



INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

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CHAUBEY: Today is February 18, 2009. My name is Varanya Chaubey and I am here with Mohammed Mokhlesor Rehman Sarker who is director of Electoral Training Institute in Dhaka. I'd like to thank you for participating in this interview.

SARKER: *I also thank you and welcome to my Institute.*

CHAUBEY: Thank you. I'd like to begin by asking you a little bit about your personal background, so would you describe the position that you hold now?

SARKER: *The position is director. I am deputy chair and I have worked here for two and a half years. My job is to cope with all the activities of the Institute. Previously the Election Commission did all training for election managers. Now the Election Training Institute does the training in a 22- day course in election management. Last year in 2007, the Institute trained about four TOTs (Training for Trainers) of 326 senior officials from the civil service and administrative services, the district and sub district election officers from the Election Commission, who went into the field and trained all the enumerators and supervisors. The Institute, established in 1994 by the election Commission, is the sister department of the Election Commission. The people who work during polling time are trained here.*

In the middle of 2008, the voter registration electoral roll was prepared before the parliamentary election was held in December 2008. For the parliamentary election, we had to train about six TOTS (Training of Trainers) for presiding and polling officers. Before that, we trained another TOT for 1400 senior officials including district magistrates, sub district executive officers, and other law enforcing agency officials. These 1400 senior officials went into the field and trained about 500 other polling officers for three days. Then during 25 days, these 1400 officials had been able to train six lots of presiding and polling officers and then on December 29th 2008, the Parliamentary Election was held.

CHAUBEY: In your view, what is the advantage of having a separate training institute?

SARKER: *When there is a separate training institute, there are separate officials. We can prepare independently, we can think and work independently to train the officials, the staffs. So it's a better system to have electoral training be independent of the Commission.*

CHAUBEY: I'd like to ask a little bit about the structure of this office, so would you describe the people working here?

SARKER: *There are six staff officials and other staff, not officers. At the apex is the director, then the deputy director. There are two assistant directors, one librarian and an assistant programmer for the computer division.*

CHAUBEY: Who are the people that conduct the training sessions?

SARKER: *The director and the assistant director monitor and supervise the training. We have a resource person from the government's national training pool for administration. High officials of the government, experts from the Commission and civil servants from the electoral site come to help train.*

CHAUBEY: Would you describe any partner organizations from which this Institute received support?

SARKER: *Initially, the Institute received support from NORAD (Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation), Asia Foundation and GOB, Government of Bangladesh. Support stopped in 1998 and in 1999, the Electoral Training Institute was brought under the revenue budget of GOB, Government of Bangladesh. Now there is another project of the Election Commission supporting the preparation of the electoral roll for the election and training of the election officials. It is with the assistance of UNDP (United Nations Development Program). We also have financial assistance from the Ministry of Finance. During the polling period, especially when we were training people for the parliamentary poll in 2008, we received financial assistance for the project.*

CHAUBEY: I'd like to ask you now about the sort of training programs you've held in the time you have been here. Would you talk a little bit about what they were earlier on and how they've changed?

SARKER: *Definitely, there is a change in quality and capacity. After they have been trained here, they have a better understanding of the effect of globalization and the dynamic change in the electoral process throughout the world. To mention a few of our training modules, they include office management, financial management, election management, official correspondence, translated into English, basic computer training, voter list, database systems training for election-related officers and staffs. In addition there is other training for the electoral person who works during the polling period. There is a manual about the election management, how they manage the election, how they spend money, how they maintain the conduct rules, how the polling personnel or the presiding officer, polling officers will interact with the people. Everything is taught here.*

CHAUBEY: Would you describe when the training manuals were created and who is involved in creating them?

SARKER: *The manuals were published in 2008. Senior officials who were working in the Election Commission Secretariat prepared them. The laws and regulations are vetted by the Commission. There is the Commission and there is the Secretariat, so everything is vetted by the Commission.*

CHAUBEY: Would you describe a typical training session?

SARKER: *We use all sorts of training materials and methods. Demonstrations of the equipment and ballots and in some instances, field trips to show the trainees how to use the equipment in the field. Our usual method is first, discussion then, demonstration, often through role-playing techniques, and field visits. We use computers, modems, over-head projectors, multi-media projectors and more. After the training is complete, the new trainer is evaluated usually by a questionnaire about the new rules and regulations. Then I have to prepare a report to submit to the commission to say what has been taught, what the financial expenditure was and such.*

CHAUBEY: Could you talk about some of the changes that have happened here in the training modules or the content used since you have come to this institute?

