

Citizen Participation in Union Parishad's Procurement: A Study on Dhulihor and Nagarghata Union Parishads

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BRAC Institute of Governance and Development
BRAC University, Dhaka

Working Paper Series
No. 23, December 2014

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Design & Printing

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Published by

BRAC Institute of Governance and Development
BRAC University

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Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Dr. Tofail Ahmed for his helpful comments. I want to take this opportunity to thank Mr. Mahmudul Alam Talukdar for assisting me during data collection. I would like to extend my thanks to all the respondents of this study for their valuable time.

About Author

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

CE	Citizen Engagement
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GoB	Government of Bangladesh
KII	Key Informants Interview
LG	Local Government
LGD	Local Government Division
LGED	Local Government Engineering Department
LGSP	Local Government Support Project
PP	Public Procurement
PPR	Public Procurement Rules
RTI	Right to Information
SSC	Scheme Supervision Committee
UNO	Upazila Nirbahi Officer
UP	Union Parishad
WC	Ward Committee
WS	Ward Sabha

Glossary

Chowkidar	Watchman/Gatekeeper
Mastan	Hooligans
Pourashava	Municipality
Sabha	Meeting
Union Parishad	Union Parishad is the oldest and lowest local government system of Bangladesh.

Abstract

Public procurement is one of the key economic activities of government and its outcome is evident before the people down to the grassroots. At the local government level it is believed that Procurement of goods and services is one of the key areas where local people are directly affected by its consequences. Nowadays social accountability initiatives have become a buzz word in development literature, which ultimately develop a consensus that civic engagement is essential for public accountability. Thus monitoring of Public Procurement by civil society is essential to make the public procurement process transparent and corruption free. This study tries to look the ins and outs of Citizen Engagement in Union Parishad's Procurement. It has documented the practices of citizen participation in development activities, particularly in formulating and implementing Union Parishads' annual development plan/scheme. This study has also investigated the challenges of citizen participation in implementation phase of development works of Union Parishad. Based on the evidence from the field, this study argued that it is necessary to make a congenial environment that will enable citizens and civil society organisations to engage in development processes in a sustained manner.

Keywords

Union Pariashad, Citizen Engagement, Ward Sabha, Open Budget Session, Procurement, Development Plan.

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"Open and inclusive policy making offers a way for governments to improve their policy performance by working with citizens, civil society organisations (CSOs), businesses and other stakeholders to deliver concrete improvements in policy outcomes and the quality of public services" (OECD 2009).

1. Introduction

All governments have the obligation to provide essential services to their citizens. Public procurement¹ (PP) is one of the key economic activities of a government, which addresses the needs of citizens and its outcome is evident before the people down to the grassroots. Thus, citizens need to understand the importance of PP and how they can participate in ensuring that public funds are well spent. At the local government level it is believed that PP is one of the principle areas where local people are directly affected by its consequences. Government of any country carries out procurement by using citizens' money. Citizens, therefore have an obvious role in it. Citizen participation in PP (from need assessment to implementation) can help governments better understand people's needs, leverage a wider pool of information and resources, improve compliance, reduce the risk of conflict, prevent corruption in public expenditures and establish transparency and accountability in procurement process (OECD 2009). The main contribution of public participation is thus enhancing citizens' ownership in the development processes, increasing the sense of citizenship, and resulting in better implementation of development programmes.

In Bangladesh, a Union Parishad² (UP) exercises control over its resources and money (LGSP Block Grant) and procure many things by using this money as part of its development work including construction and rehabilitation of roads, culverts, drainage and embankment systems, earth filling and piling, canal digging, etc. The objective of this procurement is to provide quality goods and services to grass-root people according to their need, in order to improve the economic and social condition of those people. It is therefore essential to deliver these procured goods and services at the time, in the exact quantity and with proper quality as specified in the procurement document. An effective pro-people procurement process might be able to ensure that they are getting quality services through this procurement.

This study thus intends to explore the reality of citizens' participation in the development plan/procurement as well as monitoring development activities/scheme implementation at Union Parishads (UP) of Bangladesh. In order to fulfil the objective, this paper tries to find out the answer of the following research questions: (i) What is the degree of Citizen Engagement (CE) in UP's procurement/development plan? (ii) What are the main factors responsible for CE in UP's procurement/development plan? (iii) What is the role of UPs in engaging citizens in procurement process/development plan? (iv) What are the challenges of engaging citizens in UP's procurement/development plan?

Thus the present study tries to look at the ins and outs of Citizen Engagement (CE) in Union Parishad's (UP) procurement. It documents the practices of citizen participation in

1. It refers to the purchasing of goods and services in the right quality, from the right source and the right price all to meet a specific need.
2. Union Parishad is the oldest and lowest local government system of Bangladesh.

development activities, particularly in formulating and implementing UPs' annual development plan/scheme. This study also investigates the challenges of citizen participation in implementation phase of development works of UP. Besides, the study aims to draw some way forward for making citizen participation more effective in the development schemes of UPs.

