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An Evaluation Study on BRAC-THP Partnership for Strengthening Local Governance Project

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September 2016

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Acronyms

CBO	Community Based Organisation
CEP	Community Empowerment Programme
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
LG	Local Government
LGI	Local Government Institute
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
RTI	Right to Information
SC	Standing Committee
SGUPAG	Self-Governing Union <i>Parishad</i> Advocacy Group
SLG	Strengthening Local Governance
THP	The Hunger Project
TNO	Thana Nirbahi Officer
UNO	Union Nirbahi Officer
UP	Union <i>Parishad</i>
UPZ	<i>Upazila</i>
VCAW	Vision Commitment and Action Workshop
WCC	Ward Citizen Committee
WL	Women Leader
YL	Youth Leader

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Executive summary

The 'Strengthening Local Governance' (SLG) Project is a joint initiative undertaken by BRAC and the Hunger Project Bangladesh (THP), with the aim of strengthening the system of local governance at the Union *Parishad* (UP) level. As the lowest administrative unit of Bangladesh's highly centralised public administrative system, UPs face a lot of challenges in terms of insufficient administrative and financial autonomy and resources, deep rooted corruption, and the lack of people's participation in the governance process. All these factors together have created a local government system that is not transparent and effective in local service delivery, and in many ways, is, inaccessible to the very people it is meant to serve. More importantly it has critically hindered the full potential of UPs, as change-makers for local governance and development.

To address these challenges, the SLG project pursued an inclusive model of local governance that is led 'by the community for the community'. This project was evaluated through both a baseline and end line study, over the course of a year. The study set out to explore the systems of governance in the SLG project unions as well as similar non-project comparison unions. The issue was explored through official UP records, as well as interviews and discussions with UP representatives, community members and project staff. The findings and observations from the field appear to indicate that the project has had a positive effect on knowledge, attitudes and practice in both the community and the UP, in the project areas. In these areas, it was observed that the UP representatives are now successfully carrying out their officially mandated functions. They regularly organise UP-community forums like ward *shavas*, and ensure that official bodies like Standing Committees are functioning as mandated. This has all been made possible, due to the positive response from the communities themselves. The SLG project volunteers, including animators, youth and women leaders are playing proactive roles in their communities engaging with people and encouraging them in turn to work with the UP and take control of their own development. This appears to be a substantial shift from what was observed during the baseline study. In contrast, the situation in the adjacent comparison (non-project) unions appears to be largely unchanged. The relationship between the UP and the community in these unions is still not very strong. Events like ward *shavas* are not regularly held, and there is very limited engagement with the community from the UP. The community for its part also appears to be uninterested in working with the UP. This stands as a contrast to what is seen in the SLG project unions.

The main point of difference appears to be the involvement of community volunteers in the SLG unions. The animators, youth and women leaders trained by the project are acting as a bridge between the UP and the community. They are ensuring the participation of the community in local governance process. The SLG project has trained 2,240 animators, 1,098 women leaders and 1,670 youth leaders. It has also helped train and create 598 informediaries who help citizens exercise their right to information regarding public services and institutions. This is in addition to the numerous trainings on ward *shavas*, open budgeting, standing committees and ward citizen committees. The project is not only providing training on participatory local governance, it is also helping ensure that the UP and the community can collectively carry out the activities needed to uphold and strengthen this system. Budget booklets provided by the SLG project have introduced a new dimension of transparency and citizen engagement in the annual open budget meetings, project volunteers work with Standing Committees

to resolve issues like teacher absenteeism at the local school, and the women leaders trained by the project regularly work with the UP in preventing and raising awareness on early marriages in their locality. These are just a few examples of how the SLG project has taken a holistic approach to the local government, tackling and strengthening all aspects of the system in order to create a level playing field where the UP and the citizens achieve development through collective action.

It should be noted that, the SLG project has also faced its fair share of challenges. Time and resource constraints presented a challenge in terms of carrying out extensive advocacy work. Therefore, while the project appears to have been successful in initiating change at the grassroots level, it has faced a lot of challenges in terms of advocating change at the higher levels of government and national policy making. Moving forward, this is an important lesson to be considered by the project. Additionally, the potential change in UP representatives following the upcoming UP elections, the political capture of the local government system, and limited project buy in from the government present further challenges, and additional areas to consider for the project, and for other projects looking to work at the local government level.

As the SLG project wraps up its activities, it is important to sustain the community driven governance systems, it has helped create at the UP level. The project appears to have initiated positive transformation at the grassroots level, however in order to sustain this transformation, there needs to be a continuation in its work, particularly in terms of continued advocacy. Long term sustainable change and development requires a continuity of efforts for initiatives like the SLG project.

Chapter 1. Introduction: The Union *Parishads*

1.1 Background, evolution and current status

Local government in Bangladesh is a 'body corporate' with the firm direction incorporated in the constitution of the Republic and *Jatiya Sangshad* (National Parliament), which has enacted local government laws by following the dictum of the constitution. According to the provisions of the constitution (Article 59), elected local government institutions are empowered to administer all the 'public services' and the 'public servants' at each of the corresponding administrative units of the Republic, where an LG body is formed. Bangladesh has three tiers of LG units at the District, *Upazila* (sub-district) and Union levels. It also has single tier urban LG units known as Pourashavas (Municipality) and City Corporations. The SLG project, and this study have both focused on the lowest and one of the oldest of the LG units - Union *Parishads* (UPs). UPs have a long history of continuity in terms of having a democratically elected body and stable functional records.

The other two higher level tiers, *Upazila Parishads* (intermediate level) and Zila (District) *Parishads* at the apex level were not organised uniformly like the Union *Parishads*. Since 1972, four elections have been held for *Upazila Parishads*. The current tenure of the incumbent *Upazila Parishads* will last 20 years, and this will end in 2019. There have been no elections at the Zila *Parishad* level since 1972. Currently, under Zila *Parishad* Act 2000; an interim arrangement has been made to make the Zila *Parishads* functional under a political appointee called 'Administrator'.

The Union *Parishads* in Bangladesh started out as *Chowkidary Panchayet* in 1870, and were renamed to Union Panchayet after a resolution passed by Lord Ripon in 1882. Over time, the name, nature of leadership, roles and functions of this institution have changed substantially but the institution itself has continued uninterrupted and passed the test of time. The name 'Union *Parishad*' came about after independence in 1972. There were different names in different times. During the large part of British rule since 1909; it was renamed as 'Union Board'. During Pakistan time, General Ayub changed the 'board' and renamed it as 'Union Council' and the designation of the Chiefs from 'President' to 'Chairman'. In independent Bangladesh, the Union Councils have been renamed as Union *Parishad* and designation of the chiefs remained the same (Chairman).

The Union level LG (*Chowkidary Panchayet*) was conceived and started by British colonial rulers as a civic body subservient to bureaucratic administration as their local aide, to help them maintain law and order, and assist with and revenue collection. It was created in the aftermath and backdrop of the '*Sepoy Mutiny*' (1858) and sporadic Peasant movements (1860 onward), which were quite violent in nature.

The very name *Chowkidary Panchayet* bears the real essence of the initiative as local policing initiative intension. The *Chowkidars* (watchmen) were given the police function and they were regarded as 'Village Police', with the power of detaining any person for suspicious movement in the locality. During the whole of British period 'policing' the locality against insurgency remained their cardinal function, and gradually some of the other civic functions were added under the supervision of District Magistrate and Collector. Lord Ripon's Resolution created an in-built spirit of autonomy within the LG system, but in reality, it remained loyal and subservient to the royal colonial administration.

During Pakistan time, a new sense of involvement with central political regime was deliberately promoted under the guardianship of bureaucracy. During the Basic Democracy regime since 1960, the Union Councils under 'Basic Democracy Order 1959' had been fashioned as a development entity guided by pro-establishment politics (essentially Army Rule) and guarded by local civil bureaucracy for all of its activities. The local legitimacy of the Union Councils was ingrained in the nature of the existing rural societies, that they were basically regarded as a social organisation manned by rural social elites, essentially dominated by rich peasants.

After independence in the post 1970s eras, with the radicalisation of society in general due to the armed struggle against Pakistanis and war of liberation, Union level leadership faced a big shock. The radical and new Bengali nationalist forces tried to create their forced entry into the system and on the other hand old pro-Pakistani rural elites wanted to continue and retain their power base. The new nationalist forces could not make substantial inroads, but the fusion continued. The Union remained grossly neglected due to its failure to accommodate the new regime during the time of the First Awami League government (1972-1975). Its development role was bypassed by the regime in the central power structure. Its social role also started facing challenges and its political role was greatly suppressed. In the initial days of Bangladesh, the Union *Parishad* stumbled and was essentially regarded as a political adversary by the ruling regime. A regeneration of Union *Parishad* leadership started from 1976, following the ascendance of power by General Zia. Zia, the first Army General to rule Bangladesh, put his political feet in the shoes of General Ayub, while reengineering started to civilianise the military regime in post 1975 era. The LGs at Union level were reenergised with increased allocation of state resources. The old clients of Ayub became the natural allies and clients of the Zia regime. The mass mobilisation in favour of Zia government was initiated with the Union *Parishads* in 1976 and 1977. The 'Referendum' of May 1977, that was Zia's first step towards the legitimisation of his regime, was conducted using Union *Parishads* as foot armies. Ayub remained faithful to his clients throughout his rule but Zia was not. Zia always looked for better alternatives; he had to, because of radical movements he was constantly facing from the urban middle class. He frequently changed the strategy of alliances, and started looking for allies among urbanites and radicals. When the fully-fledged political party (BNP) and parliament were created, former Union *Parishad* elites gradually lost their relevance in the power game, and they felt betrayed too. With the decline of political utility, the regime ignored Union *Parishads* and devised a new method of rural regeneration of support base by initiating *Gram Sarkars*. General Ershad is the third in the 'Marshal' line of civil power. He also used and abused LG organisations. In the process of civilianisation of military rule, unions did not feature dominantly in his political strategic mapping. He wanted to go at the secondary level (*Upazila*) and successfully exploited the full potential of *Upazila*. The Union *Parishads* continued their existence, but their focus was shifted by different regimes in many different directions. In the last two decades since 1990, the Union *Parishads* have been fighting for their own proper and autonomous political space. The Union *Parishads* have been suffering from a sort of arrested development. State finance them through projects from time to time tried to tie it with bureaucratic control. The leadership is being treated as client of central political parties without distinct faces of their own. The local citizens lack proper ideas and ideals of citizenship to rally themselves around unions as civic and political entities. The Union *Parishads* suffer from an identity crisis as a distinct entity amidst the political doldrums. UPs are certainly legal entities with a high political profile. However, this identity comes into question, when these entities are dissected into their social, political, administrative and developmental roles and dimensions. Their social roles have been eroded, their political roles have been reduced to client like treatment, and their development and

administrative roles have been reduced to 'agency roles', subordinate to the government functionaries.

Since the 1990s also, a new type of engagement, especially by NGOs and CSOs, have gradually started giving Union *Parishads* in many areas a new face. The NGOs and CSO are trying to forge a new alliance with elected local government institutions to make them more citizen friendly, open and deliberative. Though not many in number, there are initiatives in place that are trying to create active citizenship around public institutions, in order to make these institutions active, accountable, transparent and efficient. The BRAC-THP Partnership is one such initiative, which along with many other activities is trying to promote active citizenship around Union *Parishads*.

