Institutional Mechanism of National Identification Card: Bangladesh Experience

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Abstract:

National ID card as a legal identity promises a host of goods that have tremendous potential to improve people's lives. National ID cards are touted to provide greater access to services, benefits, and opportunities; greater protection of human rights and security; a more legitimate and equitable distribution of public resources. Seventy-nine million National ID cards (NID) were distributed to Bangladeshi citizens as part of the 2007/2008 voter registration process. The cards served as a powerful incentive for voters to come to registration centers. During the voter registration process the Bangladesh Election Commission declared that the ID cards would be needed for 22 public and private services. Now, NID cards are making an impact on the daily life of Bangladeshis despite the fact that their legal status remains unclear, as Parliament has not passed the National Identities Registration Authority (NIRA) Ordinance. This study tempted to discuss about the experience of Institutional Mechanism of NID. The experiences of two countries (Ghana and Pakistan) have been discussed as a case study also to find the missing point of Bangladesh. It seems that with the legal status sound mechanism of ID, user friendliness, updating procedure, protection of duplicate registration and well equipped infrastructure is required to attain the deserved outcome from NID.

Keywords: National ID card, Institutional Mechanism, Citizens' Information, Effectiveness

1. Introduction

Personal and family information is need at different phases of life. Information is embedded in different document i.e., Birth certificate, School admission application, Citizenship certificate, College admission form etc. The information appears in scatter form also. The national ID card can make consistency of the information of the same person whether it is needed.

The National IDs can and has a made a difference to the lives of the citizens and it will continue to make such a difference in future. In Bangladesh NID card issued to 81.3 million people before the national election was a by-a product of the Election Commission's initial project titled "Preparation of Electoral Roll with Photographs (PERP)--launched with a view to prepare voter list with photographs. An average Bangladeshi earlier had to carry at least three to four different identities to prove his identity. The limitation of existing IDs, is that they serve different and limited purposes. As citizens are issued different identity proofs with different purposes, there is lack of a centralized information data system, thus caused redundancy and wastage of resources. In the following endeavor we will try to analyze the institutional mechanism of NID formulation process of a developing country and try to explore the gaps for further improvement.

2. National Identity Card (NID)

2.1 What is NID

A national identity card is a record system in which a unique identifier (a national ID) is associated with every citizen

of a given country. A national identification number is used by the governments of many countries as a means of tracking their citizens, permanent residents and temporary residents for the purposes of work, taxation, government benefits, health care and other functions. Although different countries have different views on the usage of the national identity, a large number of countries have been in favor of having a national identification system in place (Hiltz, and *et al.*,2002: 1).

2.2 General Attributes of NID
Generally a NID has the following attributes:

1. Some specific information of a particular citizen. It could be both "**General**" and "**Biometric**". The '**General'** information may comprise name, parent's name, address, date of birth etc. of a citizen and the '**Biometric'** information may comprise hand geometry, facial recognition, retina and iris scans ("eye prints"), voice recognition etc. of a citizen.
2. Can recognize each of the individual citizen separately- through unique identification number or other attributes like finger print of a NID card.
3. Matrix of NID- paper, magnetic chip etc.
4. Coverage- generally covers whole country.

2.3 Identification Process of NID
An ID that contains some specific information of a specific citizen of a nation which is fair enough to recognize each of the individual citizen separately. Suppose two ID cards have the following sets of personal information on person X and Y respectively-

$$X=(X_1, X_2, X_3 \ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots X_n)$$

$$Y=(Y_1, Y_2, Y_3 \ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots Y_n)$$

These information could be both General and Biometric. When we find these sets of information then we can differentiate them as X or Y and recognize them. Generally a unique number is generated for every citizen to differentiate them with others. Thus on the basis of some unique features, we can recognize each individual citizen of a nation separately.

