



## SOCIAL

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# Active Citizen and Accountable Local Governance: A Baseline Survey

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## **ABSTRACT**

This baseline survey on the members of the Union *Parishad* (UP) and the BRAC *Polli Shomaj* (PS) aims to assess to what extents the UP members are pro-poor and gender sensitive, and the services that they provide to the poor. The study was conducted in two districts- Bogra and Jessore. The sample size of study was 610 UP members, 549 executive committee members of 50 PS and 199 PS general members. The study reveals that the people have very little access in decision-making process of standing committees of UP, mostly because of committees being non-functional. Few UP members were aware of the PS and its activities.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The social development programme of BRAC has undertaken a programme to create conditions for more active civic engagement by the rural poor in tabbing resources for their development and to strengthen capacities of local government to provide more accountable and effective governance. As part of the project's inception phase, this study conducts a baseline survey among members of the Union *Parishad* (UP) - the lowest administrative level in Bangladesh - and the *Polli Shomaj* (PS), a rural community-based organization convened by BRAC. The study aims to assess to what extent the UP members become pro-poor, gender sensitized as well as to what extent PS actively engages with local government. Besides, the study will also assess the UP in terms of services, they provide to the poor. The study reveals that the people have very little access in the decision-making process of standing committees, mostly because of committees being non-functional. The study also reveals the weakness in co-ordination and inter-relation among the different UP standing committees. The members stay busy with their personal work and, therefore, unable to contribute enough time to the UP activities. All the chairman and members observed are more interested in the project implementation committee or other project committees. As most of the standing committees' activities are not related with monetary matters, the members are not much interested in the activities of those committees. There is little participation of citizens in UP decision-making and project implementation. The main form of interaction between citizens and UP members is lobbying by the former for access to social safety net resources. Few UP members are aware of the PS and its activities. Interactions between the PS and UP are friendly and non-confrontational. These enhance the PS's access to information and resources, but do not allow it to protest corruption or unfair outcomes from *salish* (Informal justice mechanism held frequently in rural areas to resolve the disputes).

The PS does not appear to undermine the patron-client relationship that make up rural power structure. Instead, it maximizes the benefits that these relationships can procure for poor people, by improving their bargaining power with UP chairman and engaging the support of influential people to act as PS presidents. One consequence of this approach is that unscrupulous PS presidents can use the PS to extend their power, using their influence to procure resources for friends, neighbours, relatives and/or political supporters.

## **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

Local governance includes not only the machinery of the government, but also the community at large and its interaction with the local authorities (CDG 2000). Strengthening and improving the accountability of local government is vital to effective service delivery. The existing administrative structure and elected local bodies already reached the grassroots level, and have almost all the features necessary for participatory and decentralized governance. However, this structure has failed so far to perform efficiently. Despite the strong support for local government enshrined in the constitution, the central government maintains extensive control over local government, and fails to grant it adequate resources. Most administrative decisions must be approved centrally, usually by top-level officials in the secretariat or even certain ministers depending on the subject. Attempts at decentralization were unsuccessful; consequently local bodies are characterized by weak administrative capacity, a limited financial and human resource base, and little public participation (Ahmed 1997). As a result, development activities systematically fail to reach their intended targets.

The active citizens and accountable local government (ACALG) project undertaken by the United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF) and BRAC aims to create the conditions for more active civic engagement among rural and semi-urban poor citizens, and to strengthen the capacities of local government to provide more accountable and effective governance. The objectives of the project are to develop the capacities of both government and citizenry to deliver more accountable and equitable service and resource allocation, and to create an accessible source of information about civic rights, the mechanics of local government and its services.

## **CONCEPTUALIZING GOOD LOCAL GOVERNANCE**

The core functions of local government are assuring security, delivering basic public sector services, and providing political participation (Brinkerhoff and Johnson 2009). These functions span the same domains as other levels of government - health, education, and infrastructure. But because of their small scale, they can have the greatest impact on citizens' lives. The clear division of functions between the central government and the local government bodies can improve productivity, efficiency, and cost effectiveness for both (Hussain 2003). Moreover, the devolution of power to local government gives much greater scope for the citizen to participation in such government. Citizen participation ensures that development initiatives are aligned with community priorities, bolsters community ownership and leadership, and improves accountability. It also empowers local authorities to bargain with the central government to design policies that better reflect local needs (Rahman and Rahman 2005).

Hatisman and Kan (2001) and Imhanlahimi (2006) define good governance as the participatory or democratic administration of government operations. This definition emphasizes that governance must include decision-making and policy implementation, namely that decisions and results must be accessible to others' judgment. In order to do this, governance must satisfy eight overlapping criteria: accountability, transparency, responsiveness, participation, following rules, effectiveness and efficiency, equitable and inclusive behaviour, and consensus building (Yaghi 2008). Nanayakkara (1992) presents two similar principles of local governance. The first is community access, meaning the institutional capacity to utilize the views of the community through direct involvement of the citizen in local planning, project implementation, and other areas of decision-making. The second principle is service, meaning that local government has to achieve technical adequacy aligned with community needs and interests. Promoting local self-government is also a major component of good governance (Greaves 2001). Good governance leads to good management, good performance, good stewardship of public money, good public engagement and, ultimately, good outcomes for citizens and service users.

## **LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN BANGLADESH**

### **CONSTITUTION AND THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

The history of local government (LG) is very old in this part of the world. Local institutions existed from ancient time (Hussain 2003). The existing local government system arose from the demand for self-government in British India. However, the Constitution of Bangladesh clearly spelt out the legal basis and responsibilities of the local government. "The State shall encourage local government institutions composed of representatives of the areas concerned and in such institutions special representation shall be given, as far as possible, to peasants, workers and women"- as it is said in Article 9 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. Article 59, Chapter III of the constitution states that 'Local government in every administrative unit of the republic shall be entrusted to bodies composed of persons elected in accordance with law'.

### **CURRENT SCENARIO**

At present, there are two distinct kinds of local government institutions in Bangladesh - one for rural areas and another for urban areas. In rural areas there are three tiers in ascending order - The Union *Parishad*, *Upazila Parishad* and *Zila Parishad*. Urban local government consists of two tiers the *Pourashava* and City Corporation.

The government of Bangladesh recently enacted a new law entitled the 'Union *Parishad* Act 2009' which replaced the Local government (Union *Parishads*) ordinance of 1983. The UP Act 2009 rightly recognize the importance of community participation, transparency and accountability by including specific provisions on the formation of ward committees, participatory planning, access to information, the authority of Standing Committees, etc. But to date, corresponding measures to operationalize the new law have not been framed.