This paper is organised in the following way. Section two describes the background and research problem, third section deals with the methodology, fourth section briefly narrates the theoretical base of the study, section five deals with citizen engagement experience in Bangladesh, sixth section discusses empirical findings of the study, section seven indicates the way forward and final section is conclusion.

2. Background and research problem

Being a unitary state, Bangladesh has a long history of local government (LG) institutions for delivering services at the local level. At the lowest tier of this LG, there are Union Parishads and Upazila Parishads in rural areas, and Pourashavas/Municipalities and City Corporations in urban areas. The base of (rural) local governance in Bangladesh is the Union Parishad. These elected local government institutions are responsible for coordinating many aspects of local social and economic development in Bangladesh. Within the existing local government framework UP is an age old institution which has history about 135 years along with a long history of local democracy. Although UPs in Bangladesh have a long democratic history, they have traditionally a 'limited scope for participation' (Aminuzzaman 2010). Consequently they are also weakly accountable to their constituents. In order to make the local level administration more pro-people it needs to be transparent and accountable to its people for its responsibilities and functions. The Constitution of Bangladesh (1972) categorically emphasises the need for direct participation of the people in constituting the local body and in managing the affairs of such bodies (Chapter 3, Article 59). In line with the spirit of constitution recent local government Act (Union Parishad Act 2009) also promotes active citizenship. It goes on to state that UP need to be made accountable to the people through a system of regular village meetings as well as mandatory public display of information regarding government expenditure at all levels. Section 78 has a provision for citizens to demand public disclosure of information by the UPs. The spirit of inclusive engagement between citizens and the UP might deepen the values of local democracy as well as ensuring pro-people procurement process. Moreover, the UP Act 2009 mandated organising Open Discussion Ward Sabha (meeting) twice in each financial year for each ward of the UP for promoting citizen involvement in development activities at local level. However, this sacred attempt will only be helpful when procurement notices as well as details of contracts awarded are posted on a notice board outside the Union Headquarters - a busy area frequented by the local population. It would ensure that the local citizens are able to observe the procurement process and its outcomes, and thus hold their leaders accountable. However, it should be mentioned that public participation in purely local government led programmes is still limited. Moreover, in the years following the adoption of the UP Act (2009), the spirit of people's participation in local government bodies has not always been adequately maintained.

3. Methodology

This working paper on citizen engagement in UPs's procurement process is based on primary data. In order to fulfil the objectives, this study specifically focused on two UPs, namely Dhulihor and Nagarghata located in Satkhira district, in the south-western part of Bangladesh. The study was carried out in May 2013 and July 2014 that included intensive field visits, discussions with UP officials, communities, reviewing UP documents and visiting projects implemented by Local Government Support Project (LGSP) funds. Data was collected through Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and Key Informants Interview (KII). The participants of FGD were elected public representatives, government officials including those working in Dhulihor Union Parishad and Nagarghata Union Parishad. KII was taken thorough structured questionnaire with the chairman of both UPs, and representatives of monitoring bodies who are directly involved with this project.

4. Conceptualising citizen engagement in this study

Nowadays social accountability initiatives have become a buzz word in development literature, which ultimately develop a consensus that civic engagement is essential for public accountability. The role of civic engagement towards the quality of governance has been highlighted by a number of researchers (Adler and Goggin 2005; Zlatareva 2008; Sharma 2009). In a democratic country citizens have both rights and duties to participate actively in shaping their world. From this point of view, social accountability is a prominent intervention for "increased development effectiveness, improved governance and empowerment" (Malena et al 2004 cited in Sharker and Hasan 2010). Such a platform offers more transparency and accountability to the stakeholders and strengthens inclusive governance, ultimately leading to good governance. Public procurement is one of the most powerful economic activities of any government and the citizens are directly affected by inefficiency and corruption in its process. Thus monitoring of PP by civil society is essential to prevent the leakage of public funds (Simone and Shah 2012). In 2008 OECD member countries collectively recognised the need to 'empower civil society organisations, media and the wide public to scrutinise public procurement'. The logic behind this intervention is that supervision of the works of public procurement by the stakeholders may significantly improved procurement governance.

Further, their feedback on project quality can be useful for applying pressure to improve work quality. In the context of procurement, participation entails access to information and decision-making, monitoring of the procurement process and access to justice in case of disaffection with the process (Okello 2012). Public participation in procurement is thus critical for a transparent, responsive, accountable and competitive procurement process. But meaningful engagement may only happen when civil society/citizens and government come to a win-win situation and try to understand each other's perspectives, so that they can achieve the stated goal. Another important thing is that meaningful engagement needs citizens to be treated as partners in the decision-making process. Therefore, it is necessary to form an oversight group with the consultation of different stakeholders. Engagement, on the other hand, is a process of constant interchange between citizens (or non-citizens) and the state. It is about designing and implementing socio-economic programmes that affect particular communities or groups of people especially it needs bottom-up participation. So it is not simply an act that must happen before a valid legal decision is taken (Chenwi and

Tissington 2010). The meaningful engagement process thus needs certainty of constitutional obligations from government side to be operational in practice.

