



# Results in Citizen Participation in Local Governance

The Journey for Advancement in Transparency, Representation and Accountability (JATRA) project is built on CARE International's Governance Programming Framework and CARE's good governance and social accountability models in Bangladesh. JATRA was designed to focus on accountability and transparency in the Union Parishad (UP) budget cycle. The aim of the project is to strengthen the local governance public finance system, focusing on participatory budget-making and ensuring the participation of the women, the poor and extreme poor, and civil society groups.

## Journey for Advancement in Transparency, Representation and Accountability (JATRA)

JATRA envisions an end result in which the **Union Parishad public financial management systems are strengthened, transparent and aligned with the Local Government Act 2009**. In order to achieve this end, JATRA seeks to *build the capacities of citizens, especially the poor and marginalised, to engage in budget planning and implementation; to increase the access that citizens have to critical information, including through open budgeting processes led by the UP; and to introduce key social accountability processes that strengthen citizen voice in decentralized development.*

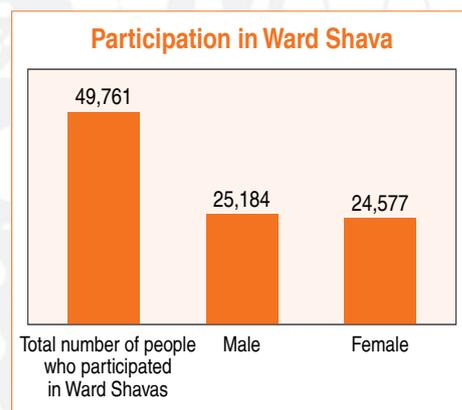
JATRA targets 15 Union Parishads in three Upazilas of two districts, all in northwest Bangladesh. Some of the Unions targeted are within the coverage area of CARE's longstanding work with local governments and civil society, focused on helping poor communities and households to gain a larger role in local decision-making and influencing local power-holders to become more responsive to marginalised groups. By contrast, some of the Unions targeted are new areas of work for CARE Bangladesh, where CARE is introducing concepts and models of citizen participation and social accountability for the first time through JATRA. This provides an opportunity to perform some comparative analysis around participation and accountability results, between these two types of programming areas.

According to the JATRA baseline data, this process was highly irregular and often completely omitted in most UPs. Typically, local budgets were prepared based on the priorities of UP elected representatives and those who directly influence them. Through JATRA programming, CARE aimed to increase the regularity of the pre-budget Ward Shava, in order to ensure space for citizen participation ahead of budgetary decision-making. Among the 135 wards covered by JATRA (9 wards in each of the 15 unions), 130 wards conducted the pre-budget Ward Shava exercise in Year 1 of the JATRA project. This represents 96% of covered wards.

**Citizen Participation in Budget Planning:** Among the 130 wards that conducted Ward Shavas in Year 1 of JATRA, a total of 49,761 community members participated. This figure represents just over 10% of the total voting population of these wards, well above the 5% mandatory attendance marker in the 2009 Local Government (Union Parishad) Act. Among them 25,184 of these participants were male and 24,577 were female, demonstrating that women are nearing parity in terms of overall participation in the Ward Shavas. On average, a total of 383 people participated in each Ward Shava.

### Participation in Planning and Budgeting

**Holding Pre-budget Consultations:** According to Bangladesh's 2009 Local Government Act, each of the nine wards in each union should hold an annual pre-budget meeting (called a Ward Shava). During the Ward Shava, citizens at the ward level should gather to voice their opinions regarding what their Union's budgetary priorities should be for the upcoming year. The intent of the pre-budget meeting is to gather input from citizens in order to influence the UP's planning and budgeting choices ahead of budget preparation each year.



In order to better understand the access that marginalised groups had to this first round of Ward Shavas, CARE assessed the number of members of poor households that attended. An average of 60% of attendees came from poor and marginalized communities. Among these participants, 48% were women from poor paras (communities) and households.

Whilst the aggregated data demonstrates that nearly half the attendees from poor communities were women, CARE identified a clear distinction between wards related to the participation of poor women. In unions where CARE has done extensive previous work on local livelihoods, civil society mobilisation, and local governance processes (in particular through the SETU project), nearly double the number of women participated, as compared with unions in which CARE's work began with JATRA. This points to a finding that the participation of poor women requires longer-term efforts around mobilisation, capacity- building, and also other interventions, such as economic empowerment.