## **UNION PARISHAD**

According to the Local Government (Union *Parishads*) Ordinance 1983, 'Union' means 'a rural area' declared to be a union under section 3 (Declaration of union and alteration of limits thereof) (GoB 1990). The UP is an elected body of 13 members. It includes one chairman elected by the total electorate of the Union, nine members, one elected from each of nine wards, and three seats reserved for women, each drawn from three wards. According to sub-section 2 of section 30 of The Local Government (Union *Parishads*) Ordinance 1983, the Union *Parishad* has 10 compulsory responsibilities. These are i) maintenance of law and order and rendering of assistance to the administration in the maintenance of law and order, ii) adoption of measures for preventing disorder and smuggling, iii) adoption and implementation of development schemes in the fields of agriculture, forestry, fisheries, livestock, education, health, cottage industries, communications, irrigation and flood protection to improve economic and social condition of the people, iv) promotion of family planning, v) development and use of local resources, vi) protection and maintenance of public property, such as roads, bridges, canals, embankments, telephones and electric lines, vii) review of development activities undertaken by different agencies at the union level, and submission of recommendations to the *Upazila Parishad* with regarding activities of those agencies, viii) motivation and persuasion of the people to install sanitary latrine, ix) registration of births, deaths, blind people, beggars and destitute people; and x) conducting censuses of all kinds (Siddiqui 2005).

Besides those compulsory responsibilities, the UP has 38 optional responsibilities described in Part 1 of the Schedule of The Local Government (Union *Parishads*) Ordinance 1983.

## **UP STANDING COMMITTEES**

According to the Local Government (Union *Parishads*) Amendment Acts 1993 and 2001, each UP would comprise of 13 standing committees, one for each of the following areas: (a) finance and establishment; (b) education and mass education; (c) health, family planning and epidemic control; (d) auditing and accounts; (e) agriculture and development; (f) social welfare and community centres; (g) cottage industries and cooperatives; (h) law and order; (i) the welfare of women and children, and sports and culture; (j) fisheries and livestock; (k) environmental conservation and tree plantation; (l) union public works and (m) water supply and sanitation (Siddiqui 2005). The UP may strike additional Standing Committees with prior approval from the Deputy Commissioner.

A standing committee consists of not more than one-third of the total members of the Union *Parishad*. No one can be member of more than three committees at a time. If a person is not a member of the UP but possesses special qualifications, he or she may serve on a standing committee as a non-voting member.



## **POLLI SHOMAJ**

The *Polli Shomaj* (PS) is a ward-level social organization initiated in 1998 by BRAC encompassing three to four villages. Membership is open to all in the community. The three objectives of the PS are to inform and build awareness among the rural poor, promote democratic practices and participation of the poor in the rural decision-making process, and engage in collective action to ensure local government accountability (BRAC Social Development Programme 2008).

Two types of meetings are held bimonthly. The general committee meeting is a platform for discussion, raising awareness, and planning and implementing initiatives. The executive committee includes the president, secretary, cashier, and the heads of seven sub-committees for health, education, legal services, opportunities and services, local committee; social committee; and information and communication committee. It also includes a general member. The executive committee is elected by members for a three-years term. The president, secretary and the cashier must not be elected from the same VO.

The PS's activities fall into three broad areas: 1) participating in local government functions; 2) participating in the local social initiatives, and 3) protesting against human rights violations. Under the first heading, the PS develops members' political consciousness and encourages them to participate in local elections and vote for the fittest candidate. Members join local committees, liaise with government services and work to advance their peers. Additionally, PS committees supervise the distribution of government social safety net resources and voter ID cards. Under the second heading, the PS leases local resources such as unused land or waterbodies and converts them to productive resources. It also raises a fund for emergencies and undertakes income generation projects, preserves important documents to land ownership and legal aid, and mediates conflicts between VOs and members. Under the third heading, the PS works to prevent and protest corruption, polygamy, acid throwing, rape, and other anti-social activities. PS members also participate in *salish* (Rashid and Alim 2005).

Nowadays, local government is very significant for its representative character. Access to decision making for ordinary citizens is much more easier at the local level. The most important aspect of local government is its scope for people's participation. Participation of local community in decision-making in specified subjects gives a special role to the local level government. In the real sense, people's participation in development activities undertaken by local government institution is almost absent, because the community people were not involved in any stage of development planning process. If participation is to be meaningful, there should be participatory local organizations of the poor. By linking with development agencies of the government at the village level, the local organizations can provide to the members a forum to participate in the designing and implementation of development programmes.

As a consequence, for this study, Union *Parishad*, the lowest tier of local government in Bangladesh, is viewed as a networking and partnership based governance system in local level, where all actors and sectors of the state particularly the civil society would work together to provide the benefits of the local inhabitants in ensuring good governance and sustainable development. Following sections of the study contain findings in this regard.

## STUDY OBJECTIVE

This study conducts a baseline survey among the members of Union *Parishad* (UP) - the lowest administrative level in Bangladesh - and the *Polli Shomaj* (PS), a rural community-based organization convened by BRAC. The broad objective of the study is to assess the effectiveness of local government bodies and the role played by the local community (namely the PS) in local governance.

### SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

The study assesses the extent to which UP members are responsive to the needs of poor and gender sensitive, their knowledge level about the activities of local government, and their methods of resource and service allocation. The study also assesses the extent and level of act as well as to what extent the rural communities actively engaged with the local government. Specific objectives of the study include the following:

1. To assess the roles and responsibilities (in practice versus theory) of the local government bodies in providing various services;
2. To assess the role of PS in demanding various services;
3. To assess the knowledge level of UPs and PS bodies about government structure and function; and
4. To assess the gender sensitivity of UP members.

## METHOD

Quantitative method was used to collect data. Information was collected from UP chairman, male and female UP members and executive and general members of PS. Responses were analyzed using SPSS. A review of published and unpublished materials was also considered.

### STUDY AREA

The study was conducted in 50 Union *Parishad* from two districts - Jessore and Bogra. Both are fairly large districts with considerable socio-cultural differences. Bogra is a comparatively developed district in the northern part of Bangladesh while Jessore lies at the border of India in the south-western part of the country. All UP members of 50 unions from two *upazilas* were included in the sample.

### SAMPLE SIZE

A total of 610 UP members (49 chairman, 138 female [Reserved] members, and 423 general members), 549 PS executive committee members of 50 PS (each PS executive committee comprising 11 Members) and 199 PS general members were included in the sample.

## FINDINGS

### MEMBERS OF UNION *PARISHAD*

Table 1 presents the salient features of socio-demographic characteristics of the UP members and their household information such as age, sex, education, occupation, economic status and NGO status or affiliations.

### SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

**Table 1. Socio-demographic profile of respondents (%) n=610**

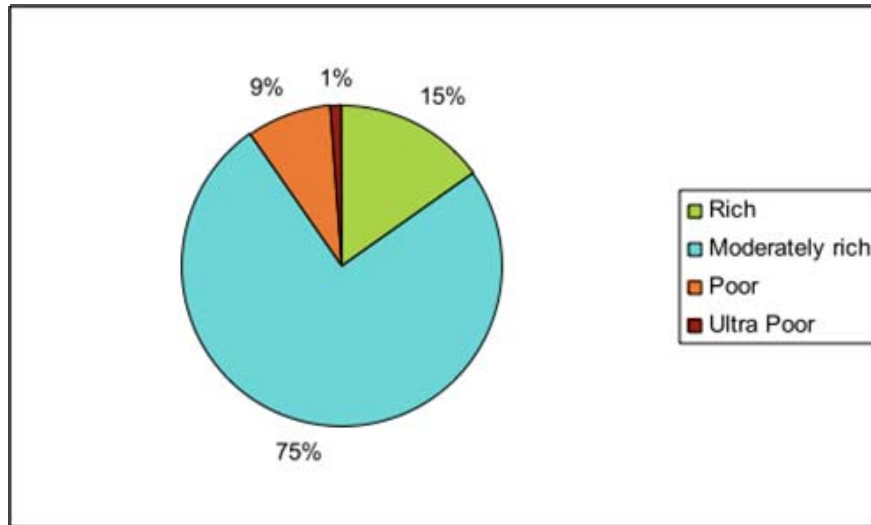
Age range	Chairman (n=49)	Female member (Reserved) (n=138)	General member (n=423)
25-34	2.0	3.6	2.6
35-44	24.5	28.3	33.8
45-54	36.7	36.2	42.1
55-64	24.5	23.2	15.6
65-74	4.1	8.0	4.5
75+	8.2	0.7	1.4
Mean age	52.84	48.52	47.74
<b>Distribution by sex</b>			
Female	8.2	100	1.4
Male	91.8	.0	98.6
<b>Education</b>			
No education (0)	.0	5.8	4.3
Primary (Grades 1-5)	2.0	20.0	15.8
Junior high (Grades 6-8)	10.2	14.5	25.1
Secondary school certificate (Grades 9-10)	22.4	37.0	37.6
Higher secondary certificate (Grades 11-12)	32.7	16.7	11.8
Graduation	18.4	4.3	4.3
Masters	14.3	1.4	.9
Hafiz of Quran*	.0	.7	.0
Religious education ( <i>Maktob</i> )	.0	.0	.2
Mean	11.78	8.43	8.31
<b>Occupation</b>			
Student	.0	1.4	1.2
Housewife/husband	4.1	10.1	.9
Self employed (agriculture)	36.7	39.9	61.5
Self employed (business)	38.8	29.7	29.6
Retired	20.4	18.8	6.9
<b>Grameen Bank and NGO affiliations**</b>			
BRAC	.0	1.4	2.6
Grameen Bank	2.0	1.4	.7
ASA	.0	.7	.2
Proshika	.0	.0	.2
Former BRAC member	.0	1.4	.7
Former member of other national NGOs	2.0	2.9	1.7
Local NGOs	.0	3.6	1.2
Not member of NGO	95.9	89.1	92.9

\*\*Multiple responses considered

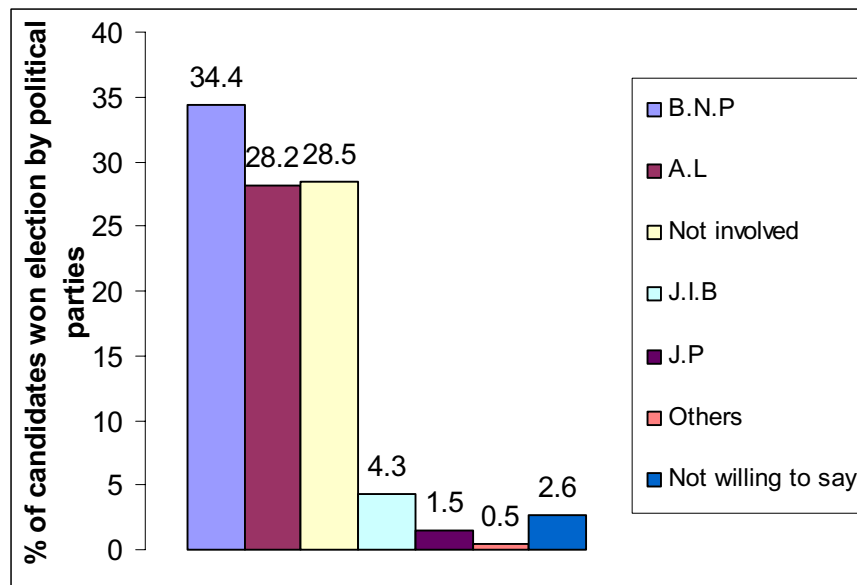
\* A hafiz ("keeper") is a person who has memorized the whole Holy Quran

Most UP members stated they belonged to a moderately rich family (75%) or rich (15%) family (Fig. 1). Figure 2, most UP members were members of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) 34.4% and 28.2% were from Bangladesh Awami League (AL). While 2.6% were reluctant to express their political affiliations, 28.5% claimed they were not involved with politics, a dubious claim given the politicization of the UP.

**Figure 1. Self perceived economic status of UP members (%)**



**Figure 2. Political affiliation of UP members (%)**



(BNP= Bangladesh Nationalist Party, AL= Awami League, JIB= Jamaat-e- Islam Bangladesh, JP= Jatiya Party)

### UP MEMBERS' KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE STANDING COMMITTEES

UP members were asked to list the names of the standing committees in their UPs. Their responses are summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2. Name of standing committees known to UP members (%)**

Standing Committee	Chairman (n=49)	Female member (n=138)	General member (n=423)
Finance and establishment	73.5	11.6	15.1
Education and mass education	57.1	34.1	31.9
Health, family planning and epidemic control	51.0	41.3	41.1
Audit and accounts	26.5	3.6	32.2
Agriculture and other development works	53.1	19.6	23.2
Social welfare and community centres	22.4	11.6	8.3
Cottage industries and cooperatives	18.4	9.4	5.2
Law and Order	83.7	59.4	64.8
Welfare of women and children, sports and culture	40.8	38.4	15.4
Fisheries and livestock	20.4	8.7	8.7
Conservation of the environment and tree plantation	40.8	15.9	18.7
Union public works	20.4	2.9	8.7
Rural water supply and sanitation	46.9	28.3	30.3

Table 2 shows that UP members could name mostly about the law and order committee (chairman 83.7%, female member 59.4% and general member 64.8% respectively), followed by the education and mass education committee (chairman 57.1%, female member 34.1% and general member 31.9% respectively). On the other hand, Few UP member knew the union public works (chairman 20.4%, female member 2.9% and general member 8.7% respectively). Chairman were more conversant about the name of standing committee compared to female and general member. Considering that this is the most superficial indicator of UP members' knowledge and practice, these findings suggest that standing committees are largely non-existent or inactive. Anecdotal evidence from BRAC POs, PS presidents, and even some Chairman confirmed that standing committees exist only on paper in the UPs. Table 3 summarizes the score of UP members' knowledge on the standing committees.

**Table 3. Score of UP members' knowledge on the standing committees (%)**

Level of Knowledge	Chairman (n=49)	Female member (n=138)	General member (n=423)	Total
No knowledge	2.1 (2)	19.6 (19)	78.4 (76)	100.0 (97)
Low	5.8 (26)	24.1 (108)	70.2 (315)	100.0 (449)
Medium	28.3 (17)	18.3 (11)	53.3 (32)	100.0 (60)
Higher	100.0 (4)	.0 (0)	.0 (0)	100.0 (4)
Total	8.0 (49)	22.6 (138)	69.3 (423)	100.0 (610)
Mean	4.98	2.51	2.56	2.74

(Knowledge on the standing committees ranged from 0-13. 0 represented no knowledge, 1-5= Low, 6-9= Medium, 10-13= Higher level knowledge)

Data reveal that only 4 out of 49 UP chairman has the high level of knowledge on the UP standing committees. Female and general members possess negligible level of knowledge regarding standing committees. No score also found higher (78.4%) among the general members of the UP (Table 3).