5. Citizen engagement practice in development project: Bangladesh

With the Reinventing Government and New Public Management (NPM) movements of the past two decades, inclusive governance has become a buzzword in development literature. Savra and Denhardt (2010) argue that active citizen participation in planning, policymaking, implementation, and service delivery is required in order to make the local level governance effective and efficient. Since Bangladesh is a democratic country and her Constitution promotes a kind of democracy that is representative and participatory, it somewhat makes provision for individuals and communities to take part in service delivery processes and decisions. Proponents of development literature therefore, now are raising their voice to promote citizen engagement in various aspects of national life including PP. Through passing the Right to Information (RTI) Act in 2009 the Government of Bangladesh has acknowledged its citizens' right to know public information which ultimately promotes active citizen participation in service provision or government action.

Traditionally the process of PP of Bangladesh had exclusively been confined to the government procuring entities and the members of the private bidding communities like contractors, suppliers and intellectual service providers since the British era. In other words, there is very little scope of participation for common people in decision making or management and the community as a whole or particular stakeholders are not concerned about the quality and sustainability of the public works. However, in line with the practice of RTI Act, Government of Bangladesh (GoB) intends to engage Third Party Monitoring in PP in order to make PP more transparent, participatory, efficient, effective and accountable. The idea of citizen engagement in PP in Bangladesh is mooted in the fourth component of the Public Procurement Reform Project-II titled 'Communication, Behavioural Change and Social Accountability'. Based on the concept of active citizenship it is believed that people would perceive what is important to them, engage in problem-solving and decision making in order to make a difference in their surroundings.

The provision of citizen engagement has started in Bangladesh through donor driven project namely, 'Reaching out of School Children and Rural Development Programmes'. However, citizen engagement for monitoring public procurement in Bangladesh is a relatively new concept. Although not so extensive, latest Public Procurement Act (2006) and Public Procurement Rules (2009) (PPR) have opened up new possibilities for more transparent and accountable procurement in Bangladesh. It is also evident that over the last two decades some public sectors started opening up space for citizen engagement in some of their projects either in design or in implementation phase out of sheer necessity. It also provides formal arrangements for the engagement of beneficiary groups of those particular projects.

For instance, the Water Development Board (WDB) finds some space for civic engagement in the operation and maintenance of drainage and irrigation channel construction, repair and maintenance of embankments by different associations formed by and under the board. Fair Election Monitoring Alliance (FEMA) in election monitoring, social forestry in afforestation project, Urban Governance Project of LGED, Community Health Clinic of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, National Environment Management Programme (NEMAP) are

some examples of attempts to engage citizens in different ways. Water Management Cooperative Association (WMCA), Market Management Committee (MMC) and School Management Committee (SMC) are also other examples of citizens engagement in Bangladesh.

5.1 Local government support project and citizen participation in union parishad

Since its inception, UPs in Bangladesh have experimented with a series of new approaches and institutional framework for addressing its governance issues. One of such initiatives is the Sirajganj Local Governance Development Fund Project (SLGDFFP) which later inspired the Government of Bangladesh to launch a new project called 'Local Governance Support Project (LGSP)'. With the new trend towards decentralisation of government functions, LGSP has emerged which promotes transparency and accountability in local government through effective oversight by citizen. Through the commencement of the LGSP programme the government aimed to practice good local governance through fiscal decentralisation as well as support the UPs to develop as pro-people and accountable public institutions with enhanced service delivery capacity. Being encouraged by the success of the LGSP, GoB and World Bank jointly started its second phase LGSP II to provide UPs with incentives to engage in open planning and budgeting and publicly disclose information about audits, plans, budgets and procurement (World Bank 2011). Under this project, community voice in local development was brought to the forefront by empowering inclusive community bodies at the ward and lower levels through Ward Sabhas (WS) and Standing Committees (ibid). The goal of LGSP is to enhance UPs' capacity through self regulation and bring accountability in local governance through citizen participation in Bangladesh.

The development objective of the LGSP is to strengthen inclusive and accountable institutions of local governance, through empowering communities to make choices on their development priorities and basic local services needs, and empowering local governments to respond to community priorities. This allows the UPs to allocate funds according to their own priorities, provided that stringent requirements for community participation, transparency and regular reporting and auditing are met. Through a highly focused communication strategy, LGSP II aimed to ensure that basic information on local governance issues is provided to the general public. Of the components³ of LGSP, component-two is about institutionalising local accountability. This component of the project aims to strengthen systems of downward and upward accountability as well as improve transparency through better information flows. In order to improve transparency, LGSP II is going to ensure that information related to UPs is made publicly available. UPs are expected to publicly disclose their annual audit reports, procurement activities, and annual financial statements. In accordance with the provisions of the RTI Act (2009), UPs are also expected to provide citizens in their jurisdictions with access to six-monthly reports, procurement documents, and other information about UP activities.

