

Transferring Knowledge and Experience from One District to Another : The Case of Tangail Louhojong River Cleaning Drive

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Social Media has created open platforms, which has rapidly become one of the greatest forces of social change throughout the world. Bangladesh has put forth a successful example of a strong sense of solidarity between the government and citizens. One of the strongest features of social media is that it provides an environment and medium for people to express themselves independently as well as mobilize public opinion in certain matters.

INTRODUCTION

e-participation through social media has been playing a vital role to minimize the communication gap between the Government and the community in Bangladesh. It has become a buzz word since it helped the government officials and the citizens to come together to act on a particular issue. It also helps to take social action for social and public good. Tangail District has taken an initiative of cleaning the Louhojong River through; 1) connecting people, 2) using knowledge and experience from Barisal Jel Canal cleaning drive, and 3) using social media. In this brief the story of Tangail Louhojong river cleaning drive has been assessed critically from the lens of Social Experts..

THE BEGINNING

- Barisal has put forth an excellent example of cleaning the Barisal Jel Khal (canal) with the help of the social capital raised by the government and citizens. Following the footsteps of this drive, The Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Tangail decided to clean the Historical LOUHOJONG River of Tangail. He gathered knowledge, experiences and support from the DC and Citizen Journalists of Barisal.
- At First the DC of Tangail exchanged views underpinning the necessity of cleaning the Louhojong river through meetings, addressing all stakeholders to join in this cause and to provide their insights. Many organizations and institutions responded very positively and gave their mandate and support.

The Story of Social Action through Social Media



Announcement using Facebook, a tool for connecting people



Consultation with stakeholders on Louhojong river cleaning

Ways to Bring the Community Together

The biggest challenge of this cleaning drive was to bring the community together. The DC of Tangail took many initiatives to aware the citizens, even the higher officials. He used the social as well as mass media. The DC went out himself and distributed leaflets in the busiest areas of the town. Citizens who were not online were also informed by other means of communication, i.e. miking, leaflet distribution, human chain, collecting mass signature, writing songs, developing videos, audio-visual documentaries etc.

Role of Facebook

Facebook has been used in this cleaning drive as an open platform between citizens and the authorities to communicate and participate in this cleaning drive. Many Facebook pages posted regular updates of this cleaning drive. The DC of Tangail supervised the Facebook pages` "Tangail fb TV" , " District Commissioner, Tangail". Everyone can have an access to these pages. Tangail FB TV gave live feedbacks of the procedure step by step. The Facebook page, "The public service innovation Group" held the most important role among all of them. In this page the DC took advices from the higher Officials.

Communicating people who grabbed the river

The Government administration, exchanged their views with the public without getting them angry or frustrated and made them understand that the land beside the river belongs to the government and if the river gets clean eventually, it will benefit the public . Illegal structures were marked with the red crossed signs. red flags were inserted where crossed marks can not be reached .Because of the publicity many people took off their belongings and went away at their own will. People who didn't have anywhere to go, were kept under a project of "Asrayon". They will be given facilities from the government.

Collaboration of Organizations

Almost every organization of Tangail took part on this cleaning drive. About 60 government organizations, 50 private organizations, including NGO'S, Humanitarian workers, environmental organizations, 200 print and electronic media workers, 300 UDC, PDC, Village Police , UP Secretary, Students, Scouts, all 12 Upazilla Administrations, Workers from 11 different municipalities, people from owner-employee committee, Citizen Journalist Groups, as well as people from every sphere of life has come together to clean the river.

Role of Citizen Journalist Group from Barisal

A delegation of Citizen journalists comprised of 60 citizen journalists from Barisal came to Tangail district to help in the cleaning of the Louhojong river. Sahriar Hossain is one of the citizen journalist from Barisal who said that The Tangail cleaning drive is more planned and successful than The Barisal Jel canal cleaning drive, since they had some idea about the procedure from the Barisal Jel khal cleaning drive. Also they are doing more activities than that of Barisal. We have cleaned the Jel Canal, and they are not only cleaning the river, but also making it free from encroachers and doing beautification for recreation of the people.



Distributing Leaflets among citizens



Forming Human Chain to attract citizens



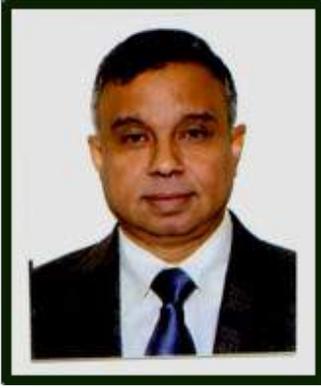
Louhojong cleaning updates were posted on a regular basis



Drive just begun : Illegal structure red marked



Citizens are removing their structures at their own will



Md. Abul Kalam Azad,
Principal Secretary

“One district is learning from the successful experience of another district. Barisal and Tangail district has become an example to other districts. DC of the Barguna district has already shown his interest in this matter. Now it's turn for other districts to follow the footsteps.”



A Citizen Journalist Group from Barisal, joined the cleaning drive which turned into the talk of the town, people started asking to the unknown people, “Are you from Barisal?””

“Jel khal ++”.

N.M Zeaul Alam, Secretary (Co-ordination and Reforms) opined The Cleaning of Louhojong River as “Jel khal ++”.

Difference between Barisal Jel khal cleaning drive and the Tangail river cleaning:

The LOUHOJONG river cleaning has more steps rather than the Barisal Jel khal cleaning Drive. These are:

- Cleaning and Digging the LOUHOJONG river .
- Demolishing the illegal structures.
- Beautifying banks of the river.