UP members were next asked to describe the activities of each of the standing committees. Table 4 presents their responses on average.

**Table 4. Average of knowledge of UP members on standing committee activities**

Standing Committee	Chair- man (n=49)	Female Member (n=138)	General Member (n=423)	p-value		
	1	2	3	1 vs 2	1 vs 3	2 vs 3
Finance and establishment	2.48	.36	.43	.00	.00	.47
Education and mass education	2.69	1.10	1.18	.00	.00	.63
Health, family planning and epidemic control	2.69	1.76	1.64	.01	.00	.51
Audit and accounts	.67	.07	.13	.00	.00	.19
Agriculture and other development works	2.04	.53	1.09	.00	.00	.00
Social welfare and community centres	.57	.15	.13	.00	.00	.77
Cottage Industries and Cooperatives	.24	.16	.08	.40	.02	.06
Law and order	2.28	1.42	1.74	.00	.00	.01
Welfare of women and children, sports and culture	2.32	1.56	.68	.05	.00	.00
Fisheries and livestock	.51	.13	.16	.00	.00	.58
Conservation of the environment and tree plantation	1.44	.64	.74	.00	.00	.52
Union public works	.22	.05	.07	.00	.00	.36
Rural water supply and sanitation	1.22	.94	.92	.21	.11	.84

No more than average number of 3 chairman, 2 female members, and 2 general members could correctly describe a given standing committee's activities. The data further suggest that standing committees are not functional in UPs. Significantly more chairman than female members and general members responded correctly. These findings support anecdotal evidence that information and resources are centralized in the chairman, who allocate them to other members as he sees fit. Table 5 reveals the score of UP members' knowledge on standing committee activities (Table 4).

**Table 5. Score of UP members' knowledge on standing committee activities (%)**

Level	Chairman (n=49)	Female member (n=138)	General member (n=423)	Total
No Score	2.3 (1)	20.9 (9)	76.7 (33)	100.0 (43)
Low	5.1 (26)	23.4 (119)	71.5 (364)	100.0 (509)
Medium	35.7 (20)	17.9 (10)	46.4 (26)	100.0 (56)
Higher	100.0 (2)	.0 (0)	.0 (0)	100.0 (2)
Total	8.0 (49)	22.6 (138)	69.3 (423)	100.0 (610)
Mean	11.37	5.30	5.37	5.84

(The study found standing committee had 32 activities. Knowledge on standing committee activities ranged from 0-32. 0 represented no knowledge, 1-11= Low, 12-22= Medium, 23-32= Higher level knowledge)

Only two out of 49 chairman of UP's had the high level of knowledge on the standing committee activities in the UP. No and Low scores persisted mostly among the general members of UP were (76.7% and 71.5% respectively) (Table 5).

### UP MEMBERS' KNOWLEDGE OF THE UP'S ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The 1983 Ordinance divided the functions of Union *Parishads* into five categories: civic, police and defence, revenue and general administration, development, and transferred functions. UPs also implement development schemes in agriculture, forestry, fisheries, animal husbandry, education, health, cottage industries, communication, irrigation and flood protection, as well as the development of local

resources. UPs review the development activities of all agencies at the union level and make recommendations to the *Upazila Parishads*.

UP members were asked to describe the roles and responsibilities of the UP. Their responses are categorized in Table 6.

**Table 6. UP members' knowledge on their roles and responsibilities (%)**

Roles and responsibilities	Chairman (n=49)	Female Member (n=138)	General Member (n=423)
Implement different projects	10.3	13.0	46.6
Infrastructure development	.3	6.9	10.8
Education development	1.6	4.1	14.1
Health development	.8	.2	1.6
Law and order development	1.8	4.8	14.1
Help to ill and destitute people	22.3	41.7	137.3
Budget preparing and pass	.5	.0	1.0
Agriculture development	.0	.5	.0
Sports	.0	.7	.7

Multiple responses considered

Table 6 shows that the UP members generally appeared to be ill-informed of the UP's roles and responsibilities. Most UP members considered their prime role and responsibility were to help ill and destitute people (Chairman, 22.3% (136), Female member 41.7% (254), general member 137.3% (836) respectively), followed by the implementation of various projects. The other roles and responsibilities were mentioned less.

## UP TAX COLLECTION

UPs are meant to collect tax from two sources, internal and external. Internal sources include tax on: the annual value of a homestead; professions, trades and callings; cinemas, dramatic and theatrical shows and other entertainment such as natural amusement places; fees for licenses; fees (i.e. leases) from specified *haats*, bazaars and ferries to be determined by the government; and a share of the land transfer tax (1%) collected within the boundaries of the UP.

UP members were asked to list the sources from where they collect taxes. Their responses are summarized in Table 7.

**Table 7. UP members' knowledge on tax collection (%)**

Sources of Taxes	Chairman	Female Member	General Member
Tax on household	7.0	19.2	62.6
Occupation, business	3.4	9.0	31.5
Cinema hall, theatre	.7	.3	.8
License fee	5.7	7.9	26.6
Lease money	2.5	4.8	13.6
Arable land	1.8	8.5	17.4
Animal prison	1.6	5.7	14.1

Multiple responses considered

Table 7 suggests that UP collects tax from most eligible sources except cinema halls and entertainment venues, and that different members tend to use different combinations of sources. The most UP members identified household tax as the

highest income sources (88.8%), followed by occupational and business tax (43.9%) and license fees (40.2%).

## INFORMATION SHARING

The free flow of information is essential for establishing good governance, which is notably absent in Bangladesh. When asked what types of information they provided to their constituents, UP Members gave the following responses as summarized in Table 8.

Table 8 shows the types of information that the UP provides to its constituents. Information about government handouts (78.5%) and health (53.3%) were the issue most frequently provided, followed by infrastructure development (35.2%), voter lists (32.0%), and tax (16.7%). Other issue were negligible.

**Table 8. Types of information provided by the UP members to constituents by district (%)**

Issue	Jessore	Bogra
Health	19.3	33.9
Education	.7	.8
Law and order	.3	.5
Environment and natural disasters	.3	.0
Gender	1.3	1.0
Government handouts	33.3	45.2
Taxes	4.6	12.1
Infrastructure development	17.7	17.5
Voter lists	10.3	21.6
Birth registration	.8	1.6
Day light savings time	.2	.0
Not known	.3	.0

Multiple responses considered

Table 9 presents the media that the UP use to disseminate information. 92.3% of the cases, the UP members reported using village police. The members also used loudspeakers to a moderate extent (63.7%). 21.0% reported that they informed their constituents themselves.

