

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 divided into 9 wards) 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.

JOURNEY FOR ADVANCEMENT IN TRANSPARENCY, REPRESENTATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY (JATRA)



Citizen Engagement in Enhancing the Social Benefits from Local Government

The Citizen Forum is a group of good governance promoters set up by the JATRA project, made up of 23 community members from each union, representing each ward and nominated by marginalized communities in a participatory process. CARE has ensured that 50% of each Citizen Forum is female. Citizen Forum members are prepared for JATRA activities through a series of capacity-building themes, including: citizen engagement processes articulated in the Union Parishad Act 2009, the Right to Information Act 2009, budget literacy and formulation, Social Audits, Community Score Cards, and Union Parishad evaluations. JATRA staff organized a daylong

meeting with each Citizen Forum every 3 months throughout the project.

For their part, these Citizen Forum members are mobilizing citizens to participate in Ward Shava and Open Budget meetings, preparing them to prioritize community development priorities, encouraging community members to participate in reformed ward development and supervision committees, motivating them to pay taxes, and supporting communities to conduct Social Audits, Community Score Card processes and UP Evaluations.

Achievements of Citizen Forums

Ward Shavas: As per the Union Parishad Act 2009, all Union Parishads have to complete the pre-budget Ward Shavas by the period of February to March each year, before the fiscal year starts. The intention of this meeting is to gather community priorities to be considered during the annual budgeting process.



Ward shava at Kashirambelpukur

The Citizen Forum members in JATRA unions successfully mobilized poor communities to participate and raise their demand in both annual Ward Shavas: the pre-budget and review Ward Shavas. They organized people from poor households and women in courtyard meetings before the commencement of the first Ward Shavas each year, assisting them to identify development agendas for their communities, and preparing them to raise their priority issues in the Ward Shavas. The monitoring report of 2015-16 reveals that, on average, a total of 430 people participated in each Ward Shava (12% of the total population of voters in the covered wards). This is well above the stated mandatory threshold of 5% in the Union Parishad Act 2009. It also represents improvement from the previous year, in which the participation was 10.3% of the total population of voters. The participation of people from poor households was 68% and the participation of women was 51%. On average, 16 demands were raised in each Ward Shava, 55% of which came from poor and extremely poor people, and 25% of which came from poor and extremely poor women.

The qualitative findings of the baseline report revealed that a good number of people attended Ward Shavas prior to JATRA, but that women's presence was low (one third of men's). In addition, these participatory spaces were dominated by local elites, and the poor and marginalized made few interventions. At that time, women had little knowledge about the function of Ward Shavas, and very few of their priorities (when they expressed them) were translated into action. The Ward Shava only happened once in a year, rather than the two-part process that complies with the law.

Open Budget Meetings: As per the UP Act 2009, all Union Parishads should prepare an annual financial statement of the income and expenditure of the UP, and present the same in an open budget session in the presence of the community.



Open budget Meeting at Harinathpur

The JATRA monitoring report of 2015-16 shows that all 15 JATRA Union Parishads prepared their annual budget and conducted the UP Open Budget Shava/meeting in a public place. According to the analysis, 24% of this total budget was allocated to meet the aspirations of the poor and extremely poor (based on the priorities they put forward in the pre-budget Ward Shavas). Among this 24%, 29.5% was allocated for the priorities of poor and marginalized women, through initiating capacity-building and income generating opportunities. This increased influence is largely due to the influence of the JATRA-initiated Citizen Forums; they facilitate courtyard meetings in poor communities to help people from poor and marginalized households prepare for the pre-budget meetings. Afterward, the Citizen Forum members lobbied UP councilors to include the priorities put forward by the poor in the final budgets.

In the baseline analysis, it was revealed that 86% of the female respondents and 80% of the male respondents said that, even though they had participated in the open budget meetings, they did not have real knowledge regarding the local budget.

Participatory Planning: According to the Local Government (Union Parishad) Act 2009, each Union Parishad should prepare a five year plan (among other periodic plans) in a participatory manner. These plans should incorporate all the priority problems of the area, as identified by the local community in the planning meetings organized by Ward Shavas.