“To make Tangail Louhojong cleaning drive successful ,our first priority was to create public acceptance. Every electronic and printed media was used for this purpose. Such as: Facebook, news on local newspaper and media, distributing leaflets, creating human chain on busy streets etc. We sought cooperation in Development Coordination Meeting, Law and Order Meeting. Dialogue exchange within different union district commission. Last but not least ,this enormous project wouldn't came to reality without the help of Facebook.”



Mahbub Hossain, DC, Tangail

How was it possible?

“After measuring the bank of the Louhojong River, Illegal structures were marked. We went to every house asking about the previous condition and the present condition of the Louhojong river. Everyone showed their interest to save and preserve the Louhojong river. Because of my hospitality and approach they thought I was a journalist, then I broke their misunderstanding by answering them that I am their own ac land. Sanwar shahin , Assistant Commissioner (land).



12 Upazilla Administration collaborated



Demolishing Illegal Structures to create new roads.

Exchanging Knowledge and Experience from One District to Another



Barisal DC and Barisal citizen journalist group

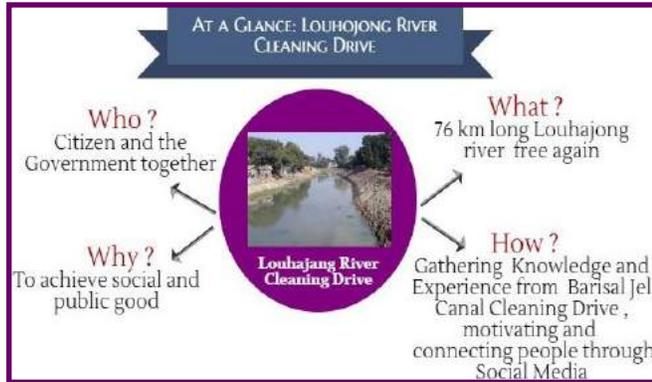


Mass people came together to volunteer



Barisal Citizen Journalist working in Tangail

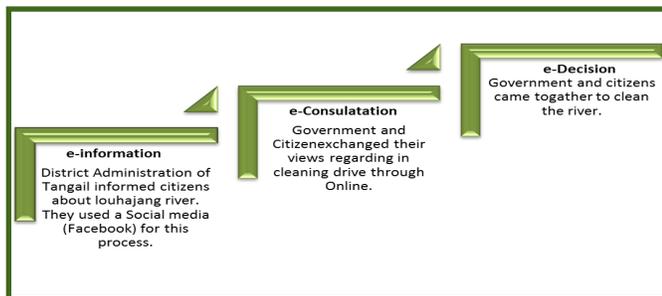
At A Glance



An Excellent Example of e-participation

Bangladesh has ground breaking success on e-participation throughout the country. e-participation ensures in the development in e-government. Bangladesh ranked 124th in 193th according to UN e-government survey 2016. E-participation shifted the role of the government from service provider to solution enabler. The “Government-to-you” approach shifted and it became “Government-with-you” approach.

E-participation has three crucial steps; 1) e-information, 2) e-consultation, and 3) e-decision. Tangail Louhajang river cleaning drive has also followed this three steps. First, e-information was ensured by communication through social media as well as mass media. Second, the Government consulted with the higher offi-

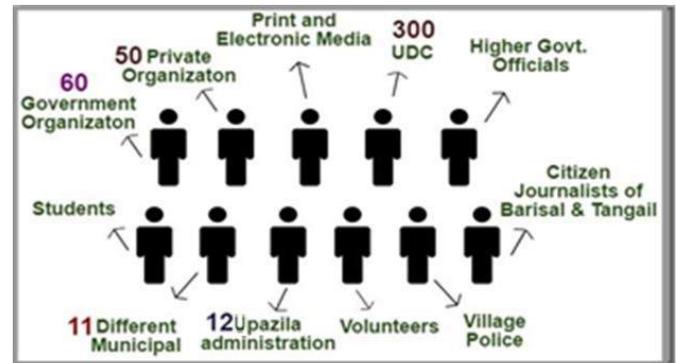


e-participation model for Tangail Cleaning Drive

CONCLUSION

This cleaning drive emphasized on bottom up planning approach. The hierarchy was maintained from citizens to higher officials. Thus engagement of the citizens and the officials were more spontaneous and unprecedented. Tangail Louhajang cleaning drive was more conceptualized, planned and managed. Everyone contributed regardless of location and social status. In developing country like Bangladesh social capital can play a game changing role. Social media can gather a huge number of people to work for an cause. This Drive gained huge popularity and the outcome was unmatched than any other incident happened before.

The Power of Social Capital to Achieve Social Good



COLLABORATION OF ORGANIZATIONS TO CLEAN THE RIVER



Before The Cleaning Drive

Public and Industrial waste, Illegal structure stopped the flow of the Louhajang river.



After The Cleaning Drive

people connected each other by using Social Media, and the experience from other districts to Make the cleaning drive



Access to Information (a2i)
 Prime Minister's Office
 Old Sangsad Bhaban, Tejgaon, Dhaka-1215
 ☎ 88 02 9144848, 9102311, 58154176 ☎ 88 02 9112276
 ✉ a2i@a2i.pmo.gov.bd 🌐 www.a2i.pmo.gov.bd
 📱 /a2ibangladesh 📱 /a2ibangladesh