3. NID around the World
National IDs have been implemented in various forms and mechanisms and serve varied purposes. Many countries have a system of national identity cards, some of which require their citizens to carry them at all times. Most European countries have ID cards. Some examples has been shown in table 1

Table 1 National IDs: Country Snapshots

Country	Name/Form of Identification Systems	Characteristics
Belgium	Identity card	Everyone above the age of 12 has to carry some means of identification at all times. For Belgians it is the identity card, for foreigners residing in Belgium it can also be a passport, a work permit or a (temporary) residence permit. Since the year 2000, all new identity cards have a chip.
Malaysia	Mykad, or Government Multipurpose Card, (GMPC)	It is the official compulsory identity card. It is regarded as the Government world's first smart identity card. As of 2006, MyKad has eight Multipurpose current and several planned applications. From March 2003, a variant issuable to newborn babies was introduced known as MyKid.

Pakistan	Computerized National Identity Card (CNIC)	Citizens must register for the Computerized National Identity Card (CNIC), with a unique Card (CNIC) number, at age 18.
Portugal	Portuguese national ID card	All Portuguese citizens are required by law to obtain an Indent Card as they turn 16 years of age. They are not required to carry it with them always but are obligated to present them to the lawful authorities if required.
Singapore	National Identity Card	The National Registration Identity Card is given to all the Singapore Citizens and Permanent Residents. The NRIC contains a unique number that identifies the person holding it, and is used for almost all identification purposes in Singapore, including authentication when accessing the Singapore government's web portal.
Spain	National Identity Card	It is required to open a bank account, to sign a contract to have state insurance, to register in a university or to be fined by a police officer. It is one of the official documents required to vote at any election, although any other form of official ID such as a driven license or passport may be used.

Source: Information collected from websites and documents from Bali Ministerial Conference Ad Hoc Experts' Group II - Regional Workshop on 'Identity Management: Challenges and Opportunities For Cooperation',2004.

4. Objective of the Study

The overall objective of the study is to analyse the entire NID formulation process in Bangladesh. The specific objectives of the study are, firstly, to identify the current institutional arrangements, secondly to explore the risk and opportunities, thirdly to examine other countries experiences for lessons and finally to suggest steps required to make NID more effective in Bangladesh.

5. Methodology

The study has reviewed all available literature on ID card to get a thorough understanding. The documents included, project documents, monitoring reports, status reports on implementation of activities under various objectives of the project. The review of the above- mentioned literature helped in understanding the various aspects ID card. Hold interview sessions with different stakeholders of the project such as project staff, Bangladesh Election Commission officials including PERP (Preparation of Electoral Roll with Photographs), NIRA (National Identities Registration Authority) officials, TigerIT BD, business leaders, politicians. The groups were targeted in order to get responses from a diverse cross-section of Bangladeshis.

6. NID Formulation Process in Bangladesh: Institutional Arrangement

6.1 Context

The 9th Parliamentary Election was scheduled on 22 January 2007 following the dissolution of Parliament in October 2006 in Bangladesh. Eventually, the elections could not be held. There were very strong demands for reconstitution of the BEC; amendment of the laws, rules and regulations relating to holding of elections in order to create a level-playing field for all contesting political parties and preparation of a new electoral roll with photograph. In fulfillment of these popular demands, the new Caretaker Government reconstituted the BEC with the appointment of a new Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and other two Commissioners. To start the process of completing the cycle, BEC took steps for preparing a credible electoral roll. Given the level of mistrust and lack of confidence in the authenticity of the 2006 electoral roll, revising this electoral roll in the existing mode was not an option. The minimum that seemed acceptable was an electoral roll with photograph. The proposed electoral roll with photograph will be merged into a central database by incorporating the fields necessary for voter registration. Development Partners (DPs) have also recognized the need of electoral reforms in Bangladesh in order to stabilize the future of

democracy in the country and expressed their willingness to assist the Election Commission in executing its various reform programs including preparation of an electoral roll with photographs on an urgent basis. In this regard, UNDP came forward as a partner of on-going technical support.