Many agencies and organisations such as government and NGOs as well as development partners are implementing projects in order to strengthen and empower the feeble, emaciated and weak LG institutions. The BRAC-THP Partnership for Strengthening Local Governance is also a project for strengthening the LG at Union level with few defined objectives. The current study will look into the project in line with its original design and achievement through its various interventions.

1.2 Background of the BRAC-THP “Strengthening Local Governance (SLG)” Project

Unions are the lowest administrative units in Bangladesh in the chain of its governance structure. Union *Parishads* (UPs), as mentioned before, face a number of problems that make it challenging for them to carry out their roles effectively. The Union *Parishad* Act 2009, Union *Parishad* Operational Manual 2012 and Right to Information Act 2009 (RTI Act) together refer to an important legal framework and institutional arrangements aimed at enhancing the transparency, accountability and effectiveness of service delivery of UPs and, and creating opportunities for people's participation in activating the institutional functioning of local government (MLGRD 2012). Some of the institutional arrangements include Standing Committees, Ward Committees, Scheme Supervision Committees, Ward *Shavas*, Open Budget Sessions, Citizen Charter and mandatory response to any application under the RTI Act. All these legal implications and institutional devices exist to facilitate people's participation in the local governance.

However, due to a lack of capacity and many other related complexities, participatory local governance at the union level rarely becomes a reality.

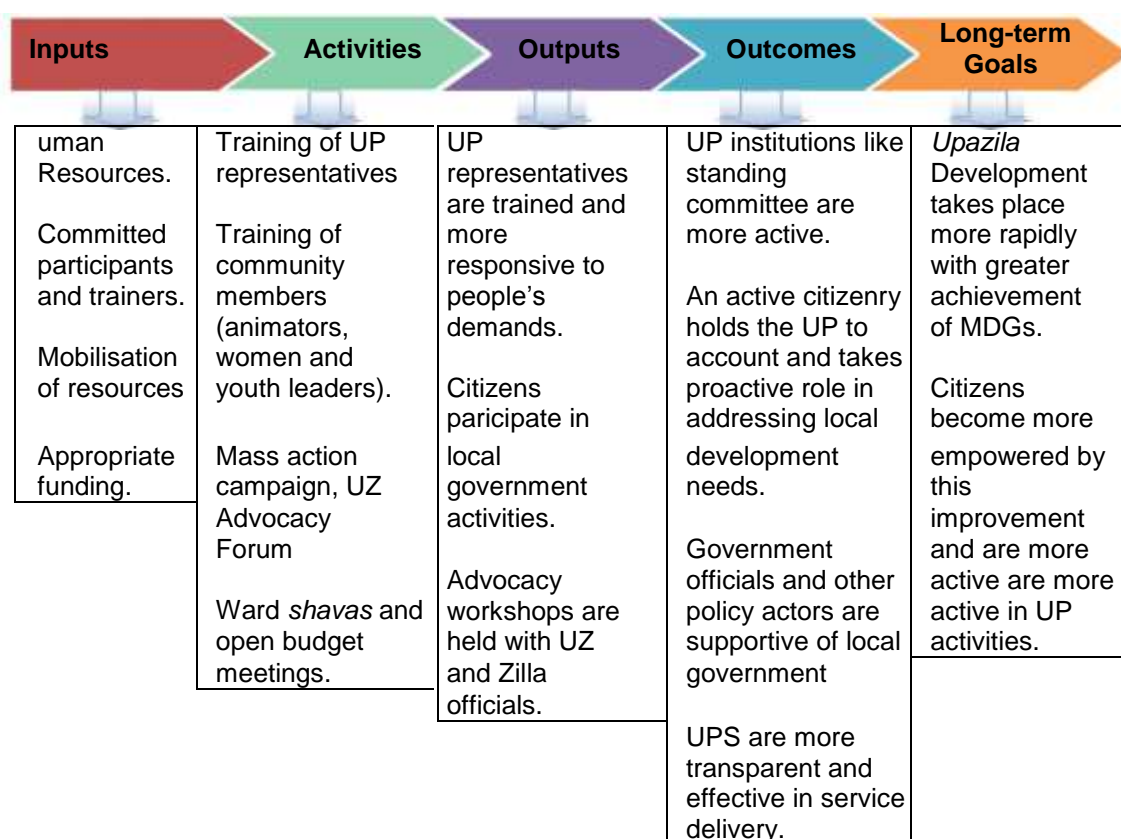
In order to address some of these issues affecting local governance, BRAC and The Hunger Project - Bangladesh (THP) launched an initiative at the UP level, with the aim of creating a community-driven system of local government that function in accordance with the UP Act of 2009, fostering local development and creating an environment for the achievement of the MDGs in some of the most marginalised areas of Bangladesh. It aims to do so by making massive capacity building and awareness campaign among multiple stakeholders such as UP representatives, their constituents (voters), duty bearers, specially the youth generation- male and females on their duties, responsibilities and rights, allowing them to become the change agents for their own localities. The initiative covers a total of 61 unions covering three Divisions, four Districts, and 14 *Upazilas* across Bangladesh. The core philosophy behind this programme is that well-informed citizens can bring about a greater degree of transparency into the system and can encourage UPs to be more accountable in their actions. Ultimately this may lead to institutional and policy changes on the part of the national government in granting local government bodies greater operational and financial autonomy.

1.3 Theory of change

A Theory of change is a specific and measurable description of a social change initiative that forms the basis for strategic planning, on-going decision-making and evaluation. The theory of change of this project can be derived from the aim of the project, which is to strengthen the Union *Parishads* in the target areas for transparent, accountable and inclusive governance.

The main strategy of the project, as embodied in the Theory of change, is to enable Union *Parishads*, to create an active citizenry and engage with policy actors so that they work together in a conducive institutional environment to bring about a greater degree of equitable development at local levels. A group of volunteers including motivated UP representatives, animators, women leaders, youth leaders and ‘infomediaries’ are the main agents of change of the project. The broader areas of expected outcomes of the project are transparent and accountable UPs, especially in the area of service delivery, active participation of rural citizens in the activities of local government and the level of collective action for local development. This is shown below.

Flow chart of Theory of Change of the project



1.4 Statement of the Problem

Even though the existing Union *Parishad* Act 2009 provides some political autonomy to the elected representatives and options for community people to participate in the process of local governance, this is not exactly what happens in practice. The entire system of government in Bangladesh is highly centralised. All significant power and decision-making authority is in the hands of the central/national government. This leaves local government bodies such as UPs in a situation of gross deficit of both

funding and operational autonomy. This severely limits their ability to function as effective local change-makers. Additionally, deep-rooted corruption at the local government level and the lack of people's participation in the governance process creates a system that is not transparent. A serious constraint on both rural and urban local government is their over dependence on the central government. One authority describes the relationship between national and local government as a 'clear patron-client relationship' (Siddiqui, 2005). The power and authority legally delegated are not practiced at any level.

Aminuzzaman (2010) reveals that the majority of the chairmen and members of the LG units do not have adequate understanding of the operational procedures and functions of these bodies as embodied in the legal documents. There is another school of thought in Bangladesh that believes that local government is weak because they cannot mobilise their local resources. In this perspective, as long as the LGs remain dependent on national government resources, they will remain weak. There exists an all-encompassing system of corruption in the government system that inhibits the spread of information and transparency regarding what services are available for the citizens as it is regarded to be risky to share this information (Aminuzzaman 2010).

UPs are constrained by lack of transparency, low capacity, excessive bureaucratic control, political interference, limited authority, lack of accountability of service providers, weak financial resources and a limited orientation towards local communities (Wescott and Breeding 2011). The Asian Development Bank reveals that the majority of women members lack adequate knowledge and skills required for discharging their responsibilities as peoples' representatives. A large percentage of female members also lack confidence, and this prevents their active participation in official meetings (Mukhopadhyay 2005).

Analysing these issues, the study has been designed to find out the answers to the following research questions:

- i. Are local governments carrying out their duties accordingly UP Act-2009?
- ii. To what extent are UPs transparent and effective in service delivery?
- iii. Has involvement of community people increased in UP activities like ward *shava*, open budget meetings etc.?
- iv. Are government officials and other policy actors supportive of local government?

To assess the answers of the above questions in depth, the present study entitled "Evaluation of BRAC- THP Partnership for Strengthening Local Governance Project", has been undertaken.

1.5 Objectives of the study

With a vision to keep the research on track and to make it manageable, a set of objectives has been formulated, considering time and resources. The objectives of the study are as follows:

- i. Assessing capacity of UPs to carry out their legal mandate in a transparent, accountable and inclusive manner.
- ii. Exploring engagement of rural citizenry to hold UP accountable and to take proactive role in addressing local development needs.

- iii. Exploring engagement of government authorities and policy makers to be supportive to LGIs.
- iv. Exploring challenges and recommendations from grass roots to strengthen local government towards participatory development.
- v. Developing action strategies to strengthen local government institutions.

1.6 Justification of the study

Under the joint partnership of BRAC's Community Empowerment Programme (CEP) and The Hunger Project (THP) Bangladesh, a project entitled 'Strengthening Local Governance Project (SLGP)' was undertaken with an intention to making Union *Parishads* (UPs) strong, effective, and people-centred. This is a two-year project (2014-2015) that began in February 2014. The main activities of the SLG project include, capacity building training for the UPs representatives, workshop with standing committees members for strengthening UPs standing committees, community monitoring of UP activities through formation of citizen committees, formation of *Upazila* Forum with women UP members, activating *ward shava*, developing five years plan book for UPs, Right to Information (RTI) workshop for UP officials, publishing UP citizen charter, training for creating animators, training for creating women leaders, leadership training for youth, organising vision, commitment, and action workshop, RTI training for creating infomediaries, popular theatre show, advocacy workshop at *upazila* and district level, strengthening the support in strengthening Self-governing Union *Parishad* Advocacy Group (SGUPAG).

For achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and establishing a social movement across the union, the project provided training to the UPs as well as potential beneficiaries for making them skilled and empowered, so that they, along with the UP can contribute to the development of their own locality. The programme was designed to give priority on the development of capacity and leadership of elected UP representatives and community members, and also to create greater space for meaningful interaction between local communities and local government. In spite of heavy physical presence of central government agencies and elected LGIs, non-state actors such as NGOs, Community Based Organisations (CBOs), development partners, civil society groups as well as private sector service providers have gradually made significant inroads into the sphere of local governance in both rural and urban contexts (Ahmed 2016). A review of community driven development in Bangladesh demonstrates that both formal and informal organisations can bring about people centric development through empowerment (Baroi and Rabbani 2011). Thus, it is obviously imperative to evaluate the impact of these interventions on strengthening local governance through a participatory approach.

1.7 Scope and limitations of this study

This study attempted to evaluate the impact of the designed interventions on strengthening local government. It was expected that the findings would specifically be applicable to the UP, active citizenry and community people. However, considering cultural, social, economic and geographical resemblance, the findings might also be applicable in general to other parts of Bangladesh. In addition, the findings are expected to be helpful for the researchers of different nation building government and non-government organisations in formulating strategies of action essential for strengthening local government units and the communities around them. Moreover, the findings can add some new information to the existing body of knowledge about local government systems and local activism.

