Qualitative Action Research on Results and Learning of Strengthening Local Governance Project

[Under the Joint Partnership of Community Empowerment Program (CEP) of BRAC and The Hunger Project-Bangladesh]

Final Report

Submitted To

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List of Abbreviations

AI	Assistant Investigator
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
CBO	Community Based Organizations
CEP	Community Empowerment Program
DC	Deputy Commissioner
DR	Document Review
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
KII	Key Informant Interview
LG	Local Government
LGIs	Local Government Institutions
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
RTI	Right to Information
SGUPAG	Self-governing Union Parishad Advocacy Group
SLGP	Strengthening Local Governance Project
SSN	Social Safety Net
THP	The Hunger Project
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNO	*Upazila* Nirbahi Officer
UP	Union Parishad
UDF	*Upazila* Development Forum
VCAW	Vision, Commitment, and Action Workshop
VGD	Vulnerable Group Development
VGF	Vulnerable Group Feeding

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[Under the Joint Partnership of Community Empowerment Program (CEP) of BRAC and the Hunger Project-Bangladesh)

Executive Summary

Under the joint partnership of Community Empowerment Program (CEP) of the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) and The Hunger Project-Bangladesh (THP-BD), a project entitled 'Strengthening Local Governance Project (SLGP)' has been implemented. The goal of the project was to help to make the Union *Parishad*s (hereinafter "UPs"), the elected Councils for governing groups of villages (hereinafter "Unions") more strong, effective, and people-centered. The project continued for a period of two years (2014-2015) from February 2014. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed with targeted UPs (61) in 14 Upazilas of 04 Districts under 03 Divisions.

Actions under the SLGP included: **Capacity- building training** for the UP representatives; **A training workshop** with UP Standing Committee members for strengthening UP standing committees; **Community monitoring of UP activities** through the formation of citizens committees; **Formation of *Upazila* Forum** with women UP members; Activating **Ward Shava**; Developing **five year plan** books for the UPs, **Right to Information** (RTI) **workshop** for the UP officials; Publishing the **UP citizen charter,** Providing **training** for **animators**, **women leaders**, **youth and infomediaries;** Organizing "**Vision, Commitment, and Action"** workshops; Putting on a **popular theater** show; Conducting an **advocacy** workshop at sub-district and district level; and **Strengthening** the support of self-governing union parishad advocacy groups **(SGUPAG).**

For achieving the Millennium Development Goals (hereinafter "MDGs") of the United Nations and fomenting a social movement across the Unions, trainees are upskilled and empowered. The goal is that they, along with their UPs, can contribute to the development of their own localities. The program was designed to give priority to the development of capacity and leadership among elected UP Members and Citizens. The training created greater space for meaningful interaction between local communities and their local governments. This study has been conducted to collect and understand the results of the SLGP.

The statistical data related to project interventions has been used in this study from January 2014 - June 2015. Based on qualitative empirical data, interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), the study makes a number of findings. The first set of findings is that the capacity-building training, organized under the SLGP, has increased the extent to which UP Members understand the laws for UP governance under the Local Government (Union Parishad) Act, 2009 and the Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2009. As a result of this intervention, the UPs have started to become more people-friendly and functional, as required under these statutes. The training has brought a positive change in the mind-set of UP Members resulting in improvement of the UPs' performance in all respects.

However, the activism and effectiveness of UPs cannot be enhanced by increasing their capacity alone. Thus, the second set of findings is about the effect of the SLGP on the villagers themselves. The UPs also need a grassroots-level civil society in the Union, that can work both as helping hands to UPs, to mobilise people, and as watchdogs to ensure the UP's transparency and accountability. This project has been effective in creating a civil society

from the ground up: by training a group of animators, women leaders and youth activists, who worked as an organized social force.

Due to the SLGP's interventions, community people, especially women, are acting as a pressure group, to hold their UPs accountable. SLGP-trained villagers are monitoring the implementation of UP decisions. They have been found quite vocal in preventing corruption in the service delivery process. They have encouraged their communities' people, including women, the poor, minorities, the physically challenged and marginalized people to participate in the governing processes of the UP, more specifically in "*Ward Shava*" and "*open budget*" meetings. As a result, UP Members are becoming compelled to grant the demands of common people.

More-accountable UPs, in turn, are leading to greater success in achieving MDGs. Moreover, the Union residents have become aware of their rights and responsibilities, problems of their society, and the importance of engaging themselves in income-generating activities. They consider the SLGP to be their "Light House". They are raising their voices, individually or collectively, to mobilize their communities' people, especially women. These mobilized citizens are then protected their rights [*e.g.* access to UP services such as Social Safety Nets (SSNs) and information] and preventing social and environmental evils (i.e., school drop-outs, child trafficking, dowry, child marriage, deforestation, use of unhealthy latrines, violence against women and children, mother and child health care etc.).

These changes, in the UPs and in the mindset of the villagers themselves, have a positive impact from three perspectives. First, they have increased the participation of community people in the process of governance of the Unions. Second, participation of people, especially women, in the decision-making process has made UP Members accountable for their actions. Finally, the changes have advanced the process of pro-poor planning and budgeting. All of these effects have certainly helped to accelerate the process of establishment of good local governance.

Most importantly, the poor and disadvantaged people have become empowered. Thus, they are meeting their potential to make the UP governance pro-poor. As a result, these initiatives have not only promoted inclusion of the community's people in the governing process of the UP, but also protected them from being harassed while getting services from the UP. Due to SLGP's intervention, the level of awareness (at the individual and group levels) of the community people, especially women, about their rights and social issues affecting their lives, has increased.

One effect of the increased awareness among the villagers is an increase in self-confidence. Self-confidence has led them to feel competent to steer the development of their communities. Self-confidence has also made them self-reliant. They feel confident to engage them in income-generating activities to help their families.

Thanks to the SLGP, the citizens have many opportunities to get involved with their villages' governance. They can join in citizens' committees, advocacy workshops, *upazila* forum, or self-governing UP advocacy groups, where they get an opportunity to learn about who is doing what and how, what needs to be done in a given situation, the problems that they are confronted with and the solutions to those problems. As a result, they consider each other trustworthy. That leads the Union residents, particularly women, to protect their rights collectively. The proactive role of the community has contributed to reducing the extent of child marriage, school drop-out rate, and gender discrimination. The communities have accelerated the upward trend in the state of women's empowerment, and improved mother and child health, through their greater awareness of the right things to do.

Thus, SLGP, the partnership of BRAC-CEP and THP, has made village people, especially women, capable to lead the development of their communities. This has been a significant change in an elite-dominated society.

The third set of findings is related to the role of advocacy programs of the project. Advocacy workshops, at different levels, have strengthened coordination of the activities of the UP Members and facilitated communication between local and central government officials. Communication has been further facilitated as government officials, including Deputy Commissioners (DC) and Deputy Director Local Government (DDLG), were brought together with Non-Government Organisation (hereinafter NGO) officers, journalists, civil society representatives, and local government representatives in these workshops. There they discussed issues of strengthening local governance, transparency and accountability for service delivery. Such exchanges of views have allowed the participants to know who (among the UP Members) is doing what and how, the problems they are facing and how they are managing those problems.

Perhaps it is too early for the project to achieve its third objective, of 'policy advocacy' since it takes some time to materialize the results of the advocacy. In fact, it would be reasonable to wait some time for creating policy impact, as the policy should follow the practice. Thus, more interventions are needed in the coming years, before expecting the project to create policy impact.

Finally, the SLGP is a classic example of the community-led development model. Using this approach, the project has promoted sustainable socio-economic development at the local level. The project has strengthened participatory governance and fostered community-based initiatives throughout the program's areas of operation. SLGP has mobilized people's representatives and community people to plan and carry out different activities of the UP jointly, that have a positive impact on the living conditions of people in the rural areas.

World leaders adopted a resolution entitled "Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", on September 25, 2015. This resolution will become Sustainable Development Goals (hereinafter "SDGs") from January 1, 2016. The 2030 Agenda cannot be implemented with a segmented approach. The SDGs cannot be achieved by merely implementing projects on education, health and so on, without addressing all the challenges faced by a community: peace building, State building, human rights and good governance. This will obviously require a holistic, bottom-up 'community-led development' approach, encompassing a sustained process that enables women, men and youth to take control over their own lives. Such a process will require citizens to become active agents of change, grassroots organizations to let voices be heard, creation of vibrant, inclusive economies, and an effective, accountable local government system, all playing catalytic roles.

SLGP is such a community-led development approach that is capable of transforming rural society, by establishing good governance. Good governance will free society from many evils through its active change agents, called "animators", "youth leaders" and "women leaders".

1.1. Introduction and Background

Local Government (LG) is, ideally, a practical course in the meaning of democracy, effective and efficient use of resources, making good plans and providing better services to the people. Thus, strengthening and building the capacity of local government has always been one of the policy reforms needed for development. Despite a huge amount of foreign aid and consultation, and many reform initiatives, the local governments of the developing world remain weak, context less, poor, incapable and corrupt. It has been repeatedly argued (Vartola et al., 2010, Tvedt, 1995) that, with the existing context less framework of local government, developing nations can never escape the effects of their bad governance.

However, experience shows that, despite weak governance, the NGOs, civil society and private institutions have been doing well in assisting development. They have gained international recognition for doing so (Vartola et al., 2010; Asaduzzaman, 2009; Hossain, 2001; Dhakal, 2006). A number of studies have claimed that the development activities run by the NGOs and the civil societies are flexible, innovative, participatory, cost effective, and directed for the poor (Tvedt, 1995).

An appraisal team of the World Bank found that the NGOs and civil societies are more effective than the public institutions in reaching out to the rural poor (World Bank, 1995 in Ahmad, 2000). It has been claimed that the NGOs are not only reaching out to the poor more effectively, but are also able to deliver services and implement programs more efficiently. The NGOs can both mobilize the poor and ensure their participation in the program formulation and implementation better than can the State institutions (Sarker and Rahman, 2007).

Therefore, partnership-based local government has become a 'Third Way' in public service reform in the UK (Rummery, 2006 in Sinclair, 2011) Partnership has been introduced to develop joint policy responses, in order to address multi-dimensional challenges (Sinclair, 2011). International institutions, such as the World Bank, the UNDP, the African Union and the European Union have also been enthusiastically promoting the issue of partnership, as a mechanism to ensure good governance in the developing world, since 2001. The main basis of partnership is the mutual dependence, respect and trust of partners, as well as accountability and transparency. Of course, the success of this relationship depends, to a large extent, on the inherent interests and aspirations of the partners (Binagwa, 2005).

However, it is believed that, through civil society participation in governance, people can express themselves, and resist abuses and interferences of the Government. In order to cope with the challenges of the 21st century, civil society organizations (CSO) are moving rapidly into development partnerships and are performing a watchdog function, such as Social Watch Network, at local, national and transnational level (Parnini, 2006: 192). In developing countries, local government institutions (LGI) can be strengthened through the participation of CSOs, local community-based organizations and other interventionist groups (Parnini, 2006) under a framework of partnership. Osborne and Gaebler (1992) recommended that the governments of the developing world should encourage, or at least facilitate, partnership-based local governance, in order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (in Brinkerhoff, 2002). Organisations that have achieved a highly-esteemed reputation in international development discourses include The Instituto Nacional de Bosque (INAB) of Guatemala's forest administration, Gujarat Mahila SEWA Housing Trust (NHT), People's Plan Campaign (PPC) of Kerala, and Grameen Bank, Grameen Telecommunication and Grameen Foundation (sister organizations of Grameen Bank) (Hulme and Moore, 2006; Jain, 1996; Sharma, 2007). All these organizations have been working under the legal framework

of partnership and have allowed the active involvement of their stakeholders in the decision-making process.