**Table 9. Method of information dissemination (%)**

Medium	Jessore	Bogra
Village police	36.6	55.7
Loudspeaker	24.3	39.4
Mobile phone	5.4	5.6
Local informal media	2.1	2.5
NGOs, religious and education institutions	2.8	1.5
Leaflets and posters	1.6	2.0
Notice board	.0	.2
Personally	9.9	11.2
None	.5	.2

Multiple responses considered

## UP MEMBERS' KNOWLEDGE ABOUT UP PROJECTS

The UP members were moderately aware of the status of ongoing development projects in their constituencies, and knew how funds had been allocated. To receive



projects, the members must bargain with concerned authorities. POs, some UP chairman and some PS presidents acknowledged that higher levels of government and political parties can interfere with the distribution of resources. If a chairman is affiliated with the ruling party, he tends to receive more resources. Party officials may demand VGD or VGF cards from UP chairman, which they distribute to their allies and supporters. If a UP chairman is non-cooperative or affiliated with a different party, he can be bypassed. A Chairman, an opposition party supporter stated that because local elections were approaching, the *Upazila Nirbahi* Officer (the chief government official at the *upazila* level) was deciding directly who would receive government resources. Table 10 describes the actors with whom UP members bargained.

Table 10 shows the actors that UP members bargained with to receive projects. About 58% of members stated that they bargained with no one. 35.7% bargained with the chairman and 17.2% bargained with another UP member. The implementing projects present a range of other problems (Table 11).

**Table 10. Actors the UP member bargained with to receive projects (%)**

Actor	Jessore	Bogra
Chairman	23.6	12.1
Another UP member	8.9	8.4
<i>Upazila</i> project implementation officer (PIO)	5.9	1.1
<i>Upazila nirbahi</i> officer (UNO)	4.6	1.1
<i>Upazila</i> Chairman	1.3	.5
Member of Parliament	1.5	.7
<i>Upazila</i> social welfare officer	.3	.0
<i>Upazila</i> engineering officer	.2	.0
Ruling party supporter	.3	.2
None	12.5	45.4

Multiple responses considered

The members had to face constraints while they were implementing projects. Influence of different stockholders or agencies made difficulties to implement projects but Influence of local politics were found and reflected all types of projects they implemented in last one year (Table 11).

**Table 11. Problems faced by UP members in implementing projects (%)**

Project	Problem faced				
	Influence of local politics	Internal conflict among members	Interference of local elites	Interference of local bureaucrats	Local People
Vulnerable group development (VGD) card	9.1	6.3	4.5	.8	5.9
Vulnerable group feeding (VGF) card	9.5	5.8	4.5	.5	6.7
Stipend	.1	.0	.0	.1	.0
Food for work	7.4	2.6	2.9	1.7	2.7
Old age allowance	5.9	3.4	3.4	.9	5.1
Freedom fighter allowance	.2	.2	.0	.0	.2
Widow allowance	4.9	3.7	2.5	.6	3.7
Tubewell	3.2	2.2	1.4	.4	2.4
Test relief	7.7	2.5	3.1	2.4	1.7
ADP (Annual development)	4.0	2.1	2.0	1.4	.8
Disability allowance	.2	.0	.0	.0	.2
Warm cloths	.9	.5	.5	.3	.3

Multiple responses considered

## RESPONSIVENESS TO HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AND GENDER VIOLENCE

Human rights violations, especially gender violence, is a common occurrence in rural Bangladesh. UP members were asked to recount the human rights violations that had occurred in their UPs, and whether they had taken any measures in response.

**Table 12. Incidence of human rights violations and the responses of UP members (%)**

Incidence	Incidences occurred	UP members responded
Land violation	13.9 (810)	15.8 (730)
Human trafficking	8.4 (489)	7.3 (338)
Minority torture	.2(11)	.2 (11)
Trafficking	.2(12)	.1 (6)
Gender violence	29.5 (1723)	31.9 (1469)
Acid throwing	.1 (7)	.1 (6)
<i>Hilla</i> marriage	.5 (31)	.3 (16)
Dowry	26.8 (1563)	23.5 (1082)
Early marriage	12.8 (748)	12.4 (570)
Fighting	6.6 (386)	7.1 (327)
Illegal divorce	.9 (51)	1.2 (53)
Total	100 (5831)	100 (4608)

*Salish* is a traditional mechanism of informal dispute arbitration, most often organized by village elites (Table 12). *Salish* cannot be held for criminal offences such as murder, but is the preferred mechanism for settling less serious disputes. Table 13 summarizes the issues for which UP members organize *salish*. The majority (82.0%) were organized for family conflicts and conjugal conflicts.

**Table 13. *Salishable* incidences on which UP members organized *salish* (%)**

Issue	Percentage
Family conflict	58.4
Dowry	11.5
Dower	2.9
Living maintenance	3.5
Conjugal conflict	23.6
Total	100

*Salish* is commonly organized for non-*salishable* issues. Many UP chairman acknowledged that they did so, arguing that otherwise issues might never be settled or turn violent if left to Bangladesh's lumbering court system. Table 14 summarizes the non-*salishable* issues for which UP members organized *salish*. The most common issue was fighting (46.7%), followed by gender violence (26.2%) and land violations (16.5%).

**Table 14. Non-*salishable* issues for which UP members organized *salish* (%)**

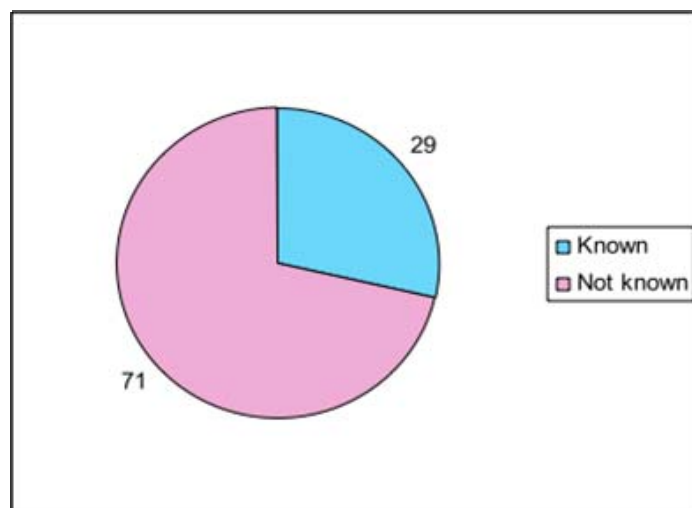
Name of the non- <i>salishable</i> cases	Percentage
Rape	.1
Land violation	16.5
Hijacking	4.0
Minority torture	.2
Trafficking	.2
Gender violation	26.2
Acid throwing	.1
<i>Hilla</i> marriage	.3
Illegal divorce	5.6
Fighting	46.7
Total	100

## **KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE PS**

As Figure 4 shows, relatively a few UP members were aware of the PS and its activities. There was a notable discrepancy between how PS presidents and UP chairman understood the intensity of the relationship between their respective organizations. For example, while one PS president described at length the initiatives she had pursued with the chairman, the chairman was unfamiliar with the term *Polli Shomaj*. When prompted with the name of the PS president, he recalled a few relatively superficial encounters. Most UP chairman required some prompting to recall the PS or its initiatives. UP chairman had an interest in minimizing the the role of the PS, as they would not acknowledge its mandate to improve government accountability and reduce corruption. For their part, PS presidents tended to exaggerate their accomplishments.