This study, like other research of the same nature had the usual limitations of time, money and other necessary resources available to the researcher. To keep the research within the manageable limits, the following limitations were considered:

1. The study was conducted in only seven project UPs out of 61. To address this, it also looked at seven adjacent comparison UPs where the same project is not running
2. The respondent for data collection was kept limited
3. The study was focused on strengthening local government.
4. For information about the study, the researcher was dependent on the data furnished by the project. This was complemented with the data collected from randomly selected unions and respondents
5. The researcher had to rely on the data furnished by the respondent from their memory and perception during the interviews.
6. The study also took place just before the Union *Parishad* elections (January-February, 2016). During this period, it was often difficult to get hold of respondents, especially UP Chairmen and Members.

1.8 Assumptions of the study

The following assumptions were in the mind of the researchers while undertaking the study:

1. The respondents included in the sample were capable of furnishing proper responses to the questions contained in the interview schedule.
2. Views and opinions furnished by the respondents were the representative views and opinions of the whole population.
3. The responses furnished by the respondents were reliable and they truly expressed their opinions on the impact of the project interventions.
4. The data collected by the researcher was free from bias.
5. Almost all the respondents had similar backgrounds and were judged to be homogenous to a large extent.

Chapter 2. Methodology

Research methodology is a structured set of guidelines or activities intended to generate valid and reliable research results (Mingers 2001). It is the responsibility of a researcher to clearly and systematically explain both the procedure used to collect data and the tools used to analyse it. This study employed both quantitative and qualitative techniques to explore the facts and underlying evidence of strengthening local governance.

2.1 Locale of the study

The study was conducted at the UP level in areas where the project has been operating. The locale of the study was in seven UPs randomly selected from the 61 project unions under the four project districts. Seven more adjacent non-project UPs were also chosen, for comparison purposes. A total of 14 UPs were chosen for this study to collect comparable data. The UPs selected for comparison were chosen based on geographical proximity and similarity in socioeconomic conditions with the treatment unions. The locale for the study was as follows (Table 1):

Table 1. Locale of the study

Division	District	<i>Upazila</i>	Treatment UPs	Comparison UPs
Sylhet	Habiganj	Sadar	Habiganj Sadar Gopaya	Richi Lukhra
		Dakhin Sunamganj	Purba Birgaon	Paschim Birgaon
	Kishoregonj	Nikli	Nikil Sadar Gurui	Raoti Charirchar
Khulna	Bagerhat	Fakirhat	Fakirhat Sadar Piljanga	Nalda Maubhog Mulghar
Three Divisions	Four Districts	Four <i>Upazilas</i>	Seven Treatment UPs	Seven Comparison UPs
Total number of Union <i>Parishads</i> in Study			14 Union <i>Parishads</i>	

2.2 Population and sample of the study

A list of population targeting from the targeted UPs through random sampling was prepared. The study used a combined method of quantitative and qualitative data collection. For the quantitative data, the respective UP secretaries of the 14 UPS (Seven treatment UPs and seven comparison UPs) were interviewed. For the qualitative component, in-depth interviews, key informant interviews and focus group discussions with UP chairmen, male and female members, community people, and programme participants (animators, youth leaders and women leaders) were conducted. The total sample size came to 136 (quantitative and qualitative combined). The sample breakdown is outlined in Table 2.

Table 2. Population categories and sample size of the study

Category		7 Treatment Unions	7 Comparison Unions	Total
UP Representatives/Staff	Chairman	4	4	8
	Male UP Member	4	4	8
	Female UP Member	4	4	8
	UP Secretary	7	7	14
Active Citizenry	Animators	6	n/a	6
	Women Leaders	6	n/a	6
	Youth Leaders	6	n/a	6
Community people (FGDs with 5-6 participants per FGD)		40	40	80
Total				136

2.3 Methodological design of the study

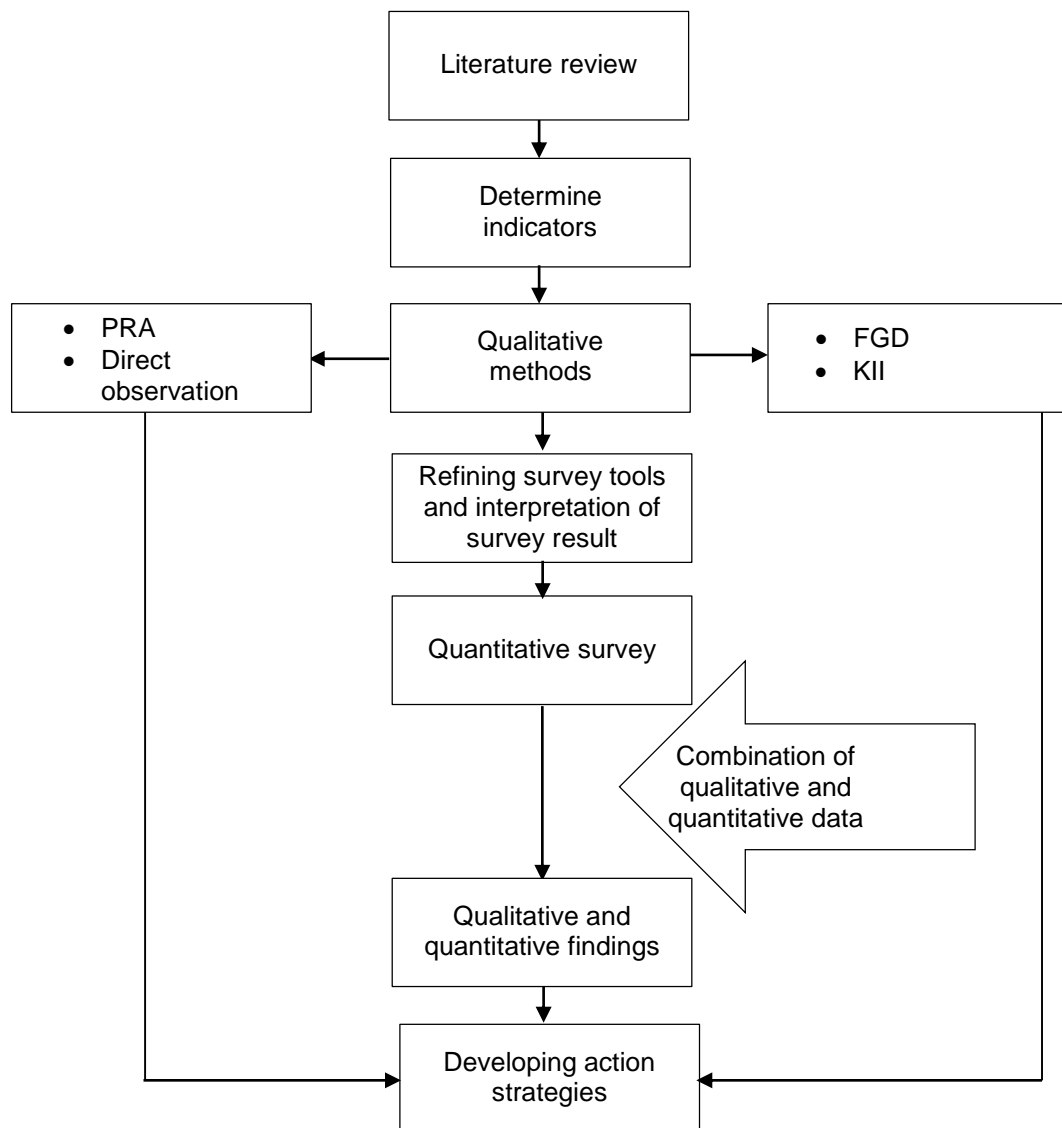
A triangulated methodological approach was applied based on the complexity and sensitivity of the subject matter. The triangulation of several data collecting methods is very important for the purpose of covering the complex nature of strengthening local governance. Although quantitative surveys are statistically valid and reliable and have the possibility of getting comparable results, they are now often used in conjunction with participatory and other qualitative approaches to get adequate exploratory views of complex concepts of effectiveness. Thus, a mix of methods was applied in the field of survey to enhance the consistency of findings and accuracy of the data analysis, thereby, solidifying their explanatory power. The methodological design of the study is shown diagrammatically in Figure1.

2.4 Data collection instruments

2.4.1 Quantitative data collection

Data was collected from the respondents with the help of a pre-tested and carefully designed questionnaire. Keeping the objectives of the study in mind, the questionnaire was prepared to collect necessary and relevant information on officially documented UP activities. Content validity of the instrument was ascertained through peer review. The questionnaire contained both open and closed form of questions. Before data collection, a pre-test was run to justify relevance, validity and reliability of the interview schedule. On the basis of pre-test and suggestions of the experts, the interview schedule was finalised. Necessary precautions were maintained at the time of data collection in order to achieve valid and reliable information.

Figure 1. Methodological design of the study



2.4.2 Qualitative data collection

Qualitative methods are appropriate when the phenomena of the study are complex and social in nature (Anon 1998) and in situations where researchers need to first identify the variables that might later be tested quantitatively. Participatory research methods are useful when the respondents are mostly illiterate and unable to provide information through a structured set of questions. Hence, a group of participatory tools and methods was used to capture the real situation. Purposes of application of different qualitative methods have been presented in the Table 3.

Table 3. Purposes of application of qualitative methods on different target groups

Participatory tools	Purposes	Target groups	Event
Rapid Rural Appraisal	Getting first hand idea and information about villages, people, resources, social institutions, infrastructure and public services through normal discussions	Local leaders and villagers	14
Focus Group Discussion (FGD)	Identifying key variables, indicators, problems and suggestions and refining the survey instrument	Respondents, local leaders and villagers, elected representatives	6
Case Study	In-depth understanding of impact of the designed interventions	Individual respondent	7
Key Informant Interview (KII)	Understanding roles, responsibilities, views	Union <i>Parishad</i> personnel, local leaders, programme participants	42
Assessing UP Records	Checking UP records for information on ward <i>shavas</i> , standing committees, open budgets etc.	UP Secretary	14
Direct observation	Authenticity, validation and cross checking the data		

In addition to our own data collection, we have also made use of THP's own project data and case studies. Which are presented in Chapter 3.

2.5 Ethical considerations of the study

The ethical implications of conducting a research are wide-ranging and can be addressed by several means. Certainly, the researcher has an obligation to be ethical (Newman 1994). The basic ethical principles maintained throughout the study are listed below.

- The researcher has professional experience in dealing with rural people, in understanding and in assessing their behaviour. Hence, a considerable discretion was maintained with the respondents and local people during the field study.
- The respondents were anonymous and were treated with great intimacy and respect. The purpose of the study was made clear before starting interviews with them. Their autonomy, privacy, confidentiality and non-judgmental views were considered substantially during making interviews or discussions. Enumerators were introduced by the respective 'local representative' with the aim of forging trustworthiness with interviewees and getting honest answers. Thus, it was assumed that the interviewees responded with sincerity based on their own observations and experiences without any pre-set ideas.
- Special care was taken to avoid subjective judgment and misinterpretation during collection and documentation of qualitative data. After the field survey, the researcher and the research staff verified the collected data and ensured that it was all documented properly. A diary was kept by the researcher to record the day to day field observation.