Finally, in order to enhance public participation in UP activities, the project encourages UPs to 'activate' their Standing Committees and to ensure that their WS are fully operational. The LGSP-II is implemented by the UPs and communities in a participatory process. Each WS is obliged to discuss needs of the communities in open meetings, establish Ward Committees⁴

3. LGSP II has five components. The components are: (a) fiscal Transfer; (b) accountability to citizen; (c) local government capacity building; (d) policy evaluation and (e) social protection pilot in 15 unions.

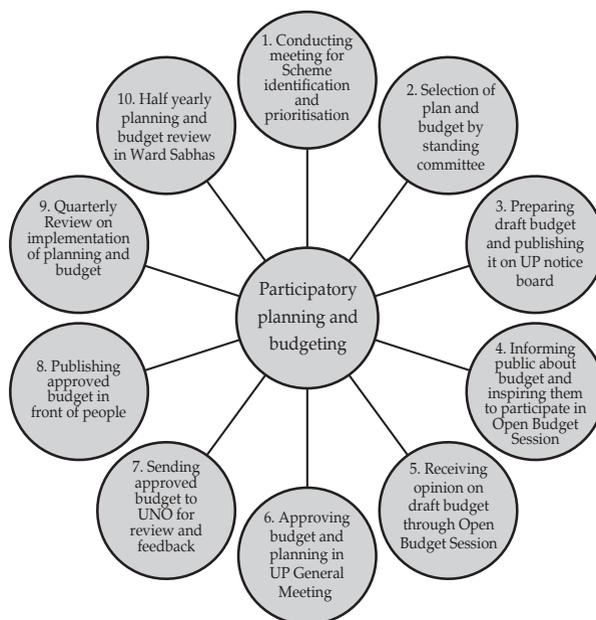
4. Consists of 7 members including respective female/male ward member, two UP members, one school teacher, two social workers, one representative of NGO or Civil Society, one freedom fighter or his/her children or general citizen.

(WC) and prioritise schemes. Later, open budget meetings would be organised by UP for finalisation of schemes and budget. LGD is also drafting a Local Governance Communication Strategy for enhancing citizen participation in programme development, implementation and monitoring. In this regard, Simone and Shah (2012) assert that though it is not a necessary precondition but a precise legal mandate, it is a strong incentive for civil society participation in monitoring government procurement, because it provides some guarantee that the monitors will be granted access to information and that their involvement will be respected and facilitated by both government officials and bidders. In this backdrop the present study is an attempt of narrating experience of citizens' involvement in UP's development activities. This study examined both UPs deeply in order to find out the existing practice of citizen engagement in UP development plan and procurement and to point out ins and outs of such practice.

6. Level of participation and citizen engagement in union parishad development works: experiences of Dhulihor and Nagarghata union parishad

Participatory development planning: According to UP Operational Manual, UP has full authority to procure goods/works/services for its people. It also asserts that UP will make its five year plan and other term plans by engaging citizens in this process. Local people will identify and prioritise their needs in WS development plan meetings and these needs will be incorporated in five year development plans and other term plans. According to this provision, each ward of UP will organise WS for getting the development scheme from its locale. Then each WC will make a comprehensive list on the basis of the public demand and submit it to the UP. Lastly, the UP will make the final list and approve the local development plan based on the priority addressed by the community in the WS. In order to implement this development plan UP will use its own fund and LGSP block grant. It is the duty of the UP to publish the amount of LGSP grant in front of UP office premise. Finally after approval of five year plan and annual plan UP will circulate the list of development work through UP notice board, LGSP website and other important places of the ward.

Figure 1: Participatory development planning and budgeting in UP



Union Parishad procurement under LGSP II: Under LGSP II it has been mandated that UP Chairman, Secretary, Ward Members, Ward Committee and Tender Evaluation Committee and Scheme Supervision Committee⁵ (SSC) will play significant roles in UP procurement. In line with the PPR 2008 UP operational manual has adopted its procurement policy for LGSP II. In order to maintain proper procurement rules and regulations, chairman will be conscious in procuring and implementing schemes, members of WC and SSC will be responsible for scheme selection, implementation and supervision, secretary will be responsible for preparing, processing and maintain procurement related documents and members of UP will be responsible for observing the methods of procurement. Under LGSP II, UP can apply Direct Procurement method, Request for Quotation method, Community Procurement method and Open Tender method for procurement. Procurement related committees under LGSP II:

- a. Ward Committee (WC)
- b. Tender Evaluation Committee
- c. Scheme Supervision Committee (SSC)

Publish procurement related document in front of local people: UP will circulate summary of procurement related information (name of scheme, amount of allocated money for this scheme, method of procurement, etc.) in public places i.e. government office, court, bazaar, bus stand, railway, launch/steamer station, community centre and respective area of the particular scheme as well as in the UP bill board at its premises. Moreover, UP will also place a bill board in the respective areas containing of name and description of upcoming and ongoing schemes, its primary budget, end date, and name and address of contractor. Name of SSC members will also be included in this bill board.

Grievance redressal mechanism for procurement: There is provision that any person can lodge complains against ongoing procurement process in order to ensure accountability of schemes under LGSP II. UP will place a bill board in a public place containing information regarding grievance mechanism and name and address of concerned personnel to whom local people can lodge complain.