Of the 29% (177) of UP members that were aware of the PS, Table 15 presents which of the PSs' activities they were aware of (Fig. 4).

**Figure 4. Proportion of UP members aware of the PS (%)**



A moderate number of UP members were aware of PSs' work helping the ultra poor (50.3%), followed by promoting female leadership (37.7%), protesting human rights violations (30.9), and promoting social justice (21.1%). About 26% of the UP members did not know about any of the PSs' activities, and only 21.7% stated that one of its activities was working with local government (Table 15).

**Table 15. Knowledge of UP members' on the activities of PS (%) (n=177)**

Activities	Jessore	Bogra
Protest against human rights violations	16.0	14.9
Promote female leadership	20.6	17.1
Promote social justice	8.6	12.6
Work with local government	9.1	12.6
Help the ultra poor	24.6	25.7
Develop education	1.1	.0
Awareness raising among PS members	.6	.0
Develop sanitation	.0	.6
Does not know	7.4	18.3

Multiple responses considered

## PS EXECUTIVE MEMBERS

Table 16 presents the salient features of socio-demographic characteristics of the PS executive members and their household such as age, education, and social status.

### SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF PS EXECUTIVE MEMBERS

**Table 16. Socio-demographic profile of the respondents (%)**

Age range	President (50)	Secretary (50)	Cashier (50)	Other executive member (399)
12-21	.2	.4	.4	7.8
22-31	1.5	1.8	2.6	25.0
32-41	2.6	2.4	4.0	21.9
42-51	4.2	2.9	1.5	12.2
52-61	.5	1.6	.7	4.4
62+	.2	0	0	1.5
Mean Age	40.80	40.60	36.24	34.73
<b>Education</b>				
No education (0)	1.8	2.0	2.0	21.1
Primary (1-5)	2.9	4.7	4.0	27.5
Junior high (6-8)	2.9	2.0	1.8	12.9
Secondary school certificate (9-10)	1.3	.4	1.3	10.0
Higher secondary certificate (11-12)	.2	0	0	1.1
Mean	5.12	3.84	4.34	4.08
<b>Social status</b>				
General villagers	7.3	8.7	8.9	71.2
Wives of local elites	.5	.4	.2	1.3
Former UP member	.0	0	0	.2
Present UP member	1.3	0	0	0

### ACTIVITIES: PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT FUNCTIONS

One of the PSs' main activities is supporting candidates for UP social safety net resources. Table 17 summarizes which resources PS executive members reported applying for, and on whose behalf.

In terms of resources PS lobbied for, the most common services included VGD, VGF, old age allowance, widow allowance and hundred days employment generation programme, etc. for poor. It is worth noting that PS applied for more resources on behalf of PS members than non PS members (Table 17). The data shows the average number of government (VGD, VGF, Stipend and Food for work etc) and other services (Tubewell, latrine, warming clothing etc) obtained each PS by districts. Higher average number of services received by Jessore district in both categories than the Bogra district but there were not found statistical significant (p-value .20) between the districts.

**Table 17. Average number of services PS member and villagers received with help of PS by district**

Services	District			
	Jessore		Bogra	
	Received the services for PS (1)	Received the services for villagers (2)	Received the services for PS (1)	Received the services for villagers (2)
Government*	6.45	4.59	5.26	3.77
Others**	5.43	5.10	5.19	7.17
Total	6.27	4.72	5.24	4.52

(\*Government services included VGF Cards, VGD Cards, Old Age Allowances, Widow Allowances, the 100 Day Employment Programme, and etc.)

\*\*Others included Latrines, Agricultural Equipment, Warm Clothes and etc.)

VGF (34.0% and 50.0% in Jessore and Bogra, respectively), VGD (26.0% and 56.0%), and Widow allowances (30.0% and 40.0%) are the services for which PS members most actively lobby in both regions (Table 18).

Another role of the PS is to promote women's leadership and support members' involvement in the local power structure. Competing in elections is a prominent activity under this heading, and PSs show strong participation. Figure 5 shows that 46% of PS members competed in the local government elections, and 32% won seats.

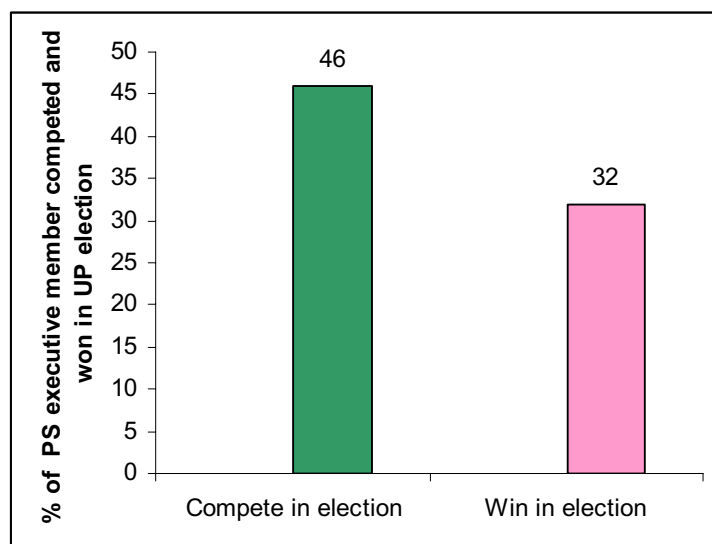
**Table 18. Lobbying with chairman and members for access to UP services (%)**

Service	Jessore	Bogra
Never approached	4.0	2.0
Vulnerable group development card	26.0	56.0
Vulnerable group feeding card	34.0	50.0
Stipend	.0	12.0
Food for work	6.0	10.0
Old age allowance	28.0	46.0
Freedom fighter allowance	.0	2.0
Widow allowance	30.0	40.0
Tubewell	10.0	22.0
Test relief	10.0	14.0
Warm clothes	16.0	36.0
Latrine	14.0	22.0
Disability allowance	14.0	22.0
Relief	12.0	2.0
100 Day employment programme	2.0	2.0
Agricultural equipment	.0	6.0

Multiple responses considered

Aside from engaging with the government, PS executive members reported that the PS participated in social initiatives (Table 19).

**Figure 5. PS Executive members' participation in the last local government election (%)**



p-value= 0.08 (n= 50)

#### **ACTIVITIES: PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL SOCIAL INITIATIVES**

Table 19 shows the average number cases where PS members undertook local social initiatives by district. PS located in Bogra district took higher initiative on average in case of dowry, schooling, early marriage, providing assistance after disaster, financial assistance, and rural infrastructure maintenance. Besides, PS were found to be active on behalf of PS members and facilitated more average number of social initiatives in both districts. The difference between the Jessore and Bogra was statistically insignificant (p-value .19).

