

The Role of Grievance Redress Officer for Implementing Grievance Redress System in Bangladesh

Mohammad Mamun^{1*}

ABSTRACT

For ensuring better service delivery, accountability and transparency, the government of Bangladesh has formulated and published Grievance Redress Guideline in 2015 which was revised in 2018. The main goals and objectives of introducing GRS are to enhance the quality of services, reducing visit, cost and suffering; and developing proactive and people centric mentality among the government officials including to prevent the recurrent happening of complaints through maintaining a scientific database of GRS (institutional repository). Under this system, the government appointed Grievance Redress Officer, Appellate Authority and established high level Cell to monitor and implement GRS all over the country. However, there is no study on whether the role of Grievance Redress Officer sufficient and proper to reduce the dissatisfaction and anger of citizens and readdress the grievances faced by service seekers for enhancing government services is yet to explore. Hence, the main objectives of the study were to explore Grievance Redress Officer's role in implementing GRS in Bangladesh; and find out effect of Grievance Redress Officer's role in implementing of GRS through applied qualitative approach and for collecting primary data Semi-structured Interview (In-depth) and Focus group discussion, Key Informant Interview and Analyzed some selected cases critically. Findings of the study reveals that the GRS valued and empower the citizens and held accountable of the government officials which is mandatory for the establishing good governance and transparency. However, due to lack of awareness of citizens and concern officials and not following guideline properly during appointment of Grievance Redress Officer and Appellate Authority, lack of training, motivation for the officials and harassing tendency of some ill-motive people, the country cannot in cash the full benefit of the system. Therefore, competent authority should take necessary steps to address the above-mentioned issues for getting the full benefit of the GRS and developing a people centric administration.

Keywords: Grievance Redress System, Grievance Redress Officer, Appellate Authority, Grievance Management Cell and Institutional Repository.

¹ Senior Research Officer, Bangladesh Public Administration Training Centre, Mamun235@gmail.com

* Corresponding author

1. INTRODUCTION

As per constitution, it is mandatory for every government employee to serve the people of Bangladesh all times (MoLJPA, 2021). For ensuring better service delivery accountability and transparency, the government of Bangladesh has developed five social accountability (SA) tools such ‘Annual Performance Agreement (APA), Citizen Charter (CC), National Integrity Strategy (NIS), Grievance Redress System (GRS), and Right to Information Act (RTI). Among those five SA tools GRS is being used all over the world for measuring and analyzing the effectiveness of any ministry/division/department/agency (Cabinet Division, 2021a). In GRS any aggrieved citizen/service seeker can lodge formal, anonymous complaints through online or traditionally about public service providers. This system is being monitored by Cabinet Division (CD), Bangladesh which offers end to end tracking of grievance (CD, 2021; and P4D, 2021). The main objectives of GRS are to ensuring accountability of government’s offices, improving services and providing suffering free public services. Thus, modern GRS system is a must in a civilized society. Secretariat Instruction (2014) of Bangladesh has provided instruction for taking the grievance of citizen properly and redress those with maintaining transparency and neutrality and accordingly keeping the record of those.

Therefore, in public administration, GRS becomes the inevitable part for establishing and enhancing administrative justice that indicates qualities of decision making process which endures the decisions of the administrator (Mashaw, 1983; seen in Alom, 2021). Since citizens, normally, are not agreed and happy with the every decision of authority, the aggrieved citizen express their dissatisfaction through loading complains under GRS system. However, this system was not developed in one day. After the first circular in 2007 for establishing Grievance Redress Officer (GRO), the CD issued second circular on 30 April 2008 about the GRS which highlighted solving corruption and irregularities complains raised by the citizens through setting up an effective internal controlling mechanism such as process of complaining and their disposal, detailed contact information of the focal points and proper maintaining of database of complaints including sending up to date status report of those to the CD monthly in every office. The third circular was issued on 19 July 2009 which emphasized that it is mandatory to send update information regularly and strict action will be taken against those who are responsible for not sending report regularly as per prescribed format. The fourth circular came out on 23 September 2012 which asked ministries and divisions to introduce awards for the officials who will handle the complaints effectively and disposal those efficiently (Cabinet Division, 2021b). In addition, it emphasizes on publicizing the current system of complaints and disposal in the print and electronic media to enhance awareness among the service seekers about the GRS

including published year-wise complete report in the website by the ministries and divisions.

For proper implementation of GRS, the Government of Bangladesh (GOB) formulated and published Grievance Redress Guideline in 2015 which was revised in 2018 (GRS Guideline 2015, revised 2018). The guideline defined the complaint as electronically or traditionally submitted applications by service seeker about his dissatisfaction and anger related to committed services, goods, and service delivery process of a public office, about unlawful actions regarding services, about non-compliance of public officials with entertaining lawful rights of service seekers. Even, grievance was classified, in the document, into public, staff, and official categories. Moreover, the guideline provided the comprehensive information about the procedure of complaints lodging and their disposal, role of GROs and other officials and committees involved in GRS including different forms.

