

CASE STUDY 3

STORIES OF INFLUENCE

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Background

The Bangladesh government allocates a significant portion of its annual budget on public procurement. This huge investment, if not managed efficiently, can result in substandard output, cost overrun and project implementation delays. The Public Procurement Reform Project II, funded by the World Bank and implemented by the Central Procurement Technical Unit (CPTU) with assistance from the BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD), sought to increase the transparency of the public procurement process and make the relevant actors adhere to higher standards of accountability. Citizen engagement has been introduced into the monitoring of public procurement as a way to ensure greater accountability and transparency and subsequently increase the quality and deliverance of public goods and services. The outstanding challenge is to devise a citizen engagement strategy that offers sustainability, in terms of cost efficiency, and potential replicability of the strategy in wider societal contexts. Through citizen engagement, the government seeks to promote greater inclusion of its citizens in the governance and development process.

Implementation of the pilot project for citizen engagement in the monitoring of public procurement took place from January – November, 2016. The strategy devised by BIGD included establishment of Citizen Committees, complimented by local community mobilization near project sites. The study sites included Rangpur (Sadar and Mithapukur Upazila) and Sirajganj (Sadar and Belkuchi Upazila). The BIGD pilot strategy focused exclusively on the implementation stage, i.e. construction and maintenance, of the procurement process. BIGD, with support from its partner NGOs ESDO (Rangpur) and ASOD (Sirajganj), organized rigorous training workshops for the Citizen Committees before the monitoring exercises commenced. Furthermore, the local community engagement was ensured through extensive awareness campaigns by local LGED officials and the Citizen Committees.

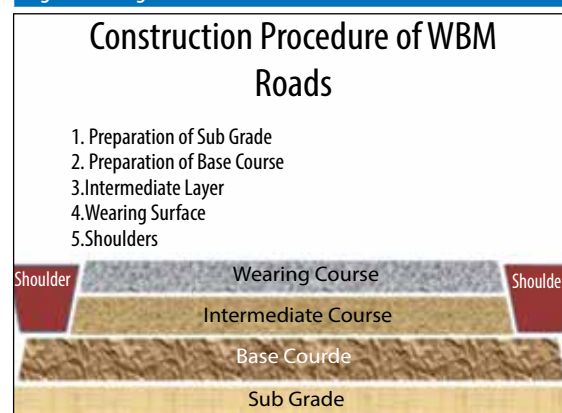
This citizen engagement strategy aimed to address few major challenges, chief among them the quality of project implementation. The main reason for implementing a pilot project was to identify which strategy or combination of strategies work best in creating successful citizen engagement. By allowing the common public to get involved in monitoring project implementation as a *third eye*, the government hopes to address the issue of quality assurance and accountability of relevant parties.

The experiences gained from this pilot project shed light on both the successes and the challenges that remain. This case study highlights stories from the pilot project in terms of the level of success of the citizen engagement strategy. While these stories bring to light the accomplishments of the piloting exercise, they also reveal the challenges that require attention to further improve the process of citizen engagement in public procurement.

Citizen Engagement Strategy

The citizen engagement strategy, carried out by BIGD, involved monitoring of the implementation stage of public projects. The Citizen Committees were advised to make routine site visits and monitor whether the construction or maintenance works were being implemented according to the approved specifications.

Figure 1: Stages of Road Construction



In case of the construction of roads, visits were made at 5 stages of construction: construction of sub-grade, construction of sub-base, construction of base (Intermediate layer), preparation of wearing course and construction of shoulders. In

case of the construction of schools, citizens visited the project sites at 4 stages of construction: box cutting, construction of base, construction of grade beam and construction of roof. However, in some cases, the Citizen Committees chose to visit the construction sites more than four times.

Beyond the pre-planned Citizen Committee visits, the local community near the project sites also participated in the monitoring of construction works. Due to their close proximity to project sites, the local community could monitor construction on projects more frequently. Citizens were provided with a checklist, as a guide to monitor different aspects of the construction project during their visits and were encouraged to report any discrepancies in the work process. Citizens directly contacted local LGED officials or reported to either the partner NGOs or BIGD.

