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EVALUATION REPORT



TRANSTEC
PROJECT
MANAGEMENT

**UDF-BGD-08-250 - Active Citizens and Accountable Local Government
(Bangladesh)**

Date: 29 November 2012

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Disclaimer

The views expressed in this report are those of the evaluators. They do not represent those of UNDEF or of any of the institutions referred to in the report.

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

(i) Background

The project ran from 1 November 2009 to 30 October 2011, with a total grant of USD 325,000 (out of which UNDEF retained USD 25,000 for monitoring and evaluation).

The project was designed and implemented by BRAC. BRAC aimed to create conditions for more active civic engagement among poor rural citizens and to strengthen the capacities of local government towards more accountable and effective governance in 10 subdistricts (Upazilas) of the districts of Bogra (Shahjahanpur, Sherpur, Shibganj, Dhunat, Nandigram, Gabtali) and Jessore (Bagherpara, Monirampur, Keshabpur, Jhikargacha) in Bangladesh. Project activities were undertaken pre- and post-elections. As defined in the Project Document, the project objectives were to:

- Tackle both the demand and the supply side of effective, accountable local governance;
- Develop information sharing practices to make local governance more transparent and accessible;
- Target the local bureaucratic and political culture to make it more responsive towards the poor.

(ii) Assessment of the project

Project design and objectives were **relevant**. In line with the National Rural Development Policy and the constitutional mandate, the project made a deliberate effort to reach out to socially disadvantaged communities. Findings of the project's baseline survey confirmed that the target area's rural population was hardly involved in local decision-making processes and that little was known about the roles and responsibilities of their locally elected representatives, the Union Parishad (UP) members. Accordingly, the training was designed to reduce awareness deficits and to increase interaction between UP members, Polli Shomaj¹ (PS) members and individual citizens. Information materials carried crisp messages about local development issues and the importance of availability/ accessibility of information for participation in local governance. Advocacy workshops aiming to generate an enabling environment for inclusive, transparent and sensitive local government, involved multi-stakeholder participation (different governance levels) to instigate lasting interaction between rural poor and local government.

Although external issues (delayed local elections) led to quantitative shortcomings at output level, the project was **effective**. The grantee's capacity building and communication activities prompted UPs to activate public consultation mechanisms (e.g. standing committees, topical community meetings). Poor citizens, in particular women, were brought in direct contact with their UP members. Theatre performances demonstrating the potential of good governance and active citizenship for community development and social welfare were highly popular among the wider rural population.

1 Polli Shomaj are organizations raising awareness among the rural poor, promoting democratic practices and participation of the poor in the rural decision-making process, and engaging in collective action to ensure local government accountability.

Expenditure for capacity building measures (training, exposure visits and meetings) and staff absorbed 45% and 17% of the project's budget respectively. Both expense categories display very low average unit costs (USD 18.80 per beneficiary; USD 132.50 per staff/month), thus providing evidence of **highly efficient** project conduct.

Due to a misunderstanding the grantee's approach to data collection remained incomplete, thus limiting the evaluators' analysis of **impact** to a review of anecdotes. The grantee has, however, undertaken notable efforts to document impact by other means than an end-of project survey (i.e. post-training questionnaires establishing impact prospects and the publication of 10 success stories). On the basis of cases gathered in the course of site visits and during discussions with some 62 former beneficiaries, evaluators have formed the view that the project greatly facilitated access to and use of local resources and services corresponding to the needs of the rural poor and the marginalized.

The beginning of the operation of "Upazila forums" did not only help female UP members to establish direct working relationships with sub-district level government officials, they have also proven to facilitate networking among the women from different UPs to cooperate and jointly develop solutions to common issues. At the same time the involvement of Polli Shomaj in UP service delivery has ensured a proper recognition and prioritisation of pressing local issues within the Union Parishad. The combination of both carries a synergetic and lasting potential, thus representing a good strategy to ensure **sustainability**.

(iii) Conclusions

- Having mobilised increased participation in local decision-making processes **the project has brought about change**. Improved consultation mechanisms provided room for citizens' concerns and the consideration of their suggestions (e.g. in the context of local budget formulation) and have led to improved levels of acceptance (e.g. improved local tax payment) among the rural population. There is also evidence that the involvement of PS members in the delivery of local services greatly facilitated access to local resources and services for the rural poor and the marginalized.

- Among the many signs of improvement and change for the benefit of the local population, we most importantly have witnessed that **female UP members** have, beyond their involvement in fields they are traditionally associated with (e.g. local health, education and social services) also become increasingly involved in the identification and management of local infrastructure projects and the assurance of public order.

(iv) Recommendations

- We recommend that the grantee conducts a second survey among a representative sample of UP and PS members. Covering achievements systematically will **improve the quantitative and qualitative assessment of impact** and of the needs that remain, which may help to refine BRAC's long-term strategy and to convince potential

donors of the benefits that the expansion of the original project will generate. To UNDEF we recommend **to assign increasing importance to the integration of project monitoring mechanisms** into project proposals.

▪ **A relationship with the media with increased focus on women's empowerment** is also recommended to secure it as a steady partner for more frequent reporting about stories of leadership. Promoting the achievements of individual female UP and PS members will help to sustain the debate of persistent issues, thus fostering the democratization process and social change.

II. INTRODUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT

(i) The project and evaluation objectives

This report contains the evaluation of the project entitled “Active Citizens and Accountable Local Government” (ACALG). The project ran from 1 November 2009 to 30 October 2011, with a total grant of USD 325,000 (out of which UNDEF retained USD 25,000 for monitoring and evaluation).

The project was designed and implemented by BRAC. BRAC aimed to create conditions for more active civic engagement among poor rural citizens and to strengthen the capacities of local government towards more accountable and effective governance in 10 subdistricts (Upazilas) of the districts of Bogra (Shahjahanpur, Sherpur, Shinganj, Dhunat, Nandigram, Gabtali) and Jessore (Bagherpara, Monirampur, Keshabpur, Jhikargacha) in Bangladesh. Project activities were undertaken pre- and post-elections. As defined in the Project Document, the project objectives were to:

- Tackle both the demand and the supply side of effective, accountable local governance;
- Develop information sharing practices to make local governance more transparent and accessible;
- Target the local bureaucratic and political culture to make it more responsive towards the poor.

