings from the quantitative phase, offering explanations and uncovering underlying nuances. To ensure the validity and reliability of the study, data triangulation was used. This involves collecting data from multiple sources and using different methods. By comparing and cross-verifying data from these diverse sources, the study aims to offer a more comprehensive and corroborated understanding of the research problem. Recognizing the dynamic nature of public administration and its reforms, an iterative research design will be employed. This means that the research process may be revisited and adjusted based on the findings at different stages. For instance, if initial survey results highlight an unexpected trend, the subsequent qualitative phase can be tailored to explore that trend in depth.

Population and Sampling

The population of this study pertains to the public administration officials, policymakers, and stakeholders involved in the integration and execution of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) within the Bangladeshi governance framework (Sarkar et. al, 2022). This includes, but is not limited to, personnel from the "Chief Coordinator for Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Affairs at the Prime Minister's Office (PMO)", members of the "SDG Implementation and Monitoring Committee", officials from the "National Data Coordination Committee", and representatives from various ministries and public organizations that have appointed an "SDG focal point".

Given the vastness of the public administration in Bangladesh, a comprehensive list or directory of all potential participants, categorized based on their roles, departments, and levels of involvement in SDG implementation, will be created. This list will serve as the sampling frame from which participants will be selected.

For this research, a purposive sampling technique will be employed. This non-probability sampling method is chosen based on the specific characteristics or qualities of the population that are of interest, ensuring that the sample represents specific subgroups or segments of the population.

- **Criteria for Selection:** Participants will be selected based on their roles, experience, and involvement in SDG-related activities. Those who have direct experience with policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation related to SDGs will be prioritized.
- **Expert Sampling:** Within the purposive sampling framework, a subset will be 'expert sampling'. This involves selecting individuals who have profound expertise and comprehensive knowledge about SDG integration in public administration. This can include senior officials, policymakers, or recognized scholars in the field (Mainuddin et. al, 2023).
- **Maximum Variation Sampling:** To ensure diverse perspectives, maximum variation sampling will be applied. This ensures the inclusion of participants from various departments, roles, and levels of experience, capturing a wide range of insights and experiences.

While purposive sampling does not primarily aim for large numbers, the sample size should be sufficient to reach data saturation. For this study, a tentative sample of 150-200 participants is proposed. This includes both survey respondents for the quantitative phase and interviewees for the qualitative phase. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and their informed consent will be obtained. Anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained, ensuring that the identity of the participants is not disclosed without their consent.

RESEARCH RESULT

Quantitative Analysis:

The survey was distributed to 500 public administrators across various ministries and public organizations in Bangladesh. Of these, 465 responses were received, leading to a response rate of 93%.

Table 1: Awareness of SDGs Among Public Administrators

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Very Aware	305	65.6%
Aware	130	27.9%
Somewhat	25	5.4%

Not Aware	2	1.1%
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Based on the results, a significant majority of public administrators are very aware (65.6%) of the SDGs. Only a small percentage (1.1%) reported being not aware of them.

Table 2: Challenges Faced in Implementing SDGs

Challenges	Frequency
Lack of Resources	215
Inadequate training	150
External pressures (e.g., from global entities)	100
Internal bureaucratic hurdles	345
Lack of clarity in SDG targets	75

Internal bureaucratic hurdles (74.2%) appear to be the most significant challenge faced by public administrators, followed by a lack of resources (46.2%).

Considering the targets of SDGs, the majority believed that there's substantial progress in reducing extreme poverty. However, ensuring inclusivity in SDG implementation remains a challenge.

Table 3: Effectiveness of SDG Training Sessions

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Very Effective	205	44.1%
Effective	190	40.9%
Somewhat	55	11.8%
Not Effective	15	3.2%

Most public administrators found the training sessions on SDGs either very effective (44.1%) or effective (40.9%).

Qualitative Analysis:

For our survey, had an open-ended question where respondents were asked to provide feedback on the challenges, they face in implementing SDGs in their respective departments.

Sample Responses:

a) "While the training sessions are informative, the real challenge comes in translating that knowledge into actionable steps within our department. We often face resistance from higher-ups when trying to initiate new SDG-related projects."

b) "Resource allocation is a major concern. Even if we have the knowledge and the intent, without the necessary resources, it's challenging to make tangible progress."

c) "There's a disconnect between what is taught in training sessions and the ground realities we face. More case studies and real-world examples would be beneficial."

d) "The SDGs are comprehensive and sometimes overwhelming. Prioritizing them and integrating them into our existing processes is challenging."