6.2 Institutional Arrangement

The Bangladesh Election Commission (BEC) is a constitutional body charged primarily with the task of conducting elections for the Parliament and the local bodies. To avoid the previous mistrust and lack of confidence in the authenticity of the earlier electoral roll BEC launch the PERP (Preparation of Electoral Roll with Photograph) project.

6.2.1 PERP Project

PERP is responsible for the implementation of the electoral roll with photograph project under the direction of the Election Commission. The head of the PERP project is an army officer and he called National Project Director (NPD). There is a Project Steering Committee headed by the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) to provide broad-based oversight, policy guidelines and direction for the project (GOB and UNDP, 2007: 16). The PERP is generally seen to be a very successful project of the Election Commission.

6.2.1.1 Management Arrangements

Management Arrangements has been shown in figure 1 in details.

Project Board/Steering Committee

The membership of the project board includes the Chief Election Commissioner as the Executive, the Bangladesh Election Commission Secretary as the Senior Beneficiary, the UNDP Country Director as the Senior Supplier, and other Government institutions and development partners as members. Other Government institutions include ERD, the Planning Commission and IMED. Development partners included on the project board include EC, DFID, in addition to UNDP. The main responsibilities of the Project Board are 1) Provide overall direction for the project, 2) Monitor and control progress, 3) Review each completed stage, 4) Commitment of project resources, as required, 5) Deliver project results and objectives, 6)Provide inter-ministerial coordination and 7) Approve any revision of the work plan。

Project Manager

The Bangladesh Election Commission appoints a National Project Director (NPD) to manage the project. The key responsibilities of the NPD includes 1) Day-to-day management of the project, 2) Identify and obtain any support and advice required for the management, planning and control of the project, 3) Reporting progress through regular highlight reports to the Implementation Committee and the Project Board/Steering Committee and 4) Delivery of project outputs in the project document

Training Team: The Training Team was responsible for the development of curriculum and the management, training, scheduling, and coordination of the core group of master trainers with monitoring all the tasks.

Operations Team: The Operations Team coordinated with 508 Upazila Election Officers on the Upazila-level data collection offices, the ward-level registration centers and the computer operators staffing the registration centers. Upazila Election Officers reported to the Bangladesh Election Commission. The Operations Team also coordinated with the Upazila Nirbahi Officers (UNOs) on the enumerators. UNOs reported directly to the District Commissioner and were responsible for coordinating all Upazila activities.

IT Team: The IT Team was engaged and funded from the UNDP Support to the BEC project. The IT Team developed and supported all computer software and was responsible for data management.

Finance Team: The Finance Team was responsible for the day to day management of budgetary and payment processing and management.

Administration Team: Team oversees all personnel management and procurement processes. The team was responsible for the planning of activities and ensured that all processes follow UNDP and GOB guidelines.