UNDEF and Transtec have agreed on a framework governing the evaluation process, set out in the Operational Manual. According to the manual, the objective of the evaluation is to “undertake in-depth analysis of UNDEF-funded projects to gain a better understanding of what constitutes a successful project which will in turn help UNDEF devise future project strategies. Evaluations also assist stakeholders to determine whether projects have been implemented in accordance with the project document and whether anticipated project outputs have been achieved”².

² Operations Manual for the UNDEF-funded project evaluations, p. 6.

(ii) Evaluation methodology

The evaluation was conducted by an international expert, working with a national expert, under the terms of the framework agreement between UNDEF and Transtec. In accordance with the agreed process, the evaluation aimed to answer questions across the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) criteria of *relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability*, as well as the additional criterion of *UNDEF value added* (see Annex I).

The evaluation took place from May – July 2012 with the field work in Bangladesh conducted from 12 to 17 May. The evaluators reviewed available project documentation and contextual and background materials on local governance in Bangladesh (Annex 2). Initial and final interviews were held with program managers at BRAC's head office, also involving BRAC's program director. Final interviews also involved some of the project's local staff from Bogra and Jessore districts (of which the latter could not be visited due to time and budget constraints). Field work focused on meetings and exchanges with members of Union Parishads, Polli Shomajs and Citizen Committees, to confirm the project beneficiaries' experiences and to obtain updates on their most recent activities. These interviews and group meetings were carried out in Unions throughout the Bogra district, involving 62 trainees and 16 local BRAC representatives/trainers. For confidentiality reasons, names of interviewees have not been listed (Annex 3).

(iii) Development context

As far as emphasis on local governance is concerned, the constitution of Bangladesh is considered to be among the most progressive in South Asia³. Following Bangladesh's independence from Pakistan in 1971, today's local government institutions find themselves soundly integrated within the country's constitutional framework. Article 9 of the constitution highlights the state's responsibility to promote local government and to ensure special representation of peasants, workers and women. Most importantly, Article 11 establishes as a fundamental principle of state policy that "[...] the Republic shall be a democracy in which [...]...effective participation by the people through their elected representatives in administration at all levels shall be ensured". Chapter 3 of the constitution provides the legal basis for local governance in Bangladesh, defining in Article 59 the principles of local administration and the work of public officers. The same chapter includes the maintenance of public order and the preparation and implementation of plans relating to public services and economic development as the principal roles⁴.

The Union Parishads supported by the present project are based on village councils (known as Union Councils, later referred to as village Panchayats), which were introduced for tax collection purposes by law under British rule in 1870. Two types of local governance structures are currently in operation: while in rural areas local government is comprised of three tiers; Union Parishad (village level), Upazila Parishad (subdistrict level) and Zilla Parishad (district level); in the urban areas of Bangladesh local government is represented either by Pourashavas (municipalities) or City Corporations. Given the current local

3 S.A. Aminuzzaman (2010), Local Government and Development in Bangladesh. Lessons Learned and Challenges for Improving Service Delivery of Union Parishad (UP), Local Government Division, Dhaka. Source: <http://www.undp.org.bd/projects/prodocs/LGSP/Local%20Government%20&%20Development%20in%20BD%20Lessons%20Learned%20&%20Challenges%20for%20Improving%20Service%20Delivery%20of%20Union%20Parishad.pdf>

4 Constitution of Bangladesh. Source: http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/pdf_part.php?id=367

government structure, the Union Parishad (UP) hence represents the local government layer closest to citizens living in rural areas. The UP is an elected body of 13 members. It includes one chairperson elected by the total electorate of the Union, nine members, one elected from each of nine wards⁵, and three seats reserved for women, each drawn from three wards.⁶

Improved, consistent and effective local government has faced several challenges since the country's independence⁷. The emergence of democracy in the early 1990s introduced the principle of citizen representation to local governance. However, this has been deemed insufficient to ensure effective participation of citizens, as in most cases expectations of the local population were not met. Although local governance has been widely viewed as an effective way to deliver quality and effective services, its institutions over the years were often misused by political parties for the purpose of political gains⁸.

The government of Bangladesh, however, emphasizes the need for a strong and accountable system of local governance in rural areas through decentralization. One of the four pillars of The Sixth Five Year Plan's capacity development strategy is "promoting devolution to local governments", along with vesting financial autonomy and ensuring accountability for results⁹. The National Rural Development Policy (NRDP) 2001 underlined the importance of "accountable and responsive" local government institutions, where "people will be made aware of and given access to services and opportunities offered by government"¹⁰. The Union Parishad Act 2009 also recognized the importance of community participation, transparency and accountability by including specific sections on formation of ward committees, participatory planning and budgeting, access to information and extended authority of standing committees¹¹.

Despite the above commitments by national policy and legislators, persistent social and societal issues hampered further progress on citizen participation in local governance in Bangladesh. Women were for long excluded from contesting in local elections. The Local Government (Union Parishad) Second Amendment Act 1997 was a landmark towards ensuring women's equal access and increased participation in local decision-making processes. This amendment provided for direct elections to reserved seats for women in local elections, including UPs. However, their inclusion has not been welcomed by their male counterparts, who continue to exclude female UP members from local decision making as well as from the oversight of development projects¹².

People living in rural areas are also still largely unaware of their constitutional rights vis-à-vis local government institutions. They have not been provided with information about the

5 A ward usually corresponds to a village.

6 A. Khan, M. Rahman, C. Evans (2011), "Active Citizen and Accountable Local Governance: A Baseline Survey", p. 7

7 The local government tiers of rural areas have been the subject of numerous changes. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) e.g. established 'Gram Sarker' in 1975 next to UP, but this tier was discontinued by other political parties later.

