

## **Barriers to Knowledge Transfer: Empirical Evidence from the NGO (Non-Governmental Organizations) - Sector in Bangladesh**

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*Knowledge Management is a young and the emerging discipline under the greater parameter of the management discipline. Knowledge transfer is a crucial element of knowledge management process. Knowledge transfer between the Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and their beneficiaries encounters number of barriers in Bangladesh. To explore the issue, total 54 semi-structured interviews were carried out with the top level, mid-level and lower level NGO-officials covering seven administrative divisions of Bangladesh. Content Analysis technique is used to analyze the data. Lack of trust, pressures from the political leaders and local elites, ambiguity in knowledge, superstitions, religious fundamentalists, duplication or overlapping in the NGO activities, lack of absorption capacity in beneficiaries due to education and literacy, lack of knowledge and training in the NGOs, stubbornness and language are identified as the vital barriers to knowledge transfer in the NGO-sector of Bangladesh. Formulation of central regulatory framework for all the NGOs in Bangladesh is suggested.*

**Field of Research:** Management

### **1. Introduction**

Bangladesh is a country where approximately 22, 000 NGOs are in operations with different objectives (Devine, 2003). The Donors, the NGO itself and the beneficiaries are the vital stakeholders in the NGO sector (Najam, 1996). The beneficiaries are the main stakeholders as this sector (e.g. NGO sector) is created for the beneficiaries. It is no point of transferring knowledge if knowledge does not reach the ultimate beneficiaries in order to develop their socio-economic conditions. So it is very crucial to know the factors those impede knowledge transfer between the NGOs and their beneficiaries. It is unfortunate to note that very few literature addresses this issue in the Bangladesh NGO context. Knowledge transfer is receiving wide attention (Argote, Ingram, Levine, Moreland, 2000) as it is essential for the survival and prosperity of the organisations (Wathne, Roos and von Krogh, 1996) and the communities. There are numerous barriers to knowledge transfer (Davenport and Prusak, 2000). Bangladesh NGO-sector also encounters many barriers to transfer knowledge. So the main objective of this research is to investigate the major barriers to knowledge transfer between the NGO employees and the beneficiaries in Bangladesh. This study is set to operate on the following research questions: What are the barriers the NGOs encounter to transfer knowledge to the beneficiaries in Bangladesh? The motivation behind this study is to bridge the literature gap on knowledge transfer in the NGOs so that necessary measures can be undertaken to

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eliminate the knowledge transfer barriers between the NGOs and their beneficiaries in Bangladesh. It may be noted that the previous literature (Rahman, 2006; Rafi and Chowdhury, 2000; Shehabuddin, 1999; Hashemi, 2002; Edwards and Hulme, 2002) could not brought a comprehensive picture of the barriers to knowledge transfer in the Bangladesh NGO context.

The structure of this study is organised as follows: The literature review (section-2) of this paper highlights the factors influencing knowledge transfer. Section-3 describes the methodology of this research. The results part of the paper exhibits the findings of the content analysis (section-4). The discussion section (section-5) shows the linkage between the findings of this study and the literature. Section-6 presents the concluding remarks of the study.

## 2. Literature Review

Determining which factors promote or impede the transfer of knowledge constitutes an important area of research (van den Hoff and van Weenen, 2004). A successful transfer changes the behaviour of the recipient in a positive way (Shannon and Weaver, 1949).

“Characteristics of knowledge” is a crucial factor influencing knowledge transfer. Knowledge is characterised as tacit and explicit by the researchers and theorists (Polanyi, 1966; Nonaka, 1994; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). The inherent qualities of tacit knowledge like non-codification (Hu, 1995; Nonaka & Kanno, 1998), hard to articulate (Spender, 1995), difficulties in communication (Ambrosini and Bowman, 2001), complications in warehousing (Hansen, Nohria and Tierney, 1999) etc. work as catalysts to the barriers of transfer. Stenmark (2000) finds tacit knowledge as elusive. He argues regarding the difficulties and causes of failure of externalisation process as “(i) we are not necessarily aware of our tacit knowledge (ii) on a personal level, we do not need to make it explicit in order to use it, and (iii) we may not want to give up a valuable competitive advantage (p. 90). Haldin-Herrgard (2000) informs that perception, language, time, value and distance are the barriers for transferring the tacit knowledge.