Participatory poverty and power mapping in Khatamodhupur UP

As an integral part of understanding the local context for the development of context-specific implementation strategies, the JATRA project facilitated local participatory poverty analyses, involving Union Parishad elected representatives, the union's Citizen Forum members and other identified 'natural leaders' in each of its working unions.

These analyses provide relevant information for the Union Parishad to articulate its vision of development for its five year plan. The analyses help the UP focus on providing equitable resources and services for the poor and vulnerable communities that were overlooked in the past. The Citizen Forums help to prepare the plan, represent the voices of communities in the mapping process, and hold officials accountable for being honest about how resources are shared in their locality.

The plan is then tracked through participatory UP evaluation exercises at 6 month intervals. Citizen Forum members lobby UPs between each evaluation period, encouraging them to allocate resources to neglected areas. During the participatory evaluations, Citizen Forum members score UP members with green, yellow, and red cards, based on community perceptions of UP councilor performance.. The tracking of resource allocation reveals that, while 21% of LGSP scheme funds went to poor communities in 2013-14, in 2015 – 16 it went up to 40%. Investments in social safety nets, in which the most vulnerable are the beneficiaries, have also gone up, from 40% to 51%. Likewise, contributions to cash for work schemes went up from 38% to 55% in working Unions.

The baseline survey reveals that not a single Union Parishad produced a participatory 5-year plan or displayed a 5 year plan in public for citizens prior to JATRA. Plans were produced by UP councilors only, confined in paper files, and never evaluated how much was achieved.

Participatory UP Evaluation: As stated in LGSP guidelines, the top 75% of best scoring UPs, divided into three performance groups, will receive the PBGs on a graded scale. The best 25% will get a 30% top-up on their BBG allocation; the 2nd 25% of UPs will get a 20% top-up on their BBG allocation; and the 3rd 25% will get a 10% top-up on their BBG allocation.

JATRA has adopted a tool developed by CARE Bangladesh to facilitate a six-monthly participatory performance evaluation of Union Parishad elected representatives, with the objectives of fostering self-responsibility by UP members and accountability to the public. This process is very effective as the UP is able to clearly link their performance with their 5 year vision for development set by themselves, along with tracking the requirements for obtaining a performance grant. Citizen Forum members score UP councilors from the view of community members, and these scores are compared with UP councilors scored themselves. This holds the councilors accountable to scoring themselves in a realistic and evidence-based fashion.

This activity has led to: enhanced positive competition amongst UP representatives; a positive mindset among UP chairpeople and members to ensure accountability; responsiveness for the implementation of planned activities within the stipulated time; and increased participation of the leaders from the poorest and marginalized communities. The LGSP audit report reveals the performance ratings have gradually increased; the audit team from LGSP rated JATRA Ups at an average of 14 in 2014-15, which increased to 17 in 2015-16. In other words, 6 JATRA Union Parishads obtained a performance block grant in 2014-15, which has gone up to 9 in 2015-16.

Ward Committees (WCs) and Scheme Supervision Committees:

As articulated in LGSP, there will be two committees at the UP level for scheme implementation of LGSP block grant-funded projects: a Ward Committee and a Scheme Supervision Committee. The Ward Committee is responsible for the organization of local level planning sessions through Ward Shavas and will assist communities in developing their local plans. The SSC supervises the implementation of projects in terms of quality, quantity and timeliness, as indicated in the approved procurement and implementation plan.

The Citizen Forum members assist respective ward members in organizing the Ward Shava meetings, settings up the two required committees. In many cases, the Citizen Forum members serve directly on these Ward-level committees.

The monitoring report reveals that these committees are now active in all JATRA UPs. Within them, 57% of the Ward Committee members and 43% of the Scheme Supervision Committee members are from poor communities and are members of Citizen Forums. Among these, 62% are male and 32% are female.

Base line data revealed that, prior to JATRA, these committees (where they existed) were mostly made up of the family members of the UP chairmen and UP members, with the poor and marginalized getting little opportunity.

Social Audits: In order to ensure that UPs are accountable for the quality of projects they implement with their LGSP II block grants, CARE supported communities to run Social Audits, organized by Citizen Forums. The purpose of the Social Audits was to improve the implementation of schemes, so that the process becomes more effective, efficient and transparent and that the full benefits of the projects reach the larger community.