In next two sections two case studies on Dhulihor and Nagarghata UP are being illustrated in order to present the scenario of citizens' engagement in development plan i.e. procurement of UP in Bangladesh.

6.1 Dhulihor union parishad

It has become a culture of Dhulihor Union Parishad to make its yearly development plan through local people's participation. The development plan of Dhulihor Union basically includes local infrastructure development programmes, construction of earthen roads, brick roads, pitch roads, small bridges and culverts, earth filling and piling, reconstruction of mosque, temple and other public places. In fiscal year 2012-2013 Dhulihor Union has organised 18 Ws, one Open Budget Session, one pre-open budget dialogue, one open budget preparation dialogue, few Ward Committee dialogues or meetings. In order to ensure transparency and accountability in its financial activity, this UP has been organising Open Budget Sessions for the last seven years. It also organises pre-budget sessions to get people's opinions regarding its development plan. In the fiscal year 2012-2013 in each ward two Ws

5. SSC is the monitoring and quality control body at ward level which is completely community committee. It consists of 7 members includes school head master, member of civil society, Sub-assistant Upazila engineer and other important person and local elite.

were held where the attendees made development plan for their respective wards. Around 5-7% of the voters attended the WS in each ward. The UP authority took various measures (circulated cards, used mikes, hung posters in public places, used village police and chowkidars to circulate the news of WS) to let the local people know about the time and venue of the WS in advance. WC of each ward fixes the agendas of the WS beforehand. This year the agenda was (i) Last year's implemented development activities and budget (ii) Plan for next year based on community demand. In WS people generally discuss about construction of roads, earth filling, piling, and human resource development problems. Ward members of Dhulihor Union opined that provision of people's participation is really helpful to plan the development work according to the local need and due to people's participation, development plan formulating process becomes more transparent than earlier.

It has been found that there is a *Samajik Uddog* Forum⁶ (Social Initiative Forum) for motivating people to participate in these activities and making them aware of their rights and responsibilities to the UP. Before LGSP project people hardly knew about the development activities of UP. In the last six years this scenario has changed. People started participating in pre-budget sessions, Open Budget Sessions and WSs. People have started asking questions to the members and chairmen of UPs and in this way accountability has been ensured. Although cent per cent of the common people are not well informed about the process of procurement but now at least they know that UP demand index will be formulated on the basis of their demand. They therefore, participate in WSs and other meetings to raise their needs and demands those they want to be materialised.

After taking people's opinions from WS, each WC of the respective ward made their own lists and submitted to the UP. In the general meeting the UP discussed all these lists and finalised the development draft based on prioritised public demand. In this process Dhulihor Union implemented various schemes by using LGSP II Block Grant, its own and other funds. The development plan includes construction of 23 brick roads and five culverts, repairing task of three mud roads and 16 religious establishments. Local citizens and ward members monitor the process at the UP level to ensure that their proposals are included in the final UP plan. If there is any deviance from their demand, they ask the chairman for clarification or justification. For instance, in a budget session one participant noticed that reconstruction of a particular road was the first priority demand from people's side whereas it has been listed as tenth priority demand in the final plan. The person raised the issue in front of the committee and asked for clarification. Chairman admitted that it was a mistake and promised to rectify the list according to people's choice as soon as possible. In this regard UP Chairman mentioned that since the UP officials are directly elected by the local people, they have to answer to their electorate if they cannot maintain the standard of the work. Such type of practice also opened windows for local level power sharing culture.

In the implementation stage of these development schemes there is also provision of participation of the beneficiary group. For the supervision of these schemes there is SSC consisting of 7 members. This study has revealed that the formation of this committee mostly depends upon the UP chairman and members. Although it is mandated to select SSC members through WS, chairman and UP members select the persons close to them in an arbitrary manner. For instance, one member of SSC of Dhulihor union informed that he has been selected by the member of ward no. 6. This study also has found it out that though there

6. Samajik Uddog Forum is a part of a local NGO in Satkhira district working for raising awareness among mass people and supervising development programmes at Union Parishad level.

is provision of holding regular SSC meeting but it is not practiced here. Members of the SSC do not meet regularly and do not discuss about the progress of the schemes among them. Some of the members even do not know who else are in the committee. Regarding activities of SSC, chairman of Dhulihor Union pointed out that if people complain against the quality of the work he takes it into consideration and asks to stop the work if it is found that quality of the work is not being maintained according to the procurement document. He continued that it is a matter of regret that those who come to WC/SSC are not fully aware of the significance of their opinion in this regard. He also added that sometimes it is also noticed that few parties try to make the quality of work worse because of rivalry with the selected contractor. So it is also necessary to think about who is monitoring the work, and how much the local monitoring body is reliable and competent for this work, because monitoring by local people sometimes hampers the progress of the work due to lack of knowledge regarding the particular issue or project or work.