The main goals and objectives of introducing GRS are to enhance the quality of services, reducing visit, cost and suffering; and developing proactive, positive and people centric mentality among the government officials including to prevent the recurrent happening of complaints by the service seekers through maintaining a scientific database of GRS (institutional repository), appropriate mechanism of addressing, carrying out research for addressing new issues and policy guideline so that concern officials can take preventive measures (GRS Guideline 2015, revised 2018).

However, implementation of GRS depends on the GRO who is playing very important role, but there is no study on whether the role of GRO sufficient and proper to reduce the dissatisfaction and anger of citizens and readdress the grievances faced by service seekers for enhancing government services is yet to explore. This paper intended to address this gap through evaluating the role of GRO in the aspect of implementation of GRS which will be very crucial for the policy maker for ensuring transparency and good governance in the country.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the study were:

1. To explore GRO's role in implementing GRS in Bangladesh; and
2. To find out effect of GRO's role in implementing of GRS

2. METHODOLOGY

The research adopted a qualitative multiple-case study approach integrating Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and document analysis. Both primary and secondary data was used. Primary data was collected

by using Semi-structured Interview (In-depth) and Focus group discussion (FGD) since it was very effective in qualitative research in which attitudes, opinions or perceptions towards an issue, product, service or programme are explored through a free and open discussion (Kumar, 2011). Besides selected case was critically analyzed and scrutinized since case study is a systematic investigation of a study, a setting or a single subject or a single depository of document or a specific event (Berg, 2009) along with Key Informant Interview (KII) for collecting data from the CEO/top management of the concern offices. The purposive sampling technique was employed to select 30 respondents from 15 ministries/divisions/departments/districts. The inclusion criteria included direct engagement in GRS activities, experience as GRO or AO, and administrative hierarchy. Data collection was guided by a semi-structured interview protocol emphasizing GRO roles, challenges, awareness, and systemic gaps.

Data were analyzed thematically through coding, categorization, and pattern identification using NVivo-style logic. Triangulation of sources (KIIs, FGDs, and document analysis) ensured data validity and reliability. Analytical themes emerged under three domains: institutional capacity, role performance of GROs, and citizens' awareness of GRS. This approach enabled evidence-based conclusions reflecting grounded realities within the Bangladeshi public sector.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Theoretical Foundation of GRO and GRS

The conceptual foundation of this study rests on three interrelated theories: Accountability Theory, Good Governance Framework, and Public Service Motivation (PSM). According to Accountability Theory, public officials must be answerable for their actions and decisions to ensure transparency and public trust. The GRS serves as a mechanism of vertical accountability where citizens can voice grievances and demand redress. The Good Governance Framework, as endorsed by UNDP and World Bank, emphasizes citizen participation, responsiveness, and integrity—core values reflected in the role of the Grievance Redress Officer (GRO). PSM theory suggests that civil servants' intrinsic motivation to serve the public interest enhances the effectiveness of grievance redress systems (Brinkerhoff, 2017, Pande & Hossain, 2023 and Sano, 2002) . Therefore, the GRO's commitment, empathy, and ethical orientation play a decisive role in achieving responsive and citizen-centric governance.

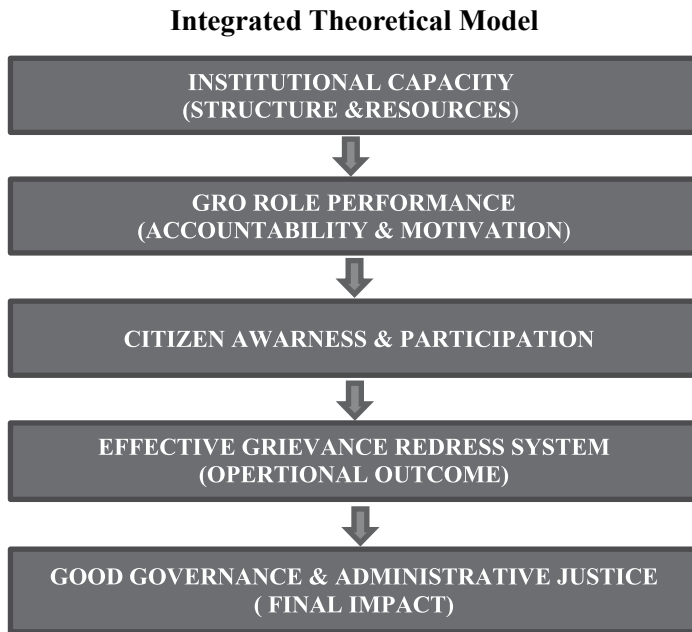


Figure 1: Integrated Theoretical Model

This integrated model shows (Figure-1) that institutional design alone is not enough; the motivation, ethics, and capacity of GROs mediate between system design and actual service delivery. Thus, effective GRS implementation requires both structural adequacy and behavioral commitment.