Like the central government, local government in Bangladesh, particularly UPs, performs many similar functions like infrastructure development and revenue collection. Although the scale and scope of these activities are limited, being closer to the community the activities and services provided by the UP can have immediate impact on people's lives. Yet UPs are frequently accused of corruption, lack of transparency and accountability, inefficiency, wastage of resources, lack of people's participation in making decisions affecting their lives, and lack of people's access to the UP services.

Westergaard and Alam (1995) considered the impact of participation in local government by members of groups mobilized by an NGO. They have argued that participation in local government bodies by the poor is an important, and probably a necessary, condition for wider impact on the democratization process. So, taking the above-mentioned arguments for partnership and the limitations of UPs into consideration, CEP, of BRAC and THP has initiated a project entitled 'Strengthening Local Government'. The intention of SLG was to make local governments, particularly UPs, strong, effective, transparent, accountable, and most importantly, people-centered, on the basis of partnership.

Under the joint partnership of BRAC-CEP and THP, SLG started full functioning for a period of two years in February 2014. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed with 61 UPs of 14 upazilas of 03 divisions at the very beginning of the project. Several programs have been carried out under the project. Such activities included: training or capacity-building of elected people's representatives; animator training of motivated citizens in each Union; foundation courses on women's leadership, and youth leader training.

To achieve MDGs and establish a social movement across the Union, trainees are made skilled, empowered, and inspired in training. With the support of the UP, they can contribute to the development of their own communities. Assistance has also been given in organizing *Ward Shava* (village meetings), with people's participation, and workshops with the participation of Standing Committee Members, to build their capacities. *Upazila* Forum has also been formed, for realizing citizen privileges and speaking in favor of citizens. Popular theater shows have been organized regularly, to raise consciousness on various issues including health, education, women's empowerment, and the services of the UP. Policy advocacy workshops and views exchange meetings have also been organized at *upazila* and district level, to create and enhance people's access to government services and privileges.

It is now imperative to look back and share the learning of what worked and what should be reviewed. That is the purpose of this paper. It collects the results and learns from the experience of the SLGP of BRAC-CEP and THP. The conclusion from this study will then be disseminated in the dissemination seminar.

1.2. Objectives of the Assignment

The main objective of this research was to explore the results and learn from the experience of the SLG, relating to the following stated objectives of the SLG program:

(i) To capacitate Union Parishads for carrying out their mandates as defined in the Union Parishad Act, 2009 and enhance their transparency, accountability and people's participation in the delivery of public services, especially to the poor and marginalized.

(ii) To create a rural citizenry that holds the Union *Parishad* accountable and promotes the MDGs.

(iii) To engage in advocacy with relevant local and national level actors, including policymakers, for ensuring support from the Government in adopting project learning and institutionalizing best practices.

1.3. Logical Framework

Considering the objectives of the research, the following logical framework has been developed.

Table-1
Logical Framework of the Action Research

Objectives	Indicators	Methods[1]
To capacitate Union Parishads for carrying out their mandates defined by the Union Parishad Act, 2009 and enhance their transparency, accountability and people's participation in the delivery of public services especially to the poor and marginalized.	Knowledge about assigned functions and roles of UP as per UP Act-2009 and its affiliated programs, including *Ward shava,* budget meeting, Citizen's Charter, RTI, participatory planning, transparency, accountability and evaluation; effectiveness of the capacity-building initiatives to make the governing process pro-poor and women-friendly; and consultation with a cross-section of people like government officials, NGOs representatives, citizen group, and standing committees for preparing five-year development plans.	DR, KII, FGD
To create a rural citizenry that holds the union parishad accountable and promotes the MDGs.	Creating Community leadership and empowerment (*participation in leadership training for women, training for creating animators, leadership training for youth;* involvement in mobilization of community's people for their greater participation, specifically women and marginalized in *Ward Shava)* and social initiatives to be taken by the Citizen Committees' members: involvement in preventing and protesting violence against women, child marriage, and dowry; protecting Social Safety Nets (SSNs) rights of poor people; preventing school drop-out; and self-generated income earning activities and encouraging others to get engaged in income generating activities) and participation in *Ward Shava, budget meeting, standing committees, UP-level project implementation,* information dissemination, use of RTI in ensuring and strengthening good governance e.g., transparency, accountability and people's participation in the delivery of public services.	DR, KII, and FGD
To engage in advocacy	Advocacy workshops and exchange of views	KII, and

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[1]DR refers to Document Review; KII refers to Key Informant Interview and FGD refers to Focus Group Discussion.

		FGD
with relevant local and national level actors, including policy makers for ensuring support from the government in adopting project learning and institutionalizing best practices.		

1.4. Methodology of the Research

To assess the result and learning of this ongoing program, a holistic evaluation approach has been applied. Several methods, such as review of documents, interview, KII, case studies, and FGD, have been used to collect necessary information on the results and draw conclusions about the program. Both primary and secondary data have been used in this study. For a collection of empirical data, four districts, including Kishoregonj, Hobigonj, Bagerhat, and Sunamgonj were selected purposefully. Methods used for data collection include KII, DR, Interview, Case Studies and FGD[2]. To get the real picture of targets or objectives of the programs, relevant project documents have been reviewed. Therefore, all the relevant documents, including program guidelines, implementation plan or arrangement, monitoring reports, and literature of similar kinds of projects implemented by others have been studied and reviewed.

Table-2
List of Respondents

Category	5 UPs from four districts[3]	Total
Elected Representatives	Chairman (1) x 5 Male Member (1)x5 Female Member (1)x5	15
Animators	3 from each UP x 5 UP	15
Women Leaders	3 from each UP x 5 UP	15
Youth Leaders	3 from each UP x 5 UP	15
UNO	5 (from 5 Upazilas)	5
Project staff	5	5
FGD with Community people	01 from each UP x5	05 (ensuring the participation of both males and females).
Case Studies	01 from each UP	05

Finally, a multi-staged quality control mechanism has been adopted to ensure the quality of the evaluation. Apart from using a triangulation process, to ensure theoretical and practical quality, three specific techniques have been used. These techniques are: (a) each respondent's information has been cross-checked by others' views, (b) at the last stage of data collection, major observations have been shared with community people, and (c) team leaders and AI have conducted the FGD and KII.

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[2] For a complete list of respondents, please refer to Table-2.
[3] 01 UP from each four district was selected purposively. 01 UP was additionally chosen from Dirai Upazila of Sunamjong where all UPs are under intervention.

1.5. Limitations of the Study

Although this research was carefully conducted, the following limitations should be noted:

1. The research was conducted over a short period of time. The time frame was not sufficient for the researcher to observe all of the relevant data of the project. It would have been better if it had been done over a longer period.

2. The project has been implemented in *Haor* areas. These are temporary dry spaces in rivers, with minimal transport and communication services. Thus, data collection in these areas was really a difficult task. That is why; some data may have been unavailable despite our tremendous effort.

3. Due to the patriarchal values of the society, it was very difficult to get in touch with the female respondents in this study.

In addition, since the assessment was conducted by the consultant himself, despite caution being taken, a certain degree of subjectivity might be present.

2. Activities of the SLGP

The implementation strategy of the SLGP involved several types of activities. Broadly, such activities are of three types: (1) activities with Union *Parishads*, (2) activities with active citizens − women, men and youth, and (3) advocacy activity. The following section deals with specific activities of SLGP under these three major heads.

2.1. Activities with the Union *Parishad*:

2.1.1. Capacity Building Initiative For UP Members:

One of the main activities of SLGP is to develop capacity of the UP Members, with a view to carrying out their mandates, as defined in the Local Government (Union Parishad) Act, 2009, and bring about a change in their mind-set. As a part of capacity-building initiatives, a three-day long residential training for UP representatives (Chairmen and Members) is organized under SLGP, which is treated as the focal point of the SLGP. The main intention of this training is to create a platform for the participants to learn about the basic issues of governance related to the UP. These issues include strategic goals, roles and responsibilities, structure, power, functions, and formations of UP; accountability of standing committees; importance of *Ward Shava* and its management; the importance of developing a five-year plan; and budgeting and resource mobilization. Capacity-building trainings with the representatives of 61 UPs have been completed, having ensured the participation of 735, of which 552 male and 183 female representatives. Moreover, follow-up meetings with these trained UP representatives have also been accomplished twice in a year, in order to keep them on track about what they have learnt from training. Out of a targeted 244, 133 follow-up meetings have been completed so far. Another important facet of this training is to bring about a change in the mindset of the people's representatives and ensure gender equality, good governance and people-centered development, aimed at attaining MDGs. Thus, this training is not only regarded as an avenue of learning, but also a place of creating change in mindset and feeling that creates an urge to do something. This, in the long run, will lead to the development of quality leadership.

2.1.2. Initiative for Strengthening Standing Committees of UPs:

MDGs cannot be attained unless and until it is possible to ensure good governance. Among other requirements, accountability acts as a facilitator to establish good governance. Standing Committee is one of the mechanisms through which accountability of UP activities is ensured. The Local Government (Union Parishad) Act, 2009 has required each UP to

establish 13 Standing Committees that consist of UP Members as well as committed and skilled citizens from different *strat*a of the society. As part of SLGP activities, workshops with Standing Committee members are organized.

Out of a targeted 61 Standing Committees, 55 workshops have already been conducted, with participation of 2012 males and 813 females. Out of thirteen, Members of seven Standing Committees have been given support to make them able, after a workshop and practice meeting, to conduct their regular meetings (bi-monthly meeting as per law) and to follow-up and monitor the development work of the UPs. These seven committees are education, health, and family planning; agriculture, fisheries and livestock, and other economic development works; birth-death registration; water and sanitation; environment protection and development, and tree plantation; social welfare and disaster management; family conflict resolution, and women and children's welfare). In order to keep Standing Committee members active and aware of their duties and responsibilities, follow-up meetings have also been organized under SLGP. Support that has been provided through workshop and meeting under SLGP for strengthening standing committees has made them able to be accountable for ensuring pro-poor local development by monitoring development work in their meetings.

2.1.3. Activation of Ward Shava:

Ward Shava is another mechanism through which accountability is ensured. For ensuring transparency and accountability, stakeholders' participation in planning and implementation of projects is required. Ward Shava is such a platform of the UP, where stakeholders set their priorities to be incorporated in the development plan of UP. Therefore, it is clearly specified in the Local Government (Union Parishad) Act, 2009 that Ward Shava has to be held. The purpose of this meeting is to enable the community's people to identify their problems/needs, as they know best about what is required for their community. As part of the project activities, initiatives have been taken to activate Ward Shava in the study area to increase people's participation there.