However, participants of FGD mentioned that when there is any work in the village the local people keep watch since everyone wants to ensure the quality of work for their locality. This study revealed that though the common people have keen interest in undergoing development schemes, sometimes they have no knowledge about it due to absence of scheme information billboard. One participant of FGD mentioned that it is often found that UP places the billboard after completion of the scheme though it is mandated to place the information billboard before starting the work. One SSC member from the respective UP informed that they could not supervise all undergoing development schemes but still they had to sign the quality certificate for each scheme. Thus this study has found that the SSC is not very effective in this union.

Another supervision committee from *Samajik Uddog* Forum works for monitoring development schemes in this UP. Sometimes, they observe that quality and standard of work are not maintained properly and sometimes low quality construction materials have been used by the contractor. They try to inform the UP to investigate the matter properly. But the monitoring body feels helpless working in a hostile environment with scarce information and without any proper legal mandate, and has little influence in this matter. Therefore, it has been seen that detected corruption and fraud sometimes remains unheard by the concerned authority. This finding indicates that the common people and even the representatives of *Samajik Uddog* Forum are not well informed about the grievance redressal mechanism under LGSP II. As a result social monitoring and quality control activities of the projects under LGSP have not been properly maintained.

6.2 Nagarghata union parishad

Like Dhulihor UP, Nagarghata UP also has its own development plan. For its annual development plan it follows all rules suggested in UP operational manual. After the inception of LGSP community people have become powerful in terms of taking decision about local level development plans in this Union. In the fiscal year 2012-13, 18 WS, one pre-budget session and one Open Budget Session were held in Nagarghata union which is mandated in UP operational manual. In these meetings percentage of participation was 7-8 of total voters. UP and WC used mikes, posters, and village *chowkidars* to inform local people about the *sabhas* and requested them to join these programmes. As per the mandate of UP

operational manual, UP members including the chairman emphasised on people's participation in these meetings for drafting the yearly development activity plan. WC organised these *sabhas* in a populated place so that a good number of people can attend the meeting. WC of each ward fixed the agenda beforehand of the Ws. This year the agenda was (i) Last year's implemented development activities and budget (ii) Plan for next year based on community demand (iii) Special plan for the disadvantaged communities and (iv) Some safety net plans. In these Ws participants discussed about water stagnation problems, mud and brick roads construction, canal digging, water sewerage, etc. Such practice of discussion in this meeting opened doors for sharing decision by the stakeholders including UP representatives. In these Ws mass people generally discussed their problems and the WC recorded their demands. Later on, each WC of the respective union made a demand list based on the needs raised by the common people in the Ws.

Participants of FGD mentioned that sometimes chairman and members of UP try to impose their priority and try to enlist their demands in the development plan but the percentage of such manipulation has become rare now-a-days because people join these *sabhas* on regular basis and try to follow up on the progress of development plan. Overall, local people are now more aware of their needs from and duties to the UP than earlier. Thus peoples' participation through Ws compels the UP representatives to move forward in carrying out the most demanded work. Regarding formation of WC and SSC they pointed out that sometimes members of UP decide who will be in these committees. This type of manipulation hampers the spirit of people's participation at the local level.

Samajik Uddog Forum is also active in this UP and they have their own Supervision Committee to monitor the development work. One of the members of *Shamajik Uddog* Forum remarks that while overseeing brick road construction work from Trish Mile to Sharashkati areas of the respective union they noticed that low standard brick was being used for this road construction. They complained about it to the UP. As a result the contractor threatened the committee. However, the higher authority investigated the matter and issued notice for halting the work. He mentioned that in another instance the Supervision Committee of *Samajik Uddog* Forum observed that low standard bricks were also being used for brick road construction from Abdur Rashid Sarder's house to Professor Ishak Ali's house in ward no.3 of this UP. The committee informed the issue to the UP chairman and UNO. But the authority did not take any legal action against it. So they informed a local journalist of this issue and requested to publish it in the local newspaper. Unfortunately the matter was not taken into consideration and the road was constructed using those low quality bricks. One member of Supervision Committee from *Samajik Uddog* Forum complained that at the beginning of work contractors showed that they were using standard materials (bricks, sand) for the construction later they started using low quality materials for the same construction. This study revealed the fact that this Supervision Committee was not enough aware about the procedure of lodging complains under LGSP II. It also indicates that information about complain lodging procedure is not well publicised among people in this UP.

Regarding formation of SSC under LGSP II one of the local elite mentioned that members of this committee did not even know that they were in the committee. The committee consisted of the persons who were close to the UP chairman and members so they never complained even if lower quality materials were being used for the construction. In this regard the project

co-ordinator of *Aragoti Sangstha*⁷ remarked that people were not willing to monitor the project since they were not fully trained about the monitoring process of such development schemes and were not even convinced about the benefit of the monitoring. Moreover, the committee is not empowered for monitoring in real sense rather they are active only on paper and serve the purpose of providing certificate of completion to these schemes. So the SSC and UP build a patron-client relationship and hardly works for public welfare. Regarding monitoring of development work SSC secretary of this UP mentioned that though they were supposed to supervise each development scheme but due to time constraint it was not possible for the members of SSC to monitor every project. However, they try to monitor majority of them. In last year the SSC supervised two-third of total development schemes. However, it can be argued that though citizens' role in overseeing is very limited here in project implementation phase but the culture has set in due to the LGSP. Nonetheless, it is a matter of hope that many people can at least take part in WSs and Open Budget and pre-budget sessions.

