Article

Local governments and sustainable development: Nurturing best practices through horizontal learning process (HLP) across countries

Santanu Lahiri
World Bank Group, India

JB Rajan
Kerala Institute of Local Administration, India

Abstract

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity. To maintain the pace of development, local government institutions (LGIs) in many countries have started adapting innovative good practices. These practices are being generated as an offshoot of some projects, initiated by local governments, sub-national and/or national governments. However, these innovations are generally so closely associated, and depend so much on those projects, that once the projects officially phase out, the good practices also start falling apart. Those training institutions for LGIs in Asian countries are imparting training and applying participatory methodologies like peer learning. This enhances the capacities of the functionaries of the respective LGIs. However, the learning that emerges from the good practices, that have evolved, is often missed out in these course curricula, despite the fact that both the good practices and capacity for generating good practices, exist at the local level in the form of tacit learning. The Horizontal Learning Process (HLP) helps to overcome the inherent limitations of existing training methodology by capturing, upscaling, and nurturing tacit learning based on good practices. This paper highlights the concept and salient features of HLP, its evolution, process and steps, application areas, achievements and challenges—especially in the context of the SDGs and the role of LGIs.

Corresponding author:
JB Rajan, Kerala Institute of Local Administration, Thrissur 680581, Kerala, India.
Emails: jbrajan07@gmail.com; slahiri@worldbank.org

Keywords

Background

Though decentralization came to be increasingly recognized as an administrative necessity, especially for governments, in the 1990s, the word "decentralization" originated in early 18th century.[1] Very rarely we observe a nation that does not place focus on strengthening of local government as part of its development agenda. (Bahl, 1999). There are exceptions like United Kingdom where the central government in various ways decreased discretion of local authorities and preventing them from increasing the quantity and quality of their services. (Booth, 2015; Jamie et al., 2009). It is hard to determine when the process of decentralization started in Asia. But it is widely agreed that, from the 1990s, the decentralization process gained momentum, and that sub-national governments have become the cornerstone of Asian economic development. (White and Smoke, 2005). Extensive decentralization processes are under way throughout Asia, including Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Nepal, and Mongolia. (Naoyuki and Morgan PJ, 2017). Decentralization is the key toward sustainable and inclusive development in emerging Asian economies, which require continued high levels of public sector investment in areas such as infrastructure, education, health, and social services. These responsibilities, especially with regard to infrastructure investment, need to devolve increasingly to the regional government level. (Naoyuki and Morgan PJ, 2017). The improvement of services in city corporations, municipalities, and rural local governments depends upon the capability of local government institutions (LGIs), and on how they can ensure improved services and good governance. Thus, the progressive increase in fiscal decentralization gives more and more responsibilities to LGIs for ensuring good governance, in spite of whatever local government structure exists in these countries. The role of LGIs has been further enhanced with the advent of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The SDGs, otherwise known as the Global Goals, are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity. (United Nations, 2015). These 17 Goals build on the success of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by including new areas such as decent work and economic growth; action on climate change; life below water; life on land; and peace, justice, and strong institutions. The SDGs are interconnected—often the key to success in one will involve tackling issues more commonly associated with another. Almost each and every country is pushing hard to attain the SDGs by 2030, while simultaneously many countries, such as, Bangladesh, are trying to reach the status of middle-income country by 2021. The LGIs can play pivotal role in attaining the SDGs. (KILA, 2016).

To maintain the pace of development, the LGIs in many countries (for example; *Gram Panchayats* in India, Union *Parishads* in Bangladesh, *Soums* in Mongolia, and Village Development Committees (VDCs)—now called *Gaunpalika* (Village Councils)—in Nepal) have started adapting several innovative good practices. Often these practices are

being generated as an offshoot of some projects or programs, either initiated by local government's leaders and/or officials, or the subnational, and/or central/national government. However, these innovations are generally so closely associated, and depend so much on these projects or programs, that they are only known locally. Once these projects or programs officially phase out; the good practices also start falling apart.

Training institutions in Asian countries, especially the State Institute of Rural Development (SIRD), Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA), National Institute of Rural Development & Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR), and others in India; National Institute of Local Government (NILG) in Bangladesh; National Academy of Governance (NAG) in Mongolia; and Local Development Training Academy (LDTA) in Nepal are continuously planning and imparting training to their respective functionaries of LGIs, and applying alternative methodologies like participatory methods to build capacity. Due to that, their capacities keep improving—this is the most important feature, which is well-planned, and is being implemented vigorously to execute various projects that are being undertaken by the governments.

The learning that is emerging from the good practices that have evolved locally are often missed out in these course curricula, in spite of the fact that both the good practices and capacities for generating good practices exist at the local level in the form of tacit learning. The Horizontal Learning Process (HLP), often also called the Horizontal Learning Program in Bangladesh, is an outcome-based non-classroom capacity-building methodology; which helps to capture, upscale, and nurture these good practices. This paper looks into the potential of HLP in scaling up and nurturing best practices in the context of the SDGs.

Revisiting capacity-building methodology

Various attempts have been applied for enhancing the capacities of LGIs by different countries, which is key to all leading LGIs understanding their respective functions, and to be effective functionaries to ensure sustainable development in their respective areas. Almost every country has established such institutions that are responsible for planning, designing, implementing, and overseeing capacity-building programs to strengthen the capacities of LGIs. Most of these efforts are designed with "core training programs" cascading from top to the lowest tier of LGIs. This, most importantly, is an essential component of "cross cutting issues" to enhance capacities for fulfilling sustainable development. These training programs follow a Systematic Approach to Training (SAT) cycle, which represents a major contribution to functionary development. It originated in the 1960s thanks to Boydell. (Boydell, 1970, 1971). The training component is designed on the assumption that LGI functionaries do not know about the legislations on LGIs and their functions. Therefore, "what to train," "how to train," "whom to train," "where to train," and "how long to train" are designed by experts. The programs evolving out of this are supply-driven trainings. Often, some specialized training is also being organized as per demand of the project staff and LGIs—demand-driven training—fulfilling the demand for specific projects/programs/institutions. This type of training is necessary to help frontliners to internalize project/program objectives, rules, roles, and reward systems.