Legal Team: The Leal Team operated as a contract administration resource. Many vendors were involved through the procurement and support of equipment and the provision of services. The Legal Team ensured that all contract conditions were met and provided advice to the project team in the event of further contractual requirements or negotiations.
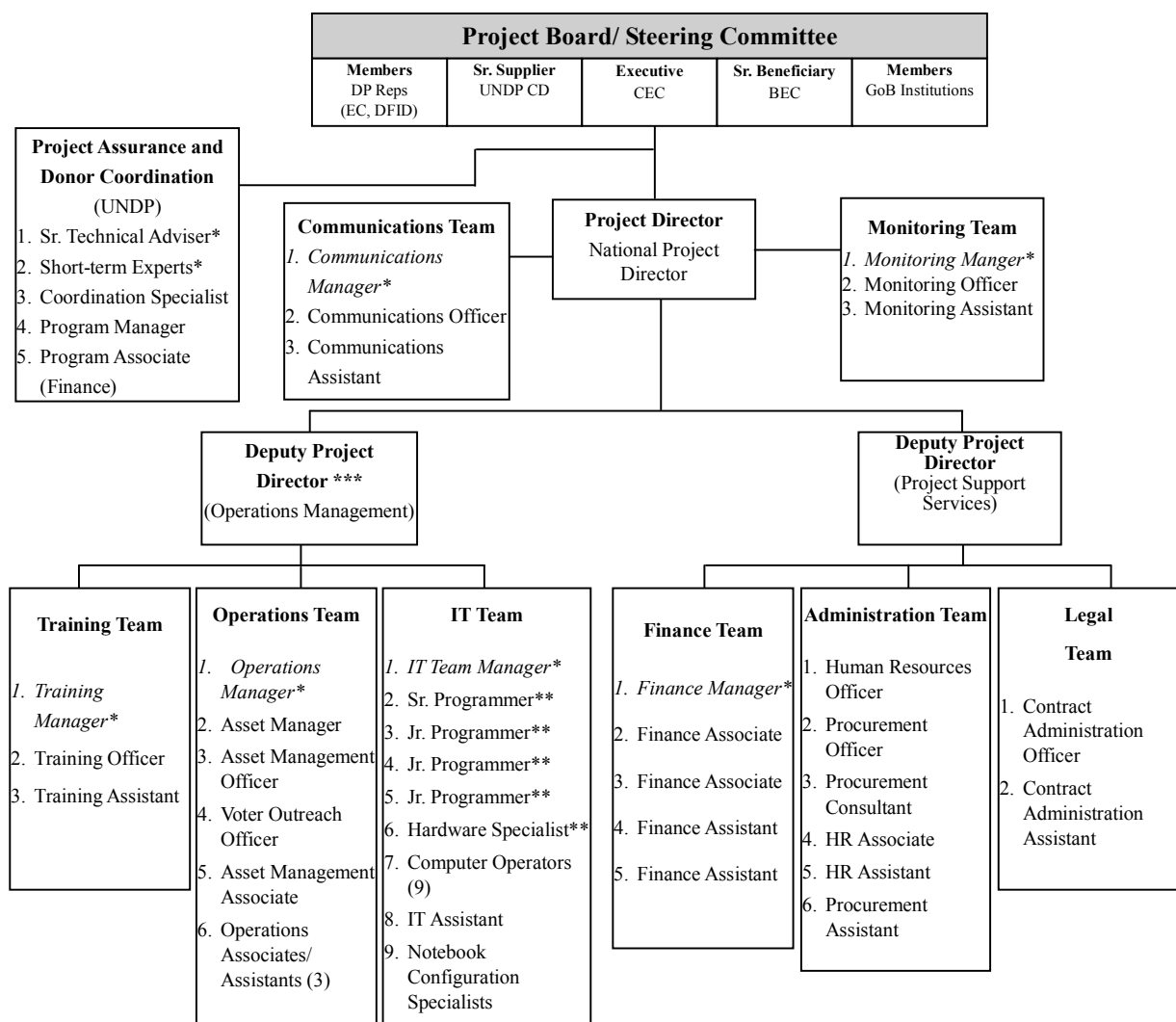
Figure 1 Management Arrangement

* Technical Assistance Team on UNDP contracts

** To be funded under separate UNDP project, 'Support to Electoral Process Project'

*** From Bangladesh Army

The role of the Bangladesh Army

The role of the Bangladesh Army in the implementation of the PERP project was to contribute management and technical support services in strategic areas as well as to provide logistical support and ad-hoc surge staffing as and when deemed necessary by the Bangladesh Election Commission. The BEC may seek one high ranking Army official having expertise in computer hardware/software to be posted as the project director on secondment/deputation. At the field level, a number of Army personnel (not exceeding 5) are likely to be engaged in each registration center so far as it relates to data entry and associated activities.