Stories of Influence

Shaluabhita Road, Sirajganj			
Type of Road	Length	Construction duration	Budget
Union road, RCC road construction	130 meters	05.04.2016 – 30.05.2016	BDT 104,555



The Shaluabhita road construction commenced in early April, 2016 and from the beginning there were major concerns expressed by the Citizen Committee as well as by the local community about the quality of construction. The contractors, perhaps in an attempt to economize on cost, purchased construction materials that were below the standard as indicated in the specification. There was an added issue of local community's lack of trust in relation to Citizen Committee members' motives/interest to sincerely monitor the contractors. The local community members feared that the Citizen Committee would be driven by narrow interests

of certain factions of the community and may not act on behalf of the community as a whole.

On their first visit, during the sub-base stage of construction, the Citizen Committee inspected and noted that the *khowa* or brick chips being used in the construction were not of the size and quality that was stated in the project specifications. The Citizen Committee members notified the contractors about this issue during their visit. However, due to the unavailability of bigger brick chips, the contractors had to compromise and use a larger number of the smaller chips for construction.

During the construction of the base, there were similar issues, where the Citizen Committee found that the number of rods being used in the construction did not match the numbers mentioned in the specifications. The contractors refused to increase the numbers of the rods but later due to the vigorous and persistent objections raised by the Citizen Committee, they were eventually compelled to bring in more rods.

During the preparation of the wearing course, local community members and the contractors got embroiled in conflicts following an inspection, by the former, of the mixture of sand and cement prepared for the casting of the road. According to the local community, the proportion of sand and cement in the mixture was not correct. The local community also found that the contractors were filling the bed of the road with poor quality (light weight and hollowed) brick chips. There were further objections by the local community regarding preferential use of better quality brick chips on certain portion of the roads to please the influential individuals of the community. Compromises with the quality of materials being used and inappropriate work methods also led to physical altercations between some members of the local community and the contractors. The construction was halted for some time due to this and the local LGED engineer had to intervene to bring the conflict to an end and resume the work.

Following the altercation, it was decided that a monitor, chosen from the local community, would be stationed at the project site during

the working hours. This was done to prevent the contractors from again being noncompliant of the standards in relations to materials and work methods. The contractors also agreed to discharge the laborers who got into physical altercations with the local community. The contractors also assured the Citizen Committee and the local community that the lower quality construction material would be replaced by standard ones.

Jagadispur Government Primary School (GPS), Rangpur			
Type of School	Dimensions	Construction duration	Budget
GPS	Length:45ft Width: 30ft	26.04.16 – 15.10.16	BDT 47,50,900



The Citizen Committee began monitoring the construction activities at Jagadispur GPS in April, 2016. They monitored the construction work until the completion date in October. During the construction period, the Citizen Committees first met and consulted with the headmaster and other members of the School Management Committee (SMC) of the school. The Citizen Committees encouraged the SMC members to monitor construction process and highlighted the importance of citizens' oversight.

On their first visit, during the box cutting stage of construction, the Citizen Committee, along with the SMC members monitored the box cutting process. The inclusion of a retired engineer in the Citizen Committee helped the other Committee members to better comprehend the technicalities involved in the monitoring box cutting process.

The Committee carefully monitored whether

the box cutting was done correctly. Using a measuring tape, the Committee also checked the length of the vertical rods used in the construction of the base. There were some major concerns about the construction work at this stage. The Citizen Committee noted that the height of the base layout was not in conformity with the specifications. The Citizen Committee immediately contacted the Deputy Assistant Engineer via cell phone to let him know about their observation.

During their second visit, the Citizen Committee faced criticism from the District LGED official. He questioned the need for the Citizen Committee, arguing that the citizens did not have the technical knowledge to monitor construction work and hence, their complaints could not be trusted. The contractors working on this school project also voiced concerns about the engagement of citizens, saying that it was unnecessary and that it would lead to delay in construction.