Both the top-down (or supply-driven) "core training" and/or bottom-up (or demand-driven) training are important to improve the capacity of LGI functionaries. The training should be related to the end results that the organizations seek at the heart of the systematic approach. The systematic approach to training focusses fundamentally on the fact that training is a part of the organizations" overall planning process in pursuit of their goals. Every organization has its own training strategy which informs the approach to development of functionaries. The systematic approach is applicable across a range of development activities that are inevitable in every organization. They are induction of new employees, basic training for young employees, specific skills trainings, safety training, attitude training, management training, etc. (Rajan, 2011). The original SAT model may have applicability in situations characterized by a stable environment, a clear set of objectives, and high degree of employee identification, etc. But every organization is working in a dynamic environment, where this static approach would not serve the purpose. Hence, the need to explore an alternative approach (Rajan, 2011). As Robert Chambers (1984) rightly remarked: "…Knowledge flows in one direction only—downward—from those who are strong, educated, and enlightened, toward those who are weak, ignorant, and in darkness."

The need for alternative approach in learning was well recognized in the education sector long time back, followed by development sector and organizational management. The philosophical roots of alternative learning can be traced mainly to the theory of action learning by Reg Revans, activist adult education methods by Paulo Freire, and rapid rural appraisal by Robert Chambers. These have implications on the knowledge management—assimilation as well as dissemination of knowledge—with practical applications in field level.

The theory of "action learning" was originally developed by Reg Revans (1982), who applied the method to support organizational and business development initiatives and improve on problem solving efforts. Action learning, an approach to problem solving by taking action and reflecting upon the results, helps to improve the problem-solving process as well as simplify the solutions developed by the team. (Revans, 1998). According to Revans: "The organization that continues to express only the ideas of the past is not learning, and training systems intended to develop our young may do little more than to make them proficient in yesterday's technique. Thus learning cannot be solely the acquisition of new programmed knowledge, howsoever important the possession of that knowledge may be." (Revans, 1998). Action Learning process involving small group working on real problems, taking action and learning as individuals, as a team, and as an organization. Thus it helps organizations to develop creative, flexible and successful strategies to pressing problems that cannot be addressed through traditional training.

In 1967, Freire published his first book, Education as the Practice of Freedom which advocated for the process of teaching students to think critically. He followed the concept of "critical thinking" with his most famous work, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, first published in 1968. (Freire, 1993). In terms of pedagogy, Freire is best known for his attack on what he called the "banking" concept of education, in which students are viewed as empty accounts to be filled by teachers. He notes that "it transforms students

into receiving objects [and] attempts to control thinking and action, lead[ing] men and women to adjust to the world, inhibit[ing] their creative power." (Freire, 1970). The critical thinking pedagogy build a dialogic relationships between teaching and learning. It ensures a continuos process of what Freire called "unlearning," "learning," and "relearning," "reflection," "evaluation"; thus ensuring creativity and innovations; as against "teacher-centric" "traditional schooling."

By the early 1980s, there was growing dissatisfaction among development experts with both the reductionism of formal surveys, and the biases of typical field visits. In 1983, Robert Chambers, a Fellow at the Institute of Development Studies (UK), used the term rapid rural appraisal (RRA) to describe techniques that could bring about a "reversal of learning," to learn from rural people directly. (Chambers, 1984). By the mid 1990s, the term RRA had been replaced by a number of other terms including participatory rural appraisal (PRA) and participatory learning and action (PLA). (IIED, 2015). The evolution of participatory approaches made a shift from a "top-down" to a "bottom-up" approach, a paradigm shift in learning process.

Another paradigm shift that took place in the eighties was in organizational management, where the focus moved toward Appreciative Inquiry (AI) Model. This was to address the criticisms raised against Frederick Taylor's scientific management[2] that the firms are viewed as machines, rather than entities of people. David Cooperrider is often considered the pioneer of the Appreciative Inquiry Model. However, the paradigm was developed during the eighties by both Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva, his then mentor. (Catherine, 2019). Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a collaborative, strengths-based approach to change in organizations and other human systems. (Cooperrider and Srivastva, 1987). This is one of the key positive organizational approaches to development and collective learning.

What we have seen is the paradigm shift in the field of education, development, and management. But in the training arena, Experiential Learning Tools (ELT) evolved as an alternative approach to tackle the static nature of SAT model. This alternative approach of ELT considers plurality of interests, recognizes the need for different types of learning, and promotes learning as a total organizational process. The Alternative Model of the double loop of corporate strategy nesting the inner loop (structured learning) within the outer loop (unstructured experimentation) was propounded by Harry Taylor (1991). With the realization of the existing scenario, the new realities will be addressed by envisioning the new scenario, new mission, and setting new values. But by retrospectively tracking at different stages—vision, mission, and values—the outer loop will be standardized, and enter into the inner loop, where the trainers apply SAT cycle (Rajan, 2011). This alternative approach of ELT complements the SAT cycle by opening space for direct experience and self-reflections to the learners through participatory training methods. Of course, this alternative approach shifts the focus from trainer-centered to trainee-centered, but the trainer-trainee relationship is well maintained. Rather, these kinds of trainings alone do not allow LGI functionaries to learn, self-apply, and reflect on how to improve their confidence and wisdom, since in both cases the assumption is: "There is lack of capacity." Therefore, experts design everything to impart training, either through the framework of SAT or ELT, or both. Promoting learning organizations

and communities of practice (CoP) are the need of the hour. (Mumford, 1997). In communities of practice, learning is a process of social formation of a person rather than as only the acquisition of knowledge. (Igor et al., 2017). However, the "expert-designed" frameworks of training such as SAT and ELT have their inherent limitations. There are many good practices by the LGIs—mostly of their creativity and through trial and error process—captured by the ELT framework, but not necessarily leading to CoP and mutual learning process of learners. The HLP helps to overcome these limitations, and opens new avenues for capability development.