There are some philosophies to introduce the concept of GRO in the public administration under the Grievance Redress Mechanism and one of the such philosophies is that GRO can meet the expectation of the others (Sugden, 1995) particularly the aggrieved citizens through internalizing their problems and will take necessary measures to address those. Hence, GRO is playing significant role in ensuring effective coordination between the service provider and service receiver in the realm public administration (Janssen, 2001). Therefore, Schelling (1960) define the GRO as the visible catalyst factor to all and whose responsibilities and decisions are expected to recognized by all the concerned in case of negotiation and other context because of their importance. Since the inception of systematic investigation of coordination, the GRO concept has been widely used, however, in the perspective of game theory. In the game theory perspective, the relevant stakeholders coordinate among or between them with put communicating their idea, plan among or between them (Schuessler et.al., 2019). Yet, in Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM), GRO always communicates all the stakeholders to confirm quality and suffering free services to the citizens by addressing their dissatisfaction and grievances. As a result, government has introduced the

provision of GRO in different the government's departments/agencies to address the dissatisfaction of the citizens related to government's services. Hence, for a better and quality services, GRS is one of the recognized systems around the Globe. It is one of the important pioneers for showcasing the organizational proficiency and efficiency. Since it is governmental procedure to manage the dissatisfaction among the recipients therefore; every government establishes the system for providing satisfactory services without less hassle and suffering to the service seekers.

On the other hand, corruption is a much talking and burning issue worldwide irrespective of Developed and Developing since it is one of the major hindrances for ensuring satisfactory and harassment free service to the service seekers. Therefore, development partners and donor agencies such as European Union (EU), World Bank (WB) and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) have emphasized to reduce and curb corruption in Bangladesh including imposing strong condition to take strong measure against corruption (Mottaleb and Sonobe, 2012).

Consequently, the government of Bangladesh has taken several measures and reform initiatives for providing corruption free and satisfactory services to the citizens and one of the initiatives, as per the recommendation of Public Administration Reform Commission 2000, is establishing a grievance receipt center from the citizens in the entry point of secretariat centrally by the Cabinet Division (CD, 2021a) since effective and efficient GRS is the integrated part of any government for ensuring accountable and transparent administration. Thus, implementing of GRS is significant indicator for ensuring the justice in the society through safeguarding administrative justice (Alam, 2021) which indicates the process of taking proper decision as per rules and regulations (Mashaw 1983). The GRS plays the catalyst role for achieving good governance, democracy, people participation and corruption free country etc. as per the vision 2021 and target 2030 particularly the Goal 16 (Akhter, 2022). Thus, GRS was established in ministry and division to nominate GROs in their subordinate offices asking them to adopt measures to receive complaints from service seekers and resolve them in the way their ministries and divisions do (CD, 2021b).

Under the system any aggrieved citizen can appeal to the relevant authority if she/he cannot get her/his desire services within stipulated time in satisfactory way. Thus, the GRS of an organization - be it public or private - is an ideal tool to measure the efficiency and effectiveness of that organization, as it provides important feedback on the working of its administration.

3.2 GRO and Appellate Authority and Their Responsibility

As per the Circular and government order, it is obligatory to appoint GRO under GRS whose main responsibilities are to awareness activities and organize training for citizen and officials about procedures of complaints and disposal in online and traditionally. It is evidence that, under the GRS system, citizens get the opportunity to resolve their complaint, grievance and disputes whenever it arises in the government offices since it empowers the citizens (CD, 2021a). The GRO will be a senior officer selected by CEO (Chief Executive Officer) in case of division/ district level offices and department/agency/ autonomous other institutions. In case of upazila and Union level offices the designation of the GRO will be district level officer of those offices. However, in case of ministry/ division, the designation of the GRO will be at least at the rank of Joint Secretary.

Citizens can apply to the GRO if they cannot get their desire services according to the citizen charter. Even they can apply to the AO and ministry if necessary. The country is maintaining a distinct website on GRS so that people can apply from anywhere for getting her/hir desire services (CD, 2021b). Consequently, GRS becomes the important tool to ensure transparency, responsiveness, accountability and people participation in the governance system of the country (Akhter, 2022). One of the important roles of GRO under GRS system, is to take awareness programs for the mass people so that they can apply following the prescribed procedures if necessary. The GRO has to also monitor and resolve the issue where and when required including keeping record appropriately for stopping the recurrent dissatisfaction by the service seekers. For monitoring all the activities of GRO and AO, the CD is maintaining effective control system by asking monthly report related to GRS from every government office. Hence, the government gets the update information related to GRS in a real time base through monthly bases report and online submission.