Chapter 3. Project milestones and achievements

BRAC-THP implemented a two-year long local government strengthening project in 61 UPs of 14 *Upazilas* under 4 districts. The project planned and designed activities with UPs to promote active citizenship and also conducted massive advocacy programmes. The activities with UPs included signing of MoUs with each of the 61 UPs in the project, providing training and support to UP representatives, strengthening UPs standing committees, activating ward *shava*, facilitating effective UP participatory budgeting, developing five-year plan book for UPs, formation of UPZ forum and publishing 'citizen charter' for each of the 61 UPs. The project also designed activities to promote active citizenship among women, men and youths by creating animators, women leaders, youth leaders, infomediaries, and citizen committees. The communication instruments used included folk songs, popular theatre and mass action campaigns focusing on MDGs arranged with 'active citizens' and 'animators'. On the other hand, support to the district committees of 'Self-Governing Union *Parishad* Advocacy Group'(SGUPAG) and advocacy workshop at *Upazila* level were carried out as part of the project's advocacy activities. These project activities lead to the generation of numerous outputs even beyond the limited output-outcome included the log-frame of the project document.

The project milestones and achievements in conformity with the log-frame have been presented below. The various components of the programme have been discussed briefly and the achievements have been highlighted. The project data generated in every quarter were checked. Some of the raw data has also been linked with case studies to make them more understandable and relevant. Tables are provided for each component, indicating the programme's targets (in terms of events and participant/beneficiaries) and their actual accomplishments. The data for milestone achievement were collected from project documents with proper scrutiny as mentioned earlier.

3.1 Activities with the Union *Parishads*

3.1.1 Training and support to UPs representatives for statutory roles and mind-set transformation

MoUs were signed with all 61 project UPs, before the capacity training. The project held three day residential trainings with Union *Parishad* representatives, where participants discussed the strategic goals of UPs, their structure, powers and functions, formation and accountability of standing committees, importance of ward *shava* and their working procedures, five-year plans and the process to be followed to prepare these plans, annual budget preparation, tax assessment and collection for financial resources mobilisation, etc. Additionally, the trainings attached special emphasis on the importance of participants' mind-set change, gender equality, good governance, people-centred development and the assessment and achievement of MDGs at Union levels. The special initiative was included to improve the general governance at the local level by building the capacity of elected representatives and engaging citizenry to work together to accelerate service delivery for the achievement of MDGs. Sixty one events of training for 61 Union *Parishads* were arranged and a total of 735 representatives joined a three-day course against the target of 793. After the basic trainings, follow-up of the training have been conducted twice a year.

Table 4. Number of UP representatives trained

Activities	Total Target		Events	Actual Participants			Variance (+/-)	
	Events	Participants	Actual	Male	Female	Total	Events	Participants
Training for UP Representative	61	793	61	552	183	735	-	(58)

Through this training, local representatives were well oriented on the 'UP Act-2009' and the 'Union *Parishad* Operational Manual' issued by the government. The reasonable elaborations were included on the importance of ward *shava*, open budget meeting, and strengthening standing committees. It has been observed that this training motivated and inspired UP representatives to start working as a committed team with the shared vision of the betterment of their respective communities. Moreover, the training has helped them to realise the importance of working within the broader frame of law among their respective constituents and communities. They have realised that there is little scope to go outside the boundary of the law, and that everything has to be accomplished in conformity with the law and rules. This is their responsibility as representative of a statutory body. The training has helped create a law-abiding mindset and also helped create a vision and plan for future.

3.1.2 Strengthening UPs standing committees

Under the project, several standing committees (education, health and family planning; agriculture, fisheries and livestock and other economic development works; birth-death registration; water and sanitation; environment protection and development, tree plantation; social welfare and disaster management; conflicts resolution, women and children's welfare) got technical support through workshops for conducting their regular meetings and develop specific action plans in order to follow-up and monitor specific development indicators including MDGs achievements. Targeted 61 workshops with standing committees were accomplished covering 2,223 males and 847 females.

Table 5. Training of standing committee members

Activities	Total Target		Events	Actual Participants			Variance (+/-)	
	Events	Participants	Actual	Male	Female	Total	Events	Participants
Workshop with UP standing committee members	61	4,270	61	2,223	847	3,070	-	(1,200)

The SLG project also had the provision of the follow-up meeting with these standing committees to keep them in the right track. Due to the intervention of the SLG project, community people, especially women are being involved with the standing committees and UPs welcomed their participation. Standing committees which got support under the project had been functioning as a mechanism where citizens' groups/civil society advise the UP about the achievement of MDGs. Now-a-days UPs feel comfortable as general people are being actively involved in planning and monitoring processes of various schemes with them. It added new credibility and credentials for the Chairs and members of UPs.

3.1.3 Support to activate Ward Shava

The project aimed at activating *Ward Shava* by ensuring active participation of community people especially women at these events. It is believed that through these

events, transparency, accountability, and participation of the entire citizenry in local level planning and their implementation may be ensured. The local citizenry can be involved in the selection of beneficiaries of social safety net programmes. The project provided support to UPs and volunteers came forward to mobilise the community for greater participation of a cross section of people, especially women, disabled, minorities, and poor and marginalised groups in the *Ward Shava meetings*. Under the project they were motivated to plan mass action campaigns for floating local development needs as well. The project targeted 1,098 *shavas* with 164,700 beneficiaries. At the end, the project claimed that it had been able to support 1,085 *shavas*, with the participation of 123,977 citizens (75,347 males and 48,360 females).

Table 6. Support for Ward Shavas

Activities	Total Target		Events	Actual Participants			Variance (+/-)	
	Events	Participants	Actual	Male	Female	Total	Events	Participants
Support to UPs for organising ward <i>shava</i>	1,098	164,700	1,085	75,347	48,630	123,977	(13)	(40,723)

Being motivated and capacitated, UPs representatives started leading the discussions in the *Ward Shavas* as a way of disclosing financial information, taking input/feedback from citizens, engaging community members to set development priorities and incorporating those in UP's plans.

In each union, on an average 2,032 persons (male and female) attended the *Ward Shava* meetings. A total no of 1,085 *shavas* were held across 549 Wards (in all the 61 unions) with average attendance figures of 114 people in each event (including 45 women on an average). This is an impressive figure compared to other unions in the country. Several studies on local governance in Bangladesh, have assessed the issue of community participation in *Ward Shavas* and have come up with a dismal picture (Ahmed, *et al.* 2015). The project has shown a different and exceptional outcome, as a result of the very unique approach it followed in mobilising people in a concerted manner.

3.1.4 UP participatory budgeting

Under this project targeted UPs were provided support for preparing their budget which has to be formulated in line with the UP Operational Manual and it has to be followed by the 'open budget session' arranged for ensuring transparency and taking citizen's concern for each year, so that the budget is prepared in a transparent way and incorporating the voices of the concern groups including women, poor and vulnerable sections. At the end of the stipulated time, 61 UPs published their annual budget books and distributed them among the citizens.

Table 7. Open budget sessions

Activities	Total Target		Events	Actual Participants			Variance (+/-)	
	Events	Participants	Actual	Male	Female	Total	Events	Participants
Organise open budget session and publish budget booklet	61	12,200	61	7,490	3,268	10,758	-	(1,442)

3.1.5 Support developing UP's five-yr plan book

A five-year development plan is a mandatory task of UPs as per the UP Act-2009. Under the project UPs are given support to prepare their development plan. It is expected that the plans will be prepared through consultations with government officials, NGO professionals, standing committees, citizen groups, and by taking into consideration the priorities identified in ward *shava*. In the meantime, 2-3 consultations meetings with different stakeholders will be held for problem identification, priority setting and resource allocation.

Table 8. Development of UP five year plan book

Activities	Total Target		Events	Actual Participants			Variance (+/-)	
	Events	Participants	Actual	Male	Female	Total	Events	Participants
Develop UP's five year plan and publish plan book	61	-	44	28	24	52	(17)	-

As indicated in the table (8) above, the SLG project has successfully worked with 44 unions in publishing their respective Five Year Plans. The 17 remaining unions in the project had already received assistance in preparing their Five-Year Plans, from the Sharique programme (a local governance support project funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation that is also operating in some of the areas where the SLG project is working). In order to avoid a duplication of effort, the SLG project has not intervened in the 17 unions, where the Five-Year Plan has been created with help from the Sharique programme.

3.1.6 Formation of Upazila women's development forum

The *Upazila* forum is a platform that consists of elected female UP representatives of an *Upazila* who have received different kinds of training, including capacity building training and animator training under the SLG project. This platform is intended to play a substantial role in advocating with UPZ administration for effective delivery of government services, especially ensuring budgetary allocation for women related activities. It is a platform where female UP members get necessary information, develop networks amongst themselves, know each other's development issues, become aware of the availability of services at UPZ level, and share the challenges that they face. Forum members' sit together bi-monthly at the UPZ level to review the progress of their respective action plans. In the quarterly follow-up meeting, the forum members meet together, exchange their views and opinions, and take decisions for the future. The idea of having a " Women's Development Forum' in each *Upazila* came from GoB-UNDP project UZGP and UPGP. They also prepared guidelines and supported training for the forum members and arranged the election of the leaders of the forum. The SLG accepted the idea and accelerated the process. The SLG project helped to create 14 *Upazila* forums, for each of the 14 *Upazilas* and all the 14 forums are active as indicated in the following Table.

Table 9. Formation of Upazila Forum

Activities	Total Target		Events	Actual Participants			Variance (+/-)	
	Events	Participants	Actual	Male	Female	Total	Events	Participants
Upazila forum formation at Upazila level	14	350	14	67	332	399	-	49

The *Upazila* Forums are important for promoting stronger coordination and cooperation among the *Upazilas*, and the various unions under them. This is particularly important, given the centralised nature of the governance system. UPs, as mentioned before do not have a lot of financial and administrative autonomy, which stands as a challenge for their effectiveness. Bodies such as *upazila* Women Development Forums, help UPs work around the issues of women to a large extent, by ensuring a better working relationship with the authorities at the *Upazila*.

3.1.7 Publishing of Citizen Charter at UP

In order for Union *Parishads*, to comply with the provision of UP Act-2009, they are required to post a 'citizen charter' containing the list of services available, conditions and waiting period for receiving such services outside the UPs for general information for people. The project provided support to UPs to prepare and install citizen charters in their offices for the purpose of ensuring transparency and building awareness among citizens regarding the delivery of these services. Targeted UPs (61) prepared and installed their citizen charters with support from this project. The citizen charter contains available services of the UP, service charge, eligibility of persons and families for services, duration of delivery and duties of the citizens. The available services of a UP are citizenship/birth/death/character/inheritance certificate, trade license, building/construction certificate etc. As of December 2015, the SLG project had successfully installed citizen charters in all 61 of the UPs it is working with.

Table 10. Installation of UP Citizen Charter

Activities	Target	Actual	Variance (+/-)
Installation of UP Citizen Charter	61 Unions	61 Unions	-

The Citizen Charter acts as a formal list of all the available services that citizens can avail at their local UP. Moreover, it also lists official fees associated with these services, as well as the completion/processing time. Traditionally, this type of information has not been available for local people, and therefore there has always been a great deal of uncertainty and hesitation from the community, when it comes to taking normal services from the UP. By publishing the Citizen Charter in the UP buildings, the SLG project has managed to address this problem head on. The local citizenry is now more comfortable and confident about taking routine official services from the UP. The Citizen Charter has introduced a greater degree of transparency in the local governance system in the project unions, and people are now able to access services at their local UP, without any uncertainty or hesitation.

