

PROLOGUE

Social media has been playing an important role in connecting citizen towards development activities of the Government. Like other countries of the world, Bangladesh has taken up the initiative of connecting citizen through social media to accelerate decision-making process, and to consult with the citizen. In fact, ensuring e-participation through social media include; e-information, e-consultation, and e-decision making. This brief is about a Facebook group, “*Barisal-Problem & Prospect*” that has made a movement in Barisal. The Group now has 50,000+ members, where every member can raise their voice to portray the problems and prospects of Barisal, “The Venice of Bangla.”

THE STORY

19 April 2016, 2.31 pm: One group member named Momena Shifa Rumki, posted a comment on the Facebook group, ***Barisal-Problem & Prospect*** with some photos of *Jel Khal (canal)* drawing attention of the District Administration to stop environmental damage by earth filling and to protect all the canals situated within Barisal City.

20 April 2016 from 03.09pm- 09.58pm: About 17 group members posted their comments supporting her post. Following the Facebook group initiative more than 300 Students of Barisal Town High school have signed a petition in order to eradicate illegal structures from the Jel Khal of Barisal city and handed over this to DC.

29 April 2016, 10:45pm: DC Barisal directed the Barisal City Corporation to take necessary action in this regard and posted the copy of this letter to the Facebook Group on the basis of above post and public support .

4 May 2016 at 3:17pm: DC posted his comments with relevant pictures about the actions that have been taken by him to recover the canal from encroachers. The post said that along with Barisal City Corporation many illegal structures were demolished from *Jel Khal* banks including shops, storehouses and houses. Upon his action many group members instantly replied him giving thanks and appreciation. And finally, the cleaning drive of Barisal Jel Khal (canal) started in the city involving the citizens to return the beautiful look of the canal back and maintain its navigability, and free the canal from the clutches of illegal occupants and grabbers for ensuring smooth plying of river transport.

More than 30,000 of people from different professions and ages attended the cleaning drive.

INTRODUCTION

Social Media has become an inseparable part of peoples lives in Bangladesh. The Government of Bangladesh as part of its e-government activities has been using Social Media, especially Facebook, to ensure e-participation. However, by using Facebook the government has started an innovative mechanism of connecting people. Social media has solved and created horizons of possibilities. Barisal DC Office has showed an ideal example of e-participation by connecting local government and community people. Recently it has gained huge appreciation from the Government, Civil Society as well as from United Nations officials. Through the Barisal case; Bangladesh has made its beginning in the pathway of e-participation, a very modern and dynamic way of interaction with people in terms of e-decision making, e-consultation and e-information.

This e-participation brief assessed the challenges and prospects of Jel Canal Cleaning Drive of Barisal District.

Method

This brief is the outcome of an Open Discussion between Citizen Journalists of Barisal and two UNDESA Officials from New York. The program, presided by the DC of Barisal was held on 21 October, 2016 and organized by Barisal District Administration. The a2i team also conducted 10 in-depth interview with citizen journalists to incorporate and assess the Case critically. The views reflected in the brief is mainly based on the Open Discussion and In-depth interview with Citizen Journalists.

About e-Participation

The traditional process of citizen participation in government activities have been re-invented over the time. The public and private communications are also essentially changing with the introduction of new ICTs, including social media. In support of sustainable development, which has taken the place of e-Participation.

“The process of engaging citizens through ICTs in policy, decision-making, and service design and delivery in order to make it participatory, inclusive, and deliberative” (UNDESA, 2013).

Why

To connect citizens with one another, and with their elected representatives, the government.

How

- (i) **e-Information** – provision of information on the Internet,
- (ii) **e-Consultation** – organizing public consultations online, and
- (iii) **e-Decision-making** – involving citizens directly in decision processes.

e-Decision/policy making

e-Consultation

e-Information

e-participation goes beyond merely requesting people to provide their views about decisions and services proposed by the government. It mobilizes and shapes action. (UN e-Government Survey 2016)



Role of Citizen Journalists in engaging citizens of Barisal

The concept of Citizen Journalists (CJ) has got huge popularity among all classes of people of Barisal. Citizen journalist are those people who plays their role as spokesperson of the society through social media i.e. Facebook. Any citizen can play the role of “Citizen Journalist”, a strong platform to unleash potential for solving social problems in Barisal . There is a Facebook group of Citizen Journalists in Barisal who raises problems and discuss about the solution of that particular problems. They are also playing a pivotal role of transferring information between the online and offline people. Thus, they also keep communication with the people who do not use online or who do not have access to internet.