3.3 Complaint System Under GRS

Under this system, a citizen can apply both online and offline. For instance, GRS website, e-nothi, e-mail, help line are the examples of online application while example of traditional method is the offline through prescribed form or normal paper. If a citizen applies through online then within 60days the GRO has to resolve the issue or complaint. In this case, the complainant will get a tracking number through SMS/e-mail for tracking and getting updates about the issue. Even, s/he can appeal to the appellate authority if s/he dissatisfied with the decision of GRO and AO has to response or resolve the issue within 20 days. In case of traditional method, the citizen needs to follow the procedure by using prescribed format or even the normal paper and in every government office, there is box to submit the

application or service seekers can submit application directly to concerned officer. Though it is mandatory for all government offices to maintain GRS system private organizations like NGOs are also maintaining the GRS. Yet the number is not significant since only 15 registered NGOs out 2388 maintain GRS. The capacity of internalization of clients' needs and analytical power of GRO are the most important attributes for successful implementation of GRS and positive outcome in the society. The GRO and AO should have the power of interaction with the service seekers and have firsthand knowledge in detail about the common problems related rules and regulation. The major hindrances, identified by some researcher for instance Hossain and Islam (2020) for implementing GRS are the lack of positive mentality of the GRO and AO and lack of awareness of the service seekers and citizens about the GRS system and its procedures. It is found that most of the people do not know about the existence of GRS in the governmental system and procedure required to complaint under this system. Therefore, it can be said that the success of the GRS for achieving its objectives and goals depend on the GRO and appellate authority and the mass awareness about the system among the general mass.

3.4 Grievance Redress Mechanism around the Globe

Since grievances can result from dissatisfaction or discontent from the services or products provided by the government organizations to the citizens, thus it is reasonable to have an effective space or platform for seeking remedies or making statement on any grievance whether it is practical or impractical, it creates an opportunity for mitigation of citizen's dissatisfaction and discontent (UNDP, 2016). Therefore, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) defines grievance as the problems and issues that citizens and employs experience during their service receiving process and employment which covers a board areas for instance illegal recruitment through bribe, gender discrimination, charging extra money for providing services, taking extra and unnecessary time intentionally for providing required services to the service seekers by the government employees, sexual harassment or victimization, wage discrimination between male and female workers because of gender factor, poor quality of services etc.

A grievance mechanism means the procedure of how a grievance will be addressed which provide a concrete and clear framework for addressing grievances lodge at the citizen, employee and institutional level. The mechanism also explains clearly about the procedures of complaints, role of management for addressing and responding the grievance and follow-up mechanism. Hence, grievance procedures are determined and fixed according to the need of the particular organizations which again depends on country, region and culture and vary office to office. Thus, there is no prescribed and universal format for grievance mechanism. Grievance arises when a person feels aggrieved or dissatisfied from any decision which

affect him/her adversely or assumes that it will be affected them unpleasantly. It may be related with their physical, employment status or even social losses. For addressing that dissatisfaction, the Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM) has been emerged. Hence, the GRM is defined as the organizational mechanism and procedure of different government's departments to address dissatisfaction emerged from their policies, programs and decisions (UN-REDD Programme, 2015). The GRM does not limit and replace the formal and legal procedures of an aggrieved citizen, however, it provides the opportunity and platform to resolve the grievance internally through using alternative dispute mechanism which ultimately reduce the cost and suffering for the service seekers and increase reputation for the (Malani, 2017).

Therefore, the GRM indicates the instruments, methods and procedure through which solutions are proposed for removing or reducing the dissatisfaction of the aggrieved citizens (ADB, 2010). There is different mechanism for revolving the discontent of the upset person or groups though the procedures could be complex and diverse. However, the mechanisms provide avenue, forum or platform and opportunity for solving conflicts and dissatisfactions exist between aggrieved citizens/stakeholders and service providers. Though there may be some positive impacts on those decision and activities. The prime goal of the GRM is to provide a platform of the aggrieved parties for addressing those grievances and finding out a sustainable solution (Dioso et.al., 2020). Thus, the GRM is one of the important Social Accountability (SA) Tools for ensuring the accountability and transparency since the organization can address the adversely affected clients' and service seekers' concern through this system (Park, 2015). Through this mechanism, the service seekers are empowered which ultimately ensure the good governance.