3.1.8 RTI workshop with UP

The Right to Information (RTI) Law, 2009, has ensured people's access to the flow of information which in turn, has made the activities of the institutions (UPs) transparent

leading to the attainment of MDGs. Therefore, conducting RTI workshop with UP was one of the activities of the SLG project. This ensures greater transparency and accountability from the UP itself. As part of this initiative, some UPs themselves also had undertaken awareness building initiatives like campaign, discussion meeting, distributing leaflet etc. Moreover, most of the UPs had been maintaining RTI register books in their UPs. Due to such types of initiatives people's access to UP information has been increased.

The RTI training given to the UP, has been complemented with a similar type of training given to community members (called Infomediaries). The community training component is discussed in more detail in later sections. As a result of the RTI trainings, a culture of easy access to information is emerging in the SLG project unions. All unions have a functioning information centre, and the 'Infomediaries' regularly interact with the UPs applying for and extracting relevant information for their fellow community members. This includes information on various issues, including land/property rights, education, legal issues, and so on. Traditionally, this type of information has not been easy to acquire for average citizens, due to the RTI training the scenario is changing. At the time of preparing this report, a total of 267 RTI applications had been submitted in the 61 unions the SLG project.

Table 11. RTI applications in the SLG project unions

	Kishoreganj	Habiganj and Sunamganj	Bagerhat	Total
RTI Applications	183	55	29	267

3.1.9 Exposure visit for selected UP representatives

One of the important interventions of the project was to arrange an exposure visit for a group of selected UP representatives to India in particular Kerala and West Bengal in order to enable them to learn from good practices of the Indian local government system. A process with certain indicators for selecting UP representatives for this programme was developed and followed during the project period. The exposure visit was completed in August 2015 and a post visit workshop was also arranged in Khulna.

3.2 Activities with active citizens-women, men and youth

3.2.1 Training for creating animator

The prevailing notion in society and among people themselves is that they lack the ability and the power to transform their own lives. The project aimed to create animators through animator training to mobilise the community people for a mass action campaign. The four-day training covered contents like people-centred development principles, gender equity, citizens' rights and responsibilities, visioning the role of UPs in development, and the role of citizen engagement in local governance. After participating in the training, the project claims that these animators are aware of their rights and responsibilities as citizens and gender issues in its proper contexts. The animators play an active role in their community in raising their voices against social ills. They are regularly arranging campaigns on various social issues such as early marriage, child trafficking, dowry and environmental issues like tree plantation, sanitation and so on. They are also making the community aware for ensuring their participation in decision-making in ward *shava* meetings and open budget meetings. Besides social activities, they are also engaging themselves in income generating activities like homestead

gardening, fisheries, cattle/poultry rearing, sewing, block boutique, handicraft etc. A total of 2,240 animators (1,131 males and 1,109 females) were trained through the SLG project.

Table 12. Training for creating animators

Activities	Total Target		Events	Actual Participants			Variance (+/-)	
	Events	Participants	Actual	Male	Female	Total	Events	Participants
Training for creating animators	61	2,196	61	1,131	1,109	2,240	-	44

3.2.2 Training and follow-up for creating women leaders

The project had a vision to create women leaders by mobilising women and men of the community to engage them in standing committees, participate in ward *shavas*, and to bring more women in public spaces. Under SLG project periodic follow-up meetings and refreshers with these women leaders on specific issues like RTI Act 2009, women empowerment, child marriage, school dropout, dowry, legal literacy and rights of women, women's political participation etc. were also conducted to direct them towards social activism related to their rights and obligations. Participants in these events were equipped with skills to conduct gender analysis, identify possible actions, conduct court yard meetings and specially work with men. Having participated in this training, women leaders have started conducting campaigns on social issues (child marriage, dowry, gender discrimination, sanitation) and environmental issues (tree plantation, sanitation) in their respective localities. Moreover, they have started mobilising other women in their communities to participate in income generating activities through court yard meetings. Due to the intervention of women leaders' motivational activities, mass awareness has been created in the community, and people are also accessing UP services more frequently. The SLGP trained a total of 1,098 women leaders.

Table 13. Leadership training for women

Activities	Total Target		Events	Actual Participants			Variance (+/-)	
	Events	Participants	Actual	Male	Female	Total	Events	Participants
Leadership training for women	61	1,098	61	-	1,098	1,098	-	-

3.2.3 Leadership training for youth

The project aimed to create youth leaders through leadership training to facilitate community development and to organise mass action campaigns and raise youth voices in local governance.

Another important focus of the youth leadership training was to develop a sense of social responsibility among them. After participating in the trainings, the youths conducted Vision Commitment and Action Workshops (VCAWs) in their localities highlighting the importance of self-reliant-communities. Besides these, the youths have actively been working with other animators and women leaders to generate social harmony in the community. They also help in running campaigns on various issues (early marriage, tree plantation, ward *shava*, open budget meeting etc.). The SLG project trained a total of 1,670 youth leaders (924 males and 764 females).

Table 14. Leadership training for youth

Activities	Total Target		Events	Actual Participants			Variance (+/-)	
	Events	Participants	Actual	Male	Female	Total	Events	Participants
Leadership training for youth	61	1,647	61	924	746	1,670	-	(23)

3.2.4 RTI training for creating infomediaries

Access to information is an important condition for establishing good governance especially ensuring transparency and accountability. A cadre of infomediaries was trained on the RTI Act 2009, so that they can play an active role in getting information for themselves and to disseminate this information for the benefit of the community. The infomediaries were selected from the animators, women and youth leaders and citizen committees. The related activities under this initiative included follow-up workshop for infomediaries of an *Upazila*, organising popular theatre, and arranging public shows. Due to the intervention of RTI training, access to information, transparency and accountability has increased at the UP level in the project unions. Table 15 shows the RTI training activities.

Table 15. RTI Training for creating Infomediaries

Activities	Total Target		Events	Actual Participants			Variance (+/-)	
	Events	Participants	Actual	Male	Female	Total	Events	Participants
RTI training for creating infocediaries	61	610	61	368	230	598	-	(12)

3.2.5 Formation of citizen committees

The citizen committees, formed in each ward (also called the Ward Citizen Committee), consists of trained volunteers including animators, women leaders, youth leaders, infomediaries, representatives of '*Polly Shomaj*', and ward members of the respected ward. The role of these committees is to co-operate with UPs in in the planning and implementation of their activities. They function as the intermediating entity between community people and unions, especially in ensuring transparency and accountability. A total of 549 Ward Citizen Committees have been created through the SLG project.

There are 9,453 individual members in those committees; 5,451 of whom are male, and 4,002 of whom are female. The Ward Citizen Committees (WCCs) act as an important forum for the members of the community themselves. The WCCs allow the community members to sit and discuss among themselves about various issues affecting their community. They work with their respective UPs to resolve many issues concerning their mutual interests. In order to increase the effectiveness of these WCCs, the SLG project assigns their own programme participants (animators, youth and women leaders) to be part of the committees. As trained community leaders, these individuals help ensure that the WCCs hold regular meetings, and also carry out their mandated duties for community development. Members of the local '*Polly Shomaj*' (it is an informal social organisation formed under BRAC's Community Empowerment Programme) are also included in these communities, as they actively work with organisations such as BRAC and have a fair understanding of the community's needs.

The project also helped organise the quarterly meetings of the committees. In the first year of the project it organised two meetings each. In the second year this has been increased to four (one in each quarter).

Table 16. Activities with ward citizen committees

Activities	Total Target		Events	Actual Participants			Variance (+/-)	
	Events	Participants	Actual	Male	Female	Total	Events	Participants
Citizen committee formation	549	8,235	549	5,451	4,002	9,453	-	1,218
Quarterly meeting of citizen committee	3,294	49,410	4,139	28,193	26,476	54,669	(845)	5,259

3.2.6 Vision, commitment, and action workshop (VCAW)

Vision, Commitment, and Action Workshop (VCAW) is one of the most important activities of the project. The aim of this activity is to mobilise people to create a vision of a self-reliant community. A total of 1,335 VCAWs were held during the two-year period of the SLG project. These workshops were attended by a total of 24,590 people; 11,980 of whom are male and 12,610 of whom are female. Due to intervention of VCAW, community people are organizing themselves and collectively taking initiatives needed to establish themselves as a self-reliant community. Community priorities are being identified through VCAW.

Table 17. Vision, commitment action workshops

Activities	Total Target		Events	Actual Participants			Variance (+/-)	
	Events	Participants	Actual	Male	Female	Total	Events	Participants
Vision, commitment action workshop (VCAW)	1,098	21,960	1,335	11,980	12,610	24,590	237	2,630

3.2.7 Popular theatre shows and workshops

The project had a provision of arranging popular theatre shows on the issues of active citizenship, good governance, right to information (RTI) act, participatory budgeting etc. It aimed to mobilise mass people and made them aware of social injustice, social problems, discrimination and empowerment of women. The theme of the popular theatre shows was decided through 11 popular theatre workshops at *Upazila* level, where 110 people attended (63 males and 47 females).

Table 18. Popular theatre shows and workshops

Activities	Total Target		Events	Actual Participants			Variance (+/-)	
	Events	Participants	Actual	Male	Female	Total	Events	Participants
Popular Theatre workshop	14	140	11	63	47	110	(3)	(30)

On the themes approved, 377 popular theatre shows were arranged, and were enjoyed by 70,228 males and 55,264 females. Through these shows villagers were given the necessary motivation to improve their livelihood. These shows created awareness on various social issues among the community people. These also helped in changing attitudes of family members of the community resulting in a reduction in child marriages,

school dropout rate, gender discrimination, and increased access to UP services, awareness on and right to information and increased awareness about mother and child healthcare.

Table 19. Popular theatre shows and workshops

Activities	Total Target		Events	Actual Participants			Variance (+/-)	
	Events	Participants	Actual	Male	Female	Total	Events	Participants
Popular Theatre shows	427	213,500	377	70,228	55,264	125,492	(50)	(88,008)

“Such types of noble initiatives deserve profound appreciation. I personally did not have any idea about right to information. This show was very helpful for me to overcome day to day problems”, - Jobbor, a viewer of popular theatre show.

3.2.8 Mass action campaign focused on MDGs

In order to raise awareness, mass action campaigns were carried out by animators and other citizen committees. High priority social issues for campaign were reduction of school dropout rates, ensuring birth-death registration, enrollment of children in school, sanitation, safe drinking water, etc. The volunteers carried out the campaigns across unions through rally, court-yard meetings etc.

3.3 Advocacy

The SLG project works with UPs, the lowest tiers of government in the country. Limited financial and administrative resources and autonomy are therefore the biggest challenges faced by both UPs and the project. Addressing these challenges requires a significant amount of advocacy work, especially with the upper tiers of the government. The project pursued advocacy with policymakers, organised advocacy workshops at the *upazila* and district levels, and helped create ‘Self-governing Union *Parishad* Advocacy Groups’, (working groups made up of UP representatives from the different unions in a district) to carry out advocacy work. The project had plans for carrying out advocacy on a much larger scale, particularly in terms of increased dialogue with policy makers, and the more advocacy workshops at the grassroots level. However, this was not possible due to time and resource constraints. Moving forward, an increased focus on advocacy related activities is a key lesson to be considered by the project.