To prepare citizens for effective participation in this new fora, CARE trained 953 members of poor communities on topics including the 2009 UP Government Act, budget literacy, Bangladesh's formulation of the right to information, and social accountability principles and tools. Among those trained, 45% were women from poor households.

**The Voices of Women and the Poor in Local Budget Prioritization:** JATRA is designed to build toward more meaningful participation for typically marginalised groups. Firstly, the project focuses on getting Union Parishads to hold pre-budget meetings, and then on preparing a range of diverse citizens to participate in these meetings. The project focuses particularly on building the capacity of the poor and of women, and encouraging their active participation in the Ward Shavas. However, attendance does not guarantee the meaningful participation of marginalised groups.

In order to better understand whether the poor, the extreme poor, and women from these groups can actively put forward their demands during Ward Shavas, CARE tracked how many of the issues raised and priorities recommended during the public meetings were raised by attendees from poor households, and by women from these households. In the 130 pre-budget consultation meetings that took place in Year 1 of the project, 51% of the demands or issues raised came from poor and extremely poor people (1,015 issues). Of these, 19% of demands and issues were raised by women from poor households (375 issues).

Common demands raised by representative of poor households included the improved allocation of government social safety net cards for the elderly, widows, the disabled, etc.; stipends for poor students; the construction of latrines and wells; road maintenance, and tree planting. Women from poor households commonly prioritised awareness-raising and public action to stop early marriage and dowry practices; training on income generation opportunities; and leadership and capacity-building for women.



CARE was able to again identify a pattern between communities where CARE has long-term civil society and governance work, and communities with which CARE is newly engaging. In Unions where CARE is building on historic work with local communities, 59% of demands put forward and issues raised during Ward Shavas were raised by poor households. In Unions where CARE is working newly through JATRA, 41% of demands came from participants from poor households. This indicates that longer-term engagement with poor and marginalised groups has increased their ability and willingness to raise their voices in public decision-making processes, and to advocate for their needs and rights.

### Participation in Implementation

#### **Citizen Participation in Key Implementation Roles:**

Once the annual budget is approved, there are a number of spaces for citizen participation throughout the year, overseeing local projects and services. Some of these spaces include Ward Development Committees, Union Development Coordination Committees, UP Standing Committees, Project Implementation Committees, and Scheme Supervision Committees. JATRA baseline data revealed that these committees were primarily populated by the friends and relatives of UP chairmen, with the poor getting very little opportunity to participate in oversight and decision-making through these channels.

JATRA has encouraged greater participation by poor and marginalised citizens in these committees, in order to integrate typically sidelined groups into the full process of development implementation at local level. Year 1 data demonstrates the Ward Development Committees now have 27% membership from poor and extremely poor households, 7.5% on Union Development Coordination Committees, 17% on UP Standing Committees, 13% on Project Implementation Committees, and 21% on Scheme Supervision Committees. Including all citizen roles in development implementation at local levels, nearly one in five are from poor households, and 34% of these are women from poor households.

### Participation in Monitoring and Feedback

During the monitoring reporting period, the project has successfully introduced social accountability tools (the Community Score Card and the Social Audit), and ensured these are used to monitor the UP budget expenditure, as well as the quality of the services and infrastructure for which the budget is allocated. To date, 12 UPs have performed Social Audits, primarily focused on infrastructure projects constructed using block grant funds from the World Bank's Local Governance Support Program II (LGSP II). Nine UPs have performed the Community Score Card process, often focused on the functionality of social safety net schemes like the Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) scheme, the Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) scheme, old age allowances, and Cash For Work activities.

In the 12 Social Audit processes, 91 people from poor and extremely poor households participated as Audit Committee members (60 men and 31 women), and 1,709 people came to the public meetings during which the Audit Committees presented their findings. In the Community Score Card processes, 708 people from poor and extremely poor households participated in interface meetings with service providers.

### Future Results

This brief presents key findings from Year 1 of implementing the JATRA project. Based on data from Years 2 and 3 of the project, CARE will continue to assess the degree to which Unions organise pre-budget Ward Shavas and follow-up Open Budget Meetings, and the degree to which poor households and women from poor households can participate. In addition, in the coming years, CARE will be able to also trace this process further, analyzing the degree to which demands and priorities raised by the poor and poor women are: a) included in final UP annual plans; and b) actually funded and addressed by UPs. CARE will also continue to trace citizen participation in local development implementation channels and social accountability mechanisms.

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