6.2.1.2 Methodology

The photo voter list has been completed by using a software solution that can electronically record voter information from a registration form, along with digital photographs, fingerprint scans and signatures/thumb prints. The methodology was developed by the Bangladesh Election Commission with support from UNDP. Accuracy of captured voter information were verified through direct voter confirmation at the time of entry, secondary data verification, and voter verification of provisional ID card details. Fingerprint-matching software was also used at the Upazila level to ensure that the same person did not register more than once in any Upazila. Draft voter lists were posted for a mandatory 2 week period for voters to raise objections and to vary their own details and inclusion.
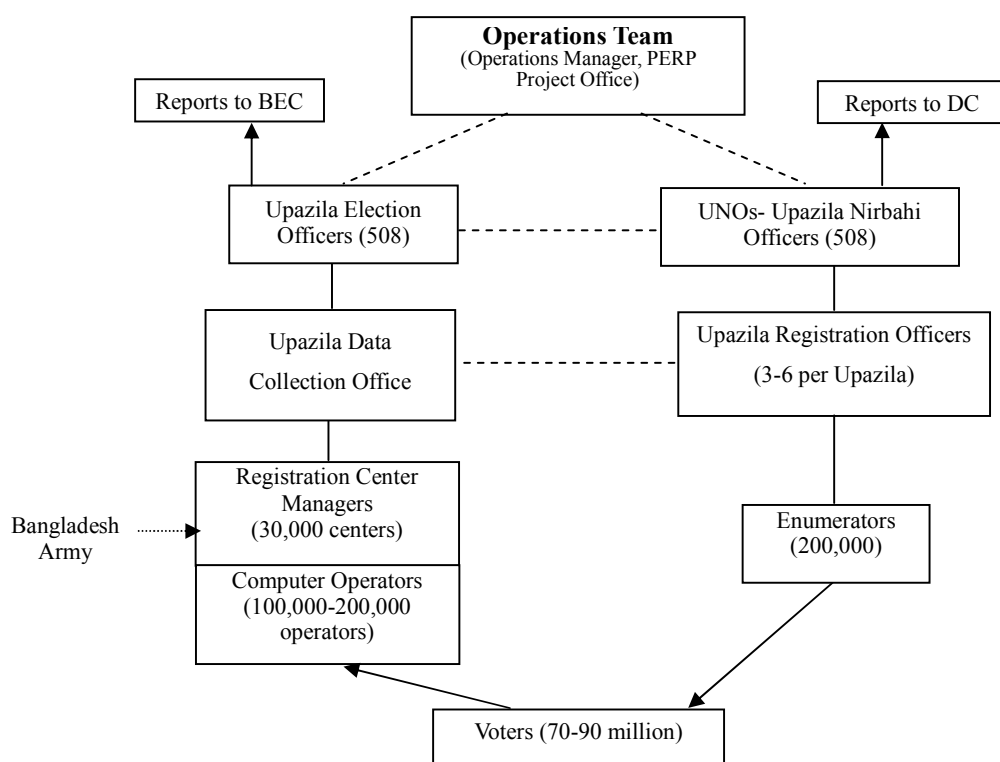
Figure 2 Field-Level Flowchart and Information Flow back to the Project Office

6.2.2 The BEC

Formulation and Distribution of NID

Bangladesh Election Commission has prepared a credible voter list with photographs and held a very successful and credible election in December'2008. The voter identity cards which were provided by the Election Commission were considered as national identity cards following government directives. Election Commission has prepared 81.3 million NID cards. About 2 million cards remain undistributed. Election commission is in possession of the central data base.

Updating Procedure
The Bangladesh Election Commission plans to issue cards to citizens as part of its voter list updating strategy for 2009. Under this strategy, *Upazila* Election Officers will mange the technical aspects of voter registration previously handled by the Armed Forces, and will print and laminate NID cards for voters that have been newly registered. The Bangladesh Election Commission anticipates registering approximately 5% new voters, or approximately 4 million voters (those that have turned 18, or were missed or were abroad during initial voter registration) over the summer of 2009. The method of voter registration follows the model established in the initial process in 2007/2008 – which combines door-to-door enumeration and voters coming to registration centers for photographs.