3.3.1 Advocacy workshop at Upazila and district levels

Advocacy workshop at *upazila* and district levels involving government and non-government officials, local elected representatives, and community representatives were conducted under the SLG project. The objectives of these workshops were to ensure more coordination and communication among local people, government and non-government personnel, service providing organisations, and UPs, to make visible accountability and transparency in delivering services, to take steps for women's empowerment, and to identify and prioritise problems and to formulate recommendations for solving those problems. Raising of individual voices and learning and exchange meetings focused on rights to information among various institutions, were also done in the form of advocacy. Moreover, the project provided support to these forums for arranging advocacy workshops, once each year, where problems and recommendations made by citizens and UPs were presented before the officials at *upazila* in order to ensure government support for UP level development issues.

The SLGP facilitated 21 advocacy workshops at the *upazila* level, reaching out to 623 people (450 males and 173 females)

Table 20. Advocacy workshops at *upazila* level

Activities	Total Target		Events	Actual Participants			Variance (+/-)	
	Events	Participants	Actual	Male	Female	Total	Events	Participants
Advocacy workshop at <i>upazila</i> level	21	630	21	450	173	623	-	(7)

At the district level, the project facilitated 4 workshops with the attendance of 172 people (140 males and 32 females).

Table 21. Advocacy workshops at district level

Activities	Total Target		Events	Actual Participants			Variance (+/-)	
	Events	Participants	Actual	Male	Female	Total	Events	Participants
Advocacy workshop at district level	6	180	4	140	32	172	2	8

3.3.2 Policy advocacy

The project has undertaken advocacy with the policy makers in order to make policy reforms and to replicate good practices all over the country. To this end, best practices and lessons learned were documented and disseminated among relevant policy actors. The SLG project organised roundtable policy discussions at both the district and national level. It organised 2 events at the district level with the press and 1 event at the national level.

Table 23. Roundtable discussions on policy advocacy

Activities	Total target		Events	Actual Participants			Variance (+/-)	
	Events	Participants	Actual	Male	Female	Total	Events	Participants
Press meeting/round-table for policy advocacy at district level	4	16	2	6	-	6	2	10
Round-table discussion at national level	1	50	-	-	-	-	1	50

3.3.3 Dialogue and exchange meeting with LG division

The project had a vision to arrange dialogue and exchange meeting with the high officials of Local Government Division (LGD), Bangladesh to share good practices and learning generated from the project, so that it can have an impact at policy level to promote the approach across Bangladesh. However, due to political turmoil it was not possible to arrange in due time and shifted to the no-cost extension period (January-March 2016).

3.3.4 Support in strengthening self governing union parishad advocacy group (SGUPAG)

The project has catalysed the creation of a bottom-up alliance of UP representatives into an organised body known as 'Self-governing Union Parishad Advocacy Group' (SGUPAG) – that carries out advocacy to the central government for more resources and authority at a local level. This alliance plays a critical role in raising voices for policy reforms and creation of a supportive environment for UPs. In order to strengthen the SGUPAG, the project provided support to form the districts committees as well as their periodic meetings. Additionally, the project provided support to central committee of SGUPAG for arranging their periodic meetings in order to discuss their action plan. Four SGUPAGs including 220 males and 75 females in four districts (Bagerhat, Kishoreganj, Hobiganj and Sunamganj) under SLG project were formed. These groups are active in organising advocacy with the local government. They are playing their role as a pressure group to the government and non-government agencies to make their voices heard. They also devote some precious time for self-criticism to make them more accountable and transparent.

Table 24. Support in strengthening self governing union parishad advocacy group (SGUPAG)

Activities	Total Target		Events	Actual Participants			Variance (+/-)	
	Events	Participants	Actual	Male	Female	Total	Events	Participants
Support to district committee formation of SGUPAG	4	100	4	220	75	295	-	(195)

3.3.5 Follow-up meeting of SGUPAG district committees

The SLG project aims to form four SGUPAG committees followed by periodic meeting with them in the targeted four districts and accordingly these committees are formed in the light of project guideline. The project carried out a total of 12 follow-up meetings of SGUPAG district committees with a total of 300 participants

Table 25. Follow-up meeting of SGUPAG district committees

Activities	Total Target		Events	Actual Participants			Variance (+/-)	
	Events	Participants	Actual	Male	Female	Total	Events	Participants
Follow-up meeting of SGUPAG district committees	12	300	-	-	-	-	12	300

3.4 Value for money

Value for money is always a big concern in projects of this scope. The SLG project had a total budget of around BDT 6 crore. It has delivered a programme that is helping bridge the gap between local government and the citizenry, and empowering communities to take control of their own development. While this initiative has generated a lot of social value, it is difficult to measure the exact monetary value that it has generated. In order to capture the value for money delivered by the project, this report has calculated the average costs associated with its key activities, on the basis of number of beneficiaries.

Table 26. SLG Project's value for money

Sl No.	Issues of training and orientation	No of participants from 61 unions	Average participants per union	Total cost (BDT)	Average cost per participant (BDT)
1	UP chairmen and members' training on UP ACT 2009	735	12	3,508,100	4,772.93
2	Training on Standing Committees (SC) Members and chairs	3,070	50	610,000	198.70
3	Ward <i>Shava</i> (WS) meeting attendance	123,977	225	384,300	3.10
4	Open budget meeting	10,758	176	469,700	43.66
5	5 Year plan preparation (17 events)	52	-	988,500	19,009.62
6	Animator training	2,240	36	2,635,200	1176.43
7	Women Leaders training	1,098	14	4,974,550	4,530.56
8	Youth leaders training	1,670	27	1,976,400	1,183.47
9	Infomediaries	598	10	921,600	1,541.14
10	Ward level citizen committee	54,669		1,383,480	25.31
11	VCAW	24,590	403	144,113	5.86
12	Theatre Shows	125,492	2057	1,563,000	12.45
Total		348,949	3075	19,558,943	56.05

3.5 Concluding remarks on project milestones and achievements

The SLG project has carried out various activities related to educating and empowering both the UP representatives and the communities they serve. It has created local leaders from the community who can act as bridges between the community and the UP. Through its various activities, the project has created an enabling environment, where the practice of participatory, community driven governance can thrive. It has created an open system, where the UP and its constituents have realised that working together can truly benefit the community in the long run. The question now is; have these initiatives made an actual difference? This is explored in detail in the following chapter, where we share our findings from the field and in the concluding part of the study.

Chapter 4. Findings and Discussions

During the baseline study in late 2014, the SLG Project had finished its training programmes in most of the places and it was just the beginning of the project. During that time, both the UP representatives, and their constituents were interviewed. Through those interviews a first-hand account of the most important issues in local governance that the BRAC-THP programme was seeking to address were identified and explored. The main challenge for community driven governance appeared to be the lack of clear communication or understanding between the UP representatives and their constituents. This created a situation of distrust, where the people did not have faith in their elected representatives, while the representatives themselves struggled to perform their duties and serve the community. This is where the importance of participatory local governance comes in. If the UPs and communities clearly communicate and work together, they can break out of this cycle, and pool their resources together for the greater good of their locality. The BRAC-THP's SLG initiative is mainly built around this simple concept of strong UP-community relationships.

With a few exceptions, the treatment and comparison unions we visited during our baseline study, all exhibited the problem of poor UP-community relationships. In some areas, however, we saw motivated citizenry and politicians, and what appeared to be the beginnings of potential change. In the course of this end line study in late 2015, we revisited some of the unions from the baseline, as well as some new ones to observe the impact of the SLG project one year later. What we found this time around, was a much different picture in the project/treatment areas. In the treatment unions, there were several examples of community driven governance, with the people themselves working alongside their UP Chairmen and Members for the betterment of their communities. This is not to say, that a lot of the external issues and constraints facing local governance have completely disappeared, but rather, there has been a realisation among both local government agents and their constituents, that these challenges can be best resolved when they could come together.

The comparison unions in contrast did not exhibit the changes observed in the treatment unions. In these unions, the UPs are still struggling to function, while the local community remains passive and indifferent in involving them in the governance process. While there may be many other factors behind the difference between the treatment and comparison unions, from what we observed, the community's lack of knowledge on the functioning of local government seems to play a huge role in this. In addition to this, the absence of clear communication and dialogue between the UP and the community further creates a situation where the two parties are unable to work together. The opposite scenario that exists in the treatment unions, indicate a positive effect of the SLG initiative. The key findings are discussed in greater detail in the following sections.

4.1 Assessing capacity of UPs to carry out their legal mandate in a transparent, accountable and inclusive manner

The UP Act 2009 dictates several roles and responsibilities to be carried out by UP Chairmen and Members as representatives of the people. One of the major components of the BRAC-THP programme is ensuring that the trained-UP representatives are aware of the mandates of the UP Act and carry out their duties in line with these directives. A large part of these roles and responsibilities includes engaging and working with the local community through various meetings and committees, including ward *shavas*,

open budget meetings, and standing committees. These meetings and committees are intended to create a common platform through which UPs and the community can work together on local governance and development related issues. During the baseline study of this project in December 2015, a common observation was that the UP representatives were aware of their duties and mandates, but not necessarily able to carry them out all the time. This was mainly due to complications within the system (such as undue political influence, local corruption etc.), and due to lack of participation from the communities themselves. In all matters of local governance, there were a sense of distrust in the community towards their UP representatives. One year on, at the time of this end line study, there have been examples of change. In the areas where the SLG project is running, the UPs have started functioning better, with the participation of the local community. The traditional relationship of distrust is slowly replaced by mutual trust and confidence and UP representatives have been finding it easier to fulfil their mandates, while collectively facing all challenges in partnership with their constituents. In order to properly assess whether the UP Chairmen and Members were carrying out their mandates, we checked the official records of activities at the UP. We validated this data through interviews with community members. In doing so, a common trend was revealed. Official documentation of the UP meetings (including attendance numbers, money spent, and other paperwork) were found in the treatment and in almost all the comparison unions. By this account, it appeared on the surface that the UPs in both the programme and non-programme areas were carrying out their mandates. However, after interviewing the community members themselves, very different facts and realities resurfaced and came to light. In the programme areas, the UPs were indeed carrying out their mandates and working with the community, as indicated on paper. In the non-programme areas this was not the case. Despite the official documentation and paperwork, the UPs were not actually carrying out their prescribed activities. Only false paper formalities are maintained to satisfy the official audit requirements. This is an important finding which influences the results furnished below.

4.1.1 Activating ward shava

Ward *Shavas* ensure transparency and direct accountability, direct participation of the entire citizenry in local level planning and implementation. The entire citizenry is involved in the selection of beneficiaries of social safety net programmes and these *shavas* are held at least twice in each year in the presence of at least 5% of voters. During the baseline study, it was found that ward *shavas* are not held regularly in all unions either the treatment or comparison category. There was also very little involvement from the community. This scenario appears to have changed after one year in the treatment unions, where regular ward *shavas* are now held with participation from the community. While these *shavas* are also held in the comparison unions, the key difference lies in the level of community involvement.

Table 27. Average attendance at ward shavas

	Treatment Unions	Comparison Unions
Kishoreganj	154	100
Habiganj	81	32
Bagerhat	558	158
Sunamganj	460	150

The Table 27 shows the average attendance numbers at the ward *shavas* held in each of the unions (Seven treatment and seven comparison) that were visited for the study. The difference in numbers of attendees between treatment and comparison unions may be attributed to the low levels of community involvement in the comparison areas. This is what was inferred from the qualitative interviews taken with the UP representatives and the community people.