Toward horizontal learning process (HLP)

Addressing the challenge

Bangladesh has a wealth of excellent development projects. But many of them remain isolated when they should be shared and upscaled. In order to address this, the Horizontal Learning Program (HLP) fosters collective learning and accountability among local government institutions, enhancing local capacity to scale-up, and sustain good practices.

In Bangladesh, the Ministry of Local Government (MoLG), Rural Development, and Cooperatives facilitates the HLP with support from 32 Developing Partners. The HLP offers a filter for policymakers to view what can be replicated at scale with local knowledge and resources. It focuses on a broad range of good practices related to good governance and improved service delivery. Local stakeholders decide what, how, and when to learn through knowledge exchange. These learning initiatives recognize that expertise lies in experience, not in income level or schooling. They prioritize building on local practices and knowledge, and help increase networking and communication across social and cultural divides. The HLP also monitors and evaluates good practice replications, budget commitments, and the number of people reached through each exchange.

The history of HLP

The government, development partners, and different agencies usually implement various projects for building capacity of local government institutions (LGIs). Development initiatives of some agencies may, in some cases, overlap with those of others. This may create setbacks in the development process. While projects may evolve workable models, such models might disappear after the project winds up. As a result, on the one hand, the capacity development of LGIs is yet to gain an institutional shape; on the other hand, diversified workable models are being practiced by different LGIs may lost in due course after phasing out of the project.

Innovating and scaling up such models could play a significant role in strengthening the capacity of LGIs. Keeping all these practical reasons under consideration, the Horizontal Learning Process (in Bangladesh it is known as Horizontal Learning Program since it is operated by the National Institute of Local Government only for LGIs; whereas in other countries, as such in India, Nepal and Mongolia it is known as Horizontal Learning Process since it is being applied by various agencies for various sector) has

been initiated to identify good practices of LGIs. The identification of good practices, through "appreciation," by the LGIs themselves is the uniqueness of this process. The identified good practices are validated through peer reviews and workable models are replicated by other LGIs by utilizing their own fund and/or mobilizing fund by LGIs. This approach helps establish confidence of elected bodies at the grassroots, and local administrative levels, and thereby contributes to strengthening capacity of LGIs in a sustainable manner.

When HLP was launched in 2007, it had been estimated that the local governments would receive funds totaling around $170 million from various projects over the five-year period of 2008–2013. Therefore, the systematic and successful application of horizontal learning would help the LGIs to properly utilize these resources to develop decentralized and improved services in a sustainable manner.

Horizontal Learning was conceptualized by some village level local government—Union Parishad (UP)—representatives, while attending a "Capacity-Building Workshop" during June 24–26, 2007. They reached a consensus on starting a collective, mutual learning programs that would strengthen the capacities of the UPs to ensure improved planning and implementation of water supply, sanitation, and hygiene activities. Some development partners came forward to provide technical support to this initiative. The Water and Sanitation Program — South Asia (WSP-SA) of the World Bank (WB) provided technical and financial support for organizing workshops, exposure visits, and consultation meetings. As per the recommendation of 24–26 June 2007 Workshop held at Elenga, the initiative for the formulation of HLP started in July 2007. Designed by WSP-SA of the World Bank with financial support from Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), and collaboration with the Local Government Division and other development partners, it was formally launched in November 2007.

The Union Parishads (UPs) initiated the Horizontal Learning Program (HLP) for strengthening their capacity to provide improved service delivery by ensuring good governance, accountability, and transparency at all levels. The program aimed at exchanging knowledge through a process of peer learning. The program initially commenced with the UPs identifying their own good practices, in the area of water supply and sanitation, through appreciative inquiry. The scope of innovating good practices thus expanded to the broader range of UPs' activities related to good governance. The peer-to-peer learning process of the Horizontal Learning Program has increased the confidence of the UPs to implement sustainable development interventions, and has also contributed to existing capacity building activities initiated by different agencies.

Horizontal learning was initially planned as a pilot in 4 Upa-zilas (sub-districts) in 44 UPs for 12 months starting from November 2007. It has created enthusiasm among local government institutions (LGIs) and other partners, under the leadership of the LGD, and coordination by WSP-SA. New partners have shown interest in being included in the process, and expand it to 96 UPs. LGIs have been effective participants by innovating and replicating good practices through appreciative inquiry.

The situation of HLP by the end of June 2008 was that 62 out of 96 UPs (61 UPs under horizontal learning and one UP from Bagmara Upazila of Rajshahi district) had allocated

BDT 24,151,573 (approximately US $355,000) for replication of 16 good practices in the fiscal year 2009 (July 2008 to June 2009). The Upa-zilas collectively planned the peer review missions for reviewing the progress of replication. It was agreed that the HLP would be further extended as a regular program, and from the next financial year a series of peer reviews would be organized to review the progress with financial support from SDC, and technical support from WSP-SA of the World Bank, under the leadership of LGD.

Definition

The Horizontal Learning Process (HLP) is an outcome-based, non-classroom, and peer-to-peer learning initiative, which aims to enhance the capacity of local governments by encouraging identification, documentation, and dissemination of good practices among peers. (LOGIN Asia, 2015). The HLP helps to capture the innovations generated by current development activities, unbundle good practices, and share the learnings with peers in a sustained manner.

Objectives

The objectives of the HLP are to:

    i.   Enhance the capacities of the LGIs.
   ii.   Scale up good practices.
  iii.   Create a platform for LGIs to network.
  iv.   Influence policies based on scaling up of good practices.

To bring about reform, and effect the necessary capacity building of the LGIs, certain building blocks are required. These are: identify, share, and replicate good practices; scale up replication of good practices; listen to the voice from the field for practice to policy advocacy; support strategic communication; and face continuous challenges as opportunities. These will enable sustained capacity building to initiate sustainable development.

Assumptions

The basic assumptions of HLP are:

    i.   Everything has multiple realities—"What we focus on becomes our reality."
   ii.   Every objective, and/or human, and/or institution has something to contribute—nothing is "useless" for this eco-system, if it is considered from a wider perspective.
  iii.   Things flourish once anything starts organically from "within" creating a real sense of "ownership"—a spirit of life can be observed—a passion and wisdom. If something is imposed from the outside, it can be perceived as a utility—but no "life" can be observed, no dynamism, no innovations, no newer wisdom emerge.