2.1.4. Organizing Open Budget Session and Publishing budget booklet/ UP Participatory Budgeting:

Organizing open budget session is another mechanism of ensuring accountability and transparency in UP activities. In the open budget session, UP representatives lead discussions, disclose financial information, take feedback from citizens on their needs/problems identified in Ward Shavas and provide clarification about why they were unable to take their identified needs/problems into consideration, if necessary. One of the activities of SLGP is to provide assistance to UPs in organizing budget sessions and publish a budget booklet to keep the community's people informed about what the UP is going to do and how. With the assistance of SLGP, 61 open budget sessions, in 61 UPs, have been organized with the participation of 10,758 people (7,490 males and 3,268 females) from all *strata* of the community: including women, the poor and vulnerable sections. 61 UPs have been published budget booklets and distributed among the communities' people as well as among different officials.

2.1.5. Developing the UP Five Year Plan Book:

As per the provision of the Local Government (Union Parishad) Act, 2009, each UP is bound to develop a five-year development plan. One of the activities of SLGP is to provide support to UPs of the study area in preparing such a plan. Such a plan book will be developed through a series of consultations with government officials, representatives of other NGOs, members of standing committees, and citizen groups, apart from taking priorities identified in Ward Shavas into consideration. The minimum number of consultations to be held for identifying

problems, setting priorities, and allocating resources will be 15. 2-3 consultation meetings with each Union Parishad and other stakeholders have been held. Consultation is still continuing and all plan books will be published within 2015.

2.1.6. Formation of Upazila Forum:

Upazila Forum is a platform that consists of elected female UP Members of an *Upazila*, who have received different kinds of training, including capacity-building training and animator training under SLGP. The aim of this platform is to play a substantial role in advocating with Upazila administration for effective delivery of government services. The Forum is a platform where female UP Members get necessary information, develop networks, learn about each other's development issues, become aware of the availability of services at *Upazila* administration, and share the challenges that they face. This Forum sits in a bi-monthly meeting, at the Upazila level, to review the progress of their plans. In the quarterly follow-up meeting, the Forum's members meet together, exchange their views and opinions, and take decisions for the future. At the Upazila level, there is another Forum, called Upazila Development Forum (UDF), headed by the *Upazila* Vice-Chairman (Female) where many of elected female UP Members of an *Upazila* meet, apart from the Upazila Forum. Elected female UP Members find these Forums suitable to express their problems in getting things done with their counterparts in the UP. These Forums also act as a platform for building women's capacity and leadership.

2.1.7. RTI Workshop with Union Parishad:

The Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2009 has ensured people's access to the flow of information. This law has made the activities of the institutions concerned transparent, assisting in the attainment of MDGs. Therefore, conducting RTI workshops with UP Members is one of the activities of SLGP.

After developing the guidelines for conducting workshops, workshops on RTI with the UPs have been organized by SLGP. The goal is to provide a clear understanding about the RTI Act 2009 and provide them an idea about people's rights to access UP information. To date, 45workshops on RTI have been held, with the participation of 470 male and 117 female UP Members.

2.1.8. Implementation of Citizen's Charter Provision:

The Local Government (UP) Act, 2009 has made it mandatory for a UP to display a Citizen's Charter that contains the list of services available, conditions, and waiting periods for receiving such services. Under the initiative of the SLGP, UPs have been given support to prepare and publish Citizen's Charters at the UPs' premises, with the intention of making the UP's activities transparent. At the same time, the initiative has also been taken, under SLGP, to create awareness among the common people regarding the delivery of these services. The study found that 61 UPs installed their citizens charters.

2.1.9. Exposure Visit for Selective UP Representatives:

Another activity of this project is to organize an exposure visit for selected UP representatives to other places where local government is performing well. With this end in view, an exposure visit for a group of selected UP Members was arranged, to India, particularly Kerala and West Bengal. The Members studied the best practices of Indian local government. On their return, they applied their learning in their UPs. In addition to this, they have also shared their learning with others, to make them able to apply it too.

2.2. Activities with Active Citizens – Women, Men, and Youth:

2.2.1. Training for Creating Animators:

There is a common notion in society, as well as among the common people, that they have a lack of ability and power to transform their lives. At the societal level, it is difficult to find people who mobilize others on their initiative. Taking this reality into consideration, an initiative has been taken, under SLGP, to create "animators". These animators will be able to mobilize their communities' people in conducting mass campaigns on issues that affect their lives. With this end in view, training to create animators has been organized under SLGP. Targeted 61 animator training sessions have already been organized, with the active participation of 2240 people (1131 men and 1109 women).

2.2.2. Training and Follow-up Training For Creating Women Leaders:

Since women constitute half of the total population of Bangladesh, development, particularly community development, is hardly possible by bypassing them. Thus, one of the activities of SLGP is to ensure that community development is led by women. Keeping this in mind, training under SLGP has been organized to create women leaders, who will mobilize their communities' people, especially women. The women leaders will get women in their communities involved in Standing Committees, participating in Ward Shavas, and increasing their participation in public spaces. Total 30 training sessions have been held, with the participation of 1098 women. In addition to this, a total of 164 follow-up meetings and refreshers with these women leaders have also been organized. Furthermore, women leaders are given updated information on various issues such as RTI, draft laws of marriage, the importance of tree plantation and so on.

2.2.3. Leadership Training For Youth:

One of the aims of the undertaken project is to create youth leaders, through leadership training. These youth leaders will conduct Vision, Commitment and Action Workshops with the community people, organize mass campaigns, and develop a sense of social obligation among themselves. They will also raise youth's voice in the process of local governance, if any irregularity or/malpractice is found. Targeted 61 leadership training sessions for the youth have been conducted, with the participation of 924 males and 746 females.

2.2.4. Formation of Citizen Committee:

As per the provision of SLGP's plans, a Citizens' Committee, consisting of trained volunteers, including animators, women leaders, youth leaders, infomediaries, representatives of Polly Shomaj, and respective Ward Members has been formed in each Ward. The role of the Citizens' Committee is to co-operate with the UP in planning and implementing its activities. Thus, the Citizens' Committee acts as an intermediary between the community's people and the UP, aimed at ensuring transparency and accountability in the UP's activities. In this regard, the role of the Citizens' Committee is to mobilize a community's people, to ensure their participation in *Ward Shavas* and open budget sessions. This is their proper place to put their demands/problems into the UPs' planning and resource allocation process. Total 549 Ward Citizen Committees, with a membership of 5,451 males and 4,002 females, have been formed. In addition to this, follow-up meetings have been held twice a year. Total 1892 follow-up meetings, out 3,294 with these committees have already been held, with the members of these committees.

2.2.5. Vision, Commitment, and Action Workshops (VCAW)

Vision, Commitment, and Action Workshop (VCAW) is one of the most important activities of SLGP. The aim of this activity is to mobilize a community's people to create, for the

community, a vision of a self-reliant community. Then they must make that vision doable, identify their priorities, and know their rights and responsibilities in making it a reality. Total 1030 VCAWs, out of 1098, with participation of 9,878 males and 9,559 females, have been conducted. Due to intervention of VCAWs, community people are being organized and initiatives are collectively being taken based on felt needs of making self-reliant community.

2.2.6. RTI Training For Creating Infomediaries:

Access to information is considered one of the important elements of ensuring transparency and accountability (i.e., good governance). As part of SLGP activities, a cadre of informediaries has been formed with the animators, women and youth leaders, and members of Citizens' Committees. Infomediaries are given training on the RTI Act 2009, so that they can play an active role in acquiring information for themselves, as well as for the community's people. The related activities that have been taken under this initiative include a follow-up workshop for infomediaries of *Upazilas* and arrangement of popular theatre workshops and shows. By now, 22 RTI training sessions, for prospective infomediaries, with the participation of 349 males and 221 females, have undertaken. Moreover, two follow-up workshops, out of 42, for infomediaries, including 36 males and 22 females, have also been done.

2.2.7. Popular Theatre Workshops and Shows:

One of the activities of the undertaken project is to organize a popular theatre show on various issues, including active citizenship, good governance, the RTI Act and participatory budgeting. The role of this show is to mobilize mass people and make them aware of different issues, including social injustice, social problems, discrimination and women's empowerment. The themes of the popular theatre show have been decided through 10 popular theatre workshops, organized at *Upazilas*, with the participation of 56 males and 44 females. On these themes, 145 popular theatre shows have already been arranged with the presence of audiences of 30,398 males and 20,930 females.

2.3. Advocacy Activities:

2.3.1. Advocacy Workshops at Upazila and District Levels:

One of activities of SLGP is to hold advocacy workshops at *Upazila* and District levels. The aim of these workshops is to ensure more coordination and communication among local people, government and non-government officials, service providing organizations, and Union Parishads. They also ensure accountability and transparency in delivering services. They take steps to empower women. They identify and prioritize problems and they formulate recommendations to solve those problems. Exchange of views and learning, focusing on RTI, among various institutions, is another aim of this workshop. Ten (10) advocacy workshops have been held at ten *Upazilas,* out of 14, with the presence of 228 males and 84 females. Participants included government and non-government officials, local elected representatives, and community representatives. One Advocacy workshops at District level, out of 4, have been held with 26 male and 4 female participants. This initiative of SLGP has created an ample scope for communities' people to take part in the decision-making processes that affect their lives.

2.3.2. Support in Strengthening Self Governing Union Parishad Advocacy Group (SGUPAG) at District:

The Self-governing Union Parishad Advocacy Group (SGUPAG) is an alliance/platform of the elected Chairmen of all UPs in a District. The Group makes representations to the central government, through proper channels, about the necessity of shifting more resources and

authority to the local governments. This alliance plays an important role in raising a voice for policy reforms and the creation of a supportive environment for UPs. These groups are actively engaged in organizing an Advocacy Workshop in each District, where discussion of various issues/problems related to the local government takes place. In attendance is a multi-sector audience: *i.e.,* high-level bureaucrats of the District, including the DC; the DDLG, NGO representatives; journalists; civil society representatives; and local elected representatives. Such an advocacy workshop is held once a year. One of the activities of the undertaken project is holding a yearly follow-up meeting with SGUPAG's District Committees.

3.0. Lessons Learnt From the SLGP: From a Community-led Development Perspective

The above discussion suggests that one of the notable features of SLGP of BRAC and THP is the community-led development approach. The ultimate objective of the project is to empower communities through building their agencies, with the expectation that they would devote themselves to bringing transformation in the overall governance of the UP and the structure of the society. The lessons that have been learnt in this assessment have been presented in three broad categories, covering the three broad objectives of the project.

3.1. Impact of the SLG on the Governing Process of the UP

As stated above, the first objective of the project is to capacitate Union Parishads for carrying out their mandates defined by the UP Act, 2009. These mandates include to enhance their transparency, accountability and people's participation in the delivery of public services, especially to the poor and marginalized. This section tries to explicate to what extent the project has achieved this stated objective.

3.1.1. Improvement of Knowledge of the UP-Governance Related Issues:

The UP Members have become knowledgeable about issues relating to UP governance (**Table-3**) due to the capacity development initiatives of the project. It is also encouraging to note that 100% of respondents now understand the Local Government (Union Parishad) Act, 2009. The increasing level of understanding of the UP Members has impacted positively on the meetings of Ward Shava and open budget meetings. Community people, including women and marginalized groups, now attend these regularly. 100% and 92% of community people interviewed in this study have been found to have participated in the *Ward Shava* and open budget meeting, respectively.