Relationship between the organisations involved in knowledge transfer facilitates or impedes knowledge transfer (Darr, Argote and Epple, 1995; Argote, 1999). An arduous relationship between the source and the recipient increases the efforts of solving transfer related problems (Szulanski, 2000) and relationship is mainly dependent on trust, power and status of the recipient (Ipe, 2003). The nature of social network affects the degree of knowledge transfer (Argote and Ingram, 2000). Research shows that number of relations with other firms and units increases the possibilities of access to the relevant knowledge (Van Wijk, Jansen, and Lyles, 2008) and also allow them to learn from one another (Hogberg and Edvinsson, 1998).

Motivation is the key to the success of knowledge transfer (Kalling, 2003), while personal motivation is the root to knowledge transfer (Stenmark, 2001). The degree of complete or collaboration, cooperation and the application of the effort supporting the transfer of knowledge depends on the motivation of the source while the motivation of the source mainly depends on incentives (Szulanski, 2000). Motivation factors (achievements, responsibility, recognition, operational autonomy, promotional

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opportunities, challenge of work etc), not the hygiene factors (salary, status, company policy, interpersonal relations etc) for which people transfer knowledge (Hendriks, 1999). Similarly, intrinsic motivation plays the crucial roles while extrinsic motivation fails to transfer tacit knowledge (Osterloh and Frey, 2000). Extending Hendriks(1999) and Szulanski (2000)'s ideas of motivation, Ipe (2003) identifies internal and external factors of personal motivation that influence knowledge transfer by suggesting " internal factors include the perceive power attached to the knowledge and the reciprocity that results from sharing. External factors include relationship with the recipient and rewards for sharing" (p. 345-346).

Absorptive capacity has an indispensable role in increasing intra-and interorganisational knowledge transfer (van Wijk *et al.*, 2008). Grant (1996) finds " at both individual and organizational levels, knowledge absorption depends upon the recipient's ability to add new knowledge to existing knowledge " (p. 111). However, if knowledge is not absorbed by the recipient, it has not been transferred (Davenport and Prusak, 2000) and the prime objective of transferring knowledge is jeopardised.

Davenport and Prusak (2000) find that several cultural factors (frictions) like lack of trust, different cultures, vocabularies, frames of reference, giving status and rewards to the knowledge owners, treating knowledge as a prerogative of particular groups, lack of time and meeting places, narrow idea of productive work etc. slow or prevent transfer and erode some of the knowledge as it tries to move through the organisation. They also claim that people who share common work culture can communicate better and thus transfer is also effective. Easterby-Smith, Lyles and Tsang (2008) claim that the meaning of a strategically important knowledge may be distorted or destroyed when it is transferred to a different culture.

Trust encourages sharing knowledge between the teams (Goh, 2002; Ko, 2010; Hasnain, 2012) and trust is one of the key success factors for effective knowledge transfer (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). Mutual trust makes actors feel more confident and secure to open up to each other (Wang, Ashleigh and Meyer, 2006). On the other hand, lack of trust is a handicap for the transfer of knowledge as it generates uncertainty and risk (Hislop, 2005) among all the actors associated with the knowledge transfer. Trust is a subject of interaction over time (Dawson, 2000). When trust increases among the parties confidence about the certainty of the future exceptions develop (Aadne, von Krogh and Roos, 1996). On the other hand, lack of trust reduces organisational performance (Debowski, 2006) and creates barrier to the knowledge transfer (Devenport and Prusak, 2000).

It may be mentioned that knowledge management literature (van den Hoff and van Weenen, 2004; Devenport and Prusak, 2000; Aadne, von Krogh and Roos, 1996; Hislop, 2005; Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2008; Goh, 2002; Ko, 2010; Jasimuddin, 2007) so far has not addressed the issue of knowledge barriers in the Bangladesh NGO context.