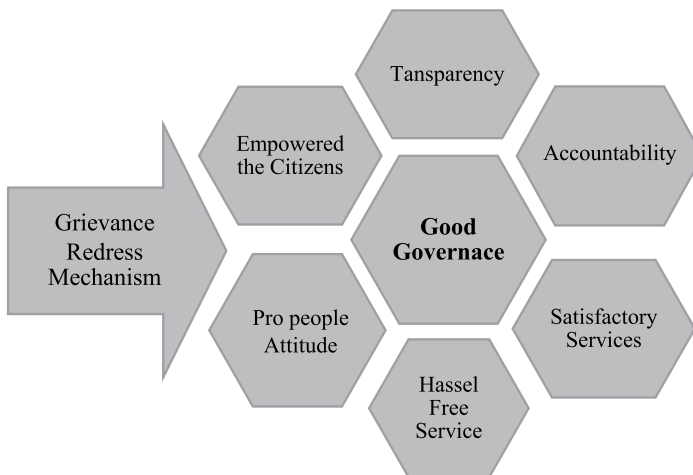


Figure 2: How GRM ensure the good governance

For addressing and resolving the grievance, under the EBRD system, an employee brings their employment-related grievance through their trade union and/ or with trade union assistance and there is no requirement for a client of the EBRD to supplement this with an additional internal procedure (EBRD, 2017). The EBRD highlighted on the employee suggestion boxes, open-door polices and an anonymous complaint process for the effective grievance mechanism.

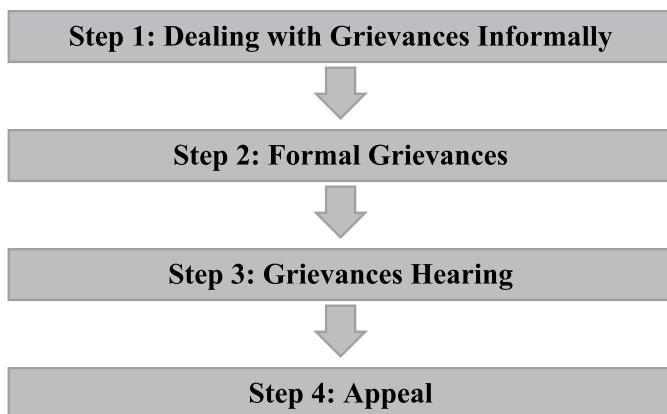


Figure 3: Detail Outline of grievance Policy and Procedure

Source: *Modified and adjusted EBRD, 2017*

In the first step (Figure-3) that is dealing grievance informally the Concerned authority and complainant are encouraged to use informal methods of resolving disagreements or disputes while in the second step the complainant can lodge a written complaint to the concerned authority If the matter is serious. In case of grievances hearing stage, third step, Designated authority (in Bangladesh GRO) will discuss the dissatisfaction issues with the complainant formally and try to resolve within stipulated time frame as per desire of the aggrieved person. However, in the last step the aggrieved person can appeal to the higher authority (Appellate authority and Cell in Bangladesh).

In India, Centralised Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS), for addressing and monitoring the grievances of the citizens related to any government department or agency. It is an online central platform open for 24 hours and 7 days a week where a citizen can lodge his/her complains from anywhere any time related to service delivery of any department or agency. In the preamble of the CPGRAMS it is mentioned that no government can claim accountable, transparent, responsive, pro people, proactive and user-friendly unless it has established an efficient and effective GRM since it is the part and

parcel of effective administration.

For handling the grievance received from the citizens and service seekers, there are two designated agencies such as Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances under Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions, and Directorate of Public Grievances under Cabinet Secretariat (Mohapatra, 2016)

On the other hand, Directorate of Public Grievances was established under Cabinet Secretariat in 1988. At present, this department is managing the grievances of 16 central agencies. It is empowered to call any file or paper for this purpose from the concern department. Based on their scrutiny, they can make recommendations which are mandatory to follow the concern department/agency within stipulated time. For dealing the 21st centuries new and complex problems, it always updates its knowledge and informs the concern department for meeting the needs of the new generation as the citizens are main focus of any government of the present world (GoI, 2022).

Analyzing the Indian government mechanism on Grievance Redress System, it is evident that Bangladesh follows the more or less same strategy in case addressing GRS. In the country the highest authority to resolve the GRS, if the concern governmental department fails, is the GRS Cell which is directly controlled by the Cabinet Division of Bangladesh. In the GRS of Bangladesh, the GRO is playing the crucial role to mitigate the grievances of citizens and ensure hassle free services. However, there is lack of quality research on the role of GRO for implementing GRS in Bangladesh. Therefore, this initiative had been taken to fill in the gap in the academia.

Based on the critically review the different scholarly articles and analysing the existing system for managing GRS by various governmental and private organization, Rohwerder and Rao (2015) have been identified important strategies for effectively handling and implementing the GRMs which can be seen in the following figure (4).