Table-3
Level of Knowledge of the UP Representatives

Category	Total	
	Yes (%)	No (%)
UP's formation, structure, power and functions	93.33%	6.67%
Importance and functions of Ward Shava	100%	0%
Process of Five Year Plan making	86.67%	13.33%
Standing committee's formation and UP's accountability issue	93.33%	6.67%
Budgeting and resource mobilization	86.67%	13.33%

Along with the increasing level of knowledge of the UP representatives, the project has also increased the level of understanding of animators, women leaders and youth leaders about issues relating to the governance of the UP (**Table-4**).

Table-4
Level of Knowledge of the Volunteers about the UP-Related Issues

Knowledge Level of the Animators		Knowledge Level of the Women Leaders		Knowledge Level of the Youth Leaders	
Category	%	Category	%	Category	%
About duties & responsibilities of the people's representatives	100%	About involvement of common people at WS	80.00%	About local governance related issues	100%

Another encouraging finding is that the community people have participated in identifying their priorities. 90% of the community people were of opinion that the UP Members were responsive to the people's priorities when making decisions in the *Ward Shava*. The finding has been well-supported by the 93.33% of the animators, who also believe that the UP Members are taking initiatives to ensure the inclusion of common people in the decision-making process. While commenting on the participation of community people in the *Ward Shava,* one people's representative expressed that:

> In our UP, *Ward Shava* was not formally organized before. We used to write the proceedings of the *Ward Shava* for official formality, which were then sent to the required number of people for their signature. However, the situation changed after the intervention of BRAC-THP. Now, we are holding a *Ward Shava* meeting regularly, ensuring the participation of both males and females (Interview Data, 2015).

Such a claim of the people's representative has been well-supported by the activity of an animator who has become a community organizer.

Dipti Rani Nath: A Story of Becoming a Community Organizer

> Dipti Rani Nath (34), who is a resident of *Charmoholla* Union of Chatok Upazila of *Sunamganj* District, is an animator of SLGP in that area. Before attending the training session for animators, she did not have any understanding about the issues of WS and OBS. Inspired by the training, she is now mobilizing the people of her locality through yard meetings, so that they take part in these forums and place their demands there. She is also motivating them to raise their voices in OBS if they notice any kind of irregularity in the inclusion of demands identified in the WS and the UP Budget. She mainly teaches the community people about the importance and functions of WS and OBS, and the role of the community's people in ensuring the transparency and accountability of the UP functionaries. Her activities have brought positive changes in the mind-set of the community people, who have become motivated to take part in the activities of the UP (FGD, 2015).

In addition to this, the UP representatives (100.00%) have also been found active in strengthening Standing Committees to ensure accountability for what the UP does. While commenting on the effectiveness of the capacity building initiatives of the SLGP, the Chairman of Nikli Sadar UP, Nikli, Kishorgonj stated:

> We had knowledge on different issues of local governance as stated in the Local Government (Union Parishad) Act, 2009 and RTI Act, 2009. Yet we hardly paid attention to those issues. Now, we have become sensible to and able to realize the importance of these issues, after participating in training and workshops of the SLGP. Earlier, we used to think that power lies with the Members after they get elected. Those training courses and workshops have made us understand that people are the source of

all power. We need them to get involved in the governing process of the UP. Nowadays, nothing is done without having consultation with them. Since we are accountable to them, we get them involved in our planning process as well (Interview Data, 2015).

The impact of the capacity-building training for the elected representatives can be understood through the following examples:

Jaraitola UP: A Story of a Changed Union Parishad

Jaraitola is a Union *Parishad* of *Nikli Upazila* of Kishoregonj. There was a time when the activities of UP suffered from lack of coordination, as there were conflicts among the UP's members. The UP Chairman was the leader of one group while the other group was led by the Members of the UP. That is why no more than 6 Members were attending the UP's monthly meeting and consensus building in the decision-making process was a difficult task. Having participated in the training session (Batch no. 2,133) of capacity-building organized by the SLGP on 09-11 June 2014 in Kishoregonj they got a clear understanding about different aspects of the Act of 2009. They realized that facilitation of overall development of the UP depends, to a large extent, on the unanimity of the decision-makers. The influence of the training became apparent when it was seen that the first meeting after the session was attended by all Members of the UP including the Chairman. There all allocations received under different schemes were distributed based on mutual agreement. Currently, all monthly meetings of the UP are taking place following proper rules and ensuring participation of all. Moreover, all development plans have been implemented on the basis of collective decisions. In addition to UP monthly meetings, Ward Shavas and open budget meetings are also taking place on a regular basis and Standing Committees are functioning properly. The importance of incorporation of community people in the governance process has been acknowledged by the UP Members, since the participation of community people helps the establishment of transparency and accountability at the local level.

The UP chairman Md. Rayce Uddin again mentioned that, "We were implementing development work even before, but mass people were not included in the decision-making process. That is why people were holding negative ideas about the *Parishad*. Now, such atmosphere has been changed. We have been inspired and motivated in the training programs and we are on the right track now. It is my firm belief that, if all UPs are being administered with transparency and accountability, local government will be strengthened. Development for local people will be facilitated" (DR, 2015).

Gopaya: A Story of Changed Union Parishad

One of the Unions of Sador Upazila of Habiganj District is Gopaya, where the SLGP has been successfully implemented, due to the welcoming responses of UP Members, as well as community people. Before the intervention of SLGP, the UP functionaries were neither willing to follow the rules in taking steps related to the issues of UP governance, nor did community people have any understanding about UP governance. This resulted in a failure to ensure transparency and accountability. However, capacity-building training of SLGP and motivation of SLGP's staff have been instrumental: not only in inspiring the UP Members to get community people involved in UP governance, but also in following the Local Government (Union Parishad) Act of 2009, both in letter and spirit.

The capacity development initiatives have also brought changes in the activities of female people's representatives. We can see this in the typical case of Jorina Begum.

Jorina Begum (38), who is a female Member in a reserved seat of the UP, attended training in capacity-building. Now, she is well-informed about the powers & functions of the UP and the duties & responsibilities of elected Members. She knows the importance of *Ward Shava* and participatory budgeting, the role of Standing Committees and, most importantly, the Local Government (Union Parishad) Act of 2009. She is also playing an active role in the development of her locality. Yet she did not have any idea about the above-mentioned issues before participating in capacity-building training. She used to think that her only duty was to attend UP's meetings physically. Capacity-building training has brought positive change in the perception of UP functionaries. As a result, all of the Standing Committees are performing actively. Decisions in the meetings of the Standing Committees are made based on consensus of the opinion of the participants. Women are also given encouragement to take part in the decision-making process of the UP. Moreover, WS & OBS are taking place regularly as per the provision of the Act of 2009, with active participation of community people irrespective of their sex, class, physical condition, religion, caste and profession (Interview Data, 2015).

Another area of UP representatives where improvement has been noticed is the collection of taxes. Tax fairs were organized on the initiative of UPs for making them financially solvent. The following example also substantiates how capacity building initiatives have helped the UP to become financially self-reliant through the holding of tax fair.

Karimpur UP: A Story of becoming financially Self-reliant Union Parishad

According to the UP Act-2009, the UP can impose tax, rate, toll, fee etc. in prescribed manner on its residents. All taxes, rates, tolls or fees are to be collected by authorized persons in the prescribed manner under the Act. Despite these legal provisions, Karimpur Union of Dirai Upazila of Sunamgonj did not have a clear idea about the management, process and collection of taxes. So, the size of revenue collection was very small in this UP. That was affecting the implementation of social development negatively. Having participated in capacity-building training sessions, the UP's Chairman, Asab Uddin Sarder, and Members got an idea about the importance of making the UP financially solvent. They learned about different methods of collection of taxes systematically in accordance with the provisions of the UP Act, 2009.

Influenced by the training, the UP collectively decided to organize a tax fair in their UP. Moreover, they took initiatives to make people aware about the importance of the payment of taxes and involved them in the collection process. As per UP's decision, "Tax Fair 2014" was organized on the 24th of October 2014, in Chandpur Government Primary School. People residing in different villages within the UP participated. In the tax fair, people, on their own initiative, paid their taxes, including balances due. Altogether 75 individuals paid their taxes worth of TK. 29,743. At the end of the day, prizes were given for the highest and 2nd highest taxpayers of the day. The total amount of tax collected in 2014 was three times greater than that in the previous three years.

3.1.2. Changes in the Mindset of the UP Representatives

Another encouraging finding is that the capacity-building initiatives have been successful (93.33%) in bringing about changes in mind-set of the elected UP Member. The change in the mindset is reflected in the increasing level of participation of Union residents, including the physically challenged, minority, poor, and marginalized, in the meetings of Ward Shava, open budget, and Standing Committees. Most importantly, the participation of people has viewed positively by the UP Members. While commenting on the issue of transforming the mindset of UP representatives Karar Borhanuddin, Chairman of Nikli Sadar Union Parishad, Nikli, Kishoregonj expressed that:

> We should acknowledge the importance of participation of both men and women in the governing process of the UP. If both men and women work together nothing remains impossible (Interview Data, 2015).

While commenting on the issue of transforming the mindset of UP Members, Khan Shamim Jaman Palash (42), Chairman of Piljonga Union *Parishad*, Fakirhat, Bagerhat mentioned that:

> After receiving training on capacity building, we (the UP Members) have started to think positively about all matters related to the UP governance process and have also started to take necessary action for ensuring equal participation of both males and females at all levels. Moreover, we are identifying and taking development initiatives and having consultations with the general public at the Ward Shava, open budget session or Standing Committee meetings. In addition, we are discharging our assigned duties and responsibilities in accordance with the provision of the Act of 2009, apart from delivering different UP's services (e.g., VGF, VGD, and old age and widow allowance) to the real beneficiaries. To be frank, we did not consider these issues before in the way as we think now (Interview Data, 2015).

3.1.3. Participation of Community People in the UP Governance Process

3.1.3.1. Participation in Ward Shava:

Ward Shavas were not really organized in the study area before SLGP came into operation. The UP Members have been given motivation under SLGP to organize Ward Shava. The volunteers of THP, who are mainly women leaders, youth leaders, animators, and members of the Citizen's Committees, have created awareness among community's people so that they could participate in Ward Shava for raising their voices. As a result of their activities, Ward Shavas are taking place regularly in the UPs under study area. Due to activities of volunteers of THP, people's participation is gradually increasing in the Ward Shavas, which has been acknowledged by 100% of the respondents. Although the ratio of the men and women in Ward Shava is almost equal, women's participation, in some cases, is greater than men. For example, available data suggested that 92.00% of female respondents, as compared to 84% of male respondents, have

Graph-1: Participation of Citizens in Different Issues of the UP
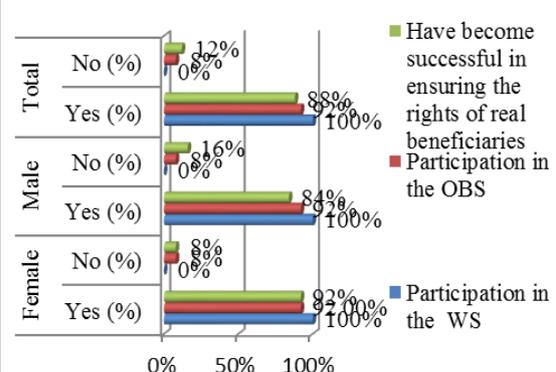
mentioned that they are playing an active role in ensuring the rights of really-qualified beneficiaries (**Graph-1**).