### 3. Methodology and Research Design

To find out the barriers to knowledge transfer between the NGOs and the beneficiaries, this study purposefully selected Bangladesh because 22, 000 NGOs (the highest number in a country with equivalent size) are in operations here with

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different objectives (Devine, 2003). Further, the contribution of the NGOs to the socio-economic development of Bangladesh is widely acknowledged. 14 NGOAB (NGO Affairs Bureau) enlisted NGOs (7- large NGOs and 7- small NGOs) were purposefully selected for the interviews. Total 54-semistructured interviews consisting of their top, mid and lower levels based on salary grade (18 from each) were carried out. The interviews were conducted from January to March, 2010 in Bangladesh.

Regarding the qualitative data analysis techniques Jankowicz (2005) finds “the main technique associated with semi-structured interviews is called content analysis” (p. 270). Now-a-days content analysis technique is popular to academics, commercial researchers and communication practioners (Neuendorf, 2002). For this research all interviews (recorded and interview notes) are transcribed. The arrangements of the data into structured meaningful themes can be approached from the deductive and inductive point of views. A deductive analysis involves arranging quotes into a set of pre-determined categories, where as an inductive analysis allows the themes and categories to emerge from the data, rather than being imposed before analysis (Patton, 1990). The data were put into predetermined categories as per the theory and the research questions and also from the interviews. This study borrowed the procedural guidelines to tabulate and present the content analysed data from Jankowicz (2005, p. 272-73,). Jankowicz (2005) suggests the steps of the analysis as shown in the table below:

**Table-1: Procedure and guide to tabulate and present content analysed data (Jankowicz, 2005)**

1. Sample specification
2. Indicate if stratified and how
3. Indicate how many respondents in each stratum (to provide columns for the table)
4. Prepare the units of analysis
5. Prepare the data
6. Specify the categories
7. Code the data
8. Tabulate the data, calculating percentages, using the total of each column as the base of each column
9. check that total percentages sum to 100 allowing for rounding for rounding error
10. prepare a verbal description of the table, to be used when presenting the table in the project document

The categories are put as per the research issues of this study. The categories of the content analysis of the interviews were divided into couple of parts. Three copies of the coding sheet were prepared. To check the coding, two coders were requested. They were given the hard copy of the coding sheets. Firstly, this researcher coded using the symbol tick (✓) in a sheet, Coder-A used the symbol star/cross (\* / X) in a sheet and Coder-B used circle (o) in a sheet. The coding sheets of coder-A and B were collected. Now the differences of the coder-A from this researcher are transferred to the sheet of this researcher. Further, the differences of the coder-B from this researcher are transferred to the sheet of this researcher. At this stage, both the coders' percentage agreements corresponding to this researcher is calculated separately (Neuendorf, 2002). [Add up the number of cases that were coded in the same way by two coders and dividing by the number of cases. For example: Number of cases agreed=18. Total number of cases=20. So %

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agreed=18/20=90%]. They had had an excellent rate (e.g. above 90%) of matching with this researcher. The minimum level of 80% is usually treated as normal (e.g. Riffe, Lacy and Fico, 1998). Here the rating is higher. So the other researchers may also draw the similar conclusion.

### 4. Findings

According to the suggested format of Jankowicz (2005) the Content-analyzed data are appended in the following table.

**Table-2: Content -analyzed data: Barriers to Knowledge Transfer (N=54)**

	Barriers	n	%
1	Lack of trust	06	8.11
2	Pressures from the political leaders and local elites	07	9.46
3	Ambiguity in knowledge	02	2.70
4	Superstitions	03	4.05
5	Religious fundamentalism	12	16.22
6	Duplication or overlapping in the NGO activities	03	4.05
7	Lack of absorptive capacity in clients due to education and literacy	08	10.81
8	Lack of knowledge and training in the NGOs	04	5.41
9	Stubbornness	02	2.70
10	Language barrier	01	1.35
11	Others (Miscellaneous)	02	2.70
12	No Answer	24	32.43
	Total:	74	100*