Following this criticism by the LGED officials, the partner NGO, in this case ESDO, had to intervene and together with the Citizen Committee explained to the LGED representative as to why citizen engagement in technical projects is possible and also would contribute to efficient outcomes in construction works. The Citizen Committee made it clear that they had sufficient knowledge to carry out the monitoring activities. Due to this open discussion, the LGED representative was able to understand the role of the Citizen Committee and agreed to fully cooperate and provide any assistance needed to the members.

On their following visits, the Citizen Committee discussed the correct mixture of cement, brick chips and sand required for the construction (1 bag of cement, 6 pans of brick chips and 3 pans of sand) with the LGED representatives. The Committee members found that the contractors were not following the specifications. Upon inspection of the roof on their fifth visit, the Committee found that the casting was not leveled properly. Additionally, the contractors began working on the construction of the roof without

notifying the SMC or the Citizen Committee as it was decided during their previous visit.

The LGED representatives intervened and the contractors were asked to correct any mistakes before proceeding further with the construction work. The LGED representatives played a crucial mediating role between the Citizen Committee and the contractors in order to prevent possible conflicts between them. After the completion of the school construction, both the LGED representatives and the SMC members expressed gratitude towards the Citizen Committee for their engagement in the monitoring process and thereby, improving the quality of construction.

Ajugara Bazaar to Doulotpur Motin Market Road, Sirajganj			
Type of Road	Length	Construction duration	Budget
Village road	3 kilo-meters	15.03.2016-15.08.2016	BDT 1,97,00,000



Construction work on the Ajugara Bazaar to Doulotpur Motin Market village road entailed upgradation of the existent *kachha* road to a *pacca* road. Due to excessive flooding at the project site, construction had to be halted after sand filling during the construction of the base. Therefore, the citizen committee was not able to monitor the entire cycle of the road construction. Unlike in other project locations, the Committee was able to make only two visits to the construction site of the road.

Apart from the issues of water logging, the Committee found out that there were other major issues of accountability regarding this project, particularly as a result of political influence. The contractor responsible for

this construction work was being politically influential and highly powerful, as perceived by the members of the community, as well as by the LGED officials. This discouraged the local LGED officials from intervening in the construction work even when the work done by the contractor was noncompliant to the specifications.

Even in this politically unfavorable and non-cooperative environment, the Committee was able to identify several mistakes in the construction of the road. The members noted that the height of the road was less than what it was specified to be. There were further issues regarding the rolling of the base after the sand filling stage. The Citizen Committee reached out to the LGED office to file complaints. However, the LGED representatives were mostly non-responsive. The Committee reported that no actions were taken against the contractor to address those mistakes.

Such stories of political influences that compromised the quality of works were noticed in several other project locations, indicating the challenges involved in citizen monitoring.

The Citizen Committee found it difficult to intervene in the Kandapara GPS project in Sirajganj, where a two storied building was being constructed for the school. As in the case of the Ajugara Bazaar to Doulotpur Motin Market village road, the contractor was a politically influential and powerful member of the community. Furthermore, the contractor was also the donor of the land in which the school was being built. The Citizen Committee visited the school construction site twice. However, they were unable to carry out their routine monitoring activities. The contractor claimed that this project was already subject to citizen oversight and therefore, there was no further need for the involvement of the Citizen Committee.

Fulkucha GPS, Rangpur			
Type of School	Dimensions	Construction duration	Budget
GPS	Length:81 ft Width: 32 ft	05.04.16 – 23.09.16	BDT 48,12,877



The Fulkucha GPS was monitored by the Citizen Committee from the first stage of construction. The Committee had an initial consultation with the LGED Upazila engineer about the specifications of the project. The Committee members noted that the LGED representatives were cooperative and offered to assist with the monitoring activities.