In addition to this, one of the notable findings is that the participation of the disabled, minorities, poor and marginalized groups in the meetings of the WS and OB of the UP has increased to a great extent. 100% of the respondents have expressed their views positively in response to both questions on this issue. While commenting on the role of the project in this regard, one respondent stated that '*volunteers of THP informed the community's people that beneficiary list of SSNP [Social Safety Net Programs] would be prepared in the Ward Shava. Being informed from the volunteers, people participated in Ward Shava*' (so that truly qualified persons would receive the benefit) (Interview Data, 2015). It has also been learnt that attempts have been made by the SLGP to motivate UP Members to prepare five year plan books for their UPs. All the UP Members verify this (100.00%). Moreover, consultation in preparing a Ward-by-Ward Five Year Plan Book has also been provided under SLGP.

3.1.3.2. *Participation in Open Budget Session:*

The UPs have been given assistance under SLGP in organizing open budget sessions in accordance with the UP operational manual. As a result of this assistance, budget sessions have taken place in UPs in the study areas regularly. On the other side of the coin, the volunteers of THP have initiated an awareness-raising campaign, so that community's people participate in the budget session of UP. The data suggests that 92.00% of citizens (both males and females) have participated in an open budget session (**see graph-1 for more information**). Open budget session allows community people to actively oversee whether their demands, as identified in the WS, are getting included in the UP budget or not. Most importantly, community people, including women, the poor, the marginalized and the physically challenged have been participating in the open budget meetings and raising their voices. In addition to providing support to both demand and supply side actors in making the OBS participatory, supports (both financial and technical) have also been provided to the UP for publishing their approved budget as a booklet.

3.1.3.3. *Participation in Standing Committees:*

The data indicate that all UP Members surveyed (100.00%) realized the importance of the formation of Standing Committees only after attending the workshop organized by SLGP. They had known about the statutory requirement of 13 standing committees in their respective UPs in the Local Government (Union Parishad) Act, 2009 but had not taken it seriously. It was recognized by the UP representatives that there was no participation from the community in the standing committees before the intervention of the SLGP, as those had been constituted with UP Members only. However, after the SLGP intervention, Standing Committees have been formed and are functioning as per rules. People's participation in general and the participation of women especially have increased quite sharply. It is to be noted here that 33.33% of women leaders have mentioned that more women have been included in the Standing Committees and believed that the female representation on the Committees would increase in the future. However, 66.67% of women leaders have expressed their disagreement on this particular issue, meaning that more initiatives need to be taken to ensure more women's participation in the Standing Committees.

One of the notable findings is that projects that are getting identified in the Standing Committees are getting implemented by the UPs. This has created an opportunity for the common people to know how things are done in the UP, which is closely related to transparency and accountability of the UP activities. While commenting on the effectiveness

of the SLGP in this regard, Md. Raice Uddin, Chairman of Jaraitola Union Parishad of Nikli Upazila of Kishoregonj District said:

> Most of the Members used to remain absent in UP monthly meetings due to division among them. There was a lack of agreement among them while making decisions. But capacity-building training has changed their UP. Now, they feel that it is the unanimous decision that can facilitate the overall development activities of UP, instead of division. All allocations are distributed on mutual opinion. In addition, Ward Shava is being organized in all Wards systematically and Standing Committees are actively performing. Now, they realize that it is not possible to ensure transparency, accountability and good governance by keeping the people outside of the UP's operation.

> We did development work even before, but that remained unknown to the mass of people. That is why people maintained a negative image of the Parishad. Such an atmosphere does not exist at present. Being inspired by training organized under the SLGP, we are administering development work, but ensuring active participation of the people.

> Administering our activities with transparency and accountability will not only strengthen local government, but also will facilitate the development of local people. Or, if all UPs administer their activities with transparency and accountability, local government will be strengthened on the one hand and development for local people will be facilitated on the other hand (DR).

While commenting on the success of SLGP in strengthening Standing Committees, Basanti Rani (42), who is an elected women Member of the Charmoholla Union of Chatok Upazila of Sunamganj District, says:

> I did not have any idea about the importance of Standing Committees as regards to ensuring transparency and accountability of the activities of the UP before I attended capacity-building training organized under SLGP. There was no representation of women from community level in Standing Committees earlier. Even, we (elected women Members of the UP) hardly got any chance in the meeting of Standing Committees to speak about the issues that were brought into the notice of the Committee, before SLGP was in operation. Moreover, there was an absolute dominance of our male counterparts over the activities of the Standing Committees. That is why; opinions expressed by the women in the meeting were of little or no value. But, the capacity-building training of SLGP has brought positive changes in the formation and the way of functioning of the Standing Committees. Now, both of us (the male and female Members of the UP) try to ensure equal participation of our community's men and women in Standing Committees, so that the decision taken in the meeting is reflective of the opinion of the community's people.

3.1.4. Voices of Women in the UP Governance

"Voice" as a term, has gained paramount importance in the development discourse. Voice is most important in empowering the disadvantaged community, including women who are considered as a traditionally-excluded group. Creating space for women's participation and giving them a voice in the decision-making processes are regarded as effective solutions for

facing the challenges that affect their lives. SLG, BRAC-THP has taken some initiatives so that women in rural areas of Bangladesh become able to participate in the decision making processes of UPs and raise their voice.

3.1.4.1. Voice of Women in the UP Governance Process:

Although women constitute half of the total population of Bangladesh their participation in decision-making of UPs is generally insignificant. On the other hand, those women who are participating are unable to fill their mandated roles due to several factors: social, political and religious.

However, in SLG areas, poor women and elected women UP members are not only taking part in the decision-making processes of their UPs more often, but also playing an important role in resolving governance issues of UP. For example, 88.00% of poor women are involved in the beneficiary selection process of social safety net (SSN) -related programs of the UP. After training by SLG, women Members of the UP have become capable to raise their voices and play their mandated roles in the process of governance of the UPs. While commenting on the role of training of the SLG in empowering UP women Members to play an active role in UP governance, Konok Rani, who is one of the elected women (Reserved Seat) Members of the Damiha Union Parishad of Tarail Upazila of Kishoregonj, stated:

> I could not play any notable role in the development process of the UP in general, or my electoral territory in particular, due to lack of my knowledge and understanding. However, having been participated in an animator training organized under the SLGP; I have become aware about my roles in the development process. Accordingly, I am playing an important role in the overall governing process of the UP. I am also assisting the UP in its endeavor to organize monthly meetings of the UP and Ward Shava, and restructuring of standing committees. Simultaneously, I am trying to increase the level of awareness of the community people about different issues: education, health, nutrition, sanitation, child marriage, prevention of violence against women and children, and alleviation of unemployment. I now do this on a regular basis through different types of campaigns. I am also playing a role for the development of our women's community, as the general secretary of Tarail Upazila Women Development Forum. My involvement in many activities has increased my self-confidence. I could have done much more for the people of my locality if animator training would have been organized earlier. I will always keep playing a positive role in the development of my locality, using the knowledge gained from the training (Interview Data, 2015).

While commenting on the role of training by SLG in empowering UP Members to play a role in the governing process of the UP, Aparna Sutradhar (45), who is one of the elected women (Reserved Seat) Members of Rajanagar Union Parishad of Dhirai Upazila of Sunamgonj, declared:

> I did not have any idea about the formation of the Standing Committees and their functions before I participated in the training session organized under SLGP. Although I was made the Chair of the 'Standing Committee on Arbitration and Conflict Mitigation' of our UP but I used to preside over the meetings of the Committee only. As a matter of fact, I was able to play a role in the process of mitigation of conflicts that were brought into the notice of the Committee. However, the level of my understanding about different issues relating to the roles and responsibilities of this Committee increased to a great

extent as a result of my engagement with the SLGP intervention. Now I can raise my voice in the meeting for securing women's rights. Moreover, I have reorganized my Committee for ensuring equal participation of both male and female members (Interview Data, 2015).

3.1.4.2. *Voice of Women in Public Forums*

In order to enhance people's participation in different activities of the UP and make the UP an effective, people-friendly body, holding of meetings of *Ward Shava* and open budget have been made mandatory by the Act of 2009. Like supply side actors, demand side actors can also easily express their opinions in different forums of UPs. By attending different meetings, including 'open budget' and '*Ward Shava*' women (92.00%) raised their voice against any sort of irregularities. They also pressed their demands on issues like construction of roads and making correct lists of the poor people for different benefit schemes, including elderly allowance, widow allowance and distribution of VGD (Vulnerable Group D) and VGF (Vulnerable Group Feeding) cards. By attending meetings, they have become more conscious and confident in their understanding about different issues of UPs.

Now women can speak. Yet are they heard? If they are heard, do their voices have any impact?. At least in some cases, the answer is "yes": women's voices are being considered in the decision-making process.

To achieve the goal of greater participation of both men and women in the activities of UPs, SLG has been implementing training programs and organizing other events. Different types of activities that are attended by women are *Ward Shava*, open budget, Standing Committee and Citizens' Committee. Thus, training provided by SLG has had a positive impact in terms of greater participation of women from the demand side. The following case example illustrates the contribution of SLG in increasing the voice of women in the public forum:

> Jahanara Begum (34), a resident of the Piljonga Union of Fakirhat Upazila of Bagerhat District, is a health worker of BRAC. She did not know about the fact that every citizen of the Union has the right to raise their voice about any issue related to the UP governance. Being informed and inspired by volunteers of the SLGP about various matters of her UP, and the roles and responsibilities of active citizens, she is now raising her voice in public meetings (e. g., Ward Shava and open budget session) to ensure their (women) rights. Presently, the UP functionaries have also been found responsive to the needs of the mass people. For an instance, she placed a demand in last UP's open budget session for reconstruction of a road that remained muddy in the rainy season. In response to her demand, the UP Chairman informed her that inclusion of the construction of that road in this year's UP budget is not possible due to resource constraints. But, the Chairman has made his commitment that he would include her demand in the next year's budget of the UP.

3.1.5. Changes in the Service Delivery Process of the UP

3.1.5.1. *People's Access to Information*

UP representatives (100.00%) have been found interested in ensuring people's access to UP information, having been inspired by the activities of SLGP. Training and awareness-raising programs on RTI have increased the level of understanding of community people (90%) and THP volunteers [women leaders=100%; youth leaders = 100%; and animators (100%] about rights to information (**Graph-2**).

Most importantly, using their consciousness, these groups of people are keeping themselves busy, using their RTI rights, to know what is happening in other organizations that could affect human life in their villages. In their endeavours, they have learned that 'the UP is bound to provide whatever information people want to know' (Interview Data, 2015). 62% of community people have made contact with UP functionaries to get information on different issues. Among this group of people, 96.77% have received information as compared to 3.23% who did not receive their requested information. 93.33% of the respondents who expressed their views about receiving information have received information, following the rules and procedures, while only 6.67% did not receive information as required by law.