The monitoring report reveals that all 15 Union Parishads performed Social Audits, on a total of 30 pieces of public infrastructure funded by LGSP-II grants. The major projects that had Social Audits performed on them were: community U-drains, pond side-guard walls, box culverts, ring pipes, and clinic boundary walls. A total of 105 poor and extremely poor people (75 male and 30 female) actively participated as Social Audit team members from the 15 Union Parishads. In the public hearing meetings at the end of each Social Audit, a total of 8,273 community people (4,423 men and 3,850 women) participated and observed the overall findings of the Social Audits. Social Audits brought attention to UP members toward design inconsistencies, budget inadequacy, and incompleteness of work, which occurred in some cases. This process has made Ups more accountable for finding solutions, including mobilizing a large number of local citizens in volunteer labor, as part of their shared responsibility to work for completion of the scheme that provide a wider social benefit.

Community Score Card: To understand the perception of citizens on the use of LGSP grants, Community Score Card were used to measure the satisfaction of citizens. All 15 Union Parishads have done the exercise of the Community Score Card for observing the status of BBGs (Basic Block Grants) and PBGs (Performance Block Grants), looking at the sectoral allocations as well as the use of the money of the block grants following the LGSP guidelines. A total of 105 poor and extremely poor people (75 male and 30 female) actively participated as Community Score Card team members from the 15 Union Parishads.



Community score card session on LGSP block grant in Kalsirambelpukur UP

From the CSC process it became clear that the councilors tend to look at the schemes based on the degree to which they have met the requirements of LGSP (how they have met audit criteria). On the other hand, the citizens/users tended to take the perspective of the overall social benefit, quality of work, design and budget, when evaluating the schemes. In order to increase the satisfaction of both citizens and councilors, recommendations from the CSC processes included the schemes of IT were unilaterally decided upon by UP councilors, this should be selected only via public discussion at wardshava. The satisfaction levels related to LGSP-funded schemes are different between UP councilors and citizens, LGSP should work to close the gaps and citizen views should be given to priority. The options for sectoral allocations should be thoroughly shared and explained with all UP councillors and citizens (especially to women, who appear to have less information).

Information Sharing on Hat Days through Folk Songs:

The JATRA team hired a local expert, a trainer on people's theatre and folk songs, who trained six local cultural teams from the three respective Upazilas of Saidpur, Kishoregonj and Polashbari in Nilphamari and Gaibandha districts.



Folk song performance in Kalsirambelpukur

The content of the folk song included key messages on the right to information, importance of citizen engagement in Ward Shavas and open budget meetings, social accountability for improved service delivery, the availability of the UP digital information center for access to information, and taxation as a citizen obligation. The purpose was dissemination of inclusive messages for public awareness about inclusive governance.

The trained six local cultural teams staged 60 performances, each of 40 minutes duration, in the Upazilas of Saidpur, Kishoregonj and Polashbari. A large number of people (a total of about 41,148 male and 30,560 female) were observed in the performances.

Best Practices sharing through Community Radio

An interactive radio program was launched with the name of 'Sushasoner Sanglap', meaning dialogue on good governance, with Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication (BNNRC). BNNRC has made contracts with 5 community radio stations: Radio Chilhari, Radio Mohanondo, Radio Nolta, Radio Pallikontho and Radio Lokobater. These radio stations are situated in the Upazilas of Chaipai Nobabgonj, Gomoshtopur, Shibgonj, Volagat and Nachol, all outside of the JATRA coverage unions.



Interactive Community Radio Program on Participatory Planning

Under the 'Sushasoner Sanglap' radio program, two magazine events were aired through each community radio station. The magazine events were titled 'Political Economy Analysis for Long-Term Planning', and 'The Importance of the Ward Shava for Pro-Poor Budgeting'. Under these events, the local government representatives and members of Citizen Forums from Bothlagari and Harinathpur unions shared their experiences, which were recorded and replayed in each radio station, followed by live reflections from local government representatives who reside adjacent to the radio stations, then followed by open call-in questions and answers to citizens. The total potential audience was three million in 5 districts.



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