**Table 19. Average number of social initiatives undertaken *Polli Shomaj* for PS member and villagers by district**

Services	District			
	Jessore		Bogra	
	Success rate (For PS members)	Success rate (For villagers)	Success rate (For PS members)	Success rate (For villagers)
Prevention of dowry	3.5	0.6	6.5	1.1
Prevention of early marriage	1.88	0.6	2.3	0.9
Natural disaster relief	4.75	2.0	16.3	0.3
Promoting school enrollment	10.6	3.1	20.3	6.6
Financial assistance for the poor	4.18	1.9	7.2	2.1
Rural infrastructure maintenance	1.86	0.7	3.4	2.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.68</b>	<b>1.52</b>	<b>9.5</b>	<b>2.7</b>

The PS was by far the most prominent source of financial support for social initiatives, supporting 87.4% of initiatives. 21.8% of initiatives were self-financed; other sources of financial support were negligible (Table 20).

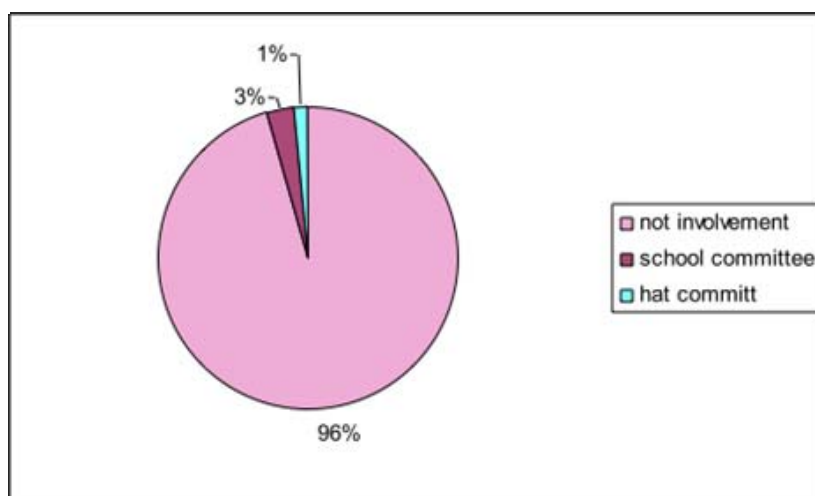
**Table 20. Financial support initiatives targeted toward ultra-poor women**

Supports	Source of financial support (%)				
	Self-Financed	UP	GO	PS	NGO
Assistance for ill people	9.2	2.3	.0	27.6	2.3
Assistance for ill people in poor households	6.9	1.1	.0	29.9	4.6
Education	4.6	.0	1.1	19.5	1.1
<i>Khas</i> land distribution	.0	.0	1.1	1.1	.0
Waterbody distribution	.0	.0	.0	1.1	.0
Help with marital disputes	1.1	.0	.0	8.0	.0

Multiple responses considered

As demonstrates, The most PS members (96%) are not involved in local committees (Fig. 6). Most did not even know about the committees that existed in their localities. Of the few that were involved in committees, three percent were involved in school committees and one percent in *hat* (local market) committees.

**Figure 6. PS executive members' involvement in local committees (%)**



## ACTIVITIES: PROTESTING HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AND GENDER VIOLENCE

**Table 21. Constraints faced human rights abuses protest (%)**

Issue	Constraints Faced				
	Local politics	Disputes between UP members	Interference from local elites	Interference from government officials	Interference from local non-elites
Rape	.0	1.2	2.4	.0	.0
Land violation	3.7	1.2	4.9	1.2	2.4
Kidnapping	1.2	.0	3.7	.0	1.2
Minority violence	.0	.0	1.2	.0	.0
Gender violence	8.5	.0	8.5	1.2	8.5
Acid throwing	.0	.0	1.2	.0	.0
<i>Hilla</i> marriage	.0	.0	1.2	.0	1.2
Dowry	6.1	3.7	11.0	.0	4.9
Illegal divorce	2.4	1.2	6.1	.0	2.4
Early marriage	9.8	3.7	7.3	.0	7.3

Multiple responses considered



Table 21 represents the most common constraints to protest the human rights abuses were interfered by local elites (34.5% of issues), local politics (23.0%) and interference by local non-elites (20.4%). Influence by government officials was negligible (1.8%). Only in 25.7% of cases were there no obstacles to protest the human rights abuses. No constraints appeared to be particularly prevalent for a given issue.

The Interviews evidence suggest that PSs do not frequently organize *salish* independently. In order to be legitimate, *salish* usually must be organized or condoned by village elites. Only one PS president claimed that the PS independently organized *salish* for divorce-related issues, dowry, and marriage registration. However, she gave a very unreliable impression, claiming, for example, that she was able to arrange VGD cards and the like for 8 out of 10 PS members. Upon following-up with several members reported that they did not receive anything. (In fact, this was the PS in the area that had been rezoned as a *Pourashava*, therefore, VGD cards had not been available for the last five years.) However, quantitative evidence suggests that the PS was moderately active in organizes *salishes*, as described in Table 22.

Local elites continue to dominate *salish*, organizing 57.2% of *salishes*. PSs organized 41.5% of *salishes*. No one institution tended to predominate for specific issues, with the exception of mugging: local elites organized *salishes* for 15.7% of the cases, versus 7.5% for PSs and 5.7% for UPs (Table 22).

**Table 22. Institutions organizing *salish* (%)**

Issue	Organizing Institution			
	UP	Local elites (Traditional <i>Salish</i> )	Court	PS
Financial dispute	.0	.6	.0	.0
Mugging	5.7	15.1	.0	7.5
Family dispute	5.7	20.8	.6	15.1
Gender violence	.6	7.5	.0	8.2
Dowry	.6	6.9	.0	6.9
Minority violence	.0	.6	.0	.0
Rape	.6	1.9	.0	1.3
Land violation	.6	3.8	.0	2.5

Multiple responses considered

**Table 23. Role of PS members in *salish*, 2008-2009 (%)**

Issue	Role of PS				
	Observer (silent)	Observer (vocal)	Plaintiff	Witness	<i>Salishkar</i>
Financial dispute	.0	.7	.0	.0	.7
Mugging	4.0	12.6	.7	2.6	6.0
Family dispute	5.3	21.2	.7	.7	8.6
Gender violence	2.6	6.6	.0	.7	6.0
Dowry	1.3	6.0	.7	1.3	6.0
Minority violence	.0	.7	.0	.0	.0
Rape	.0	2.6	.0	.0	1.3
Land violation	.0	4.0	.7	.7	2.0

Multiple responses considered

Based on interview findings, PSs appeared to play a relatively minor role in the informal and formal justice systems. Although PSs would sometimes bring issues to the attention of UP chairman, the chairman tended to find out more quickly by other

means. Most PS presidents mentioned that representatives of the PS would attend *salish* organized by *matbors* (village elites), usually defending the victim (i.e. the wife) in domestic disputes. Sometimes only the president would attend. In one PS in Bogra, this was the case because it was considered inappropriate for women to participate in *salish*. At other times, presidents stated that they and several other PS members would participate. The PS general members never mentioned that they or the PS were involved in *salish*. It therefore, appears to be an activity restricted to the presidents, who have the social status for their opinions to carry weight. Table 23 describes the roles that PS members play in *salish*. It was found that the PS members played role as *Salishkar* in different issues.