Justification

The justification for applying the HLP in Asian countries is:

i. Ensuring Inclusiveness

Access to improved services and good governance in hard to reach areas, and for hard to reach people, is still an issue. In addition to that, "inclusiveness" for improved services is also an issue. People who are "differently abled," in general, often miss out on availing improved services, which they can effectively use in their own manner.

ii. Maintaining Quality

The quality of improved services is the greatest challenge emerging from the success of the any improved service delivery program. Adequate measures to carry out periodic monitoring are lacking, though sporadic attempts have been made in some of the projects led by development partners, which have yet to be fully scaled up and institutionalized.

iii. Improving Skills

LGIs are fully responsible for ensuring delivery of improved services. Often, this is misinterpreted and LGIs try to deliver services themselves. However, they are unable to oversee the quality of services being delivered by others, including the private sector. LGI functionaries are being trained continuously by various agencies but this training is especially designed for specific projects. The LGIs' own aspirations and interest areas are often undermined or ignored. Therefore, special attention is required in this area. Until LGI functionaries are capable of ensuring and regulating the quality of services, the impact on the ground and its sustainability will be questionable.

iv. Creating a Conducive Policy Environment

Policies and regulations generally come from the national/subnational level. Often, these are neither fully understood nor internalized by the LGIs. This is a big challenge of how to translate any Act/policy/strategy into action. Until policy advocacy moves from the bottom up to a national/subnational level to complement what works and what needs to be strengthened, an ideal enabling policy atmosphere will not be created.

v. Encouraging Regulatory Role of LGIs

The regulatory role of LGIs is quite important to ensure improved quality of services by developing effective and realistic by-laws. It is noteworthy that, so far, in many countries little attempt has been made to enhance capacities of the lowest tier of LGIs by helping them to understand the value of, and need for, by-laws. Therefore, it is a challenge—how to enable the lowest tier of LGIs' internalization of existing laws to take the lead to develop, and operationalize by-laws to ensure quality of improved services for all within their respective jurisdictions.

vi. Improving Coordination

The government, development partners, and different agencies usually implement various projects for building capacity of LGIs. Development initiatives of some agencies

may, in some cases, overlap with those of others. This may create setbacks in the development process. While projects may evolve workable models, such models often disappear after the project winds up. As a result, on one hand, the capacity development of LGIs has yet to gain an institutional shape; on the other hand, diversified workable models are being practiced by different LGIs. Innovating and scaling up such models could play a significant role in strengthening their capacity.

vii. Showing Results on the Ground

Often, considerable funds are being used for capacity building, but the results and impact of the training are difficult to measure. This has triggered the search for some innovative capacity-building initiatives that can demonstrate outcomes at the grassroots level.

viii. Tapping "Untapped" Local Resources

In spite of these challenges, many LGIs have already developed/adopted some good practices that emerged from some projects. Often, however, these good practices and expertise are localized, neglected, and/or underutilized.

ix. Heterogenous Communities

The societies in Asian countries are diverse in terms of cultures, religion and caste, socio-economic milieu, etc. HLP is relevant considering the heterogenous communities that offer sharing of rich and diverse experience.

How to Operationalize HLP?

Steps

Though it is commonly known as horizontal learning, it is in a real sense "a process of mutual and collective learning." Unlike capacity building, HLP is not externally induced process but evolve from within the learners. However it needs to be ignited for nurturing and taken up by the learners. Hence certain steps are inevitable in HLP. The major steps involved in HLP are:

(i)   **Identify** good practices (through appreciation) most voted five good practices among local government institutions (LGIs) in HLP Workshops.
(ii) **Share** all five good practices of different HLP Workshops in a **HLP Network Workshop**
(iii) **Learn** self-selected good practices by **visiting** them (connect with peers)
(iv) **Prioritize** and **integrate** good practices within LGI's annual plan and budget in consultation with citizen
(v)   **Adopt and replicate** good practices through peer's hand holding support.
(vi) **Peer Review** (peer's validate the replications)

(i) Identify Good Practices

First and foremost step in HLP is identification of good practices through appreciation. Here is the igniting role of training institutions to identify the good practices and invite them for a HLP Workshop. The LGIs invited for the workshop could be through search process, collected from news clippings, or traced through the ongoing training process. The invitees make a brief presentation. The most voted five practices, among LGIs in the HLP Workshop, is identified as good practices. The voting is made, based on indicators. There can be series of HLP workshops depending on availability of practices and themes.

(ii) Share Good Practices

Organize HLP Network Workshop in which all five good practices identified from HLP workshops are shared. They are to be equipped to prepare a Fact Sheet in advance, so that it can be circulated in the Network Workshop. A Fact Sheet, like a brochure, provides an overview (description of good practice) and salient features (purpose, strength, indicators, limitations, results and contact addresses) of the good practice. The workshop then facilitates them to connect between peers on the areas of their interest.

(iii) Learn

The LGIs then learn self-selected good practices by making structured learning visits (SLV); thus, connecting with peers. This is the exit stage of training institution, as connection between peers ignited and a network of good practitioners created. Not necessary that everybody is interested in every good practice. There may be different permutations and combinations possible.

(iv) Prioritize and Integrate

Based on the learnings from the visit to good practices, the LGIs prioritize the good practices. And integrate prioritized good practices into the annual development plan (ADP). But this is in consultation with citizen.

(v) Adopt and Replicate

Upon approval of ADP, good practices are adopted and replicated. The replication process of good practice requires peer sharing and learning. The peers in the HLP network provide handholding support. The learners themselves arrange structured learning visits (SLVs) or invites good practitioners for sharing their experience. From the SLVs, they learn by seeing and sharing.

(vi) Peer Review

The progress in replication is monitored through peer reviews. The peers in the HLP network review the progress, based on pre-designed monitoring plan. The achievements recognized through the HLP network is further propagated and a leap toward upscaling of good practice. And becoming a best practice when a desired number of LGIs practiced it. This will also influence the policy of the sub-national/national government for furthering it.