Citizen Journalists through face book group;

- Post problems of Barisal and discuss about the solution.
- Draw attention of the Government to solve citizen problems.
- Invite others to work together for the sake of their city.
- Raise voice and awareness on social problems and prospects.
- Deposit social capital to address development challenges.
- Ensure e-participation in support of sustainable development.
- Ensure transparency, accountability and access to public service.



Case study: Face Book Group Barisal Problems and Prospects

The Facebook Group, “Barisal-Problem & Prospect” was created on 13th august,2015.The Group has currently 50,381+ (members and 9 Admins from both Government and Citizen.

The DC of Barisal has been playing a vital role in engaging citizens. He looks after the Group regularly as an Admin.

In its description, it is mentioned that the Group is run by the District Administration to;

- Unleash potentials of Barisal.
- Reduce hassle in terms of getting public service.
- Ensure mass communication between government and citizen.

Also anyone can post regarding problems and way forward of solving that particular problem in the Group .



_Dipu Hafizur Rahman

The Jel Canal Cleaning Drive started with the Face Book Group, “Barisal-Problem & Prospect”. We encouraged people by collecting mass signature, posting on face book, distributing T-shirts, providing free Wi-Fi Zone, building health camp, and making video documentary .



_Momena Shifa Rumki

The Jel Khal (Canal) is the heritage of Barisal. The Cleaning Drive is like as making history. There were huge challenges to implement the Drive especially gathering more than 30,000 people. However, it was easily done through Facebook.



_Protiva Sharmin Nitol

Using technology we want the nature to be alive which requires appropriate use of technology. we want continuous blessings of nature by reducing effects of technology. Barisal Jel Canal Cleaning Drive was an appropriate example of using technology. The campaign does not end here, it will continue. Let us spread this message across our Sonar Bangla.

Challenges

Big initiatives always confront with big challenges. Barisal Jel Canal Cleaning Drive proved again that the power of Social Media by using social capital can over come any challenge. There were lots of challenges in implementing this huge task. These challenges were;

- to create public opinion and take proper steps to make the citizen believe that the cleaning drive will success if they work together.
- to recover the canal from invaders. Their illegal possession of the canal was on threat when the cleaning drive begun.
- to regain people’s trust on the government, was also a big issue. The administration and citizens were working together on this project.
- to create a healthy environment through getting rid of illegal infrastructure, discharging huge amount of garbage’s was a big challenge.
- to co-ordinate between approximately 30,000 people and creating a similar mindset on a particular work was a huge task.

Moreover, manpower, money always remained as a challenge .

How Jel Canal Cleaning Drive came into reality

- Barisal Jel Canal Cleaning Drive showed that one individual’s idea can be implemented in a community for a better cause. They needed to overcome many challenges to make this theory to become reality.
- Everything started when a single post of a girl named Momena Shifa Rumki caught an eye of the authority. The DC responded and took proper action to make the canal clean again.
- Youth of the Barisal community played a vital role in this project. They showed that, Youth are the heart of the society. If they lead into a specific direction, they can solve the challenges and try to overcome it with their innovative ideas.
- The citizen journalist was active during the whole process. They played a vital role to communicate with the common people online and offline. They updated the condition of the canal cleansing progress continuously.
- District administration took the lead when the citizens showed up on the field to cleanse the canal. Feedbacks from the common people made the authority to act enthusiastically.
- Thanks to social media, which gave a platform to co-ordinate between the government and citizen. Facebook gave the opportunity to show love and integrity of the common people towards their community. Citizen’s feel a sense of satisfaction by working for their community. It regained their believe that they are fulfilling their duty towards their country.



Prospects and Impacts

Social awareness, social business, and social capital is highly possible through social media. There seems huge potential of social media in terms of solving citizen problems and unleashing potential. The Jel Canal Cleaning Drive of Barisal has just started a beginning of a new era of hope and prosperity. Social impacts of this jel Canal Cleaning Drive are:

- The initiative has generated evidence that citizen and public administration can work together and bring success on any big challenge.
- The positive side is that attitude towards government, public administration and public service have been changed.
- People of Barisal are now aware of keeping their city clean from their own responsibilities, rights, and roles.
- Due to this drive, people of Barisal are now aware about their rights, and responsibilities.
- Collective efforts has been made the drive possible and made the canal live. This will not go into the same situation again.
- This drive will increase recreational facilities for the people of Barisal City. Surely this will help ensuring social development.
- Other public properties will be recovered as a result of this Drive. Again, no encroacher will try to do the same.
- Other Districts will be motivated to take such initiatives. It is observed that other District Administration has been taking such initiatives following the success of Barisal.
- People are getting solutions of their problems more quickly. Thus connection between Government and citizen are becoming strong and trustworthy.