## PS GENERAL MEMBERS

Table 24 presents the salient features of socio-demographic characteristics of the UP members and their households such as age, education, occupation, NGO affiliation, etc.

### SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF PS GENERAL MEMBERS

**Table 24. Socio-demographic profile of PS general members (%)**

Age range	PS general member (n=199)
20-29	20.6
30-39	31.7
40-49	27.6
50-59	11.6
60+	8.5
Mean Age	39.54
Education	
No Education (0)	44.7
Primary (Grades 1-5)	1.5
Junior High (Grades 6-8)	30.2
Secondary School Certificate (Grades 9-10)	12.1
Higher Secondary Certificate	11.6
Mean	3.24
Social status	
General villagers	99.5
UP member	.5
Total	100
Occupation	
Housewife	22.1
Self-employed (agriculture)	24.6
Self-employed (business)	22.1
Day labour (agriculture)	9.0
Day labour (non agriculture)	15.6
Regular job (govt.)	.5
Regular job (non-govt.)	5.0
Unemployed	1.0
Grameen Bank and NGO affiliations*	
BRAC	9.5
Grameen Bank	6.0
ASA	3.0
Former BRAC Member	3.5
Former member another NGO	1.5
None	74.9
Local NGO	6.5

\*Multiple responses considered

### KNOWLEDGE OF GENERAL MEMBERS ON LOCAL RESOURCES

Table 25 represents that PS members were most frequently knowledgeable about religious institutions (97.0% of the total), infrastructure (66.0%), and *hat* bazaars (36.5%). Almost no PS members were knowledgeable about waterbodies, abandoned waterbodies (*kheya ghats*), and 16.5% were not knowledgeable about any resource.

**Table 25. General members' knowledge on local resources (%)**

Local resource	Jessore	Bogra
Infrastructure	25.5	40.5
<i>Hat</i> bazaar	11.0	25.5
Waterbody	.5	.5
<i>Kheya ghat</i>	.0	.5
Abandoned waterbody	1.0	1.5
<i>Khas</i> land	2.0	8.5
Religious institution	39.5	57.5
Does not know	7.0	9.5

Multiple responses considered

### **PS MEMBERS KNOWLEDGE ON ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF UP MEMBERS**

PS general members were asked to describe the roles and responsibilities of their UP members. Table 26 summarizes their responses.

Table 26 shows that PS members were most strongly aware of UP members' responsibility to assist destitute and ill people (80.5%), and secondarily infrastructure (51.0%) maintaining law and order (46.5%). Only 3% of PS members reported not to know anything about UP members' roles and responsibilities.

**Table 26. Knowledge of general members on the roles and responsibilities of UP members (%)**

Roles and responsibilities	Jessore	Bogra
Implementing various projects	9.0	13.5
Infrastructure	25.5	25.5
Education	2.5	8.0
Health	6.5	11.5
Law and order	19.5	27.0
Assisting destitute and ill people	32.5	48.0
Preparing the UP budget	.0	1.5
Does not Know	1.5	1.5

Multiple responses considered

### **GENERAL MEMBERS' KNOWLEDGE ON POLLI SHOMAJ**

PS General Members were asked to state the objectives of the PS. PS members were most strongly aware of PS' objective to help the ultra-poor (63.0%), followed by the objective of promoting women's leadership (37.0%). Thirteen percent of the PS members did not know any of the PS's objectives (Table 27).

POs, UP Chairman, PS Presidents and PS General Members reported that the PS approaches the UP on two major issues. First, the PS lobbies the UP to grant social security resources - VGD cards etc. - to deserving candidates. Second, the PS and UP are both stakeholders in the formal and informal justice systems. They therefore come into contact when conflicts or human rights abuses occur.

**Table 27. Knowledge of general member on the objectives of PS**

Aims of PS	Jessore	Bogra
Protesting human rights violations	6.5	9.0
Promoting women's leadership	17.5	19.5
Establish justice in the society	9.5	13.5
Working with local government	4.0	9.0
Providing help to the ultra-poor	28.0	35.0
Helping implement family planning, water and sanitation projects	1.0	.0
Does not know	5.0	8.0

Multiple responses considered

### KNOWLEDGE OF PS ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSIBILITIES

One of the objectives of the PS is to promote women's leadership. Therefore, it is important to ensure that PSs are well-governed. Interview data revealed that PS presidents are usually much wealthier and more socially influential than general members. Consequently, they have a tendency to dominate the PS. In some cases, the presidents were even found to act as gate-keepers to information and opportunities to acquire government resources, sharing them preferentially with family, friends, neighbours, and political allies.

To test PS general members' knowledge about administrative responsibilities, and by extension, their level of engagement in internal decision-making, members were asked who were responsible for organizing meetings and writing resolutions. Table 28 presents their responses. PS members firmly consider the PS president to be responsible for organizing meetings (72.5%), followed by BRAC staff members (21.5%). PS members largely did not consider themselves responsible (Table 28).

**Table 28. Knowledge on who is responsible for organizing PS meetings (%)**

Responsible person	Jessore	Bogra
BRAC staff member	11.0	10.5
BRAC microfinance holder	1.0	1.0
PS president	26.0	46.5
PS members	4.0	4.0
Does not know	5.5	2.5

Multiple responses considered

## CONCLUSION

The standing committees in UP appear to exist only on paper. The UP members have little knowledge of the roles and responsibilities of the UP. Few UP members are aware of the PS and its activities. There is little citizen participation in UP decision-making and project implementation. The main form of interaction between citizens and UP members is lobbying by the former for access to social safety net resources. Interactions between the PS and UP are friendly and non-confrontational. These enhance the PS's access to information and resources, but do not allow it to protest corruption or unfair outcomes of *salish*. PS and UP Members identify two main issues that bring the two organizations to interact: 1) the distribution of social safety net resources, and 2) human rights violations and other injustices. The main challenge to good intra-PS governance is the dominance of the PS president. The data suggest that PS are relatively active in organizing *salish*, and that PS members participate in *salish* in a variety of roles.

The study reveals that the people have very little access in the decision-making process of standing committees mostly because of committees being nonfunctional. The study also reveals the weakness in co-ordination and inter-relation among the different UP standing committees.

The members stay busy with their personal work and, therefore, unable to contribute enough time to the Union *Parishad* activities. All the chairman and members are more interested in the project implementation committee or other project committees. As most of the standing committees' activities are not related with monetary matters, the members are not much interested in the activities of those committees.

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## ANNEX

### Annex 1. Linear regression on knowledge score on standing committee of UP members

Variables	Coefficients
Education	.085 (.029)*
Age	.004 (.011)
Number of elected	-.022 (.125)
Number of training received	.379 (.051)**
Self perceived economics status (Poor=1, Non-poor=0)	.414 (.288)
UP member type (Chairman=1, Others=0)	1.950 (.335)**
UP member type (Female member=1, others=0)	.157 (.214)
Involvement in political activities (Involvement=1,Not involvement=0)	.655 (.182)**
Constant	.517 (.643)
R square	.231

\*\* , \* denotes statistical significance at the 1% and 5% levels respectively.