The Election Commission plans to carry out the voter list update through out the year. The Armed Forces of Bangladesh will not be involved in the update process. Bangladesh Election Commission has embarked on a pilot project in March'09 in *Manikganj* district and the lessons from the piloting would be used later in nation wide voter list update. In case of this update, registration centers would operate with a view to allow new-voters who turned 18 years of age on 1st January of a given year and also include those who missed out earlier and also to identify people who died since the time of preparation of the voter list. It may be mentioned here that deceased person's information would not be deleted from the data base, rather they will be marked as dead. The BEC estimates to add approximately 5% new names to the list.

Expanding Physical Infrastructure
The BEC and UNDP have begun a program to expand the Commission's physical infrastructure at the *Upazila* and *Thana* level in February 2009. Activities are going to expand electronically also. The *Upazila* and *Thana* server stations will serve as the points of interaction between the BEC, the voting public and local representatives from stakeholder organizations."(CSSED Project Document, 3) The project also calls for 5 regional server stations to be built in order to facilitate transfer of data between local servers and the main data server in Dhaka. The CSSED Project is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2010.

The BEC is establishing the infrastructure and staff capacity to maintain the voter list database through continuous activity at the local level. With computer equipment, trained staff, and infrastructure in place, the BEC is well positioned to continue creating and issuing ID cards.

6.2.3 The National Identities Registration Authority (NIRA)
The council of advisers of the Caretaker government on 30th of May, 2008 approved the National Identity Registration Authority (NIRA) Ordinance 2008. The ordinance establishes that the Ministry of Home will serve as the control ministry for providing national identification cards. It also states that voter identity cards which were provided by the Election Commission will be considered as national identity cards. The ordinance includes penal provisions for providing false information in obtaining a card, or for carrying more than one card. Forging a national identification card can be penalized by up to seven years imprisonment and a fine. Following the government gazette NIRA started its operation and had its head office in Agargoan, Dhaka with 1 Chair, 3 members, 2 directors and 10 supporting staffs. In fact, these officials and staffs were deputed from different government department/divisions/ministries. The main functions and responsibilities of NIRA as outlined in the government gazette were as follows:

a. Registration of NID and Issuing NID
b. Collecting data and information for NID, verification and preservation
c. Supplying the preserved data and information collected for NID

    d. Imparting training to the officials and staffs of the Authority
    e. Supervising the officers under the Authority
    f. Coordinating among different ministries, divisions and departments of government on matters relating to NID
    g. Undertaking and implementing different projects relating to NID
    h. Organizing seminar, symposium on issues relevant to national

However, because Ordinance No 18, 2008 has to date not been passed by the newly elected Parliament, NIRA officials have begun to be transferred to other government agencies, expecting that NIRA will cease to exist. This will leave the aforementioned initiatives uncompleted.

NIRA's Achievements During its Brief Existence:
During its brief existence NIRA took the following measures since its inception to link the NID with different government services:

    a. The passport office in Dhaka is providing one stop service and this has been possible for them as they are relying on NIRA provided data and information
    b. Shared the data with different public and private banks which contributed immediately to stopping the attempts to open fake, multiple and undeclared bank accounts.
    c. NIRA made an attempt in collaboration with the Ministry of agriculture to stop wastages and corruption in the process of distribution of fertilizer subsidies among the needy farmers.
    d. Special Brach of Police use the NID data for different verification.
    e. Mobile phone operators used the information of NID for the registration
    f. NIRA made a draft plan to complete the registration of all citizens below 18 in different phases.
    g. National identity registration draft law was made and sent for approval.

7. NID Formulation in Bangladesh: Some Key Issues

NID: Government Stated Benefits
The government gazette on the establishment of National Identification and Registration Authority (NIRA) published and circulated on 15th May, 2008.

Gazette mentioned that NID have to be presented in case of[1] 1) Issuance and renewal of a passport*[2], 2) Driving license*, 3) Trade license, 4) Tax identification number (TIN)*, 5) Bank accounts*, 6) Business identification number*, 7) Business bank account, 8) Beneficiary's owner account (Stock Exchanges)*, 9) Connection of utility services*, 10) Telephone connection*, 11) Mobile phone registration*, 12) Internet connection, 13) Cable television connection*, 14) Registration for public exams, 15) Marriage registration*, 16) Loans*, 17) Government Subsidies*, 18) Government Allowances*, 19) Buying land, 20) Selling land*, 21) School admissions and 22) Lodging cases in court.