8 M. Asaduzzaman (2009), Development Role of the Local Governance Institutions in Bangladesh, Empirical Overview, Nepalese Journal of Public Policy and Governance, vol. Xxiv, no. 1, pp. 99-114

9 Sixth Five Year Plan of Bangladesh. Source: http://www.plancomm.gov.bd/sixth_five_year_plan.asp

10 National Rural Development Policy 2001. Source:

<http://www.rdc.gov.bd/dmdocuments/National%20Rural%20Development%20Policy%20%28English%29%5B1%5D.pdf>

11 Union Parishad Act 2009. Source:

http://www.lgd.gov.bd/images/pdf/download/up/local_government_union_parishad_act_2009.pdf

12 A. Begum (2007), "Local Governance in Bangladesh: Towards a 'Critical Mass' to Combat Discrimination against Women with Special Reference to India", Journal of Social Science, vol.14, no.3, pp. 261-272

services they are entitled to obtain from local government authorities and are often confronted with mediators (personal assistants) when trying to reach out to their elected representatives. It is still common practice to exclude the poor, and especially female citizens, from access to resources.

In 1998 BRAC introduced Polli Shomajs (PS), as ward-level organizations (covering the territory of 3-4 villages), which are open to all members of the local community. Their mission is to inform and build awareness among the rural poor, promote democratic practices and participation of the poor in the rural decision-making process, and engage in collective action to ensure local government accountability.¹³ By October 2011, BRAC had supported the establishment of 11,217 Polli Shomaj across Bangladesh, counting around 750,000 members in total.¹⁴

Lack of awareness, capacity and necessary skills among local government and rural community representatives still severely impair the effectiveness of local governance. Therefore, additional resources and training are required to establish credibility at local governance level. At the same time accountability vis-à-vis the people whom local government is supposed to represent must be established, by means of a system that ensures the actual participation of citizens in local decision-making processes. The intervention of NGOs and donor agencies undertaking actions to support effective local governance is a response to the absence of adequate resources needed to implement existing legal provisions and the measures, as identified by the government in its Sixth Five Year Plan.

13 A. Khan, M. Rahman, C. Evans (2011), "Active Citizen and Accountable Local Governance: A Baseline Survey", p. 8

14 BRAC (2011), Community Empowerment Programme (CEP) brochure.

III. PROJECT STRATEGY

(i) Project strategy and approach

The overall objective of the “Active Citizens and Accountable Local Government” (ACALG) project was to create an enabling environment for greater engagement of rural citizens in local decision-making processes. Three specific key objectives constituted the project's strategic approach, as defined in the Project Document:

- (a) Tackling simultaneously both the supply (UPs) and demand (local communities) side of effective, accountable local governance, through capacity development for local government and rural citizens, to ensure that the planning of resource allocation and delivery of services take place in an accountable and more equitable manner.
- (b) Improved access to information for rural citizens about civic rights, local government and its services, through manuals, mobilization and the development of information sharing practices, thus increasing awareness and understanding.
- (c) Improved (more inclusive, transparent and sensitive) local government practices vis-à-vis the rural poor and the marginalized (in particular women), by confronting the local bureaucratic and political culture with new standards that provide for incentives to become more responsive.

The above approach was based on BRAC's overall assessment that increased interaction between local governments and rural communities is required. Bangladesh's rural population lacks access to government resources and services, as Union Parishads remain non-responsive to their needs, also maintaining little or no communication with other tiers of local government. BRAC's mission is the empowerment of people and communities in situations of poverty, illiteracy, disease and social injustice. Since 1972, the development organization has addressed the most pressing needs of the disadvantaged segments of society, including education, health care, social and economic empowerment, human rights and legal aid. Through its economic and social programmes BRAC aims to enable men and women to realize their potential¹⁵. The ACALG project was embedded in BRAC's social development programme (SDP), which focuses on rural resource mobilization, community engagement, rural institution building, local governance and human rights violations¹⁶.

Rural institution building, a central element of the SDP strategy, involves the formation of independent organizations of the poor at ward-level, referred to as “Polli Shomaj”. Another area of intervention of SDP (local governance) addresses the capacity building of UP members. Previously, 61 districts in Bangladesh were targeted by BRAC's SDP, with the districts of Bogra and Jessore yet to obtain the support addressed by the objectives above. BRAC chose to implement the project through its own local presence without involving other partners. Headquarter (HQ) expertise was provided by SDP to its project staff based in local learning centers, as needed and at no cost to the UNDEF-supported budget.

¹⁵ Source: <http://www.brac.net/content/who-we-are-0#.UBhk7UL3DBI>

¹⁶ SDP meanwhile transformed into the Community Empowerment Programme (CEP) with identical, but refined objectives: community institution building, strengthening of local governance, access to information, prevention of violence against women.

(ii) Logical framework

The Project Document translates BRAC's programmatic approach into a structured plan of project activities and intended outcomes, including the achievement of the project's three key objectives. The framework below aims to capture the project logic systematically, also attempting to eliminate confusion between intended outcomes and outputs evaluators at times observed in the Project Document's result framework.

Project Activities and Interventions	Intended outcomes	Medium Term Impacts	Long Term Development Objectives
<p><i>1. Capacity building</i></p> <p>Training for UP members/ chairmen and Polli Shomaj members</p> <p>Local government offices liaison and visits</p>	<p>1,300 UP members and 900 Polli Shomaj members are aware of their rights and responsibilities</p>	<p>Increased consultation of rural citizens by local government officials</p> <p>Increased access to local resources and services for poor people, in particular women</p>	<p>Planning of resource allocation and delivery of services take place in an accountable and more equitable manner</p>
<p><i>2. Info and Communication</i></p> <p>Upazila forum formation and Upazila meetings</p> <p>Female UP members conduct ward meetings</p> <p>Polli Shomaj meetings; local government manual development and distribution</p> <p>Popular theater; poster/ leaflet development and distribution; community meetings involving men, women, old and young</p>	<p>300 female UP members are in regular contact with upper tier government officials</p> <p>The poor, in particular women, living in 900 wards can access UP members</p> <p>Members of 300 Polli Shomaj access info, execute rights, claim entitlements</p> <p>The poor, in particular women, living in 900 wards are aware of their civic rights and responsibilities</p>	<p>Increased awareness and understanding of the importance of availability/accessibility of information/sources</p>	<p>Rural poor can access information about civic rights, local government and its services</p>
<p><i>3. Mobilizing local planning and service delivery</i></p> <p>Advocacy workshops: grass-root level, Upazila level, district level</p> <p>Citizen committees formation; meetings; UP chairmen monitoring</p>	<p>Mechanism for local government accountability established in 10 Upazilas (100 Unions)</p> <p>Performance monitoring established in 100 Union Parishads</p>	<p>Increased responsiveness to the needs of the rural poor and the marginalized (in particular women)</p>	<p>Transformation of bureaucratic practices: inclusive, transparent and sensitive local government</p>

IV. EVALUATION FINDINGS

(i) Relevance

Baseline Situation

The socio-cultural, economic and political issues described above and the fact that the UP Act (2009) recognized the importance of community participation, transparency and accountability confirm the relevance of the project's specific key objectives and intended activities. In line with the NRDP (2001) and the constitutional mandate (Art. 9), the project made a deliberate effort to reach out to socially disadvantaged communities.