HLP Hypothesis

The HLP steps are followed based on some hypotheses. It is essential to apply them while planning and implementing the HLP. These are stated below:

  i. Development and the will to develop is natural and innate

People have enormous capacity in their experience, understanding, knowledge, skills, and relationships. The challenge is to support people to access what they need, so that they can choose to take their own initiative and responsibility for change.

  ii. People's own capacity to learn from experience is the foundation of their knowledge and development

Learning from each other is not new. People have been doing it for centuries. It is important to know how to learn from one's own experience, how to observe, remember, and reflect, especially in an appreciative manner. Someone who has just learned something is often a better teacher than an expert, who has known it for years. They are closer to the experience of learning, and can more easily help others work not only with *what* has to be learned, but with *how* it can be most effectively learned.

  (i) Development depends on relationships

People live, learn, and develop within three differently experienced kinds or levels of relationships: relationship with self, interpersonal relationships with people around us, and external relationships with the rest of the world. An appreciative approach can change people's mind-set dramatically in a positive direction to work collectively.

The steps outlined above help to initiate the "capacity building" process by LGIs, offer them learning journeys; select their own learning agenda from informed "learning menus" offered in network workshops; plan, visit, and learn from peers. LGIs then prioritize, consult with citizens by conducting a dialogue; incorporate their learning agenda in the open budget meeting and plan; allocate their own funds for replication; replicate through hand-holding of peers; and finally have the results reviewed by peers to improve and/or innovate further.

Keeping all these practical reasons under consideration, the HLP was initiated to assist LGIs to enhance their capacities and confidence. Then, they identify existing good practices, through appreciation–connection–adaptation–replication (A-CAR[3]) principle by LGIs themselves, and share these good practices with their peers to learn and scale-up to mitigate issues and challenges mentioned earlier.

Spiralling of HLP initiative

The HLP—an innovative learning process— was conceptualized and designed by the Water and Sanitation Program (WSP) of the World Bank, in collaboration with Local Government Division (LGD) of the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development, and Cooperatives (MoLGRDC), Government of Bangladesh, and others in 2007. (World

Bank, 2007). This allows LGIs to learn from each other about existing good practices that emerged from decades of investment, and support of various projects and programs by diverse agencies. Simultaneously, by supporting this process, all tiers of LGIs and development partners also learn from each other to further strengthen the vertical linkages between each tier, and between line agencies and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), national government, and donors.

The HLP was initiated to reform the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation sector in Bangladesh, when realization dawned that quality service delivery in this sector has to be ensured at the micro level—typically at the lowest tier of LGIs. (Government of Bangladesh, 2009). It is up to the LGIs to be the harbingers of change by involving the community. Certain good practices evolved in pockets by isolated LGIs. They only required recognition, and dissemination via replication of good practices, with appropriate local adaptations, for reform to become a reality. These realizations and initiatives gradually spread into other countries too. (LOGIN Asia, 2015, 2019). The results achieved so far in different countries are summarized below.

Macro Level

Bangladesh	HLP included within Basic National Development Framework for Union Parishads (UPs).
	HLP integrated for rolling out nationwide through Local Governance Support Project-II and III, covering almost 100 million people.
	3 policies (circulars) and 4 by-laws (at UP level) emerged through HLP practice to policy initiatives.
	HLP Core Team developed to support HLP activities in Bangladesh.
	HLP Secretariat established within the National Institute of Local Government (NILG).
	HLP institutionalization started by the NILG with support from the Local Government Division, and financial support from the SDC.
Nepal	HLP concept and program approved by the Ministry.
	Local Development Training Academy (LDTA) became Nodal Institution to facilitate HLP in Nepal.
	HLP Core Team developed to support HLP activities in Nepal.
India	KILA became Nodal Institution for HLP in India.
	KILA established National Resource Team for HLP.
Mongolia*	HLP integrated within "Capacity Development Framework to Strengthen the Capacity of Municipal and District Development Policy and Planning Officers" for the City of Ulaanbaatar.
	HLP integrated within "Khoroo Staff Training Framework Course Curricula" for the City of Ulaanbaatar.
	Three separate HLP Resource Teams developed (consisting of 50 senior level mentors) in Mongolia.
	Three Projects—MASAM, MONFEMNET, and UGP—are in the process of rolling out HLP in Mongolia.
	International Women's Leadership Forum organized in Mongolia in which more 300 people participated, and senior officials for Mongolia and Switzerland attended.
	LOGIN assisted in organization of 9 HLP Workshops for SDC partners in Mongolia.

Meso Level

Bangladesh	Different NGO partners rolled out HLP in their respective projects, such as, Blue Gold Project supported Dutch Embassy in 15 Upazilas (subdistricts); IWRM Project supported by DASCOH, Swiss Red Cross and SDC is replicating HLP in 6 Upazilas, and so on.
	The NILG has planned to orient all Deputy District Local Government (DDLGs) Officers on HLP to facilitate the HLP process more effectively throughout the country.
Nepal	A few Regional Training Centres of LDTA are acting as Regional HLP hubs in Nepal.
	HLP integrated within graduation course of Tribhuvan University of Nepal.
India	The RSCD and Mahila Rajsatta Andolan integrated HLP within their movement in Maharashtra, and developed HLP Bank—a repository of good practices introduced/implemented by elected women representatives.
	HLP initiated in more than 7 states in India, such as, Maharashtra, Bhuj of Kutch in Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and West Bengal.
Mongolia*	110 good practices identified by three projects in Mongolia.
	24 HLP introductory workshops organized by Mongolian partners for rolling out HLP.
	HLP was introduced in 39 regular training courses by MUB Training Center to impart training to 697 professionals and/or elected representatives.
	Discussion initiated to establish a Nodal Agency for hosting HLP in Mongolia.