Note: \*Nearest figure rounded

### Religious fundamentalism

Literature (Edwards and Hulme, 2002; Rahman, 2006; Rafi and Chowdhury, 2000; Shehabuddin, 1999; Hashemi, 2002) reports the interferences of religious fundamentalists, rural elites and political leaders to the NGO activities in Bangladesh. It is reported that NGOs are accused of false allegation of converting people to Christianity and with the instigation of that class (e.g., religious fundamentalists, rural elite and political leaders) villagers of many places of Bangladesh set fire to the NGO schools imparting basic literacy skills to women and they also destroyed the mulberry plants which were planted with the help of the NGOs (Shehabuddin, 1999). Further, Rafi and Chowdhury (2000) report “as part of the human rights education campaign, the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) fixed 700, 000 posters throughout Bangladesh. This met with opposition from the religious organisations”(p.19). Additionally, the NGO fieldworkers face suspicion, resistance or non-cooperation from religious leaders and local elites (Ahmad, 2002). In parallel to the above authors, Rahman (2006, p. 47) also informs about many evil strategies adopted by the religious conservationists against the NGOs in Bangladesh. “Even now in the continuing struggle against religious fundamentalism, NGOs are actively seeking donor intervention” (Hashemi, 2002, p.

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109). So here, the environment (context) is a factor which may create impediments to knowledge transfer (Nelson and Winter, 1982). Sharing the same reflections, this empirical investigation also could identify religious fundamentalism and pressures from political leaders and elites as the barriers to knowledge transfer. Majority of the respondents (e.g. 16.22%) has the opinions that religious fundamentalism is one of the vital barriers to knowledge transfer the Bangladesh NGO context. A field worker of an NGO reports,

“.....barriers come from the religion fundamentalists .... from my service experiences I can inform you that I have encountered them. There are some area-based leaders who are called “Shamprodhan”. ..I spoke about some awareness issues like taking pills and using stuff for family planning. I faced one of the Shamprodhans. He asked me to stop. He said that whatever I was saying is against religious beliefs. He said that birth and death is in the hand of the God and men have got nothing to do with it.....In....[an] office [of an NGO]....most of the staff were female. So people.....surrounded the office to attack the women staff. They were against their [women's] bicycle-riding ....So in knowledge transfer religious fundamentalism is a great barrier....”

Similar complaint is also reported by an NGO- employee:

“...Religious fundamentalism is a major problem to the NGO activities in Bangladesh. Many a times it happened with [name of the NGO]. Our workers were attacked by these fundamentalists. People know very little about this problem. Particularly women empowerment activities and family planning are not approved easily by the religious fundamentalists.....”

In this connection a Manager of an NGO informs,

“There are barriers to knowledge transfer here. Bangladesh is a religious-sensitive country. Our people want to follow the Hijab with due importance. It has a negative influence to knowledge transfer. The knowledge transfer takes place in the Uton Boitok [meeting in front of the front yard of the houses] and the members need to attend it. If she thinks that attending the meeting will breach her practice of religion, she will not attend the meeting. Even if she attends she keeps herself away from others, as if she has been compelled to attend the meeting. So if the participation is not spontaneous, knowledge transfer will not be successful...”

### **Lack of absorptive capacity in clients due to education and literacy**

Several authors (van Wijk *et al.*, 2008; Grant, 1996; Szulanski, 1996; Davenport and Prusak, 2000; Marquardt, 1996) discover that lack of absorptive capacity in recipient of knowledge is a barrier to knowledge transfer. Regarding the knowledge transfer and the absorption capacity of the recipient, Davenport and Prusak (2000) believe “if knowledge is not absorbed, it has not been transferred” (p. 101). In the Bangladeshi NGO context, the beneficiaries are the ultimate recipients of the knowledge which is transferred to them by the NGOs. It is no point of transferring any knowledge if they cannot understand and apply it to their daily life. In support of the literature several also have the similar opinions. The clients are the recipients of knowledge. In Bangladesh maximum clients are illiterate. So it may be difficult for them to absorb and act as per the directions provided in the transferred knowledge of the NGOs. Lack of absorptive capacity in clients due to education and literacy is the barrier to knowledge transfer as identified by 10.81% interviewees.

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In this regards an NGO coordinator observes,

“...Sometimes we design projects and plan without the consultation with the bottoms [clients]. We do not consider the level of the clients who will be receiving our knowledge. So when we go for transferring knowledge and technology to them we face difficulties...”

In the similar voice, an NGO official states,

“We are working for the development of those people who are less educated or even illiterate...So these are the barriers in case of knowledge transfer...”

