

Open Budget Meeting: Magnifying the voices of the poor and marginalized



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The JATRA baseline data revealed that the participatory spaces of Ward Shavas (pre-budget meetings) and Open Budget meetings were dominated by local elites, while the poor and marginalized typically give less input. Women's presence was low (approximately one third that of men), and women appeared to have less knowledge regarding the function of the Ward Shava. In general, the Ward Shavas were only happening once in a year, instead of twice, as mandated in the Union Parishad Act of 2009. With only one public budget meeting, people were only able to provide initial inputs, but did not get a chance to question the final commitments the UP members made, in terms of the use of budget planning and the prioritization of development projects.

Through JATRA, each locality now has a Citizen's Forum, which after obtaining capacity-building, began to mobilize people in their communities to participate in participatory spaces, get access to information, and use social accountability tools to provide feedback to local governments.

The key findings from the Year 1 monitoring report demonstrate that, on average, a total of 383 people participate in each Ward Shava, of which 60% came from poor and marginalized households, 48% of which were female. On average, 15 issues were raised by the citizens in each ward. Out of these, 51% were demanded by poor and marginalized people, of which 19% were from women.

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



CARE Bangladesh
Pragati Insurance Bhaban, 20-21, Kawran Bazar, Dhaka-1215, Bangladesh
Website: www.carebangladesh.org



Contact:
Murad Bin Aziz, Governance Coordinator
E-mail: muradbin.aziz@care.org

Community Score Card: End users give feedback for improvement of local government services



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Political Economy Analysis undertaken in each union through JATRA has revealed that vulnerable groups and poor communities receive fewer services, and have less ability to capitalize on infrastructure development opportunities, due to a lack of influence over decision-makers. Their demands for safety net programs are neglected, the government standards for these benefits are often not met, and decisions regarding who should benefit from social safety net systems are often made based on patronage.

A further analysis regarding the use of local government block grants revealed that 47% of the grants were used in transportation development, 19% in water supply development, 18% in sanitation and waste management, 7% in education, 6% in human resource development, 1% on health, and 1% on agriculture and market development. No grants are specifically used for

women and their capacity-building, despite high demand from poor women for this kind of service.

Through JATRA, communities undertook Community Score Card exercises, so that people could provide feedback to local governments regarding the allocation of social safety net benefits, and the use of local government block grants. The first round of Community Score Cards influenced Union Parishad officials to adopt a participatory process of beneficiary selection for social safety net benefits, and to publicly disclose the list of beneficiaries. The second round of Community Score Cards on block grants influenced local governments to allocate more funding to women's empowerment. This year, monitoring data revealed that 27.3% of the budget was proposed for women's empowerment in the fiscal year 2015-16.

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Citizen Forum: Reshaping the power relations in communities

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The Citizen Forum is comprised of 23 members at the union level, representing each ward, nominated from deprived communities through participatory processes.

Project inputs

- Capacity building for effective use of participatory spaces articulated in Union Parishad Act 2009
- Awareness raising on Right to Information Act 2009
- Capacity building on participatory budget cycle
- Engagement in Social Audit, Community Score Card, and Union Parishad evaluation processes
- Local leadership development through community mobilization and collective actions

Community actions

- Mobilizing the poor to put forward collective demands
- Collective actions in implementation of selected projects
- Inclusion of local leaders in Ward Development and Supervision Committees
- Assisting Union Parishads to generate revenue by improving tax collection
- Providing constructive feedback to local government using Social Audits, Community Score Cards, and UP evaluations

Bridging gaps between communities and local government and enhancing inclusive and participatory local governance

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Social Audit: Enhancing social accountability in communities

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The JATRA project Citizen Forums conducted Social Audits of the use and management of block grants used for community infrastructure. The Audits were conducted in four distinct steps: initiating, planning, implementing the audit, and conducting an interface session. The citizen Audit Committees conducts detailed in-depth scrutiny of all relevant documents, legal procedures, and social relevance for communities, and user feedback was brought to local governments for improving the quality of work and enhancing social benefits. The project conducted Social Audits for 28 projects that included culverts, rain water discharge drains, drinking water tube-wells, school benches, and guard walls to prevent landslides.

The Social Audit exercises revealed that all the projects served a larger number of people (average number of benefiting households was 250). On the

other hand, there were inconsistencies between design and implementation (in 25% of projects), budgetary inadequacy (in 39% of projects), the materials used in the projects were not up to a satisfactory mark (in 32% of the projects), the information was not disclosed to users (in 64% of the projects), and the supervision committees were not active (in 93% of the projects).

These findings are recognised by the Local Government Support Program (LGSP) and the recommendations from the social audit feedback are in consider for future planning, these includes: community consultation and participatory project design; comprehensive budget allocations; samples of materials should provide to communities for validation prior to construction; the inclusion of project end users into the supervision committees; and mandatory disclosure of project information during the design phase of the scheme.

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Union Parishad Performance Evaluations: Reflection on mandated commitments and responsibilities



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The UP Performance Evaluation process, undertaken at six month intervals, makes local government councillors accountable for their given commitments made in pre-budget meetings and articulated in the UP's five year plan. The citizen-centric evaluation of UP members is based on Union Parishad performance indicators, and provides an opportunity for citizens to give feedback on the performance of elected individuals. These exercises have led to enhanced positive competition amongst UP representatives, have developed positive mindsets among UP Chairmen and members to ensure greater accountability, and have fostered responsiveness, especially in encouraging the implementation of planned activities within the stipulated time.

In the fiscal year 2014-15, UPs covered by the JATRA project obtained basic block grants, but only six unions received the performance-based portion of the grant. Interesting findings from the first round of UP performance evaluations revealed that citizens are not consulted on the development projects of UPs, beneficiaries of safety nets are not publicly disclosed, the poor and marginalized are not given congenial attention from their representatives, and citizens are not informed of UP decisions and projects in due time. After analyzing the gaps, a six-monthly improvement plan was developed by each of the evaluated elected bodies, with the aim of improving their performance.

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