BRAC conducted a baseline survey, which covered both Bogra and Jessore districts, assessing the extent to which UP members were pro-poor and gender sensitive, identifying the services UPs provide, assessing the role of the PS in demanding these services and assessing UP/PS members' knowledge regarding local government structure and function. The survey considered inputs of 610 UP (47% of trainee population) and 748 PS (83% of trainee population) members respectively. It confirmed that the local population is hardly involved in decision-making processes, mostly because UP standing committees¹⁷ were non-functional. UP members were also frequently unaware of the Polli Shomajs and their activities.

Baseline Survey:

Selected Findings (Union Parishad)

- UP members in general were uninformed about their roles and responsibilities;
- Just 3 chairmen, 2 female and 2 general UP members could correctly describe a given standing committee's activities;
- Information most frequently provided to citizens: government handouts, health, infrastructure development,
- 29% of UP members knew about the PS, half of them were aware of their focus on helping the very poor, promoting female leadership, protesting against human rights violations, and promoting social justice.

Baseline Survey:

Selected Findings (Polli Shomaj)

- 96% were not involved in standing committees, most did not even know about their existence;
- The resources PS most often lobbied for include vulnerable group development (VGD), vulnerable group feeding (VGF) and widow allowances;
- 87.4% of financial support for social initiatives was mobilized by PS, e.g. school enrollment, financial support, natural disaster relief,
- 46% of PS members competed in local government elections (32% won seats).

The Project Response

Evaluators found various examples of relevant project design under each of the ACALG project's three main strands, tackling the issues confirmed by the baseline study:

1. Capacity Building

Contents of the ACALG training were designed to reduce awareness deficits and to increase interaction between UP, PS and citizens. The nine core topics of the curriculum for UP members therefore included information about citizen rights;

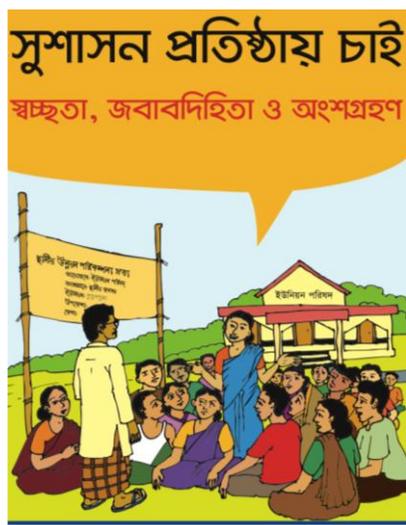
¹⁷ According to the UP Act (amendments 1993 and 2001), each UP comprises of 13 standing committees (e.g. for water supply and sanitation; union public works; health, family planning and epidemic control, finance and establishment, etc).

the concept of local government/UP; discrimination against women; sub-district level institutions and their services; communication; Muslim and Hindu Family Act; Children and Women Anti-Violence Act; alternative dispute resolution; leadership. Training for PS members comprised of four core topics (society, Polli Shomaj, services, local government/UP) and some 23 sub-themes (e.g. concept, structure and transformation of society; goals, objectives and scope of work of Polli Shomajs; identification and access to services; concept, structure, roles and responsibilities of UPs).

Training methods for both target groups followed a participatory approach, involving brainstorming sessions, group discussions, structured experience sharing, role play/simulation games, questions and answer sessions; thus allowing for joint learning through enquiry, exchange and practice.

2. Information and Communication

Three posters produced carried crisp messages to increase awareness and understanding among the rural population about local development issues and the importance of availability/accessibility of information for participation in local governance:



Poster 1: *“As good citizens, we are performing our duties. Are you doing the same:*

- Do you have a National ID card?
- Are you casting your vote with proper judgement?
- Are you sending both your sons and daughters to school?
- Have you discussed local issues with your elected representative?”

Poster 2: *“We shall try to get information about local governance and will let other people know:*

- We all will take part in development activities.”

Poster 3: *“In order to ensure good governance:*

- Transparency, accountability and participation are required.

Poster 3 “In order to ensure good governance”

- Local development planning meeting organized by the UP.”

3. Mobilizing planning and local service delivery

Advocacy workshops were held aiming to generate an enabling environment for inclusive, transparent and sensitive local government. These involved multi-stakeholder participation (different governance levels) to instigate lasting interaction between rural poor and local government. The advocacy workshops fell into three groups:

- Grassroots-level advocacy workshops, which included Union Parishad officials and rural citizens;
- Upazila-level advocacy workshops, which were also attended by sub-district level government officials, Union Parishad members and civil society representatives;
- District-level advocacy workshops, which involved also the participation of district-level government officials and civil society representatives.

Mixed participation was expected to increase responsiveness to the needs of the rural poor and the marginalized, in particular as there was little to no “bottom-up” communication between the different tiers of local government.

(ii) Effectiveness

The Mid-Term Report and the Final Narrative Report indicated that most of the project activities were carried out as foreseen, arriving at the results planned. The fact that Union Parishad elections were held with a delay of almost two years (in 2011 instead of 2009) led in the case of one activity to a modification at output level and in the case of three other activities to quantitative under-achievements at outcome level:

1. Capacity Building

Three-day training programs for UP members and chairmen reached out to 103 (planned: 100) Unions and were implemented by trained trainers, with an outcome of 1,196 trained beneficiaries (slightly lower than the planned number of 1,300). According to the project grantee, the lower trainee mobilisation was due to the delay of the UP elections, which caused uncertainty and lack of interest among UP members. The grantee therefore dropped the planned one-day refresher training for 300 female UP members and provided, following the delayed elections, a three-day training to 161 first-time female UP members instead, thus improving the resulting number of trained beneficiaries to 1,357. Training and exposure visits for 900 women of the Polli Shomajs remained unaffected.