Graph-2: Knowldge about RTI

	Yes (%)	No (%)
Animators	100%	0%
Youth…	100%	0%
Women…	100%	0%
Citizens	90%	10%
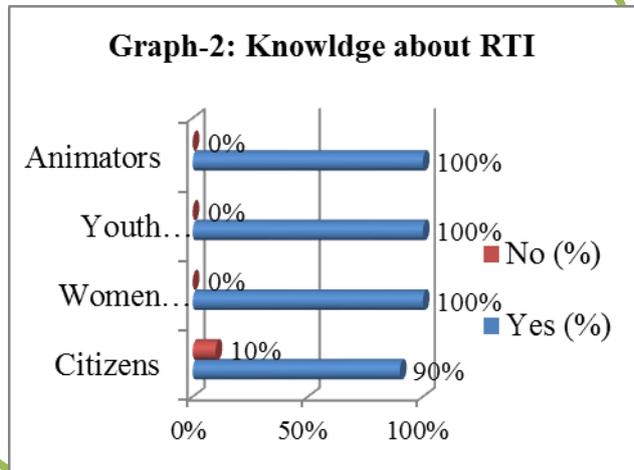
Commenting on the effectiveness of RTI training, Tania Parvin, of the Goshpara village of the Tarail *Upazila* of Kishoregonj District, stated that:

> Inspired by training about RTI, I submitted an application to Dr. Md. Monirul Islam, Assistant Medical Officer, on 23 June 2015, to get information about the total number of doctors stationed at the *Upazila* health complex, Taljanga, Taraill, Kishoregonj, compared with the sanctioned posts for doctors. In response to my application, I was informed by Dr. Islam, that although there is an Assistant Community Medical Officer and a MLSS against their sanctioned posts, the posts of Medical Officer and Pharmacist have remained vacant. I also submitted an application to Mohammad Moin Uddin Saberi, head teacher of R C Roy High School on 20 January 2015, to know about the conditions and eligibility for appointment of teachers. I also submitted an application to Md. Mubarok Hossain, secretary of Taljanga UP on June 21, 2015 to know about the number of old age and widow allowance cards that have been issued by the UP. I also collected a beneficiary list for those services. I strongly recognized that training on RTI has increased my understanding about these rights.

> The exercise of active citizenship rights has inspired different service delivery institutions to become transparent and examinable. That will ultimately contribute to the welfare of the community's people. (Interview Data, 2015) (DR).

On the other hand, Shakil Ahmed (21), a youth leader of SLGP of Piljonga Union of Fakirhat Upazila of Bagerhat District commented on the contribution of RTI training in the following way:

> Before SLGP came into operation, I did not know about the formal process of getting information from the UP about the process of implementation of RTI. I learnt about the RTI Act and its implementation process after receiving training on 'RTI Act' from SLGP. This learning made him interested to know about the allocation of government services like VGD and VGF that are distributed through the UP to the poor people. Accordingly, I made a written application to the UP in order to know about the quantity of services that had

been allocated under social safety net programs from the government for the people of their Union in the current fiscal year. Having received detailed information about social safety net programs from the UP, I disseminated that information among the people of our locality.

3.1.5.2. Preparation and Publication of Citizen's Charter:

The data suggests that, with active support from the SLG, all UPs in the intervention areas have prepared Citizens' Charters and published it in the UP premises. This is a step to enhance accountability and transparency of the UP's governance. THP volunteers have also been educating the community people about different types of services being delivered from the UP and the process of getting those services. This has contributed to bringing changes in the service-receiving scenario in the UP. 96% of the respondents have confirmed that they have made contact with the UP functionaries to get services as contained in the CC. Among them, 100% have received services without harassment.

3.1.5.3. Reduction of Corruption in the UP Service Delivery:

There is a common perception in our society that corruption pervades all government services that are distributed through the UP. Thus, services are not delivered to the right people and in the right way. Instead, eligible service receivers are availing services like VGD, old age allowance, widow allowance, and VGF in exchange for money. .

However, in the intervention areas, the intensity of corruption has started to be reduced. This is the result of active role playing by the Citizens' Committee, comprised of UP Members, animators, women leaders and youth leaders. This has been acknowledged by 100% of the respondents. While commenting on the role of the Citizens' Committee in ensuring fairness in the service delivery process of the UP, Jotindra Sarker, a freedom fighter, who is a resident of Rajanagor Union of Dhirai Upazila of Sunamganj District, expressed his understanding in the following way:

Prevention of Malpractice through Group Effort

> I tried to prevent malpractices in the UP's activities on my own initiative before the commencement of the SLGP: but I could not do it. However, having been participated in different awareness-raising workshops, I realized that collective effort could prevent this sort of malpractice. Since then, I have been consistently trying to get things done in cooperation with other people of my locality. For example, I, along with SLGP's volunteers and other common people, participated in the last OBS and raised voice for cancellation of a lease/contract of a pond. The contract was illegal, but a few UP functionaries had got its benefits. Taking our issue into consideration, the UP Chair took the initiative in making an inquiry about that contract. Upon receiving the inquiry report, the Chair cancelled the contract (FGD data, 2015).

3.2. Development of Volunteers and Active Citizens

The second objective of this project is to create a rural citizenry that holds UPs to account and promotes MDGs. The project has, for this purpose, trained animators, women leaders, youth activists and SHUJAN volunteers, to help ensure the transparency and accountability of the UPs. They are also there to help UPs to mobilize the people as an organized social force.

3.2.1. Development of Women Leadership:

By providing training, and organizing Citizens' Committees and *Upazila* Forum, SLGP is developing the community leaderships who are women. Women leaders are not only organizing mass campaigns with women against different issues: child marriage (100.00%), dowry (80.00%), gender discrimination (73.33%), sanitation (66.67%) and tree plantation (66.67%). Apart from taking their own stand against those issues, women leaders make village residents aware about these issues and their consequences. They have also spoken up in protecting the rights of the poor and vulnerable people, including women. The poor and vulnerable women have been led to visit community leaders for solving their problems. These women have been recognized as informal leaders in their locality.

Apart from their engagement in above issues, these women (100.00%) have been found to motivate fellow women to get involved in income-generating activities (IGAs) through court yard meeting for increasing their families' incomes. This finding is corroborated by the finding that 96% of ordinary women members of the society are involved in income-generating activities: including poultry farming (45.83%), homestead gardening (12.50%), sewing (16.67%), cattle rearing (16.67%) and others (8.33%). These groups of women have also confirmed that they were highly motivated by women leaders, youth leaders and animators of their areas. The following statements (cases) substantiate the finding of the study:

Bina: Training Changes Lives

A foundation course entitled 'Women Leadership development' training course has changed Bina's life. It evolved in her mind during training that she is not only a woman. She is first a human being. So, it is possible for her to do any sort of work. Such self-confidence, gained from training, helps Bina to go ahead. After she passed her Alim (Islamic education BA) degree, Bina's parents had tried hard and soul to marry her off. They got a few proposals for her marriage. Yet Bina had made her parents understand that she will become more highly-educated first and then she will get married. Apart from stopping her own marriage, she had also been able to stop the marriage of her cousin, Liza Akhtar, who read in Class VII. Bina explained the bad effects of child marriage when they talked about Liza's marriage. Her uncle refrained from marrying off his young daughter after hearing the strong protests of Bina. Now, Bina has a dream -- she will be self-dependent after finishing her education and will be working constantly for the advancement of other women/girls of her locality (DR).

Ahiza: An Example of a Woman Leader

Ahiza, who is a woman leader, has learned about the harms of child marriage from training. Knowing this makes her worried, as she herself has a daughter who reads in class X. She promises that she will protect her daughter, Hazera Begum, from being married in childhood. Yet her husband has plans to marry off his daughter quickly, using poverty as his excuse. Ahiza remains scared of these plans. She keeps looking for ways of protecting her daughter. She starts a business of selling girls' clothes in order to manage the education expenses of her daughter. The goal of protecting daughter helps her to be successful in business. Ahiza's monthly income is TK 3000-4000. Finally, Ahiza becomes able to make her husband understand that their daughter will be the asset of

their family instead of being a burden, if they both - husband and wife - become active in the business (DR).

Sapna: Inspiration for Others

Shapna Rani Dhar (31) was made a woman leader by SLGP. She is a citizen of Charmoholla UP, Chatok UPZ, Sunamganj. Having received training on 'Women Leadership Development' from SLGP, her entire thinking has changed. Now she understands women's role in acting against some social malpractices (such as early marriage, dowry and domestic violence), from which women suffer for the rest of their lives. She had not had any idea about her possible role in resisting these problems before receiving training from the SLGP. Since receiving training, that opened her eyes and thinking, she has been trying to protect women in danger. For example, Marufa Aktar (19), who was frequently tortured by her husband due to her inability to bring money from her parents, has got out of her situation of domestic violence. Shapna, along with other women organized a yard meeting at Marufa's father-in-law's house to solve the problem. In that meeting, Shapna tried to educate both Marifa's husband and his family members about the negative consequences of domestic violence and possible punishments in the law. Later on, Marufa's husband made a public commitment that he would not torture Marifa physically or mentally in the future. Now, the couple is continuing their family life in peace and happiness (Interview Data, 2015).

3.2.1.1. *Voice of Women against Social Evils:*

Historically, women prefer to keep themselves busy in household activities. In their religions, in Bangladesh, they are enjoined not to do anything that goes against their husband's wishes. In such a religion-based paternalistic society, it is hard for women to raise their voice against social ills. Having received encouragement from different activities of the SLGP, women have been found raising their voices against social ills. They are also mobilizing community's people, especially women, to get them involved in mass campaigns (i.e., rallies) organized against different social ills affecting their lives (*e.g.* dowry, violence against women, and child marriage). The following two cases are the classic examples of such bargaining that ultimately compels the Chairmen of the UPs to accept the demands of women Members.

Doly: Becoming a Social Worker

Rahima Akhtar, who lives in Anondonagar of Ward no. 02 of Nikli Sadar Union, Nikli, Kishoregonj, is a physically-challenged girl who was attending Class III. Her mother decided to get Rahima married to a 70-year old neighbor, who had three wives. Doly, a woman leader, became aware of Rahima's marriage arrangements. She then discussed the issue with the Headmistress of Rahima's school, who was alarmed to hear of it. Both, the headmistress and Doly, went to the Chairman of the UP, to inform him about the incident. The Chairman then took necessary action to stop the marriage, with the help of the police. Rahima is currently still attending her school (FGD data, 2015)

Kaberi Sarkar: Working for Women Empowerment

Kaberi Sarkar (41), who is an inhabitant of the Piljonga Union of Fakirhat Upazila of Bagerhat District, is fighting against social evils (e. g., domestic violence, early marriage, and dowry) that affect women's lives, with the assistance of the members of the '*Jui Mohila Samiti (Cooperative),*' in which

the volunteers of SLGP also play a supportive role. She is the founder of this cooperative, whose main objective is to empower women by raising social awareness. Although she was born and brought up in an educated family, she had to fight against her family members one and half year ago, when her family members decided to get her niece, Trisa Sen, married at the age of 14. Having been informed about the plan, she took a strong stand against her family's decision. In addition, she tried to teach her family members about the harmful effects of early marriage. She was very persistent in convincing her family members. Finally, she was successful in convincing them. They then refrained from getting Trisa married. Due to Kaberi's intervention Trisa escaped from becoming a victim of early marriage. Trisa is now studying at a higher secondary level (Interview Data, 2015).