Micro (Grassroots) Level

Bangladesh	658 UPs allocated US$12 million to replicate 54 good practices in almost 700 UPs covering almost 20 million people.
	More than 150 good practices have emerged in Bangladesh, from which 37 good practices have been integrated within the national course curricula and module of the NILG.
Nepal	More than 60 good practices have emerged in Nepal, and the HLP has been rolled out in 5 municipalities.
India	More than 100 good practices evolved in 7 states in India.
	HLP has been rolled out in 25 districts in Maharashtra, and utilized for capacity building by Election Commission in Maharashtra through the RSCD.
Mongolia*	HLP has been rolled out in 5 Aimags in Mongolia for replication.

Note: **MASAM**: Mainstreaming Social Accountability in Mongolia; **MONFEMNET**: National Network of Mongolian Women's NGOs; **UGP**: Urban Governance Project; **LOGIN**: Local Governance Initiative and Network; **IWRM**: Integrated Water Resource Management; **DASCOH**: Development Association for Self-Reliance, Communication and Health; **RSCD**: Resource and Support Centre for Development; **MUB**: Municipality of Ulaanbaatar.
*Dorj et al. (2019).

HLP value addition

In horizontal learning, the basic assumption is that some capacities are already existing. "What," "how," and "when" learning will be undertaken is to be decided by local stakeholders within a peer network. This complements conventional capacity-building

efforts, that is, "core training" by sharing "what works," and allowing replication among peers to improve the environment where capacity building is directed. The HLP is different from customary capacity building in many respects. The value addition of HLP is given below:

(i) Starting Point

The starting point for capacity building is identification of knowledge, skills, and attitude. The deficiency of knowledge, skills, and attitude that decide capacity building. Whereas the starting point for HLP is existing capacity of the learners, which are often hidden under any existing good practice.

(ii) Focus

The capacity building focuses on what should be trained. HLP focuses on what is really working in the field.

(iii) Resource Persons

The Experts are the resource persons, who teach in capacity building. Whereas in HLP Peers are the resource persons, who teach between themselves. In HLP, everyone is a trainer and everyone is a learner.

(iv) Decision

The programmed decision for capacity building, whereas HLP is self-decision.

(v) Rationale

The rationale for capacity building is to meet standards. The rationale for HLP is to address one's needs.

(vi) Place

The capacity building mostly takes place in classrooms. HLP on the other hand takes place in the field.

(vii) Nature of Knowledge

The codified knowledge is disseminated in capacity building. The tacit knowledge is shared in HLP.

(viii) Flow

The capacity building is vertical in nature and depending on supply-driven or demand-driven, it may be downward or upward. However, mostly it is downward. On the other hand, as the name suggests HLP is horizontal as every one is trainer and learner in the network of connections.

(ix) Cost

The capacity building generally involves significantly higher costs for their functioning. The establishment of training and learning networks among individuals through HLP is relatively low cost.

(x) Result

The result of capacity building is increased capacity. The result of HLP is increased confidence. The networks of trainers and learners naturally form among individuals interested in similar topics, to learn from each other.

There is a possibility that the HLP is confused with the Peer Learning Method (PLM) and used synonymously. The two are different. Peer learning is commonly known as "mutually relevant learning" needs, and action is needed to bring individuals/groups together for collaborative learning and action. And the PLM is organized by the Trainer, inviting learners and arranging peers having good practices. Position, age, qualifications, authority do not define the peer—it is defined by the value given to each other's knowledge and experience. When peer learning adds some values, only then is it called HLP. These values are:

[i]   HLP cannot impose anything from top.
[ii]   Learning Agenda will be driven from within.
[iii]   The Training Institutes will ignite the process, not drive the process.
[iv]   HLP produces outcomes.
[v]   HLP follows appreciation-connection-adaptation-replication principle.
[vi]   HLP is evidence based.
[vii]   HLP scale up good practices, then they will be best practices.
[viii] HLP supports practice to policy reform.

Case Study—Sample of one good practice, and how it became a best practice in Bangladesh

Water quality surveillance (arsenic testing)

Once UPs learned through exposure visits to UPs of Chowgacha sub-district how to test water samples for arsenic, now more than 54 Unions in five districts have carried out more than 80,000 arsenic screening by mobilizing own resources. Generally, community pays 15 percent for screening test, Unions 10 percent, Upazila 15 percent, and partner agencies 60 percent. These contributions keep changing from place to place. Community pays anything from BDT 10–50 per testing as per the agreement in different Upa-zilas. This screening helps community to choose the safe hand pump (marked green), and avoid the unsafe hand pump (marked red). The Ministry has incorporated this learning into its Implementation Plan of Arsenic Mitigation, where now Unions will play a role of ensuring arsenic testing, the Department of Public Health will provide technical support, and local NGOs, community based organizations, and others will carry out the testing. Prior to this good practice, there was no as such role of Unions in the arsenic testing.

> While visiting Chowgacha I discovered a unique solution to arsenic contamination. After coming back [from this knowledge exchange], we adapted and replicated this approach in our own context. This has now spread to the entire Upa-zila and beyond. (Ranihati Union Parishad Chairman, Chapai Nawabganj Sadar Upa-zila)

The entire process helps to increase the confidence of LGI functionaries, which they demonstrate through learning by doing. The outcomes are also measurable. It is interesting that every US dollar spent by the HLP triggers LGIs to allocate minimum US$7 for actual replication of good practices. If others replicate this good practice from the same local government, then an investment of US$1 can leverage US$49, meaning it will have 49 times the impact on the field. (World Bank, 2007, 2008, 2010, 2011).

HLP Services and Generic Indicators

Service	Indicator
Coordination	All services are running efficiently and delivering reliable services.
Working team meeting	HLP anchor institutions send invitations, support and conduct the meeting for HLP partners, prepare Minutes, and distribute them to HLP members.
SMS service	# SMS members, # messages sent, usefulness of SMS sent to LGIs.
Newsletter	Timeliness of newsletters—Usefulness to LGIs and others.
Fact sheets, case studies	# sharing events, # guidance notes, usefulness of guidance notes to LGIs.
HLP network workshops	Workshops are timely—LGIs play a lead role.
Validation missions	Average time taken for new "best practices" to be validated.
Support of middle tier LGI	Average time taken for new LGIs to be welcomed into the HLP family.
Communications (capture/ disseminate)	Total # HLP communication products—# local journalists reporting on HLP.
HLP website	# Hits per month.
Email messaging	Membership assessment of effectiveness.
HLP help desk	Provides support to HLP LGIs as per demand.
Executive briefing	To concerned authorities, ministries, and HLP Partners by HLP anchor institutions.
HLP Secretariat	To provide day-to-day support to HLP by HLP anchor institution.