The table below presents key findings of citizens' engagement from the two case studies mentioned above:

Table 1: Key findings of case study

Description	Dhulihor union parishad	Nagarghata union parishad
Number of ward <i>sabhas</i> held in fiscal year 2012-2013	18	18
Percentage of attendance in ward <i>sabhas</i>	5-7%	8-11%
Agenda of the ward <i>sabhas</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Last year implemented development activities and budget Plan and community demand for next year plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Last year implemented development activities and budget Plan and community demand for next year plan. Special plan for the disadvantaged communities. Some safety net plans
Decisions of ward <i>sabhas</i>	Community raised demand and UP made the plan for the next year.	Community raised demand and UP made the plan for the next year.
Development plan formulated in Ward <i>sabha</i>	Roads and RCC culvert	Roads, RCC culvert and IGA training for the poor and women
Percentage of scheme supervision by SSC	65%	75%
Meeting of SSC	No regular meeting	Sometimes met in UP meeting
Supervision by <i>Samajik Uddog Forum</i>	80%	90%
Status of grievance redressal mechanism	Not well known among general people	Not well known among general people

7. A local NGO, working for promoting public awareness in Satkhira district about citizen participation.

7. Making citizen participation sustainable in UP public procurement: lessons learned from case study

It is evident from both UP practices that based on the personal experiences and insight into local issues, local people offer distinctive knowledge regarding development related activities that is required in the design as well as implementation stage of development activities. In order to make the UP development plan effective, sustainable and responsive to local peoples' needs, the UP authority prepare the budget and present it in front of the mass people in the annual Open Budget session according to the mandate of LGSP II. The development works include construction or rehabilitation of roads, culverts, drainage and embankment system. From field study it has been revealed that to some extent LGSP II has strengthened accountability of local governments ultimately meeting community priorities through civil society oversight in forms of ward sabha and standing committee. There are good practices in both UPs to make local public policies with the consultation of local citizens, and incorporate them into the processes of decision making and evaluation through 'Ward Sabha', 'Ward Committee' and 'Open Budget Session'. According to the Local Government (Union Parishad) Act 2009, ward sabha offers common people to prepare UP development plans, ward level proposals, prioritise schemes, develop programmes to be implemented and prepare priority lists of beneficiaries of various government programmes for submission to the UP. By expressing their demands in ward sabhas, local people not only influence UP's priorities for development but also demand transparency and accountability from the concerned authorities. Citizens' participation in ward sabha dialogues and open budget sessions has made the development projects of these UPs easier to implement, effective, locally relevant and as per demands. Therefore, although in a small scale, civic engagement in UPs activities thus ensure that government spending and policies address relevant social issues.

It is now widely recognised that stakeholder participation is a critical factor for improving procurement governance. Thus, it requires meaningful citizen engagement for quality procurement work. Fortunately it is discovered that the facilitation of the ward sabhas ensures that people from all strata of the society have the chance to be heard. It also ensures an open and transparent community planning process which indicates that practice of citizen engagement in UP development activity plan already exists in both Union Parishads. From the aforementioned discussion it can be said that both Union Parishads publish their yearly activity plan publicly on a regular basis and ensure their accountability through this process. Both also seek public opinion through pre-budget sessions in order to consider their opinion before taking decision about development activities. The representatives of both UPs try to take public opinion while formulating development activity plan. Due to LGSP there are practices of learning and sharing meeting among UP chairman, members and other relevant stakeholders. Different stakeholder's participation in these meetings opens windows for sharing their enlightening experiences with each other and consequently helps to develop a locally needed development plan. Thus it can be said that to some extent citizen participation has become a culture in UPs due to LGSP and recent the local government act. Besides, civil society groups like Samajik Uddog Forum have started monitoring development work in some cases for enhancing downward accountability in the UPs. Available evidence thus indicates that UPs are now to some extent capable of embracing citizen engagement in PP process. Since individual's proper observation and insight is useful for identifying problems, thereby improving the public works' competitiveness, in order to empower local people of

Union Parishad, LGSP has opened windows for people's participation in local level planning. In this way people got the opportunity to raise their voice in the decision making process in the UP.