Important Factors for Effective GRMS		
Communication Campaigns (Using different print and electronic media for the purpose of awareness building especially for the Service Seekers)	SOP or Manuals (It explains in details about the procedure from very beginning to end so that concern officials and citizens can have full view of GRS. It should revisit and update regularly including disseminate to the all stakeholders)	Mobile Telephone (Devices which are available to the citizens such as Mobile Phone is more effective for implementing GRM since it is user-friendly to the citizens)
Management Information System (Computer's Software based program for handling and Monitoring grievances in one platform)	Normalization & Incentivization of Grievance Redressal (Accepting grievances as normal & valuable part of regular work and improving capacity of concern officials through training)	Building on Existing Mechanism (There are some existing formal and informal mechanism in the society for addressing the dissatisfaction of the citizens such as judiciary and administrative system and disposal mechanism in the indigenous and tribal community. It should be considered positively during the formulating of GRMS)

Figure 4: Some Important Factors for Effectively Implementing Grievances of Citizens

Source: Adjusted and Modified from Rohwerder and Rao, 2015.

On the other hand, among the 6 key steps for designing effective GRM, according to the World Bank (2012b), the first step is Survey existing formal and informal in-country GRMs and build on them. The first step emphasizes on finding the existing formal and informal mechanism for resolving any problems or grievances which significantly contribute for designing an effective GRM. Side by side, in the Estimate number of users and assess available resources for the GRM, which is second step, it is highlighted to mapping out the resources (financial and technological) and number of users for the purpose of determining the GRM's scope, and identifying resource gap. It is recommended to introduce GRM in limited scale in this stage, however, gradually it would be scaled up. The third stage is Develop standard operating procedures and flowcharts. In this stage it is elaborately discussed on how the GRM will be worked including procedures and implementation strategy in details. In the fourth step, Develop and publicize project grievance redress policies and guidelines, which provides guideline and helps to demonstration of commitment of the concern authority for implementing GRG for providing

desire services to the citizens. In the fifth stage the concern authorities assign the train officials to look after and handle the grievances of the citizens for ensuring transparency and accountability in the administration. The six and the last step for designing an effective GRM is Publicize the GRM to stimulate external demand. In this stage the concern authority uses the whole media of communication for building awareness among the general mass and official concerned about the complaint lodge procedures etc.

After analyzing the existing GRMs around the government and institutions and reviewing the available literature critically, the United Nations Development Programme (2016) identified *User Manual, User Friendliness, End to End Tracking, Confidentiality, security & anonymity, Publicity to ensure visibility, Accessibility, Progress monitoring, Online notification and time estimation, Data authentication, Grievance classification by nature and severity, Option for appeal and Feedback option etc.* indicators as Ideal for an effective Grievance Redress System.

3.5 GRS Managed and Practiced by Government of Bangladesh

The main purpose of establishing GRS is very important in the activities of various government's organizations since effective GRS is the pre-condition for ensuring accountable, transparent, service-focused and people centric strong institution. Therefore, active and effective GRS is the means of transforming government's institutions to more dynamic and relevant as per the need of the new era. Besides, the effective GRS is momentous for preventing corruption and irregularities within the organization, ensure optimum use of limited resources, provide speedy and time bound quality services to the citizens including organizational integrity and social justice (CD, 2011c). The CD of Bangladesh is monitoring the overall activities of GRS all over the country with due importance and provide necessary feedback for updating the system as per requirement through consultations with the relevant stakeholders. Thus, for ensuring effective operation of Grievance Redress System, the government has implemented several steps already such as appointing focal point and appellate authority and establishing GRS Cell where citizen can appeal if they are not happy with the discussions of GRO and AO; publicized the GRS procedures and process through different communications channels such as booklet, banner, festoon, poster etc.; receipt copy of complain from to the complainants; documentation of all information through modern MIS system related to complain, complaints and decision which is available to all; the system is user-friendly and any one from anywhere can lodge complain through

on line if necessary s/he can do it anonymously; the CD monitor and review the taken measure and provide feedback to the concern department/agencies for taking necessary action so that recurring occurrences can be prohibited; and within time bound the concern officials have to disposal the grievances etc. (Rohwerder & Rao, 2015). Because of the system, from anywhere any one can track and monitor the complaints which was unimaginable earlier.

4. RESULT

The findings reveal that while the institutional framework of GRS is well-structured, its operationalization is often hindered by insufficient capacity and low motivation among designated GROs. Empirical data show that only a fraction of GROs received formal training, and less than 30% of offices maintain an updated complaint database. Moreover, citizens’ lack of awareness remains a critical obstacle—approximately two-thirds of FGD participants had no prior knowledge of how to file a grievance. Interviews with senior officers indicated that workload pressure, absence of incentives, and fear of harassment discourage active engagement with GRS responsibilities.