### **Pressures from the political leaders and local elites**

Local political leaders and elites create pressure on the NGO activities to take the undue advantages. 9.46% of the interviewees say that pressures from political leaders and elites are the barriers to knowledge transfer. In this connection, a Project Coordinator states about the barriers to knowledge transfer,

“...We have some... projects which are community based. [We] give some support to them [poor clients]. ...There is always an influence of somebody in the society. It may be a politician, or a social leader, or local elite [who] tries to include his/her relatives in the [clients'] selection process...”

A Manager also adds about this kind of barrier to knowledge transfer,

“While knowledge is transferred between NGO and the clients there are barriers. The local elites, rich and influential people create problem...”

### **Lack of trust**

Lack of trust is one of the main barriers to knowledge transfer is acknowledged by many researchers (Renzl, 2008; Goh, 2002; Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998; Hislop, 2005; Ko, 2010). Not trusting the source of knowledge may be a barrier to knowledge transfer (Davenport and Prusak, 2000). Corresponding to the literature this research also finds that lack of trust is a barrier to knowledge transfer. Trust is one of the crucial factors influencing knowledge transfer. 8.11% interviewees identified lack of trust as one of the barriers to knowledge transfer.

An interviewee states,

“There are many examples where knowledge transfer activities are expedited for ..... trust and....knowledge transfer activities are impeded for... trust...”

An NGO-employee elaborates,

“...Without trust the existence of these two parties [clients and NGOs] cannot last for a prolong period of time....There are some NGOs who are busy with profit maximization and they overlook the issues of the clients...”

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Further, an NGO Branch Manager informs,

“....There are people who take loans from various NGOs. You will find they do not have any project. In that case, a misunderstanding takes place between the NGOs and those clients”

### **Lack of training in the NGOs-employees**

It is reported that many NGOs are not well trained to impart lessons to the beneficiaries. NGO-employees are the knowledge contributors to the beneficiaries. It is imperative for the NGO-employees to be well equipped with knowledge and resources. In this regard, Ahmad (2002) finds that the NGOs and their employees are not adequately trained and resourced to deliver the services to the beneficiaries. This study also finds that lack of knowledge and training in NGO employees is a barrier to knowledge transfer. Several interviewees (e.g. 5.41%) informed about the lack of training in the NGO-employees as the barrier of knowledge transfer.

In this regard an interviewee points out,

“....there are barriers. I think that there should be more training for the NGOs. If the NGOs are trained, they will be able to transfer that knowledge to the beneficiaries...”

### **Duplication or overlapping in the NGO activities**

Duplication or overlapping denotes ‘performing similar activities by the different NGOs in the same place for the same beneficiaries’. NGOs are duplicating or overlapping their services in respect of operational areas, families and beneficiaries, which is wastage of resources (Sarkar and Ahmed, 2000). Ahmad (1999) finds that 78% of the villages in Bangladesh are covered by the NGOs, which means one person receives the same service from one to three NGOs simultaneously. Citing the example he shows how one person receives microcredit from three NGOs simultaneously and repays the loan by borrowing from the other. Thus a beneficiary may fail to repay the credit and which causes arduous relationship or the termination of his/her membership with the NGO. An arduous relationship between the knowledge actors is a barrier to knowledge transfer (Szulanski, 1996). Thus acknowledging the literature this research finds that duplication or overlapping of NGO operations is a barrier to knowledge transfer between the NGO and the beneficiaries in Bangladesh. 4.05% of the interviewees have the opinion that duplication or overlapping in the NGO activities is a barrier to knowledge transfer. An interviewee states,

“Moreover different NGOs are working at the same place so there is duplication of work...”

An NGO-worker remarks,

“... [In] overlapping one client is ....receiving knowledge from [2/3 NGOs]. After receiving the knowledge, he thinks that he can do everything. But when he is applying the knowledge ... of 3/4 NGOs [,] he cannot tackle [those]...”