Popular theatre performance

2. Information and Communication

For the same reason as above, the grantee also achieved smaller meeting quantities of 51 at Upazila level (78 planned) and 1,143 at ward level (3,960 planned).

It must be highlighted, though, that the ACALG project still arrived at its initially planned outcomes, i.e.: 300 female UP members through Upazila forum meetings were brought in regular contact with upper-tier government officials (as planned) and poor citizens, in particular women living in 435 wards (planned: 900), were provided with direct access to their UP members. With 3,259 bi-monthly general Pollis Shomaj meetings (planned: 3,240) and 3,321 bi-monthly meetings of the Polli Shomajs' executive bodies (planned: 3,240) the project exceeded its initial quantitative targets.

All other information and communication activities were implemented according to plan. These included, most notably, a local government manual for Polli Shomaj members and popular theatre performances for the wider public. The manual provided PS members with detailed information about the UP's 39 core activities, its budget, types of services, the UP

chairmen's responsibilities, the seats reserved for women, the standing committees, and the involvement of citizens in ward meetings. Evaluators were impressed by popular theatre performances, during which actors directly involved and exchanged with the audience, in order to demonstrate how proactive pro-poor good governance by the local government and active citizenship and participation by community members can foster community development and social welfare.

3. Mobilizing planning and local service delivery

Grassroots, Upazila and district-level advocacy workshops aiming to strengthen mechanisms for local government accountability were implemented according to plan. In addition, the project launched 300 Citizen Committees (CC) comprised of PS members, local elites (e.g. teachers) and members of other existing forums, organizing and facilitating meetings every four months to review UP chairperson performance. CC members were guided and advised to assess the extent to which UP chairmen accomplished their principal tasks on the basis of 15 indicators which measured, among others, the frequency of UP meetings held in presence of the chairman, the involvement of women in UP development project implementation and UP services' beneficiary selection, the accuracy of development project implementation the appropriateness of allocation of UP services and allowances to citizens, the extent of tax collection, and the number and variety of standing committees held. While these committees recognized the 30 best performing UP chairmen (planned: 15), they also notified to the press 46 of the lowest performing UP members (planned: 15).

(iii) Efficiency¹⁸

Capacity building measures for ACALG project beneficiaries such as training, exposure visits and meetings were the project's principal activities. Amounting to 45% of the budget¹⁹ they were also the project's main expenditure item. Breaking the amount spent for capacity building measures (USD 134,962) over the total number of direct beneficiaries (7,174)²⁰ provides a low average cost of USD 18.80 per UP/PS/CC member and thus evidence of highly efficient project conduct. Expenses for accompanying advocacy and outreach measures, covering e.g. the popular theatre, information (local government manuals, posters, leaflets) and public relations (UP performance awards, press/media information) amounted to 17% of the budget and thus appear reasonable.

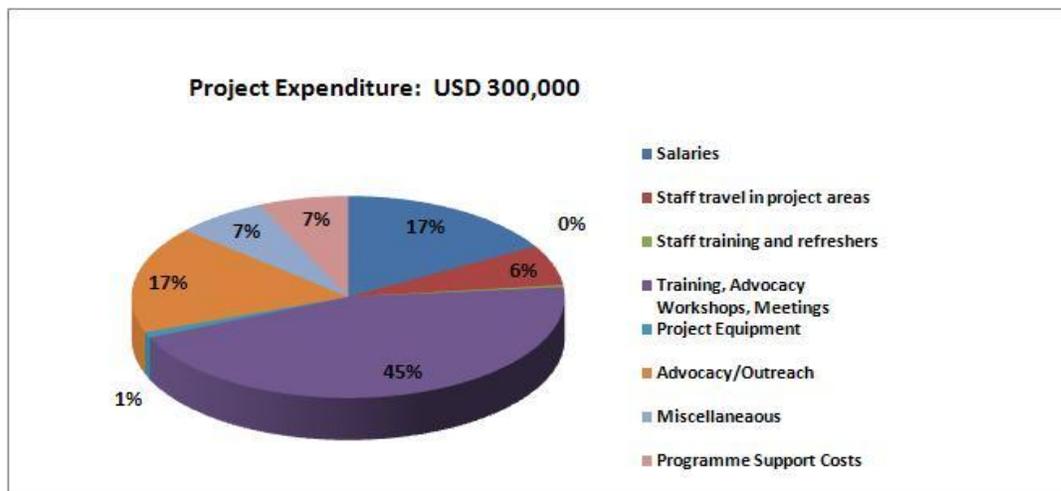
Staff costs, which related exclusively to salaries and capacity building for project staff based in BRAC's local learning centers, represented 17% of project expenditure. This was efficient, given that the budgeted amount converts into an average cost of USD 132.50 per month/local staff member. HQ expertise was provided at no cost to the UNDEF-supported budget.

Staff travel (in project-supported areas), programme support (e.g. expenses linked to HQ administration, project logistics) and miscellaneous expenses (e.g. costs of baseline study, local office accommodation and utilities) absorbed between 6% and 7% of the budget's resources each.

18 Quantitative assessments made in this section are based on the total amount of project expenditure, which excludes the budget amount reserved for evaluation by UNDEF.

19 This includes costs linked to advocacy workshops (3.3%), but excludes costs associated with staff capacity building (0.3%).

20 These included 1,357 UP members, 900 PS members, 4,917 CC members. The conduct of UP performance monitoring by CC members was assisted 'on the job' (no formal training was provided).



(iv) Impact

Due to a misunderstanding, the grantee's approach to data collection remained incomplete, thus limiting the evaluators' analysis of impact to a review of anecdotes. BRAC assumed its independent Research and Evaluation Division (RED) would carry out the post-project evaluation, using the M&E budget reserved for use by UNDEF. BRAC claims it did not undertake a second survey to determine the project's impact, as it had planned for RED to conduct an impact assessment of the ACALG project in the context of the post-project evaluation. According to the grantee, no clarification was provided that BRAC's proposal to engage RED for the post-project evaluation²¹ would not be given further consideration.