Due to delays in the starting date of construction, the Citizen Committee was able to monitor the project only until the construction of the grade beam and columns. The project was still ongoing when the Committee ended their monitoring activities.

On their first visit to the school construction site, the Citizen Committee met with the SMC members and some members of the local community. The Citizen Committee briefed the community about their monitoring activities, focusing on specific aspects of the construction work that they would be monitoring. The local community was enthusiastic about participating, stating that they wanted to ‘keep an eye’ so that they are able to know whether their neighborhood school was being constructed properly.

The Citizen Committee, along with the local community, found that the contractor was using two qualities of sand for construction, perhaps in an attempt to reduce cost of raw materials. The Citizen Committee and the SMC promptly notified the LGED office about the low quality sand being used by the construction workers. Even though the LGED representatives gave a delayed response to the complaints, their eventual intervention forced the contractor to replace the low quality sand. The Citizen

Committee claimed that greater engagement of the SMC further discouraged the contractor from using low quality construction materials. The overall quality of construction was improved and greater accountability was established due to the joint engagement of the local citizens and the responsible authority (LGED).

Paglarhaat to Udaypur Bazaar Road, Rangpur

Type of Road	Length	Construction duration	Budget
Village road	1 kilometer	20.03.2016-10.09.2016	BDT 52,15,703



The Paglarhaat to Udaypur Bazaar road was one of the projects chosen, in consultation with the Upazila LGED officials, for citizen engagement in monitoring of the construction work. The village road, according to the specifications, was one kilometer long to be constructed in Mahiyarpur village in the Chengmari Union of Rangpur.

After the construction of the road began, the citizen committee members made their first visit in the project site during the sub-grade stage of the construction. During the visit, they found that there was no signboard at the site detailing the project specifications. As a result, the local community was not aware of the construction work. The Citizen Committee collected the information from the contractor’s representative and held a briefing session where they informed the community about the project specifications. Few key indicators of road construction monitoring were also discussed during that informal briefing.

During the second visit, the Citizen Committee found that the brick chips being used in the

construction were not of the size as stated in the specification. The ratio of brick chips to sand was also incorrect. The Committee discussed this problem with the construction manager who was responsible for the implementation. The manager promised to fix the problem before proceeding further with their work. The Committee did not lodge any official complaint at LGED. However, the LGED officials were informally notified of the mistake and the actions that the manager promised to take to correct them.

During this course of construction work, the local community took initiative to get engaged in the monitoring process. They found that the contractor did not address the issues that the Citizen Committee had previously identified regarding the mixture of the bricks and sand. They notified LGED officials about this during their inspection visit.

Finding that the contractor had taken no attempt in fixing the problems, the local community halted the construction work. The Citizen Committee intervened during their third visit. They played a mediating role to solve the conflict between the local community and the contractor. It was decided that the contractor would resume construction work after addressing the mistakes that were identified.

This incident illustrates one of the few cases where the process of site specific community based citizen engagement itself acted as a triggering factor for improvement in

construction work, without any significant involvement of the LGED officials.

Conclusion

Citizen engagement, by providing oversight or a 'third eye' over the implementation of government projects, is a way to achieve greater transparency and accountability of public procurement. The PPRP II experience demonstrates that this can be achieved through the involvement of pro-active citizens who tend to have greater sense of ownership over the projects.

The challenge lies in creating a positive synergy among citizens, government authorities and implementers (contractors) to reap the maximum benefits in terms of quality assurance and accountability of relevant authorities. One of the major successes of this project has been in generating interest among local citizens and motivating them to get involved to ensure quality of projects in their community. Similar success, however, has not been achieved in creating a collaborative relationship among the citizens, LGED officials and the contractors. During the implementation of this pilot project, local LGED officials and contractors questioned citizen engagement, arguing that the involvement of citizens will be a hindrance to the procurement process. Future efforts of citizen engagement should aim to strengthen the relationship among these key actors for the greater goal of improving transparency, efficiency and accountability of the public procurement process.



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