4.1 Role Performance of Grievance Redress Officers (GROs)

The findings indicate that GROs serve as the principal operational actors in implementing the Grievance Redress System (GRS). Interviews reveal that the majority of grievances handled by GROs are public grievances, while staff grievances are rarely submitted due to perceived fear of administrative repercussions. GROs reported responsibilities including receipt of complaints, verification, coordination with concerned sections, decision.

Table 1: Summary of Key Roles Performed by Grievance Redress Officers (GROs)

Role Dimension	Observed Practice	Implication
Complaint Receipt & Registration	Online and offline complaints received; mostly public grievances	Ensures access but requires verification
Investigation & Decision-Making	Case-by-case scrutiny with rule-based decisions	Promotes administrative justice
Communication with Complainants	SMS/email updates used inconsistently	Affects citizen trust
Preventive Feedback	Limited policy feedback to higher authority	Missed opportunity for reform

The table (1) demonstrates that while GROs perform core procedural roles effectively, their preventive and feedback-oriented functions remain underutilized.

4.2 Institutional Capacity and Constraints

Findings reveal that institutional capacity plays a decisive role in shaping GRO effectiveness. Most GROs reported that grievance handling is treated as an additional duty rather than a core function. Inadequate manpower, lack of structured training, and absence of incentive mechanisms significantly limit their proactive engagement.

Table 2: Institutional Constraints Affecting GRS Implementation

Constraint	Reported Effect
Lack of Training	Weak analytical and mediation skills
No Dedicated Staff	Delayed disposal of complaints
Absence of Incentives	Low motivation among GROs
Limited Monitoring	Inconsistent quality of decisions

4.3 Citizen Awareness and Accessibility of GRS

Both FGDs and KIIs highlighted low public awareness as a major impediment to effective grievance redress. While the online GRS platform enhances accessibility in principle, digital literacy barriers and insufficient publicity limit its utilization, particularly among rural and marginalized populations. Most of the citizens and service seekers do not know where to go and how to file complaints. They also lack sufficient IT skills to access the online functionality of the complaint redress system. These findings also similar to previous research (Hossain and Islam, 2020; Alom, 2021).

4.4 Silenced Voices within the Organizations

Study further noticed that the GROs and AOs yet to receive any kind of application termed as staff grievance which could be submitted by officials of public sector organizations on their dissatisfaction or aggravation on receiving deserved services or legitimate rights as the officials of that organization. Public officials working in a particular organization usually refrain themselves from seeking redress of their genuine grievances, it is perhaps, by reason of hidden fear of the end results.

Despite these challenges, success cases were found where proactive GROs established communication desks and awareness campaigns, leading to higher

complaint resolution rates and citizen satisfaction. The analysis underscores that empowered, trained, and ethically motivated GROs significantly contribute to administrative justice and the realization of good governance principles. These evidence-based insights justify targeted reforms in GRO selection, capacity building, and citizen outreach. It encourages government employees to be service-oriented by eliminating laziness, procrastination, and harassment mentality in service delivery.

5. DISCUSSION

This section critically synthesizes empirical findings with relevant governance theories to assess the effectiveness of the Grievance Redress System (GRS) in Bangladesh. Drawing upon Accountability Theory, Good Governance Framework, and Public Service Motivation (PSM), the analysis integrates insights from the study's findings and established literature.

5.1 Theoretical Anchoring of GRO Performance

The central role of Grievance Redress Officers (GROs) identified in this study aligns strongly with Accountability Theory, which emphasizes answerability and responsiveness of public officials to citizens (Mashaw, 1983). GROs function as instruments of vertical accountability by providing citizens with an institutionalized mechanism to question administrative decisions. This procedural role enhances fairness and legitimacy in public decision-making. However, the study reveals significant variation in GRO performance across offices, suggesting that formal designation alone is insufficient to ensure accountability. This finding corroborates Brinkerhoff's (2017) argument that accountability mechanisms must be complemented by adequate capacity and motivation of implementing actors. From a Public Service Motivation (PSM) perspective, motivated GROs demonstrate greater initiative and problem-solving ability, partially compensating for systemic weaknesses.

5.2 Institutional Capacity and Governance Implications

From a Good Governance perspective, the GRS embodies principles of transparency, participation, and responsiveness (UNDP, 2016). The findings partially validate this framework, as documentation and tracking systems have improved transparency. Nevertheless, weak institutional capacity—manifested through limited training, absence of incentives, and lack of dedicated manpower—undermines responsiveness and constrains the system's transformative potential.

These constraints closely mirror the observations of Rohwerder and Rao (2015), who emphasized the necessity of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), incentives, and management information systems. Similarly, the World Bank's Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM) framework underscores training, systematic monitoring, and feedback loops as prerequisites for sustainability (World Bank, 2012a; 2012b). Without integrating grievance data into organizational learning, the GRS remains reactive rather than preventive.