“We try to maintain the practice of holding regular ward shavas in all the wards of our unions. We encourage everyone to attend especially women, and we get a lot of participation from the community, because they are better informed.” – (Interview with UP Chairman, treatment union)

“Before, people in our area were afraid of even approaching the Chairman or Members about their problems. Now they know better. They participate in forums like ward shavas and bring up their concerns to the very Chairmen and Members they were afraid of before” – (FGD with local community members, treatment union)

As illustrated by the quotes above, there appears to be an increase in both knowledge and action from both the UPs and the local community in terms of ward *shavas*. One important part of the ward *shavas*, is deciding on the distribution of social safety net packages such as VGD/VGF cards. UPs normally receive a limited number of these cards, and often some of what they receive may be taken by other influential actors in the local governance system. During the baseline, the irregularities in the distribution of these benefits was a common point of contention between the UP and the community. With the practice of holding regular ward *shavas* and wider attendance of the community, this problem appears to have abated.

“Before, we were not aware of who gets VGD and VGF cards and other benefits. But now we have regular ward shavas where we sit with our Members and decide the distribution. We used to think before that the UP is stealing from us because they never talked to us about these issues. Now it is better because we are involved.” – (FGD with local community members, treatment union)

Ward *shavas* are an important platform for creating community led governance, and this has been a key difference between the treatment and comparison unions. This is illustrated by the attitude of the UP and the people in the comparison areas.

“We hold ward shavas regularly, but there is little or no participation from the local community. To be honest, the only people who attend are a limited number of influential people from the area. People sometimes come when we announce we will give out some benefits, but at end participation is very minimum”– (Interview with UP Member, comparison union)

“Some of us attended a ward shava once, and we did not know what we were supposed to do. We raised some concerns in front of the Member, but later nothing was done about it. It seems our opinions do not matter, and so people from our community do not attend these events or bother to find out what is happening in the UP.” – (FGD with local community members, comparison union)

“We have heard that the UP holds ward shavas, but we have no idea when these are held and what happens at these shavas. The Chairman and Members hold these shavas and go ahead with their business as usual. We do not get involved from the community” – (FGD with local community members, comparison union)

Lack of people’s participation in the ward *shavas* is a very common occurrence observed in the comparison unions. This appears to be mainly due to a lack of

knowledge and interest from the local community. This automatically makes it more difficult for the UPs in these areas to engage with the community.

During the baseline, several UP Members and Chairmen cited lack of funds as one of the main reasons why ward *shavas* were not held regularly. This end line study collected data from both the treatment and comparison on the average spent on these *shavas*.

Table 28. Average expenditure on ward *shavas*

	Treatment unions		Comparison unions	
	Amount (BDT)	Source of funds	Amount (BDT)	Source of funds
Kishoreganj	3510	UP members/chairman	3510	UP members/chairman
Habiganj	822	UP members/chairman+ NGO	No record	No record
Bagerhat	8467	UP members/chairman+ NGO	4778	UP members/chairman
Sunamganj	4400	UP members/chairman+ NGO	3255	UP members/chairman

As indicated by the Table 28, the unions have a varying amount of expenditure on ward *shavas*. In the treatment unions, financial assistance is provided by NGOs for these events. This might be a notable point of difference between the two types of unions. Regularly paying for ward *shavas* might not be financially feasible for the UP Chairmen and Members in the comparison unions, especially since there appears to be very little participation from the community. Financial support for events like ward *shavas* therefore appears to be an important factor to consider, as the SLG project moves ahead.

Table 29. Use of guidelines for ward *shavas*

Guidelines and NGO Assistance						
	Treatment Unions			Comparison Unions		
	Guidelines Used?	Guidelines sufficient?	Help from NGOs?	Guidelines Used?	Guidelines sufficient?	Help from NGOs?
Kishoreganj	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Habiganj	Yes	Yes	Yes	No record	No record	No record
Bagerhat	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sunamganj	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Another area we explored was the use of official guideline in the ward *shavas*. By all accounts this seemed to be a common practice in both the treatment and comparison unions (where records were available), respondents claimed to have followed the proper guidelines. In reality however, there are no officially given guidelines from government (LGD), to follow. The working NGOs prepared their own guidelines the way they understood the ward *shavas*. The 'guidelines' that all UPs referred they followed are mere instructions from their facilitators. The main area of difference here, appears to be the support (training, facilitation, follow-up etc.) received from NGOs. This support was only provided in the treatment unions, but not in the comparison unions. This is perhaps an area that might be explored further, as NGO assistance (such as the one provided by BRAC and THP) might make it easier for UPs to carry our regular ward *shavas* with the involvement of the community. This support should also come from government in terms of guidelines and facilitation for all the UPs of the country under comprehensive

package. Isolated NGO support may not be sufficient but the approach the SLG followed may need some consideration while planning the support.

The study also explored if other official practices were being observed in relation to ward *shavas*, and particularly what methods the UP used to inform people about the time, venue and agenda of the ward *shava* meeting.

Table 30. Ward *shava* protocols

	Treatment Unions			Comparison Unions		
	How was community informed?	Attendance Taken?	<i>Shava</i> records retained	How was community informed?	Attendance taken?	<i>Shava</i> records retained?
Kishoreganj	Notice	Yes	Yes	Notice	Yes	Yes
Habiganj	Notice	Yes	Yes	No action	Yes	Yes
Bagerhat	Miking	Yes	Yes	Miking	Yes	Yes
Sunamganj	Miking	Yes	Yes	Miking	Yes	Yes

Solving Community Problems through Ward *Shavas*

“There is no way to avoid knowing about the ward *shavas* in our village” declares Rumi Saha. “A few days before the *shava*, the Member comes to the village and informs us, and public announcements are made by the Union Parishad. We have no excuse for missing this event, and we always try to attend” he adds. Rumi is from a small Hindu village in a treatment union in Bagerhat.

The Hindu community of the area, has good relations with the local UP, which in turn engages regularly with them in deciding on important local governance related issues. Members of the community say that they are always informed when the UP receives social benefits such as VGD/VGF cards, and disability and old age benefits. The local member sits with the community in the ward *shavas* and together they decide who these cards should go to. “We know there are a very limited number of these cards which are not enough for everyone who even deserves to get one.

In the ward *shavas* we all sit together and decide with the Member, who should get these benefits” says Alpona Rani, another member of the community.

This process is not just limited to the distribution of benefits only; it extends to other aspect of local governance and development. “At a ward *shava* we told our Member about paving the road leading up to our village. He brought it up at the UP-budget meeting and got half a kilometre of the road paved. The rest of the road will be paved after the next budget” said other community members.

The UP as it claimed, helps the community in observing their religious festivals without any sort of harassment. While the community and the UP actively work together, they are also aware of the limitations facing the UP. However, by working together they know the limitations and challenges and attempt to ensure good governance in their own communities.

4.1.2 Carrying out UP meeting

UP meetings or UP *shavas*, are mandatory meeting every UP has to have for formal decision-making. This is an UP’s internal formality that does not directly involve the community. However, it covers legal bindings that are to be carried out by the UP. These meetings are held so that the UP representatives and other relevant officials can plan out their work internally. These meetings are meant to be held every month. It also gives them a chance to plan out their meetings with the community (including Ward *Shavas*). Several agendas are set in these meetings and appropriate actions are taken after

discussion among the UP. This study explored the status of these UP meetings/*shavas* in both the treatment and comparison unions. To gauge the effectiveness of these *shavas*, we calculated the average number of agendas raised and resolved (through) action in both the treatment and comparison unions for 2014 and 2015 (Table 31).

Table 31. Average number of agendas discussed and resolved in UP *Shavas*

	Treatment unions (2014)	Comparison unions (2014)	Treatment unions (2015)	Comparison unions (2015)
Kishoreganj	3	1	3	2
Habiganj	5	3	5	3
Bagerhat	4	4	3	4
Sunamgonj	4	3	4	4

The number of agenda items as recorded in the notice book gives a good picture of the quality and effectiveness of the meetings. In most cases, UP monthly meetings are dominated by the Chairs. In many cases, the meetings are finished without discussing the agenda. This is the information that emerged after informal discussions with the UP representatives.

4.1.3 Enabling standing committees as a functionary mechanism

The UP Act 2009 requires each Union *Parishad* to establish 13 Standing Committees (SCs) consisting of 5-7 members in each to ensure citizen involvement in key areas such as health, education and economic development. These committees, to be chaired by UP representatives (elected members), and its members also include committed individuals from the union. The SCs include:

- Finance and establishment
- Audit and accounts
- Tax assessment and collection
- Education, health and family planning
- Agriculture, fisheries and livestock and other economic development work
- Rural infrastructure development, protection and maintenance
- Maintenance of law and order
- Birth-death registration
- Sanitation, water supply and drainage
- Social welfare and disaster management;
- Development & conservation of environment and tree plantation
- Resolution of family conflicts, women and children welfare
- Culture and sports.

The 13 SCs cover various areas pertaining to local governance and development. The SC's role is also very important for addressing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The purpose of these committees is to plan activities in their relevant areas, suggest budget and review the achievements. Some of the SCs are directly involved with the achievement of certain MDGs at the union level.

As part of this end line study, we explored the status of SC's in the treatment and comparison unions.

This was done again by consulting the official records of UPs. In addition, discussions with the UP Secretary was specially valued. Our focus was on whether the SC's were active. We defined 'active' here as SC's that held regular meetings and carried out their agendas. The breakdown is shown in the table 32.

Table 32. Status of standing committees

	Treatment unions		Comparison unions	
	No. of active SCs	Avg. No. of members per SC	No. of active SCs	Avg. No. of members per SC
Kishoreganj	13	7	13	5
Habiganj	13	5	2	5
Bagerhat	13	5	13	5
Sunamgonj	13	5	13	5

As shown in the table above, official UP records state that the 13 SC's are active in almost all the unions, with the exception of the comparison unions we visited in Habiganj, which only had 2 SC's that were active according to records.

Upon further exploring the status and work of the SC's in the treatment and comparison, a similar trend emerged as seen in the case of ward *shavas*. These committees were established in both areas, as mandated by the UP ACT 2009. However, a crucial point of difference again appeared in terms of people's participation in these committees, and in some cases the knowledge of the UP representatives themselves regarding the SC's. During the baseline study, this situation was also observed in the treatment areas themselves. One year on however, there appears to have been a considerable shift in attitudes and practices.

“A year ago, we had no clear idea about the role and functions of Standing Committees. I personally did not even know what a Standing Committee is though I was the chair of two committees. After the training from THP this has changed. We are now all proactive about our duties and participation in the SC's. We hold regular meetings, and the people themselves participate.” – (Interview with UP Member in treatment union).

A very encouraging trend seen in the treatment union was the interest and knowledge shown by the community members themselves regarding their roles in the SC's.

“We learnt about Standing Committees and what role we, the people can play in them, through the training provided by THP. Our Chairman and Members have learnt about this too. This is why we are all playing our part.” - (FGD with local community members, treatment union)

These accounts from the UP and the community represent a considerable shift from the mentality and practices observed in the treatment areas during the baseline study. Interviews and discussions with the UP representatives and the community people themselves allowed us to ascertain if the SC's were truly functioning through the cooperation of the UP and the people, or whether they were largely ceremonial. Some accounts received from the treatment unions have been highlighted above, and as discussed they indicate a positive role being played by SCs in the community.