Discussion among Union Parishad members

BRAC has, however, undertaken notable efforts to document impact by other means. These included the recording of impact prospects through post-training questionnaires²² among advocacy workshop participants, in which e.g. UP member trainees were asked to indicate which local issues and UP service activities they are going to prioritise next. Evaluators were also presented with short success story abstracts established by local project staff and with the latest draft (May 2012) of a publication intended to document "Stories of Change."

On the basis of the success stories gathered in the context of site visits and discussions with some 62 former project beneficiaries, evaluators have independently formed the view that the project indeed had positive effects. The following examples²³ have been selected and

²¹ Project Document UDF-BGD-08-250, p.9

²² However, a consolidated analysis of these questionnaires was unavailable.

²³ In line with current development practice, an effort was made to identify anecdotes different from or more recent than the 10 success stories reported in a recent publication of BRAC (Stories of Change, May 2012) or to obtain, where possible, additional details of relevance to conduct an independent assessment of impact.

grouped along some of the key issues identified in the baseline study to demonstrate the project's impact on the performance of UP, PS and CC members:

Most of the stories gathered demonstrate that the different beneficiaries of the ACALG project have used their knowledge to build relationships and deepen interaction for the benefit of the local population. The technical know-how acquired enhanced the collaboration between UP and PS members, as it enabled them to accomplish new, tangible results for their communities. In addition, these examples show that CC members, beyond their UP performance monitoring task, have been actively engaging in initiatives supporting local development planning, social justice and public order.²⁴

UP members' roles and responsibilities

Before their participation in the ACALG project, members of the **Kalerpara UP** used to perform their duties without consultation. Once trained and following an approach by the local CC, the UP chairman and the other UP members began to understand the useful effects of collaboration with and involvement of the local population in the decision-making process of the UP. CC members made concrete project proposals (roads, bridges, sanitation, water supply) that should be given priority in the local budget. Consequently, citizens are now invited to participate in UP committees and public meetings, in particular in the context of the annual budget's preparation. Since then, almost 90% of the Union's population regularly pay their local taxes, compared to 50-60% in earlier days. Joint formulation of the area's development planning hence had a significant impact on citizens' willingness to contribute taxes.

"The ACALG training has opened my eyes", says a member of **Gosaibari UP** who holds a reserved seat for women. Having learned that female UP members must be given responsibility to manage a minimum share of the local budget targeting the development of the Union, she claimed a share of the VGD scheme and also manages a portion of the local development budget (100,000 taka) to implement road construction and maintenance projects. If local issues are not properly managed by the chairman or other (male) members, she now complains to the head of the sub-district level administration, the Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO). She has gained confidence to speak up and is dealing with ease with high-level local government officials. Whenever the UNO or agriculture and fisheries sector local officials visit her area, she comes forward to greet them and to raise development issues of her ward.

In January 2011 a member of **Biddanandagati UP** noticed young people gathering around a particular house, gambling and consuming drugs. Failing to convince them to give up their anti-social activities he contacted the local police, which assured him that appropriate measures would be taken. However, there was no sign of improvement and so he informed the parents of the young persons and the local UP chairman. During a joint visit to the house they found the young people, who as a matter of fact were unemployed and driven by boredom, continuing their illegal practices. The UP chairman suggested occupation through the 40-days development scheme and the parents promised also to organize employment for their sons. Given this assurance, the young people demolished the house and started to follow different types of occupations, such as pulling rickshaws and road construction work. The UP member highlighted that his ways of tackling anti-social behavior were inspired by the training program of the ACALG project, in particular by the lessons about roles and responsibilities of good citizens and about the duties of UP members.

24 See also: BRAC (May 2012), Stories of Change: Case Story 04 "Together for a Safer Community", p. 19

Enhanced male/female and UP/PS interaction and cooperation

A Polli Somaj member from **Garidaha Union** abandoned her traditional family roles, determined to invest her time for the benefit of the local community. Years of PS engagement helped her to gain confidence and win a seat during the past UP elections. Her first effort as UP member was to ensure the reconstruction of a local road section located next to the Korotoa river, washed away by rain in August 2011. The road was of particular importance to pupils of a local school and patients of a local community hospital. People tried to cross the severely damaged and dangerous section, as the only existing alternative route was remote and time-consuming. Having assessed the urgency of the situation, she requested from the UP chairman access to funding under the 40-day development scheme. He agreed to include the scheme allocation needed for the road repairs into the local budget and despite issues related to shortage of soil and labour, road construction work was successfully completed by the end of March 2012.

It was only after the training that another **Garidaha Union** PS member felt confident to visit the UP office, because she knew she was fully informed about the services UPs are supposed to provide, such as access to free medical treatment and medication; legal assistance; special schemes (e.g. VGD, VGF) for vulnerable people, birth registration and citizenship certification. The very first thing she realized was the importance of casting a vote in elections, which is why she obtained a National Identity Card for herself and others living in her community. She also understood that it was crucial to pay local taxes in order to further the local development projects undertaken by the UP. She says that thanks to her PS engagement through the ACALG project today she closely collaborates with the UP, participating in a number of social initiatives, among them ensuring the registration of all newly born children and stopping early marriage in her community.

According to the experience of a female PS member from **Shahbondegi Union** ideas and initiatives of women were usually not followed with great attention, neither by family members nor society. However, after her return from the ACALG project's training to her local community, she became a member of her area's school management committee, and in this role she successfully convinced numerous parents to send their children to school. She also obtained local hospital treatment for elderly neighbors and raised funds for the marriage ceremony of women originating from local poor families. Today she is actively involved in different social initiatives, e.g. she stopped a number of early marriages and regularly informs the local population on how to obtain access to UP services. She ventured to participate in the local UP election after she completed the ACLAG training. Although she did not win a seat in the past, she is confident that she will manage to do so in the upcoming election.