### Superstition, stubbornness and language barriers

Davenport and Prusak (2000) unearth that pride (e.g., pleasure taken out of knowledge achievement), stubbornness (e.g., inflexibility, obduracy, dogmatism and rigidity), fear of taking risk (the possibility of knowledge misuse/ the trustworthiness of the source) and self-esteem (e.g., what we know and how we have done things in the past) attitudes are barriers to knowledge transfer. In parallel to Davenport and Prusak (2000), this research reveals that some of the NGO beneficiaries are superstitious. They do not want to accept new knowledge. They trust on the old knowledge based on magic and superstition. For the purpose of knowledge transfer stubbornness in both NGO employees and the beneficiaries is a barrier as disclosed by several interviewees. Common language (e.g., similar languages of the knowledge contributors and the recipients) is a key to successful knowledge transfer (Davenport and Prusak, 2000). This empirical research finds that in case of Bangladeshi NGOs, language is not a major barrier to knowledge transfer. It may be noted that Bangladeshi people speak the same language (e.g., Bengali).

Superstitions are the beliefs, which are not based not facts and those cannot be proven. 4.05% of interviewees identified the superstition as a barrier to knowledge transfer.

A programme coordinator informs,

“...there are superstitions. Sometimes the old grandmothers try to give their logics in the light of old methods...”

Obduracy, dogmatism and rigidity in knowledge source and recipient are barriers to knowledge transfer. 2.70% of the interviewees identify stubbornness as an obstacle to knowledge transfer. Some of their quotations are cited below:

A Director of an NGO informs,

“They [clients] have a preconceived idea that NGO workers are service holders and that is why they are telling all these. They are telling all these for their service. This sort of attitude problem is a barrier to knowledge transfer. Similar attitude problem is also there in the NGO side. NGO workers think, ‘why should we tell more?’ ”

Further an interviewee illustrates,

“...if the clients can implement the knowledge in the practical life then only knowledge transfer is successful. But unfortunately, now-a-days clients show their smartness and try to display that they know more than the NGOs. So it is difficult to transfer knowledge in such cases”

The similar or common language of knowledge donor and recipient expedites knowledge transfer. Language barrier is identified by 1.35% of the interviewees.

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An NGO- official states,

“...Another problem is language barrier. When people work in remote areas, the clients do not understand the field workers’ language and the field workers do not understand their [the clients] language. This is a barrier... [to knowledge transfer]

### **Ambiguity in knowledge**

Szulanski (1996) could find that the features of the knowledge and difficulties of interpretation capability by the receiver of knowledge hinders knowledge transfer. Simonin (1999) also has the same view that knowledge features can hinder knowledge transfer. In this connection, this empirical examination could also reveal that beneficiaries cannot absorb the ambiguous and complex knowledge and the interviewees identify it as a barrier to knowledge transfer.

Vagueness and indistinctness in knowledge creates barrier to knowledge transfer. 2.7% of interviewee inform about ambiguity in knowledge as the barrier to knowledge transfer.

An NGO high official narrates,

“...in some cases, the NGOs face various barriers [to knowledge transfer]. There is lack of clarity in knowledge and information”

