



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

CARE Bangladesh is implementing the Journey for Advancement in Transparency, Representation and Accountability (JATRA) project. The project aims to strengthen the Union Parishads' (Lowest tier of local government) public finance management systems so that they are more transparent and aligned with the Local Government Act 2009. The project endeavors to ensure active participation of the community leaders, especially women, in key decision making spaces and bodies. Moreover, JATRA strives to allow the wider community to play an active role in social accountability mechanisms to ensure inclusive democratic processes, equal access to quality services and access to accurate information at all levels of Union Parishad.



Ward shava promotes citizen centric democratic space for dialogue

The Union Parishad Act 2009 was clearly articulated to ensure the accountability of local government through citizen centric validation of schemes and development agendas through citizen's voices in Ward Shava which should take place twice a year with at least 5% of voters present. The usual pattern of participation was thin in ward shava, Union Parishad representatives placed the development agendas themselves and selected beneficiaries for projects from their patronage. Lack of knowledge and capacity to raise voices against decisions of public authorities limits the effectiveness of the meeting of citizens.

The Natural leaders (Local leaders emerged from community mobilization process) and members of the citizen forum that were trained by the JATRA project have mobilized general people of the poorest and marginalized communities to pro-actively participate in Ward Shava so that communities are prepared to raise issues relevant to their needs. The Upazila chairman, Upazila Nirbahi Officer, police officer in charge, and district facilitator of the LGSP-II (Local Government Support Project) project attended as special guests in many Ward Shavas, which created opportunities for local people to interact, challenge and share their opinions. At the same time, this has created opportunities for the UP representatives to demand resources required for fostering local development plans.

So far the major learnings of the JATRA project on Ward Shava are:

- In order to strengthen the ward shava process it is critical to work with the communities so that the local leaders are prepared to raise specific issues and constructively engage in the discussion with the elected representatives and challenge them with logic, if applicable. The effort from the project on this has resulted in more enthusiasm from communities towards participating in the ward shava and raising their voices.
- Ward Shava has been very instrumental in sharing information about UP planning, budget and services for which the poorest are entitled.
- UPs are using ward shava to explore local needs, which they prioritize during the budget formulation process. The incentive for the UP to use ward shava for local planning is to demonstrate the adoption of participatory processes, which is essential for accessing performance-based block grants.
- The citizens are using ward shava to raise their needs and ask questions to the authorities, and the authorities are also respond to the queries of citizens. A range of 10-15 number of issues are raised to the authorities to include in budget cycle from the citizens including infrastructure construction, reduce violence of women, training for the poor, sanitation, safety nets, education, irrigation and environments.