SARKER: *Yes, the voter registration 2007 is an evolution. Voter registration earlier did not require a photograph. This was the first time we have had this requirement so this was something new and all the officials have to know how to prepare for it.*

CHAUBEY: What are the basic sorts of information that you make sure that poll workers receive before they go out on Election Day.

SARKER: *I collect all current information from the field officers, from the administration, from the Commission, from the Secretariat. The field officers either fax or send by email information about the number of voting centers and presiding officers, what rule changes are needed, what equipment needs to be replaced. Their information influences my training modules.*

CHAUBEY: And who changes those rules?

SARKER: *Actually, the Commission and the Secretariat are always thinking about change.*

CHAUBEY: I would like to ask you a little bit about how much time you have to train people. So if you could offer me timeline for when you train the trainers here and when they went out and trained the workers in the field.

SARKER: *It is very hard to maintain a course calendar for the Institute because of the political situation in this country. I have to plan according to that situation, sometimes bringing in trainers only a few days before the training session.*

CHAUBEY: So for the 2007 elections, when did you do the major training of trainer's session? For the 2008 election, when did you do the major training of trainers here?

SARKER: *September to November 2008. I have been able to train about 1400 officials and then they go to the field and train the others. Four or five officials can train about 500 presiding and polling officers during two or three days.*

For example, in the Upazila sub district level, there are nine junior officers, called deputy election commissioners. There are 510 Thana or Upazila officers working there. We also have 83 electoral districts, so we have 83 district election officers. All those officers are regularly trained here.

CHAUBEY: What are some of the largest challenges that you face in your job?

SARKER: *We are always challenged by the new rules and regulations being created. The officials have to be informed. So that is always on my mind.*

CHAUBEY: Do you send out some people to monitor how poll workers are actually behaving on Election Day?

SARKER: *This is not the duty of my Institute. Our duties are procedural here. Monitoring is done from the Secretariat. Some of the officials tour throughout the country. The Election Working Group, the European Union and others come here to observe the polling and report their observations to the Commission. Sometimes my*

deputy director, my assistant directors and I go to see how the training is going on.

CHAUBEY: What are the kinds of messages that you give poll workers so that they remain neutral and just do their job?

SARKER: *Yes, my messages is so procedural because they're getting information about, they're being trained about the election management, election conduct and conduct rules, which is being maintained in the field. This is one way, another way from the Secretariat. And everybody is encouraging them to be neutral. So from this side, from that side, everybody is doing. Even from the civil society, from the Election Working Group, everybody is trying to be neutral, for clean and fair elections.*

CHAUBEY: And are there any messages that you found particularly difficult to relay to the field level? Are there any messages that you've found very difficult to pass on to the field level, something people have a very difficult time understanding?

SARKER: *Actually, it is a matter of time, if I have available time I can convey the message to the officials, field level officers.*

CHAUBEY: Okay, well I'd like to ask two more questions. First, if you were giving advice to you counterpart in another country about something that they should try or something that works well, is there any such thing you would like to mention?

SARKER: *What's that?*

CHAUBEY: An example of something that has worked well here and something you would recommend to your counterpart in other countries.

SARKER: *Yes, I can convey it that everything, which are actually, everything, which we are doing here—the electoral process and others infrastructure and other training structure and is better than that of surrounding countries. The Election Commission, which is independent here with a constitutional body and its offices throughout the country, actually part of them in the surrounding countries. So we can convey these that we are working very—you see in India there is a voting system but there is no photo—voter card with photographs. They could not prepare it. You see we have prepared a National ID card, National ID card for people. But India has not been able to do it and Pakistan could not do it. We have done it within eleven months with the help of the Bangladesh army actually, because there was an emergency in the country in at that time.*

CHAUBEY: In conclusion are there any other issues you would like to discuss that I have not raised.

SARKER: *Which one?*

CHAUBEY: Are there any other things you would like to discuss?

SARKER: *Actually we want to make this an Institute so broad and elaborate, we have to train the—we want to train the school and the college officials and the teachers about the electoral system management, democracy, civic rights, so they can spread throughout the country, with the help of their students.*

CHAUBEY: Is this a new initiative?

SARKER: *Initiative? We are just thinking to do it, actually. We have, we have, we'll have a big building near, actually, there is no building, this is a rented house actually for the student, a rented house. Then we'll be able to do it because Korea, the Training Institute in Korea, Electoral Training Institute in Korea, they have changed their name, Electoral Training Institute turned into Korean Civic Education Institute. So this can be an Institute so that we train the students about democracy, civic rights, constitution and as well as the electoral procedures. We are thinking about this.*

CHAUBEY: Well thank you so much for your time and for participating.