Barisal Jel Canal has created lots of possibilities. Barisal is regaining its heritage and history. The cleaning drive created financial impacts including:

1. creating field for new business projects.
2. enhancing it's beauty ,tourist spots will grow in this region.

Rice, River, and Canal,
These three made Barisal

This Drive has increased harmony among people and united them for the development of Barisal. As a result, the young generation have become enthusiastic for the development of Barisal. This has made people aware about their heritage, "Rice, River, and Canal, This three has made Barisal". Some future plans have been adopted such as "Eradicate poverty in Barisal" and "Clean other canals inside Barisal". Barisal initiative has spread cascading effect across our country. Tangail has started to recover LOUHOUJONG River. Many other districts got motivated too.

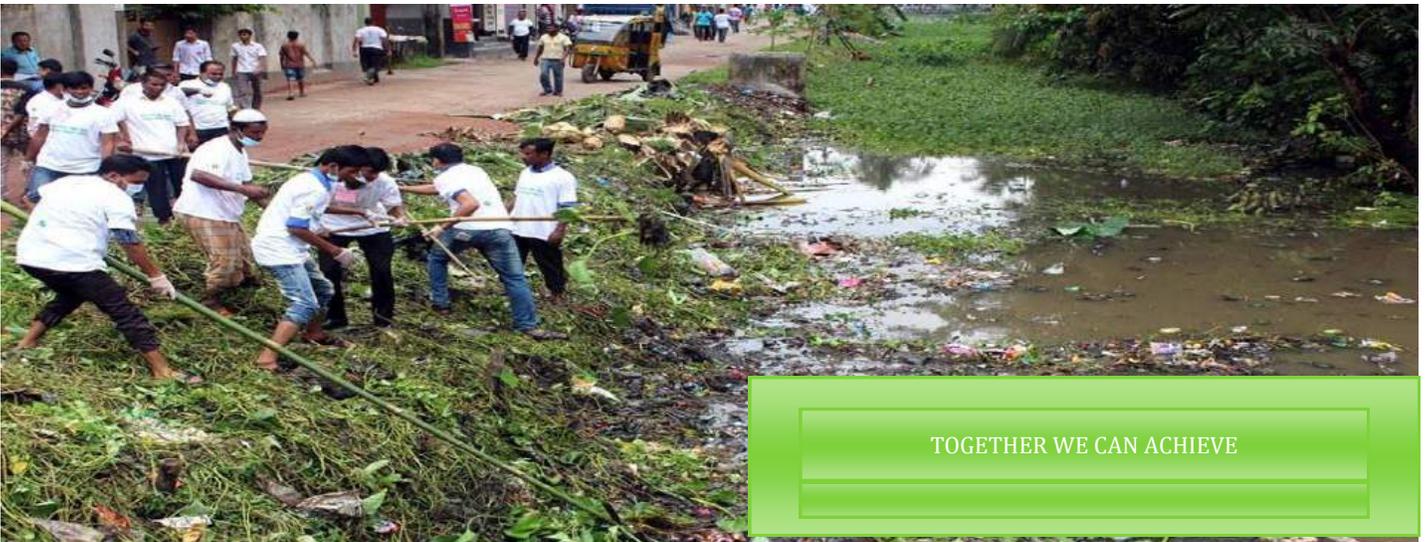
"Barisal has made an example of connecting citizen and government through the page of "Barisal-Problem & Prospect". Many problems of Barisal have been solved through social media. Barisal DC office also made an example of using social media in solving social problems. As recognition, we got national award on e-participation . "



-Gazi Saifuzzaman, DC, Barisal

CONCLUSION

Barisal Jel Canal Cleaning Drive was an excellent example of Public-Private Partnership (PPP). This is an evidence that public administration and citizen can work together and contribute in solving any big problem. The initiative of beautifying one's city through collective effort was really aesthetic. Utilizing social capital to solve citizen problems is really imperative. Through this Jel Canal Cleaning Drive people have become aware on public service and administration. Also this is a nature and citizen friendly initiative that motivate people to protect public property. However, all these have been done through social media i.e. Facebook. Thanks to Facebook, Thanks to Barisal District Administration.



TOGETHER WE CAN ACHIEVE



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Resilient nations.