5.3 Citizen Engagement and Awareness

Citizen awareness emerged as a critical determinant of GRS effectiveness. Consistent with Hossain and Islam (2020), the study finds that limited public knowledge significantly restricts system utilization. The digital divide further exacerbates exclusion, reinforcing the argument that technological solutions must be supplemented by community-level outreach and communication campaigns. Comparative insights from India's Centralized Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS) strengthen this argument. As Mohapatra (2016) notes, strong political commitment and administrative ownership are essential for grievance systems to function as instruments of reform rather than mere complaint-handling mechanisms.

Table 3: Key Determinants of GRS Effectiveness

Determinant	Observed Status	Governance Implication
Training of GROs	Inadequate and irregular	Weak analytical and mediation capacity
Incentive Structure	Largely absent	Low motivation and ownership
Citizen Awareness	Limited, especially rural areas	Restricted access and participation
ICT & Monitoring	Partially functional	Limited feedback for policy learning

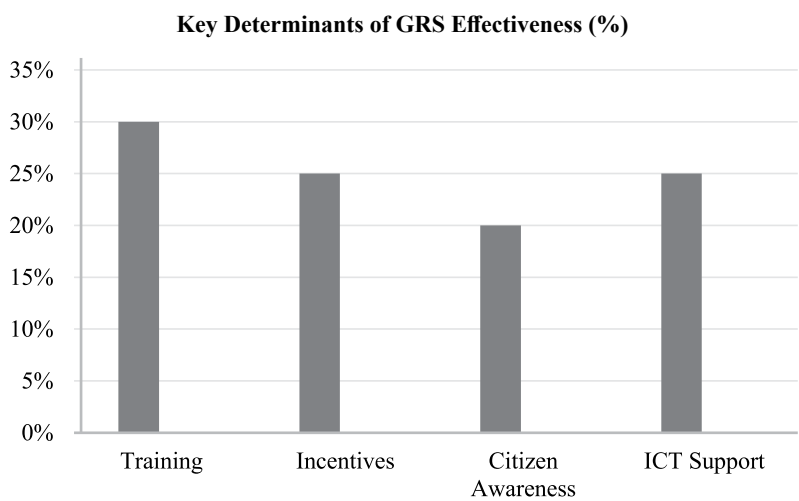


Figure 5:Key Determinants of GRS Effectiveness (%)

5.4 Synthesis and Policy Implications

Overall, the study demonstrates that the effectiveness of the Grievance Redress System in Bangladesh is mediated by the performance of GROs, institutional readiness, and citizen engagement. While motivated officials can partially offset institutional deficiencies, sustainable improvement requires systemic reforms. Strengthening training programs, introducing performance-based incentives, enhancing monitoring mechanisms, and expanding awareness campaigns are imperative for advancing people-centric governance and achieving Sustainable Development Goal 16.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to make the public service delivery transparent and accountable as well as responsive it must also be inclusive, ensuring that ‘no one is left behind’. The GRS plays a crucial role in strengthening good governance, improving service quality, and making public servants accountable to citizens. The Government of Bangladesh is implementing the Grievance Redress System (GRS), which provides a means for dissatisfied parties to make an appeal to the appropriate authorities in the event that they are dissatisfied with a public service. The study suggested following measures to exploit benefits from the GRS:

Lack of Awareness among the Mass People Officials and Desk Officers about the Procedures and Format of GRS and Complaint lodge system under GRS. Therefore, a rigorous awareness building program for the common citizen needs

to be considered.

In order to ensure transparency and accountability in the public delivery a comprehensive and well designed training program on GRS need to be organized for the civil servants with special attention to the role of GROs and AOs in order to build their competency.

Appointment of GROs and AOs are very crucial to get desired results from the GRS. There should not be any compromise with the criteria stated in the GRS guidelines while appointing a GRO and an AO. Their roles could be well defined in the job description. Special training on GRS could be organized for them by the BPATC and selected training institutes.

Since Aggrieved parties have the right to report to the Grievance Management Cell (GMC), the officials working for GMC must be fully conversant with the grievance redress system and four other social accountability tools initiated by the government. Before giving any verdict on any appeal petition, they must follow the process so that aggrieved can get the justice.

Failing to get undue benefits from the public offices some people send complaints letter with distorted facts and false information intended to harass the official which put a huge threat to their image, integrity, family peace and social life as well. Therefore, it is also important to identify these fraudsters and bring them under the law.

It is also necessary to create an enabling environment for public officials so that they can freely express their genuine grievances against their organization, if any, to GRO without feeling of hidden fear of the consequences.

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