(v) Sustainability

Following the completion of its capacity building programme the ACALG project has introduced sub-district level forums for female UP members. Through “Upazila forum” meetings female members from different UPs meet regularly and have been brought in personal contact with upper tier government officials, with a twofold purpose:



The repaired road next to the Korotoa river

- The Upazila forum serves as an exchange platform for women from different UPs, where they can share information about the local issues and challenges they face in their Union, without the restrictions they may experience during UP meetings back home, which are often dominated by male UP members.
- At the same time, the platform offers the female UP members an opportunity to directly discuss with the UNO and other upper-tier local government officials how to best address the most pressing needs they have identified in their local communities.

According to the grantee, the forums have not only helped the women to establish direct working relationships with sub-district level government officials, they have also proven to facilitate networking among the women to cooperate and jointly develop solutions to common issues.



Polli Shomaj members share their experiences

At the grass-roots level, the grantee established the Polli Shomaj as social organizations open to everyone and covering the territory of three to four villages. Their members engage with UP, CC and other local government services to address the social needs (e.g. access to health, education and other social safety net services) and fundamental rights (national ID cards, protesting human rights violations) of their peers.

It appears that the combination of the Polli Shomaj and Upazila forum meetings carries a synergetic and lasting potential to ensure proper recognition and prioritization of pressing local issues within the UPs. This approach can therefore be expected to have long-term benefits in the form of improved access to local resources and more effective service delivery, in particular for the poor segments of the rural population.

In the absence of adequate government support BRAC confirmed that it remains committed to continue its capacity building effort to support effective local governance. The Upazila forums will form a key component of BRAC's support for the years to come.

Following the end of the UNDEF-supported period, BRAC also continues to implement and expand ACALG in 10 Upazilas of Bogra and Jessore, which were not addressed by the present project. It is understood that BRAC applies a “rolling scheme”, in order (i) to address all subdistricts and (ii) to provide training to newly elected UP and/or Polli Shomaj members previously not covered by its capacity building measures. In addition, staff of BRAC's local learning centers will continue conducting refresher trainings for Polli Shomaj and Union Parishad members according to their needs, applying the lessons learned in the course of the present project.

(vi) UNDEF Value Added

All project activities and materials were branded as UNDEF-funded. Project staff proudly made use of UNDEF's full organizational name, saying that the local population particularly appreciated the support by an international organization.

According to BRAC, the grant award decision led national government authorities to endorse the ACALG project, as the UNDEF approval was seen as a confirmation of relevant project design and a qualitatively sound approach to implementation. District government officials were impressed by UNDEF's support, suggesting expanding assistance for participatory local governance to a wider number of sub-districts.

V. CONCLUSIONS

(i) Based on our assessment of **relevance**, the grantee devised appropriate measures to tackle core issues confirmed by the project's baseline study. The ACALG project's approach and methodology was designed to overcome the significant information deficit that existed among local government and civil society representatives, as well as individual citizens, concerning the specific roles and responsibilities of Union Parishads (UP). The inclusion of Polli Shomajs (PS) as project beneficiaries was of particular relevance to the enhancement of the quality of local service delivery, given their awareness of grass-roots level issues surrounding fundamental rights, health, education and other social needs.

(ii) Although external issues in the form of delayed local elections have led to quantitative shortcomings at output level, the grantee successfully achieved the objectives of its capacity building and communication activities. Based on our findings related to **effectiveness** and **impact**, the ACALG project has contributed to an improved understanding among UP members of the benefits of public consultation mechanisms (e.g. UP standing committees, topical community meetings), which in turn mobilized increased participation of individual citizens in local decision-making processes. There is also evidence that the collaboration between PS and UP members, i.e. their involvement in the delivery of local services (e.g. birth registration, filing of applications for vulnerable people) has facilitated access to local resources and services corresponding to the needs of the rural poor and the marginalized.

(iii) Expenditure for capacity building measures (training, exposure visits and meetings) and staff absorbed 45% and 17% of the project's budget respectively. Both expense categories display very low average unit costs (USD 18.80 per beneficiary; USD 132.50 per staff/month), thus providing evidence of **highly efficient** project conduct.

(iv) In the absence of consolidated data documenting progress made in relation to the results of the baseline study, evaluators were presented with numerous testimonials of beneficiaries documenting the project's impact. Among the many signs of improvement and change for the benefit of the local population, we most importantly have witnessed that female UP members have, beyond their involvement in fields they are traditionally associated with (e.g. local health, education and social services) become increasingly involved in the identification and management of local infrastructure projects and the assurance of public order. This conclusion, and the comment on the fact that the confusion around the conduct of an end-of-project survey as part of the post-project evaluation was probably avoidable, are based on our findings related to **impact**.

(v) Based on our findings related to **impact**, the Upazila forum not only helped female UP members to establish direct working relationships with sub-district level government officials, but have also facilitated networking among the women to cooperate and jointly develop solutions to common issues. At the same time the involvement of Polli Shomaj in UP service delivery has ensured a proper recognition and prioritization of pressing local issues within the UP. We conclude that the combination of both carries a synergetic

and lasting potential, thus representing a good strategy to ensure sustainability. The application of a “rolling scheme” to address sub-districts not covered by the present project and to provide training to newly elected UP and/or Polli Shomaj members further enhances sustainability.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

To strengthen the outcome and similar projects in the future, evaluators recommend to UNDEF and project holders:

(i) The conclusions left no doubt about the project's effects. However, proper measuring of **impact** will be indispensable to identify remaining (and new) needs of the beneficiaries. Limiting the baseline study effort to a representative sample (e.g. pre-training interviews with 33% of the planned trainee population) could have freed the time and resources needed for a post-training survey. The existence of and the project's embedding into BRAC's long-term SDP/CEP strategy is highly commendable, but future capacity building support for UP/PS members and/or Upazila forum activities should be designed on the basis of accurate information about specific and local needs. We therefore recommend to **rapidly conduct a second survey among a representative sample of former UP/PS trainees to assess the outcome applying the project's original baseline indicators**. Covering achievements systematically and beyond 10 narrative case studies will improve BRAC's current assessment in quantitative and qualitative terms. It may also help to attract new donors and implementing partners, thus enhancing the strategic objectives, when expanding or replicating the original project.

(ii) Based on our comment in the conclusions on impact we also recommend to **UNDEF to ensure grantees are clear about the modalities of post-project evaluations and to assign increasing importance to the integration of project monitoring mechanisms** into project proposals to facilitate the capture of performance and impact.