Challenges and opportunities of the HLP

The HLP is not free from challenges. As mentioned earlier, there is a possibility that the HLP is confused with the PLM and used interchangeably—in the former, everyone is a trainer and a learner. Thus, the flow of knowledge is reversed from vertical to horizontal which requires shifting the role of the "institutional trainer" to that of the facilitator. Also, changing the attitude of trainers who are accustomed to SAT cycle to that of an HLP framework would be a real challenge to tackle. This doesn't mean that SAT and HLP are mutually exclusive; they will complement each other. In the follow up process of SAT, good practices may be

identified where the transition toward HLP takes place. Then, the HLP has to go through different phases, such as conceiving principles of the HLP, conducting HLP workshops for knowledge sharing, networking, upscaling, and so on. The incubation support may be provided by the institutional trainer until the HLP takes its place sustainably. Hence, understanding the continuum of the HLP is important. Experiences show that an entry-plan for the HLP is well prepared, but the exit plan is amiss.

But these challenges are not a threat for the HLP because every challenge brings an opportunity for innovation. Therefore, the HLP welcomes all challenges, and mitigates them through innovative approaches. Initially, the HLP was conceptualized to provide capacity-building assistance to LGIs through NGOs in Bangladesh, but it did not work. Immediately, a new course (LGD, WSP-WB, HLP Framework, World Bank, 2011) was adopted to initiate the entire piloting of the HLP through the Local Government Division (LGD) in Bangladesh, which was a great success. Similarly, the HLP pilot in Bangladesh was meant to focus on only safe water supply and sanitation services, but as demand increased, the focus on good practices was expanded to all services that are being dealt by LGIs, and their replication started. Therefore, the HLP now focuses on safe drinking water supply, sanitation, primary education, primary health, livelihood, climate change, disaster management, access to information, and so on. The pilot originally only focused on capacity building, but as it evolved, the HLP began to focus on capacity building, net-working among LGIs, scaling up of good practices, and practice to policy support. The flexibility of the program enabled it to adjust and innovate to tackle many challenges.

Way forward

In Bangladesh, the NILG has started institutionalizing HLP from end of 2018 with support from the LGD and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. (NILG, 2012). Therefore, it will take its own course to make HLP sustainable. In other countries, LOGIN and/or CIRDAP occasionally provide technical support as demanded by agencies to help to plan, design, and roll out the HLP. However, until a proper Nodal Agency is identified for the concerned host HLP state and/or country, and "a core team" or "resource pool" on the learning process are fully developed; the desired objectives of the HLP will not be adequately leveraged. Therefore, it is quite important to identify a Nodal Agency for the HLP as the next step to support each state and/or country, and orient and mentor a group of facilitators as "HLP Core Team" or "HLP Resource Team/Pool."

The HLP is at different stages in different states and/or countries. Some have been applying it for 12 years, some for 5 years, some for less than a year. It might be good to organize an "HLP Convention" every alternate year to bring together representatives from each state and country to carry out a stocktaking of horizontal learning across boundaries. This will further strengthen the process, and help to instill further confidence among HLP implementors across boundaries. As a next step, it is also important to explore more and more avenues that universities and academic institutions can use to integrate the HLP within their graduation and postgraduation course curricula the way Tribhuvan University in Nepal has done. Once that is done, then the HLP will be fully integrated within the education system.

In addition to that, it might be good to carry out an external evaluation on the HLP every 3 or 4 years to assess the achievements of the program, as well as to identify possible challenges and mitigate them. The good practices proven and validated within this period can then be integrated within the regular training courses of local government training institutions.

Conclusions

i.   HLP's A-CAR principle helps to promote a win-win process, to connect between peers at different levels, in a non-threatening way to improve the confidence of LGIs and their functionaries to achieve results on the ground.

ii. The HLP is easy, but rigorous, and requires proper attention to application and monitoring to obtain the desired goal.

iii. The HLP, or a part of it, can be applied in accordance with the situation. However, to obtain all four objectives—enhancing capacity, networking, scaling up of good practices, and practice to policy support—and their impact, the HLP requires minimum 3 years' tenure. However, within one-and-a-half years, the first three objectives could be rolled out.

iv. The HLP needs to identify a Nodal Agency where the learning process can be anchored to steer any projects or programs; otherwise, sustaining the horizontal learning as a "process" within any state and/or country becomes a challenge.

v.   To attain sustainable development goals, the HLP can play an important role through the scaling up of good practices within and across boundaries.

The HLP underlines the principle that if capacity is imposed from outside, impact is minimized, just like a life is lost for an egg. But if capacity improves due to the passion from inside, that is, comes from within a person and/or institution, rapid development can be leveraged.

HLP Nomenclature: A Guide

Within the horizontal learning process, the following terms are used to mean:

☐ **HLP introductory workshop:** This is the first HLP workshop to introduce the HLP, and assist LGIs to identify their most voted five good practices with indicators.

☐ **HLP core team:** Staff of anchor institutions of the HLP—generally the local government training institutions, champions from HLP partners, and/or LGIs, who mentor and facilitate the HLP on the ground.

☐ **HLP good practice:** LGIs identify existing local good practices with indicators to be shared with peers.

☐ **HLP fact sheet:** Format for the LGIs (with partner support) to capture their good practices.

(continued)

(continued)

☐ **HLP network workshop:** Once all introductory workshops are over, five good practices from each LGI have been identified, and fact sheets prepared—an HLP network is then organized at the middle level of LGIs to share good practices among themselves, and select good practices to learn from and replicate.

☐ **HLP exposure visit:** Joint undertaking to learn (with a reported commitment to replicate).

☐ **HLP member:** LGIs with a budget allocated to replicate good practices identified under the HLP.