Existence of NIRA
NIRA as an organization and in charge of the national identity card began its operation in July'08. But after the democratic transition occurred in January'09, the new parliament did not pass the NIRA Ordinance. As the Ordinance was not passed, NIRA cannot legally exist anymore, NIRA will soon be scrapped. Some of the NIRA officials and staffs have been transferred already and some are awaiting postings elsewhere within government. Some observations on scrapping of NIRA are as follows:

    a. Those who oppose NIRA pointed out that creation of NIRA meant yet another addition to bureaucratic proliferation

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[1] This list was drawn from an October 4, 2007 article in E-Bangladesh titled "EC on N-ID cards".
[2] * Services included in the NIRA Ordinance. The Ordinance also includes applying for a job and taking part in insurance schemes as transactions where a NID card is required.

    b.   Election Commission did not want another government organization to get hand on national data base on grounds of data tampering

    c.   NIRA as an organization was moving too fast and promised too many things within too little time which made the Election Commission skeptical about its future role

    d.   NIRA would only add to government expenditure, it does not have its own manpower, equipment, facilities, organizational network, capacity and experience. On the other hand, the Election Commission has them all and therefore national data base can be well handled by the Commission.

BEC as in Charge of NID

As mentioned already, in Bangladesh NID cards are the by-product of the Election Commission's initiative to prepare electoral roll with photographs. The Election Commission is in possession of the national data base of 81.3 million people. With NIRA Ordinance not being approved by the parliament EC is now in charge of the NID cards in addition to its routine responsibilities.

The Issue of 2 million undistributed ID cards:

Currently 2 million cards still remain undistributed and they are now lying with the Election Commission. Some facts and issues about the undistributed ID cards are as follows:

1.   The undistributed cards belong to people mostly living in urban centers
2.   People found to be not interested to collect their ID cards.
3.   The distribution of ID cards could not be handled properly by the local leaders on their own

Following initiatives can be taken to address the problems:

1.   Election Commission must make sure that the citizens are informed of its initiatives
2.   The citizens would come and collect their ID cards if the government takes a step to immediately link the NID card with accessing the already announced services;
3.   Government may as well involve the local leaders/local government officials;
4.   Public-private partnerships can play an effective role in the process of distribution of the cards.

Lost ID Cards

At present, there is no charge for the replacement of lost ID card except some legal procedure. But the question is: how EC then plan to serve the needs of the people living in the distant villages who do not have the willingness or financial capabilities to come to Dhaka to get their replacement cards.

Reasons behind the Success

The production of 81.3 million NID cards (of which 79 million were distributed to the public) was a major external benefit of voter registration, and was the subject of significant national enthusiasm. Despite unresolved legal and institutional issues, the ID cards continue to be used in day-to-day life by Bangladeshis, and are making an impact on reducing the transaction cost of a variety of social and economic interactions (DFID, 2009: 12). Some of the key reasons for successful formulation of NID within short period of time are: a) Common people's support, b) True commitment of the government, c) Involvement of armed forces, d) Support extended by the civil society, e) The decision to turn voter ID into a national ID, f) Support extended by the local leaders, g) Support extended by the development partners and h) Ability to purchase logistics/whatever necessary within a short span of time.

The Future Challenges

There are some challenges that are needed to address in future. Firstly no involvement of armed forces is seen to be a serious challenge. Getting people in the registration centers for registration is a difficult task. A sound physical as well as electrical infrastructure is needed also. Ensuring the distribution of 2 million undistributed ID is a challenge. Moreover, checking the fake cards and management and control all over the country is a challenging task.