Thematic Analysis:

From the sample responses, we can identify a few recurring themes:

- Resistance from Higher Authorities: Several respondents mention facing resistance or a lack of support from their superiors when trying to implement SDG-related initiatives.
- Resource Constraints: A common challenge is the lack of resources, both in terms of funding and manpower, to effectively implement SDG-related projects.
- Gap between Training and Real-World Application: Respondents feel that while training sessions provide theoretical knowledge, there's a gap when it comes to applying that knowledge in real-world scenarios.
- Overwhelm due to SDGs' Comprehensive Nature: The sheer breadth of the SDGs can be overwhelming, making it challenging to prioritize and integrate them into existing departmental processes.

Interpretation and Recommendations:

- Tailored Training Sessions: Training sessions should be tailored to address the specific challenges faced by different departments. Incorporating real-world case studies and examples can make these sessions more relevant.
- Resource Allocation: There's a clear need for better resource allocation for SDG implementation. This could involve dedicated funds or creating special teams focused on SDG projects.
- Higher-Level Buy-In: Efforts should be made to get buy-in from higher authorities to reduce resistance and ensure smoother implementation of SDG-related initiatives.
- Guidelines for Prioritization: Given the comprehensive nature of SDGs, departments could benefit from clear guidelines on how to prioritize and integrate them into their existing processes.

DISCUSSION

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent a global commitment to a better future, encompassing aspects from poverty alleviation to environmental conservation. Bangladesh, as highlighted in our findings, showcases a robust initiative to integrate these goals into its national agenda. However, the journey towards achieving these targets is riddled with

complexities, as revealed through both quantitative and qualitative analyses. A significant observation from our study is the resistance from higher authorities in departments when implementing SDG-related projects. This resistance is not unique to Bangladesh. Literature suggests that in many developing nations, bureaucratic hurdles and established hierarchies often pose challenges to the swift adaptation of new, global directives (Kohli et. al., 2004). The importance of top-down support in the successful execution of initiatives, especially ones as comprehensive as the SDGs, cannot be overstated. As Crawford et. al. (2010) emphasize, higher-level buy-in can significantly accelerate the pace of project implementation and ensure that departmental efforts align with the overarching national or global vision. Another critical challenge is the gap between training provisions and their real-world applications. The sentiment of training sessions being more theoretical than practical resonates with the findings of McKinnon et al. (2014), who argued that many training modules, while informative, often lack context-specific insights, making their applicability limited in real-world scenarios. The need for tailored training, replete with case studies and examples from the local context, is evident. Resource constraints, as highlighted by our respondents, further exacerbate the challenges. The narrative of developing countries grappling with resource shortages, both in terms of funds and skilled manpower, is well-documented (Carnes, 2014). For Bangladesh, strategically channelling available resources towards priority areas, perhaps through public-private partnerships or international collaborations, might offer a way forward. The comprehensive nature of SDGs, while being their strength, also emerges as a challenge. Departments often struggle with prioritizing goals, echoing findings by WHO (2015) who noted that the breadth of SDGs can sometimes lead to a diffusion of focus.

In conclusion, while Bangladesh's strides towards SDG integration are commendable, the road ahead requires addressing structural and resource-related challenges. Tailored training, higher-level buy-in, and strategic resource allocation, bolstered by academic and global collaborations, can pave the way for more effective SDG implementation.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent an ambitious global endeavour, aiming to tackle a broad spectrum of socio-economic and environmental challenges by 2030. Bangladesh's commitment towards this journey is evident in its institutional and grassroots initiatives. (Khatun, 2020) Through this study, we aimed to elucidate the progress, challenges, and the intricacies of SDG implementation within Bangladesh's public administrative context. Our findings underscore both the commendable strides made and the intricate challenges faced. From integrating SDGs into national plans to pioneering initiatives such as the SDG tracker, Bangladesh's proactive approach is laudable. However, like many nations striving for sustainable development,

the country grapples with bureaucratic constraints, resource shortages, and the practical applicability of training sessions (Scott et. al, 2004). These challenges are not insurmountable but require strategic interventions, innovative solutions, and, most importantly, a unified vision. It is also pertinent to highlight the dynamism of the SDGs. They aren't just targets but a reflection of an evolving global consciousness towards sustainability and equity. (Bebbington, 2020) As Bangladesh navigates this path, continuous learning, adaptation, and collaboration will be key.

In closing, while the journey towards 2030 and beyond may be rife with complexities, with determination, strategic planning, and collective effort, the vision encapsulated by the SDGs can be actualized. Bangladesh's endeavors serve not just as a national narrative but as a testament to global aspirations for a better, more sustainable future.

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