3.2.2. Development of Youth Leadership:

By providing training and organizing Citizens' Committees, SLGP is contributing positively in the process of development of youth (both boys and girls) leadership in the community. These have been found vocal in raising their voice in protest of irregularities/malpractices in the activities of the UP. Moreover, they are taking initiatives for developing a self-reliant community through organizing Vision, Commitment and Action Workshops and mass campaigns. These brought changes in the lives of villagers by making them self-reliant and self-supporting. Besides these, youths are actively working with other animators and women leaders to maintain social harmony in the community. In addition to this, they are also working for creating awareness among the people with regard to several social and environmental issues, including child marriage, trafficking and dowry (100.00%), tree plantation (53.33%), and ensuring more people's participation in Ward Shava and budget Shava (60.00%). The following stories are classic examples of self-confident youth who have benefitted from the youth development training of SLGP.

Nazrul Islam: A Story of Becoming a Self-reliant Youth

Having participated in the training for the youth, I felt the urge to manage the expense of my education from my own earnings, so that I could at least ease some burden of my parents. I also perceived that it would increase my respect in the society. Also, other youth would be motivated if I could become self-reliant. After a discussion with my parents, I decided to establish a medicine shop alongside my living room, since my father had a license. In addition to opening 'Haksa Pharmacy', I also completed a course to become a Village Physician. My next goal is to expand my pharmacy and establish myself as a Village Doctor (DR).

Jafrul: An Example of Becoming Active Citizenry

Md. Jafrul Islam Sanu (21), who studies at Baccalaureate-level (Honors - 2nd year), is a youth leader of SLGP of Gopaya Union of Chatok Upazila of Habiganj District. Before participating in training in youth leadership, he had no idea about the UP's activities and the roles of an active citizen. So, the 'Youth Leadership Development Training Program' of SLGP has brought a change in his mindset and inspired him to think of making contribution to the development of the society. Now, he has got involved with social activities that are crucial for the upliftment of people's lives: especially poor and helpless. For example, he is running a coaching centre for 10 poor students (4 boys and 6 girls), ranging from class V to class VII, in his area free of cost,

aimed at making their studies easier for them. This is an outcome of SLGP because he decided to do something for his community, based on an idea of 'the social responsibility of an active citizen' that he learnt from SLGP's intervention. Moreover, he mobilizes mass people, male, female, and disadvantaged groups to join WS & OBS, as well as motivating them to raise their voice in those public meetings. In addition, he always keeps trying, not only to help the poor people of his locality, but also to compel and/or convince UP functionaries to provide services (e. g., VGD, VGF, old age and widow allowance) to the truly needy. For instance, he was able to manage a widow's allowance for Moriam Begum (38), by convincing UP functionaries over six months' time.

3.2.3. Development of Active Citizens:

By providing training and organizing Citizens' Committees and *Upazila* Forum, SLGP has created both men and women animators in the community. 93.33% of the animators have been found active in mobilizing and organizing community's people against different issues, including child marriage and trafficking (85.71%), dowry (64.29%), tree plantation (42.89%) and sanitation (57.14%), and building awareness about the problems and solutions associated with these issues.

These newly-active citizens have also been aware and vocal in protecting citizen's rights and responsibilities and for gender equality. Animators are not only working to make their communities drug- and gambling-free, but also taking initiatives to create awareness among the community's people to ensure their participation in Ward Shava and open budget session. Inspired by training, they have got involved in different kinds of income-generating activities: including homestead gardening (15.38%), fisheries (15.38%), cattle/poultry rearing (76.92%), and sewing (15.38%). Finally, they have also fought to ensure access of poor people to UP services. What they have learnt from the animator training can be found in the following two examples.

Jasim Dad Khan: Establisher of a Gambling-Free Community

In search of what he could do for the welfare of the society, as an animator, Jasim saw that many youths of his locality were wasting time playing cards for money. To get money for the gambling, they are getting involved in unethical activities. Jasim Dad Khan thought that *Shimulbag* village would be ruined if it they could not get their youths away from this dangerous direction. At first, he discussed the negative aspects of gambling with those young gamblers. He made them understand that they themselves and their families would be benefited if they could invest this time in income-generating activities. Finally, they understood their mistake. They do not play cards for money now, but a few of them play cards for fun. Jasim also has made seniors (*morubbi*) of the locality aware of the need to keep constant watch on youths, so that they do not get involved in this addiction again.

Masum Ahmed: A Self-Employed Youth

Masum Ahmed's family consists of 7 members. They are greatly suffering due to the financial crisis. He used to believe that it was not possible for him to do anything great. Animator training, that he received under SLGP in 2014, has changed his perception. Inspired by the people involved in SLGP, he started thinking of doing something after completing training. He looked for a way of earning, which was easy and required little capital. He started thinking of

developing a poultry farm. Finally, he started a poultry business in his house with a capital of TK 60,000, the major portion of which was collected from family members and relatives. He has now earned more than TK 20,000 this year. As a result, the family's other members have also been inspired to engage in their own earning activities, in addition to assisting Masum. Masum has made a plan to expand his business every year. A few jobless youths of his village have been employed in his poultry firm. Animator Masum is grateful to SLGP. He gives advice to neighbors to receive such training from this project (DR).

Training sessions, organized for the animators, have also inspired them to get involved in community activities. They update their knowledge about the issues in their society and UP. The Fulnahar's case is a classic example that substantiates the transformation of an ordinary woman into a community leader.

Fulnahar: A Messenger of Her Community

Mst. Fulnahar Begum (45), who is a housewife and an animator of SLGP of Nikli Sador Union of Nikli Upazila of Kishoreganj District, did not attend any meeting organized by the UP before she participated in the animator's training. In addition, she did not have any idea about the fact that she could place her demands in the meetings of WS & OBS. However, animator training has not only brought changes in her thinking, but also inspired her to work for poor people. This has allowed her to contribute to the advancement of the people of her locality, in addition to her role as a housewife. Now she tries to keep herself updated about issues related to UP governance (e. g., date & time of WS & OBS) through maintaining regular contact with the UP functionaries. She then disseminates that information among the common people of her locality. That is why people of her locality keep constant contact with her, for up-to-date information about the UP (FGD, 2015).

3.2.3.1. Activities of Citizens' Committees As Hubs For Knowledge Dissemination:

As stated above, there is an intermediary link between the Citizens' Committees and the UP. Thus, the contribution of Citizens' Committees has come into discussion several times while exploring the lessons of SLGP. Maximizing the benefit of "social capital[4]", members of Citizens' Committees have taken initiatives to make the "fellow feelings[5]" stronger. This platform is used for protecting the rights of common people. This is done, for example, to enhance access to UP services, including SSNs and information; access to *Ward Shava* and open budget session; benefits of income-generating activities; and preventing social and environmental problems (i.e., school drop-out, child trafficking, dowry, child marriage, deforestation, use of unhealthy latrine, violence against women, mother and child health care etc.). These Committees have been active in their communities to steer their communities' development and perform their role as a pressure group, to make the UP accountable to the community. The following case illustrates the contribution of Citizens' Committees in sensitizing a community's people to get relief from their sufferings by placing their demands in Ward Shava.

An important road of Ward no. 06 of the Cedar Union of Nikli remained in bad condition for years, although approximately 2,000 people used this road

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[4]Social capital refers to network, trust and collective action
[5]Community interest or sympathetic awareness for fellow members

daily. Nobody came forward to mitigate the sufferings of travelers on this road. Members of the Ward Citizens' Committee took a decision, at their monthly meeting that they would try vigorously to find out a way to repair the road. They discussed it with their Ward Member of the UP. They held discussions with the people in the community in this regard. Local people raised this issue with great importance in the meeting of the Ward Shava. Then, the Ward Member made an inspection of the road and expressed his agreement with the demand of the people. Finally, the Ward Member, with the Citizens' Committee, started the repair of that road, which was completed without any problem. The community people extended their thanks to the Ward Citizens' Committee for taking this initiative (DR).

The effort of Zayed Mia is also indicative of the benefits of Citizens' Committees in acting against different types of social problem:

Zayed Mia, who lives in Rasulpur Village of Zaroitola *Upazila* of Kishorgonj District, is a freedom fighter and an animator of the SLGP. Prior to attending the training, he thought that he was near the end of his life and had little more value for society. However, animator training has brought about changes in his thinking. It has inspired him to rethink: now he knows that he can contribute to the development of his community. Later on, attending a Ward Citizens' Committee, he inspired others to take a decision that they would not allow any child marriage in their village and would take a strong action to stop dowry. Accordingly, he has started inspiring the guardians of the children to enroll their children in the school at the beginning of the year and send their drop-out children back to school again. In response to his activities, 15 drop-out children have been re-admitted to the school. He is also visiting people from door-to-door, to build their awareness about sanitation and the negative effects of drugs. He has made his commitment to continue working to raise the social awareness of the people until his death. He expects that this will result in some positive changes in society (FGD, 2015).

3.2.4. Changes In The Attitudes of Communities' People

By organizing mass action campaigns (i.e., rallies), school-based campaigns (courtyard meetings), and popular theater shows (i.e., *natok*), SLGP's staff have made community people aware of and sensitive to several social issues that affect their lives. This effect has been acknowledged by 97.78% of the animators, women leaders and youth leaders.

These are not only creating awareness of various social issues among the community's people, but also acting as channel of supplying necessary information for improving their livelihoods. Changes have been noticed in the attitude of the community's people, due to these interventions of SLGP, have resulted in the reduction of child marriage, school dropout rate, gender discrimination and other social ills. They have resulted in increasing access to UP services and rights to information. They have improved the state of women's empowerment and created awareness about mother and child health care.

3.3. Exchange of Views and Learnings: Impact of the Advocacy

The findings suggest that advocacy workshops, at different levels, have strengthened coordination of the activities of UP Members. They have also facilitated communication between local and central government officials. The latter has happened as different government officials, including Deputy Commissioner (DC), DDLG, NGO representatives, journalists, civil society representatives, and local government representatives were brought

into the same forum to discuss issues of strengthening local governance and transparent and accountable service delivery. On the other hand, exchanges of views have allowed the participants to know who among the UP Members is doing what and how, the kind of problems they are facing and how they are managing those problems.

The rates of participation of different categories of the respondents in Advocacy Workshops, excepting the UP Members (60%), for animators (40%), and women leaders (13.33%) have remained low (**Graph-3**). Thus, more attention needs to be paid to the importance of ensuring participation of different categories of the respondents.