8. National ID: Case Studies of Two Countries

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Table 2 Case Study

Attributes	Ghana	Pakistan
Name of the Authority	**The Electoral Commission of Ghana**	**National Database & Registration Authority (NADRA)**
Nature of Authority	The Electoral Commission (EC) is one of the governance institutions provided for under the 1992 constitution. The Commission was established by the Electoral Commission Act (Act 451) of 1993.	An independent corporate body with requisite autonomy.
Relation With Government	-	Established under the Ministry of Interior as a sister organization
Name or Form of Identification Systems	Photo ID Card	Computerized National Identity Card (CNIC)
Data Communication Network	-	Have a countrywide Data Communication Network linking the Central Data Warehouse with eight regional hubs across the country
Usage	For election	1) Every citizen is required to have a NIC number, and the number is required for many activities such as paying taxes, opening a bank account etc., 2) E-Passport, 3) Automated Border Control System (ABC), 4) National Identity Card for Overseas Pakistanis (NICOP) or Pakistan Origin Card (POC)., 5)Automated Finger Identification System (AFIS)
Year of Formation	1995	Formed on 10th March 2000
Content of ID card	In 1995, ID card content was the name, age, sex and a unique number to all eligible voters. However, due to lack of sufficient funds, only voters in the ten (10) regional capitals and ten (10) selected rural constituencies, comprising about one-third of the voter population, received photo identity cards with the rest receiving thumb-printed cards	The Computerized National Identity Cards (CNIC) include a sophisticated array of security features to safeguard any probable forgery. The CNIC contains machine-readable information, although certain characters may be visible to the naked eye, others must be verified through the use of optical aids.
Number of People Registered	1,256,707 (2008)	With more than 56 million CNICs (Computerized National Identity Cards) issued and aims to register all 150 million citizens of Pakistan.
Political Parties Participation	Active participation of political parties (eighty thousand party agents)	No active participation of political participation
	Lessons for Bangladesh **Party Agent** The presents of political party agents and their active participation can	**Lessons for Bangladesh** **Central Data Warehouse** Like Pakistan Bangladesh may as well

ensure the credibility of the ID card updating procedure.

Public Education Program
An effective campaign should be launched to educate the people during the updating procedure.

Registration Centers
Establish the registration centers within the reach of people and ensure the number of people to be assigned in a centers on the basis of realistic calculation.

Lost ID card
For lost ID card, the commission should replace with cards of different color and maintain a database of the information of the lost ID card and then we can easily detect any fraud take place using that card.

consider establishing the central data warehouse which should be connected with the whole country to store all the information.

Swift Registration Centers
Like NADRA, Bangladesh can establish Swift Registration Centers throughout major cities of Bangladesh for updating purposes. All the centers should be linked to the central sites.

Better National Security for Bangladesh
Bangladesh can use the database to detect the criminals.

Automated Border Control System (ABC)
Like Pakistan Bangladesh may as well introduce Automated Border Control System (ABC) by using national ID card.

Automated Finger Identification System (AFIS)
Like Pakistan Bangladesh may consider introduction of Automated Finger Identification System (AFIS). This biometric solution enables fool-proof identification of individuals.

9. Concluding Remarks

The need of a NID for a country like Bangladesh becomes more crucial than for a host of countries that have already adopted such a system or are in the process of such an exercise. Provision of multiple services to a large population by government and private organizations is a mammoth task and is accompanied by many hurdles. The National IDs would help in better delivery of government services like Public Distribution System, self-employment, banking and investment services, health facilities and different schemes offered by the government. Other benefits which could be derived are: a single document with multiple information integrated to strengthen national security and social security for citizens, a useful means for citizens to access multiple government and private services and benefits, and an easier and safe means for entities to offer services, employment, etc. The NID can and has made a difference to the lives of the citizens and it will continue to make such a difference in future. But if we fail to address the problems like- legal status of NID, sound mechanism to replace ID in case of urgency, establishing public friendly and accurate updating procedure of list, protecting duplicate registration in order to obtain replacement of IDs, establishing well equipped infrastructure at local level, developing the capacity of the working personnel, putting sufficient security features in the ID cards, checking the production and use of fake cards then we will fail to attain the deserved outcome.

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