(iii) Concerning the conclusions derived from findings related to **impact and sustainability** greater importance should be assigned to the improvement of awareness about and acknowledgement of examples of women's leadership, going beyond the recent publication of 10 success stories and the reporting of project-promoted events in the press. We therefore recommend to exploit existing relationships with the **local media present in rural areas targeted by the ACALG project, to secure them as a steady partner for the promotion of achievements of individual female UP and PS members**. More frequent reporting about individual stories of female leadership will help to sustain the public debate of persistent issues and thus foster the democratization process and social change.

IX. ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: EVALUATION QUESTIONS

DAC criterion	Evaluation Question	Related sub-questions
Relevance	To what extent was the project, as designed and implemented, suited to context and needs at the beneficiary, local, and national levels?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Were the objectives of the project in line with the needs and priorities for democratic development, given the context? ▪ Should another project strategy have been preferred rather than the one implemented to better reflect those needs, priorities, and context? Why? ▪ Were risks appropriately identified by the projects? How appropriate are/were the strategies developed to deal with identified risks? Was the project overly risk-averse?
Effectiveness	To what extent was the project, as implemented, able to achieve objectives and goals?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To what extent have the projects objectives been reached? ▪ To what extent was the project implemented as envisaged by the project document? If not, why not? ▪ Were the project activities adequate to make progress towards the project objectives? ▪ What has the project achieved? Where it failed to meet the outputs identified in the project document, why was this?
Efficiency	To what extent was there a reasonable relationship between resources expended and project impacts?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Was there a reasonable relationship between project inputs and project outputs? ▪ Did institutional arrangements promote cost-effectiveness and accountability? ▪ Was the budget designed, and then implemented, in a way that enabled the project to meet its objectives?
Impact	To what extent has the project put in place processes and procedures supporting the role of civil society in contributing to democratization, or to direct promotion of democracy?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To what extent has/have the realization of the project objective(s) and project outcomes had an impact on the specific problem the project aimed to address? ▪ Have the targeted beneficiaries experienced tangible impacts? Which were positive; which were negative? ▪ To what extent has the project caused changes and effects, positive and negative, foreseen and unforeseen, on democratization? ▪ Is the project likely to have a catalytic effect? How? Why? Examples?
Sustainability	To what extent has the project, as designed and implemented, created what is likely to be a continuing impetus towards democratic development?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To what extent has the project established processes and systems that are likely to support continued impact? ▪ Are the involved parties willing and able to continue the project activities on their own (where applicable)?
UNDEF value-added	To what extent was UNDEF able to take advantage of its unique position and comparative advantage to achieve results that could not have been achieved had support come from other donors?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What was UNDEF able to accomplish, through the project, that could not as well have been achieved by alternative projects, other donors, or other stakeholders (Government, NGOs, etc). ▪ Did project design and implementing modalities exploit UNDEF's comparative advantage in the form of an explicit mandate to focus on democratization issues?

ANNEX 2: DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

UNDEF

- Final Narrative Report, including Annexes
- Mid-Term/Annual Progress Report
- Project Document
- 2 Milestone Verification Reports

BRAC

- “Active Citizen and Accountable Local Governance: A Baseline Survey”, A. Khan, M. Rahman, C. Evans (2011)
- “Active Citizen and Accountable Local Governance: Lessons Learned Sharing Session (presentation, brief report)
- “Stories of Change. Case stories from Active Citizens and Accountable Local Government” (2012)
- Popular theatre drama documentation: “In the Path of Light”; “Sun of the horizon”; “Demands of our Time”
- ACALG communication campaign posters
- Local Government Manual for Polli Shomaj
- Training curriculum: Union Parishad members
- Training curriculum: Polli Shomaj members
- Post-training questionnaire
- Union Parishad evaluation form
- Press excerpts
- Project Staff Manual
- BRAC Community Empowerment Programme (brochure)

Other sources

- “Local Government and Development in Bangladesh. Lessons Learned and Challenges for Improving Service Delivery of Union Parishad”, S.A. Aminuzzaman (2010)
- “Development Role of the Local Governance Institutions in Bangladesh, Empirical Overview”, M. Asaduzzaman, in Nepalese Journal of Public Policy and Governance, vol. Xxiv (2009)
- “Local Governance in Bangladesh: Towards a ‘Critical Mass’ to Combat Discrimination against Women with Special Reference to India”, A. Begum, in Journal of Social Science, vol.14 (2007)

National Legislative acts, policies

- Constitution of Bangladesh
- Union Parishad Act (2009)
- National Rural Development Policy (2001)

ANNEX 3: SCHEDULE OF INTERVIEWS

A detailed list of persons interviewed has been provided to UNDEF

Dhaka, May 13th and 17th, 2012

BRAC head office, 2 project management staff

Bogra, May 13th, 2012

BRAC Learning Centre, local project staff from Bogra (11 persons) and Jessore (1 person)

Shajahanpur (Mazira), May 14th, 2012

Convenors and members of 6 different local Citizen Committees (16 persons)

Kalerpara, May 14th, 2012

Chairmen and members of 5 different Union Parishads (24 persons)

Sherpur, May 15th, 2012

Members of 9 different Polli Shomajs (21 persons)

Bogra, May 15th, 2012

BRAC Learning Centre, local project staff from Bogra (11 persons) and Jessore (2 persons)

Shajahanpur (Mazira), May 16th, 2012

Present and former chairmen and members of 4 different Union Parishads (5 persons)

Convenors and members of 1 local Citizen Committees (2 persons)

Dhaka, May 17th, 2012

BRAC Learning Centre, local project staff from Jessore (4 persons) and Bogra (2 persons)

ANNEX 4: ACRONYMS

ACALG	Active Citizens and Accountable Local Government
CC	Citizen Committees
CEP	Community Empowerment Programme
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NRDP	National Rural Development Policy
PS	Polli Shomaj
RED	Research and Evaluation Division
SDP	Social Development Programme
UNDEF	United Nations Democracy Fund
UNO	Upazila Nirbahi Officer
UP	Union Parishad
VGD	Vulnerable Group Development scheme
VGf	Vulnerable Group Feeding scheme