☐ **HLP commitments:** Collated budget allocation of LGIs to the replication of the HLP good practices.

☐ **HLP best practice:** Any good practice that has been replicated by more than 50 LGIs, in case of Bangladesh, India and Nepal; and 10 LGIs in case of Mongolia, is called a Best Practice. Country to country, this may vary as per population and collective agreement among stakeholders concerned.

☐ **HLP thematic workshop:** Forum for LGIs to brief concerned authority/Ministry and development partners on their best practices.

☐ **HLP learning note:** Summary of the learning from the LGIs on their best practices.

☐ **HLP case study:** Academic research/analysis to identify challenges for these best practices.

☐ **HLP policy note:** Advocacy on the policy implications of these best practices.

☐ **HLP results:** Collated data (against HLP good practice indicators) on the extension of services. This data will show whether a "good practice" qualifies as a "best practice" or not.

Ref: HLP Induction Package, NILG (2016).

ORCID iD

JB Rajan ⬤ https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0818-8805

Notes

1. The word "decentralization" came into usage in the 1820's (Vivien, 1990).
2. Scientific management is a theory of management that analyzes and synthesizes workflows. For details see Frederick Winslow Taylor (1911).
3. For easy recall of the principles, the HLP Team in KILA has used the acronym "A-CAR."

References

Bahl R (1999) *Implementing Rules for Decentralisation*. ISP Working Paper No. 99-01. Georgia, USA: Andrew Young School of Policy Studies, Georgia State University. Available at: https://ideas.repec.org/p/ays/ispwps/paper9901.html (accessed 6 June 2020).

Booth P (2015) *Federal Britain: The Case for Decentralisation*. London, Great Britain: Institute of Economic Affairs.

Boydell TH (1970) *Job Analysis*. London: British Association for Commercial and Industrial Education (BACIE).

Boydell TH (1971) *A Guide to the Identification of Training Needs*. London: British Association for Commercial and Industrial Education (BACIE).

Catherine M (2019) What is appreciative inquiry: a brief history & real life examples. Available at: http://www.positivepsychology.com (accessed 6 June 2020).

Chambers R (1984) *Rural Development: Putting the Last First*. New York, USA: Routledge.

Cooperrider D. and Srivastva S (1987) Appreciative inquiry in organizational life. In: Pasmore WA and Woodman RW (eds) *Research in Organizational Change and Development*. Bingley: Emerald Publishing Limited, pp. 81–142.

Dorj AE, Davaasuren KG and Lahiri S (2019) Rapid Assessment of Application of Horizontal Learning Process in Mongolia (draft version). LOGIN Asia.

Freire P (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group.

Freire P (1993) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group.

Government of Bangladesh (2009) *Improving Quality Sanitation in Bangladesh—Lessons Learnt from the Horizontal Learning Program*. Dhaka, Bangladesh: Local Government Division, Ministry of LGRDC.

Igor P, Dorfler V and Edon C (2017) Thinking together: What makes Communities of Practice work? *Human Relations* 2017: 389–409.

IIED (2015) *Participatory Learning Action* Available at: https://www.iied.org/participatory-learning-action (accessed 5 June 2020).

Jamie B, Martinez-Vazquez J and Timofeev A (2009) *Subnational Government Structure and Intergovernmental Fiscal Relations: An Overlooked Dimension of Decentralisation*. International Studies Program Working Paper 01-03. Georgia, USA: Andrew Young School of Policy Studies, Georgia State University.

KILA (2016) Tool kit: role of rural local governments in attainment of sustainable development goals. *Draft for Discussion in the National Workshop in KILA, December*.

LOGIN Asia (2015) *Introduction to Horizontal Learning Program. WSP-World Bank, Workshop Report*. New Delhi, India.

LOGIN Asia (2019) HLP Guideline for Mongolia. A mechanism for scaling-up of existing good practices in Mongolia, June.

Mumford A (ed.) (1997) *Action Learning at Work*. Aldershot, UK: Gower Publishing.

Naoyuki Y and Morgan PJ ADBI (2017) Central and local government relations in Asia. In: Naoyuki Y and Morgan PJ (eds) *ADBI Series on Asian Economic Integration and Cooperation*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, pp. 4.

NILG (2012) *The Capdev Framework—National Basic Capacity Building Programme for Enhancing Capacities of Union Parishad*. Dhaka, Bangladesh: National Institute of Local Government.

NILG (2016) *HLP Induction Package*. Dhaka, Bangladesh: National Institute of Local Government.

Rajan JB (2011) *An Inward Look on Systematic Approach to Training (SAT): Concept Paper*. Submitted to DoPT (GoI), New Delhi; as part of fulfilment of Recognised Trainer on ELT, Mimeo. KILA.

Revans R.W (1982) *The Origin and Growth of Action Learning*. Brickley, UK: Chartwell-Bratt.

Revans RW (1998) *ABC of Action Learning*. London: Lemos and Crane.

Taylor H (1991) The systematic training model: corn circles in search of a spaceship? *Management Education and Development* 22(4): 258–278.

Taylor FW (1911) *The Principles of Scientific Management*. New York, NY and London: Harper & Brothers, LCCN 11010339.

United Nations (2015) *Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015. New York, NY: United Nations. Available at: https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/general assembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_70_1_E.pdf (accessed 6 June 2020).

Vivien AS (1990) *Democratizing France: The Political and Administrative History of Decentralization*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, p. 22.

White R and Smoke P (2005) *East Asia Decentralizes: Making Local Government Work*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

World Bank (2007) *Project Document on Strengthening the Capacities of Local Government Institutions on Improving Water Supply and Sanitation Services in Bangladesh. Water and Sanitation Program*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

World Bank (2008) *Horizontal Learning Program*. Washington, DC: Water and Sanitation Program (WSP)-World Bank.

World Bank (2010) *Progress Brief: Horizontal Learning of Local Government Institutions in Bangladesh Horizontal Learning Program*. Washington, DC: Water and Sanitation Program (WSP)-World Bank.

World Bank (2011) *HLP Framework, LGD*. Washington, DC: Water and Sanitation Program (WSP)-World Bank.