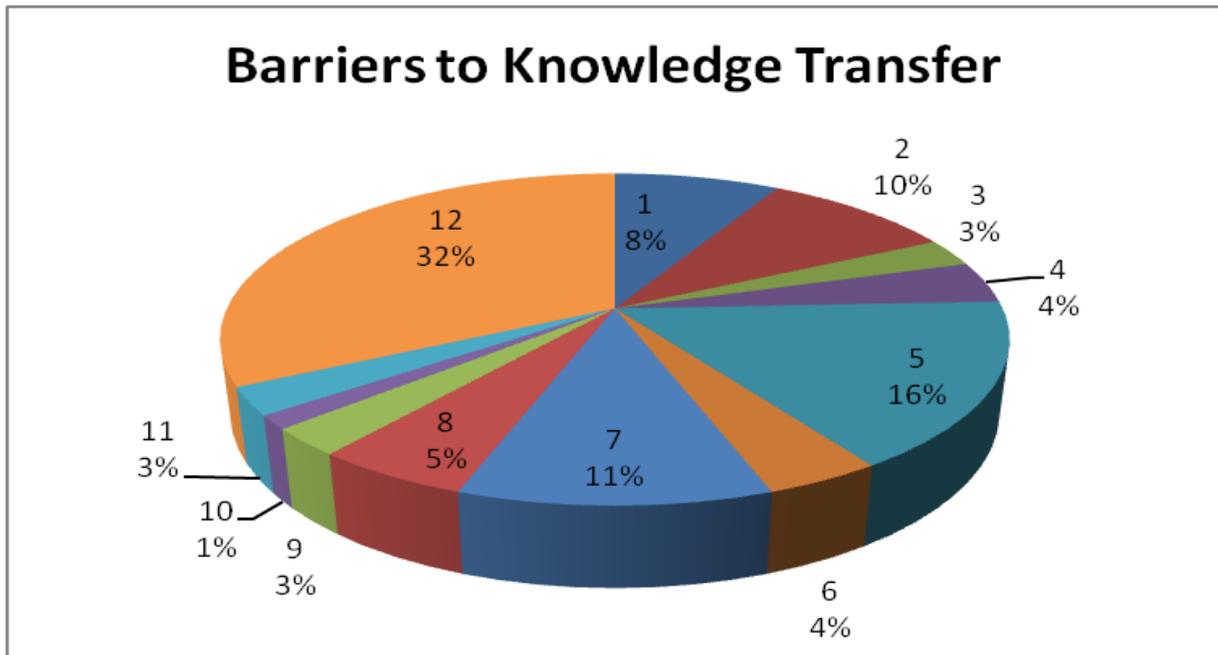
A Community Service Facilitator who works in the field reports,

“I told you.... on farming, but the beneficiaries have different type of farming knowledge. This formal knowledge and their practical knowledge have some differences and to manage this difference they face troubles...”

There is other (miscellaneous) type of barriers to knowledge transfer identified by the interviewees. Really speaking knowledge transfer does not occur if the recipient fails to implement it. For example, an interviewee talks about the difficulties in knowledge implementation due to the expenditures of the resources:

“.....These [hybrid seeds] are expensive. They [clients] need to buy seeds and hormones. .. They need to apply hormone. They have this knowledge, but they are unable to implement as it is expensive”

Figure-1: Barriers to Knowledge Transfer



Note: 1= Lack of trust, 2= pressures from political leaders and local elites, 3= Ambiguity in knowledge, 4= Superstitions, 5= Religious fundamentalism, 6= Duplication or overlapping in the NGO activities, 7= Lack of absorptive capacity in clients due to education and literacy, 8= Lack of training and knowledge in the NGOs, 9= Stubbornness, 10= Language barrier, 11= Others and 12= No Answer

## 5. Discussion

NGO sector of Bangladesh is different in terms of its operations and stakeholders and it is not similar like other public sectors. However, in respect of knowledge transfer this industry in Bangladesh encounters number of barriers. Literature (Edwards & Hulme, 2002; Rahman, 2006; Rafi and Chowdhury, 2000; Shehabuddin, 1999; Hashemi, 2002) reports about the interferences of religious fundamentalists, rural elite and political leaders to the NGO activities in Bangladesh. It is reported that NGOs are accused of false allegation of converting girls and women to Christianity and with the instigation of that class (e.g. religious fundamentalists, rural elite and political leaders) villagers of many places of Bangladesh set fire to NGO schools imparting basic literacy skills to women and they also destroyed the mulberry plants which were planted with the help of the NGOs (Shehabuddin, 1999). Further, Rafi and Chowdhury (2000) report “as part of the human rights education campaign, the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) fixed 700, 000 posters throughout Bangladesh. This met with opposition from the religious organisations”(p.19). Additionally, NGO fieldworkers face suspicion, resistance or lack of cooperation from religious leaders and local elites (Ahmad, 2002). In parallel to the above authors Rahman (2006, p. 47) also informs about many evil strategies adopted by the religious fundamentalists against the NGOs in Bangladesh. “Even now in the continuing struggle against religious fundamentalism, NGOs are actively seeking donor intervention” (Hashemi, 2002, p. 109). So here, the environment (context) is a factor which may put impediments to knowledge transfer (Nelson and Winter, 1982). Sharing the same reflections, this empirical investigation also could identify religious fundamentalism and pressures from political leaders and elites as the barriers to knowledge transfer.