8. Challenges of citizen engagement in UP development plan

Though there is a mandate for people's full participation in LGSP, it is noticeable that degree of participation in formulating development plan compared to that of implementation phase of development works is low. One major reason behind such low participation in implementation phase is that UPs get the grant of LGSP on 24th or 25th June and which is supposed to be spent by the 30th June (end of fiscal year). Union Parishads rush through in order to complete all projects within this short span of time. Therefore, sometimes it becomes next to impossible for the contractors or UP to let the SSC and other local citizens know about the ongoing projects. Thus many schemes are left out of public supervision. Furthermore, many people are still unaware about their rights of participation in supervision and monitoring of these schemes. Sometimes it is considered as an unnecessary task by the local people. Common mass (especially SSC members) usually do not have training and necessary skills for monitoring/supervising any government projects and therefore are sometimes unwilling to get involved in monitoring. Moreover, people in general are afraid to talk against any corruption of those in the power structure. It is therefore needed to raise public awareness in this regard. Project Co-coordinator of Agrogoti Sangstha informed that function of SSC was not satisfactory and its effectiveness regarding scheme supervision was questionable. He added that every SSC should be selected through WS, and not elected by UP chairmen and members. Besides, honest and knowledgeable people are needed to achieve the spirit of this type of participation. If unaware, or lazy or dishonest persons participate in these forums then the purpose of such initiatives will not be served. If the participants of WS are not knowledgeable then it will be really difficult to set the priorities of development work. Besides, it would be tough for the chairman to consult someone whose demand had not been guaranteed by the fund of this project. It is also worth-mentioning here that though there are many advantages of citizens' participation, unfavourable environments can also create scopes for ruthless exploitation of its full potential. Thus it is very important to keep in mind that a favourable environment is very crucial for factors that could hinder civic engagement in some contexts. So, in order to make the initiative of citizen participation effective, a way forward needs to come from the government's side to formalise, foster and institutionalise the existing effort.

9. Way forward

The challenges of citizen participation in UP development scheme/procurement illustrate that measures need to be taken to make this participation initiative sustainable. Thus this study proposes some key points to make this participation process more effective at local level procurement. These are as follows:

9.1 Enabling environment for civic engagement

Effective citizen engagement requires changing the behaviour of both public servants and citizens. For meaningful participation of citizens in procurement monitoring, it is important to ensure that the platform is favourable enough where common people and government can work collaboratively. It is equally important to make procurement information available to

the general public. Therefore, it is necessary to make a congenial environment that will enable citizens and civil society organisations to engage in development processes in a sustained manner. In order to make the environment citizen-participation friendly it is needed to introduce legal, regulatory and policy frameworks, and cooperative political, socio-cultural and economic factors. The institutional factors within the society need to be considered while making all these regulations for making the environment favourable for citizen participation in UP PP.

9.2 Making people aware about their rights

The major issue is that people are used to seeing their UPs in old and traditional ways for the last 140 years. So, it is difficult to change their mindset overnight. Moreover majority of the population in UP are peasants and they are busy with their livelihoods. Most of them are not well educated and are unaware about the importance of such a complex issue. So, it is necessary to make common people aware about the importance of their presence in ward sabhas and of their valuable opinions in this regard. Since there is a lack of interest among common people to attend the sabhas, it is therefore, required to motivate them to attend. It is also found that people's participation is confined to the elite class of the Union Parishads but it is important that participation should be fair and equal for all people. This is high time to recognise that other local actors (mass people) are also important agents of change to identify local needs and demands. Government may take initiative for creating awareness among local people in this regard. In order to raise awareness among citizens of their basic rights and strategies to protect and enforce onto them proper interventions from government side is mandatory. There is a need to mobilise local civil society organisations and NGOs to work and support common people to monitor any PP project. By promoting and strengthening public awareness programmes citizens' participation in PP can be made more robust. Finally, it is equally needed to create awareness amongst both duty bearers and citizens on what citizen participation is and its importance in a proper manner.

9.3 Providing monitoring body with proper instrument for monitoring

It is noted that some technical task cannot be monitored without particular knowledge which is lacking among common people. Civil society also needs proper incentives, including trained manpower and sufficient budget to participate in procurement monitoring. In order to strengthen civil society, educational and capacity building programme and training are also needed for them. In order to strengthen citizen engagement in PP it is necessary to ensure access to PP information and participation opportunities for all sectors of the society. Moreover, the concerned authority should provide proper training to the civil society to perform their role properly. Main barriers of people's participation are knowledge, political influence and threat of local mastans. Common people are seriously lacking capacities and need frequent grooming for performing their tasks. Thus, government has to take initiatives for providing required security to those who will be the monitor of the PP. It may be made through local government policy reform initiative as well as actions could be taken to enhance the capacity of local people to become watchdogs for a complex issue like PP. Government has to take initiative to strengthen institutional, policy, and legal frameworks to broaden local access to PP related documents and issues.

10. Conclusion

Nowadays it is well accepted that the community oversight in the PP methods are essential because oversight by citizens is necessary to make the process corruption free. Though in limited form but the practice of public participation in local decision making process has been started by the Local Government (Union Parishad) Act, 2009 and LGSP has facilitated the implementation of those provisions. The presumption behind LGSP was that public participation can improve public service provision delivered by UPs. This study is an attempt to view the degree of citizen participation in development schemes under the LGSP projects and draw attention to the importance of institutionalisation of civic engagement in order to develop long-term, sustainable citizen engagement in UP procurement. Finally from the findings of this study it can be argued that institutionalisation of such initiative will ensure meaningful participation and will enhance transparency and accountability and will prevent corruption in procurement in general.

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