The research has found no follow-up meeting with SGUPAG's District Committees has taken place within the stipulated time frame, due to the country's political situation of unrest during that period. It is important to mention here that it is too early for the project to achieve its third objective, 'the policy advocacy' as it requires some times to get the benefits of the policy advocacy. In fact, it would be reasonable to wait for some time for creating policy impact, as the policy should follow practice. Thus, more interventions are needed in the coming years before expecting the project to create policy impact.
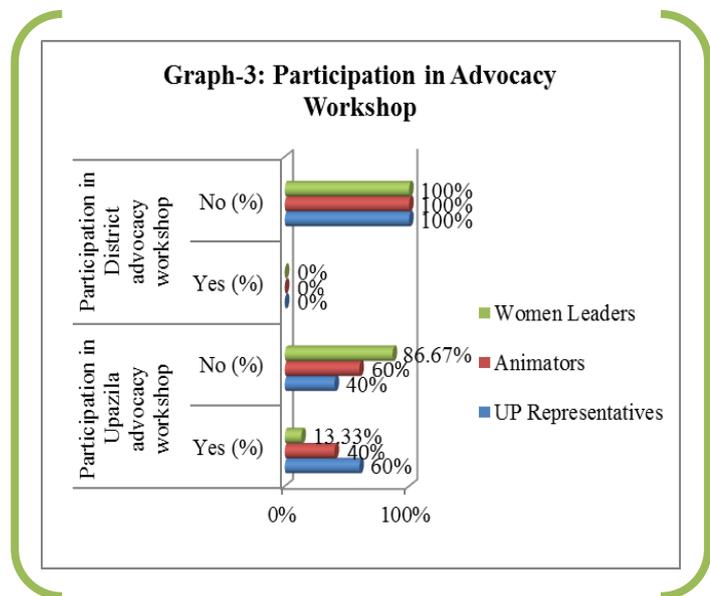
4. Discussion and Assessment

In Bangladesh, it is universally recognized that poor and marginalized people remain excluded from the mainstream of the development process, including the decision-making and receiving government benefits that are delivered through local government bodies like the UP. The main factors that foster exclusion of poor and marginalized people are corruption, illiteracy, political interference, lack of awareness, and existing power structure in rural settings of Bangladesh. As we know, capacity-building of marginalized segments of a community is a successful solution to the issue of making them capable to raise their voice for protecting their rights. The SLGP of CEP, BRAC and THP is just this kind of intervention that has opened up a window for the poor people to steer their own development. By making them aware of their rights and responsibilities as citizens, and acts and laws of Parliament, as well as decisions of the UP, they know how to participate.

Capacity-building training, organized under the SLGP, has increased the level of understanding of UP Members (males and females) about different aspects of UP governance that have been specified in the Local Government (Union Parishad) Act, 2009 and RTI Act, 2009. Changes have been noticed in the mindset/attitudes of the UP Members, due to capacity-building training. Moreover, UP female Members have become more knowledgeable, having been involved in activities of the SLGP, including women and youth leadership training programs and *Upazila* Forum. As a result of this "revolution of the minds" of decision-makers, a positive change has been noticed in UP performance in all respects.

Since community people, especially women, have become aware of their rights and responsibilities, problems of their society, and the importance of engaging themselves in

income-generating activities through attending different activities of SLGP, they are calling SLGP their "Light House". They are raising their voice, individually or collectively, by mobilizing the community people, especially women, in protecting their rights (i.e., access to UP services including SSNs and information) and in preventing social and environmental ills (i.e., school drop-out, child trafficking, dowry, child marriage, deforestation, use of unhealthy latrine, violence against women and child, mother and child health care etc.).

Changes have also been noticed in the perception of the community's people, due to their participation in different interventions of SLGP, including mass action campaign (i.e., rally), school based campaign (courtyard meetings), and popular theater shows (i.e., natok). As a result, a downward trend in child marriage, school drop-out rate, and gender discrimination and upward trend in the state of women's empowerment, and awareness building about mother and child health care have been noticed in the community.

Women's leadership training, youth leadership training, animator training, and *Upazila Forum* have played vital roles in developing community-level leadership which helps the poor and vulnerable people to avail of their rights. The emerging leaders have been quite vocal to prevent corruption in the service delivery process. They also encourage the community's people, including women, the poor, minorities, the physically challenged and marginalized people to participate in the governing processes of the UP: *Ward Shava,* open budget session, and Standing Committees. These initiatives have not only promoted inclusion of the community's people in the governing process of UP, but also protected them from being harassed while getting services from the UP.

Thus, a conclusion can be drawn that the community's people, particularly women and the disadvantaged, have become empowered as a result of SLGP. Now they are fulfilling their potential in making the UP governance process pro-poor. Due to SLGP's intervention, the level of awareness, both at the individual and group levels, of the community's people, especially women, about their rights and social issues affecting their lives, has increased greatly. Awareness has enhanced their level of confidence. Confidence has led them to become courageous in steering the development of their communities. Confidence has also made them more self-reliant, by leading them to engage in income-generating activities to relieve their families' poverty. SLGP has given them platform: Citizens' Committees, Advocacy Workshops (at *Upazila* and District levels), and *Upazila Forum*, in which they can both learn (receive information) and act (put demands). Advocacy Groups, where they get the opportunity to learn about who is doing what and how, what needs to be done in a given situation, the problems that they are facing and how solutions to those problems can be found, through exchanging their views, have equipped them with the knowledge they need to act.

As a result of their mutual empowerment, community residents increasingly consider each other trustworthy. Trust is the basic foundation allowing collective action, especially in the case of women. So, collective action has become possible and effective.

Thus, the main conclusion is that SLGP, under the partnership of CEP, BRAC and THP, has made community people, especially women and other marginalized groups, capable to lead the development of their communities in a self-reliant way, despite the elite-dominated society in which they live. Their leadership has begun to bring about real change, in hearts, minds and in reality. This is a process which has only begun and we shall see more, and more concrete, changes in the future than at this early stage of formation of leaders.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations:

The problems that community people face in their daily life are mostly local. So, their solutions are also local. The services provided by the UP are considered piecemeal solutions to those problems, like paving a road. So, community people have to be integrated into the development process and not only into the UPs.

For long-term development, community leadership must steer development and the UP can play only a supportive role. "Development" imposed by decision of the local government and not based on the values and demands of the community is not sustainable development. Thus, SLGP's fundamental strategy is to build the missing capacity for community-led development. Community-led development places people at the heart of a process that seeks fundamental changes in the way in which a community function (Torjman and Makhoul, 2012).

In the context of Bangladesh, the community acts through the UP. Therefore, if the concerns and preferences of the individuals who comprise that community are kept out of the UP decision-making process, there will be no development. Thus, SLGP has been careful not only to build community leaders, but to build their involvement in the UP processes, using the 2009 "democratization" legislation for local government to do so. In the absence of that legislation, the necessary "marriage" between the community and the UP, to achieve community-led development, never did, and would not, happen. That is difficult and sometimes, as in the case of Advocacy Workshops, which remained the preserve of UP members, it still does not totally happen.

In this process, women are more vulnerable. Although they constitute half of the community people, historically they have been kept out of all the development processes due to cultural, social, religious and political factors. Keeping 50% of the community's people out of the process, it is not possible to ensure sustainable community development. Instead, they will have to be taken into the mainstream of development, so that they can lead their community-level development. The SLGP's approach here is just right: women need capacity-building to play their role in development processes, more than institutional change. Even when they get institutional change, like reserved seats in the UPs, they cannot get any benefit if they lack capacity to use their new positions. So SLGP ignores the institutional setting and focuses on the capacity. Instead of organizing mass rallies to demand 50% seats on the UP for women, they build women's capacity to act in the UP processes. Thus, among the top beneficiaries of SLGP capacity-building are women in UP reserved seats: they had little impact before SLGP training and have maximum impact now. Even crusty old UP Chairmen now respect them and even listen to them and act on their demands! So, future institutional change, like a 50% quota for women on the UPs, suddenly no longer sounds so ridiculous.

There is no question that community-led development comes with a unique set of challenges. For those who cling to a traditional, hierarchical view of public administration, that most change should come from the centre, community-led development is messy and unpredictable. Yet the SLG project is a textbook lesson in the fact that community-led development is the most effective approach to making communities hunger- and poverty-free in a sustainable manner. If we learn anything from this project, let us learn that!

World leaders adopted a resolution entitled "Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", on September 25, 2015. This resolution will become Sustainable Development Goals (hereinafter "SDGs") from January 1, 2016. The 2030 Agenda cannot be implemented with a segmented approach. The SDGs cannot be achieved by merely implementing projects on education, health and so on, without addressing all the challenges

faced by a community: peace building, State building, human rights and good governance. This will obviously require a holistic, bottom-up 'community-led development' approach, encompassing a sustained process that enables women, men and youth to take control over their own lives. Such a process will require citizens to become active agents of change, grassroots organisations to let voices be heard, creation of vibrant, inclusive economies, and an effective, accountable local government system, all playing catalytic roles (Majumdar, 2015).

SLGP is such a community-led development approach that is capable of transforming rural society, by establishing good governance. Good governance will free society from many evils through its active change agents, called "animators", "youth leaders" and "women leaders".

However, there are some matters that the project staff should give consideration to. These are the recommendations of this report:

1. The tenure of the SLGP is about to an end. The results of SLGP are significant in the villages: it should not simply disappear and let business as usual replace it. 'That would be a change against democratization, accountability and giving effect to the 2009 legislation. Leaders have been created, but they still need support and more leaders need to be created. Therefore a 3-year extension of the program is recommended.

2. Most of the UP Members are poorly-educated. Some of them have neither capacity to understand instructions given by the Government in getting things done nor ability to make their constituents understand those instructions. Many of them are culturally averse to following formal procedures and Government instructions. Therefore, for UP Members, capacity-building may have to be replaced by full-blown education.

3. The number of volunteers has been found inadequate in the project areas. The area of operation of a volunteer has unmanageable. Many complete their assigned duties hurriedly, running from here to there, causing failure to achieve expected outcomes. Therefore, the number of volunteers should be increased. On the other hand, since volunteers are the catalyst of demand-side actors, their capacity to deal with those actors needs to be developed. In this regard, more capacity building training can be organized for them in addition to existing trainings.

4. Although women constitute half of the total population, the number of male animators is more than that of female animators. To reach out to village women, the number of female animators should be increased. This is because it is hard for male animators to reach out to village women due to religious reasons: women's cultural instinct is to shun them. By noticing the role and contribution of female animators in strengthening the process of local governance, female villagers will only feel not encouraged to go out of their houses, but also to take part in the development process.

5. Mobilization and awareness of community people, especially women, which are the two key activities of SLGP, are not sufficient. This is because they generally lack knowledge and capacity in getting things done, as compared to males, due to socio-economic and cultural reasons. Therefore, capacity building training for community people should be organized.

6. Although the volunteers of SLGP work for free, they have their own businesses. The kinds of people who act as volunteers include student, businessmen, housewives, unemployed graduate and so on. There are times when they are required to work all day for SLGP for days at a stretch. In such a situation, they suffer from income insecurity and lack of time to prepare themselves for their own tasks. This has discouraged them to work with SLGP as volunteers. Therefore, incentives should be given to them in the form of skill development trainings and providing support for self-employment activities. On the other hand, the day in which they

are to attend training organized under SLGP is of no use to them. This has led many of them to remain absent from training. In such a situation, people of the areas from where volunteers do not participate in training are becoming deprived of getting knowledge that would be helpful for improving their livelihood. Therefore, an arrangement of TA and DA allowance for trainees is recommended for ensuring their full participation in training.

7. Exposure visits of elected representatives among UPs can be organized. The performance of the UP's functionaries varies from one area to another, depending on several factors. Such factors may include educational qualification and willingness of elected representatives, location of the UP, the literacy rate and state of employment of the union concerned, the financial condition of UP as well as its residents and so on. Those UPs among the targeted UPs, which are performing better in terms of project objectives, should be visited by representatives of other UPs in order to learn best practices that have made the difference between them.

8. Exposure visits for SLGP's staff and volunteers can also be arranged in such areas under their intervention where their counterparts are doing better than others in achieving project's objectives by using their knowledge obtained from training organized under SLGP.

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