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Several scholars (van Wijk *et al.*, 2008; Grant, 1996; Szulanski, 1996; Davenport and Prusak, 2000; Marquardt, 1996) discover that lack of absorptive capacity in recipient of knowledge is a barrier to knowledge transfer. Regarding the knowledge transfer and the absorption capacity of the recipient, Davenport and Prusak (2000) believe “if knowledge is not absorbed, it has not been transferred” (p. 101). In support of the literatures the interviewees also have similar opinions. Szulanski (1996) could find that the features of the knowledge and difficulties of interpretation capability by the receiver of knowledge hinders knowledge transfer. Simonin (1999) also has the view that knowledge characteristics can hinder knowledge transfer. In this connection, this empirical examination could also reveal that beneficiaries cannot absorb the ambiguous and complex knowledge and the interviewees identify it as a barrier to knowledge transfer.

This research finds that lack of knowledge and training in NGO employees is also a barrier to knowledge transfer. It corresponds with the findings of Ahmad (2002). Ahmad (2002) finds that lack of adequate training and knowledge in the NGOs is a barrier to knowledge transfer in this industry.

Lack of trust is one of the important barriers to knowledge transfer is acknowledged by many researchers (Ko, 2010; Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998; Debowski, 2006; Hasnain, 2012). Not trusting the source of knowledge may be a barrier to knowledge transfer (Davenport and Prusak, 2000). Corresponding to the literature this research finds beneficiaries' lack of trust on the NGOs is a barrier to knowledge transfer.

NGOs are duplicating or overlapping their services in respect of operational areas, families and beneficiaries, which is wastage of resources (Sarkar and Ahmed, 2000). Ahmad (1999) finds that 78% of the villages in Bangladesh are covered by the NGOs, which means one person receives the same service from one to three NGOs simultaneously. Acknowledging the literature this study shows that duplication or overlapping of the NGO activities is a barrier to knowledge transfer between the NGO and their beneficiaries in Bangladesh.

Davenport and Prusak (2000) unearth that pride, stubbornness, fear of taking risk and self-esteem (e.g. what we know and how we have done things in the past) attitudes are barriers to knowledge transfer. In parallel to Davenport and Prusak (2000), this research reveals that some of the NGO beneficiaries are superstitious. They do not want to accept new knowledge. They trust on the old knowledge based on magic and superstition. Stubbornness in both NGO employees and the beneficiaries is also identified as a barrier identified by the respondents. Common language is a key to successful knowledge transfer (Davenport and Prusak, 2000). This empirical research finds that in case of Bangladeshi NGOs language is not major a barrier to knowledge transfer. It may be noted that Bangladeshi people speak the same language (e.g. Bengali).

From the above discussion it reveals that NGO-sector needs a barrier free knowledge transfer environment with a view to developing the socio-economic conditions of the people in Bangladesh. So it is imperative to eliminate those barriers. Future research may be carried out to find out the ways to get rid of these obstacles in the NGO-sector of Bangladesh.

### 6. Conclusion

This study attempts to identify the major barriers to knowledge transfer between the NGOs and their beneficiaries in the Bangladesh NGO-sector. From the results of the empirical investigations and the foregoing discussion it has been found that religious fundamentalism is one the most vital and foremost barriers to knowledge transfer in this sector. Political leaders and local elites are also interfering into the knowledge transfer activities between the NGOs and their beneficiaries. Absorption capacity in the beneficiaries due to their education and literacy is also identified as a main blockade to knowledge transfer. Lack of trust between the NGOs and the beneficiaries is a vital obstruction to knowledge transfer between them. This study could also find ambiguity in knowledge, superstitions of the beneficiaries, duplication of NGO activities, lack of knowledge and training in the NGOs, stubbornness of the NGO-employees and the beneficiaries are the barriers to knowledge transfer. Elimination of these barriers is essential for the smooth flow of knowledge between the NGOs and the beneficiaries. In this regard, the government may formulate a central regulatory framework. Conducting research on the foreign fund recipient NGOs only (e.g. NGOAB listed NGOs in Bangladesh) is a limitation of this study. Future researchers may include the non-foreign fund recipient NGOs for similar studies in Bangladesh. Further, the study on is conducted in Bangladesh context. Future researchers may also conduct the study in a different country.

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