In the comparison unions, a different picture was observed. The UP representatives interviewed claimed SCs were functional in the area, but once again, involvement from the community was virtually non-existent. This does not mean that these SC's were not carrying out their responsibilities. However, the committees might be more effective if there was more involvement from the community.

The people from the community who are part of the standing committees include local teachers, doctors and so on. Other than this, there are really no general people from the community. The committees do whatever work is possible, however, there is no involvement or interest from the community at large.

This is because they are unaware of these aspects of the UP” – (Interview with a community person/standing committee member, comparison union)

“We have heard of standing committees and ward shavas, but we do not know anything about them. We hear this is how work gets done in the union, but we are generally not involved in these things” – (FGD with local community member, comparison union)

“We know about Standing Committees, because some of us are members of these committees. But this is the extent of our knowledge. We do not know what these committees are supposed to do, as we have never been called for meetings or for any work. Only the Chairman and the UP Secretary know what these committees actually do.”– (FGD with local community members, comparison union)

Community and UP led groups like SCs can make in the development of a union. However, this requires good cooperation and coordination between the UP and the community. This is an area of great difference between the treatment and comparison unions. In the treatment unions, the SCs can function effectively, because the committee members themselves are dedicated. The UP works with the community to ensure that the SC holds regular meetings, and carries out its duties. The statements from the comparison unions show a completely different picture. According to the accounts of the UPO and community members in these areas, SCs appear to exist mainly on paper. Community members who are part of these committees, are never called upon by the UP to do any work. In some cases, it appears, the UP representatives themselves are not aware of their own functions in the SCs. Naturally this has created an environment, where institutions like SCs are not used as effective tools for community involvement.

The following case study illustrates how SCs are making a difference in their communities, and how the involvement of the community itself is an important factor in this.

Standing Committee fixes teacher absenteeism at local school

Doulutpur, a village in the Gopaya Union of Kishoreganj, was experiencing problems with teacher absenteeism at the local primary school. The parents had noticed this problem for a while and were frustrated by it. They did not have a lot of faith in their local Member and Chairman, and so did not approach them about this issue. This all started changing this year, when they noticed people from their own community becoming proactive in educating people on their rights and responsibilities as citizens, and how they could work with the UP for the betterment of the community. “We started interacting with our local Member more and became comfortable sharing our concerns”, says Halim Mia a father of two children from Doulutpur. “We brought up the issue of teachers being absent regularly at the primary school directly to our Member”, he adds. Upon hearing this, the Member informed them of Standing Committees, and how there was a committee whose duty it is to deal with issues related to education. “Our Member apa took some of us and raised our concerns to the committee. They heard us and took this issue directly to the UNO (Union Nirbahi Officer),” says Amena Khatun, another parent from the village. “The UNO himself came to the school and saw what was going on. He made sure the absent teachers were penalised, and warned the Headmaster that this type of behaviour would not be tolerated in the future” she adds. Following this action, teacher absenteeism is no longer an issue at the local primary school. The parents and the community are all happy not only because the children will get proper education; but also, because they have seen how seriously the UP respects their concerns and works with them to solve their problems.

4.1.4 Open budget meetings

Open budget meetings are another important milestone of the UP Act 2009. These meetings are to be held once annually, in the presence of the UP representatives, local government officials and most importantly the people of the community. The aim of these events is to introduce a greater degree of transparency in the way the UP receives and allocates its funds. Insufficient financial resources are a pressing issue facing UPs across Bangladesh. The open budget meetings, while not a complete solution; do create a certain degree of accountability in the system. While exploring the issue of open budgets, we once again consulted UP's official records to compare the type of funds allocated to the unions we visited. This information is provided below for review.

Table 33. Open budget in treatment unions (2014)

	Avg. Budget size (BDT)	Own collection (BDT)	Govt. Allocation (BDT)	Total spent (BDT)
Kishoreganj	11,463,275	232,319	10208973	10139846
Habiganj	10,176,242	1,562,656	8613586	10176242
Bagerhat	8,060,146	1,805,000	6255146	8060146
Sunamgonj	8,232,500	784,223	7448277	8232500
Treatment Avg.	9,483,041	1,096,050	8,131,496	9,152,184

Table 34. Open budget in comparison unions (2014)

	Avg. Budget size (BDT)	Own collection (BDT)	Govt. Allocation (BDT)	Total spent (BDT)
Kishoreganj	5,149,210	37,170	4,795,562	5,149,210
Habiganj	4,991,200	502,000	4,489,200	4,991,200
Bagerhat	3,788,511	731,305	3,788,511	3,788,511
Sunamgonj	5,324,335	44,654	5,279,681	5,324,335
Comparison Avg.	4,813,314	328,782	4,588,239	4,813,314

The Table 33 and 34 above indicate the budget size, and budget sources for treatment and comparison unions. The budgets on average appear to be much larger in the treatment unions compared to the comparison unions. In the treatment unions, the average budget size stood at around BDT 9.4 million; while in the comparison unions, the average budget size was around BDT 4.8 million.

On average, the treatment unions also appear to receive around double from government allocations compared to the comparison unions (BDT 8.1 million in treatment versus BDT 4.5 million in comparison). There are probably various factors behind this, however this is an issue that is beyond the scope of our study. For the purpose of our study however, it is interesting to note the differences in the amount of budget money raised by the UPs themselves. On average, the treatment UPs raised BDT 1 million on their own, while the comparison managed around BDT 3 lakhs on average. This might be an indication of better financial management and more responsible tax payment habits from the part of the local community. The study also examined the budget records for the year 2015 (See Table 35 and 36).

Table 35. Open budget in treatment unions (2015)

	Avg. Budget size (BDT)	Own collection (BDT)	Govt. Allocation (BDT)	Total spent (BDT)
Kishoreganj	8,699,647	254,039	9,161,324	7,969,446
Habiganj	11,972,401	2,172,496	9,799,905	11,972,401
Bagerhat	8,252,242	1,589,500	6,662,742	8,252,242
Sunamgonj	8,318,433	924,355	7,394,078	8,318,433
Treatment Avg.	9,310,681	1,235,098	8,254,512	9,128,131

Table 36. Open budget in comparison unions (2015)

	Avg. Budget size (BDT)	Own collection (BDT)	Govt. Allocation (BDT)	Total spent (BDT)
Kishoreganj	5,465,068	70,465	5,118,660	5,465,068
Habiganj	8,802,000	589,000	8,213,000	8,802,000
Bagerhat	4,513,048	1,298,894	3,314,154	3,443,848
Sunamgonj	5,562,723	67,629	5,495,094	5,562,723
Comparison Avg.	6,085,710	506,497	5,535,227	5,818,410

The budget trend for 2015 does not represent much of a shift from the previous fiscal year. The treatment unions have larger budgets, with the average budget size of BDT 9.3 million (a very small drop from BDT 9.4 million from the year before). The comparison unions have a smaller average budget size of BDT 6 million, this represents a rise from the 2014 figure of BDT 4.8 million. The amounts allotted by the government and raised by the UPs themselves, also follow a similar trend. The treatment unions received BDT 8.2 million on average from the government (a small increase from the previous year), while the comparison unions received an average of BDT 5.5 million (an increase from last year). Finally, the treatment and comparison unions raised an average of BDT 1.2 million and BDT 0.5 million respectively from their own sources. These figures both represent an increase from the previous year but in terms of size of the amount treatment unions were further ahead.

The tables also indicate that all 14 UPs spent their yearly budgets. This money was largely used to fund and support local governance and community development. Open budget meetings ensure community involvement in the deciding how these budget funds should be spent. While open budget meetings have been common practice in Bangladesh for some time, community participation in the process has been somewhat passive. During the baseline, a common theme observed was that community people would show up at open budget meetings and this is where their participation would end.

One year later as we collected endline data, this too is an area where there appears to have been a shift in attitudes and practice, especially in the treatment unions.

“Before the budget, the UP makes many public announcements in the community. The volunteers from the Hunger Project also go door to door, encouraging us all to attend. This has given us the courage and motivation to actively participate in these events.” – (FGD with local community members, treatment union)

While the above quote shows a shift in attitudes in the treatment unions, a different picture was observed in the comparison unions, both from the community and the UP.

“We hold open budgets meetings every year as we are supposed to, and try to get the community involved, but the truth is people are simply not interested. It is usually us UP representatives, local influential people and local government officials who attend.” – (Interview with UP Member, comparison union)

“What is the point of going to open budget meetings? We do not have any say in this process. The UP organises these events, where they invite and feed important people. They sit, eat, and plan the budget amongst themselves. There is no reason for us to attend.” – (FGD with local community members, comparison union)

Another significant point of difference between treatment and comparison unions, appears to be in the area of budget booklets. According to official mandates, UPs must publish a budget booklet outlining the various components of the budget. This booklet is a public document that is freely available for all. The purpose of this booklet is to introduce a greater degree of transparency to the budget process, and to ensure that the local community is fully aware of all of the union’s revenues and expenditures. The SLG project has included this as a part of its training, and the effects are seen in both the treatment and comparison unions.

Table 37. Publishing of budget booklet

	Treatment unions	Comparison unions
Kishoreganj	Yes	No
Habiganj	Yes	Information not available
Bagerhat	Yes	No
Sunamgonj	Yes	No

The table above indicates that the practice of publishing budget booklets, while prevalent in the treatment unions, is not common practice in the comparison unions. This is important to note, as the budget booklets add an important dimension of transparency and inclusiveness in the union’s budgeting process; and by extension in the local governance process. The practice of publishing the budget booklet it has been observed, does tend to have a positive effect on how the community perceives the open budgeting process and also their willingness to be a part of this process. This is reflected in the contrasting sentiments of the community people in the treatment and comparison unions visited for the study.

“We have attended budget meetings in the past, but did not really understand them. This year, the UP published a booklet with the budget that explains everything. We do not have to fear our union’s money being misused, as everything is explained in the booklet. We feel encouraged now, because if we find any irregularities we can talk to our Members and Chairman about it” – (FGD with local community members, treatment union)

A different type of sentiment altogether was observed in the comparison unions, as illustrated by the following quotes.

“We all go to the budget meetings, because the UP invites the community and also provides refreshments. Many high officials including the UNO attend these meetings, but we do not really understand what is going on. We only sit and listen. We are not sure what else we should do.” – (FGD with local community members, comparison)

“The budget is the concern of the Chairman and Members. We do not have any involvement in this matter. All we know is, the Chairman and Members sit together and plan the budget amongst themselves. We have no say in the matter; we just see the money being spent.” – (FGD with local community members, comparison union)

When it comes to open budgets, therefore, the picture is very different in the treatment and comparison unions. In the treatment unions where the SLG project is working, the concept of open budget is taken very seriously. The community is involved in the process, and the UP also publishes budget booklets, so that everyone is well informed on their union’s financial dealings. In the comparison unions this is not the case. Here people’s knowledge and participation are both very limited. Budgets are decided by higher authorities and presented at open budget meetings, where the participation of the community is virtually non-existent. This difference in community involvement might also explain why the treatment unions on average are able to have bigger budgets (and bigger personal collections), as opposed to the comparison unions.

A truly open budget

In the Gopaya Union of Habiganj, the annual open budget meeting has become a very community centred event. General community cooperation and involvement with the UP is becoming common practice in this union where BRAC and the Hunger Project have been running their SLG programme. In addition to ward *shavas* and standing committee meetings, another area where the community are becoming more involved is in the open budget meetings. The UP, with the help of the programme animators and youth and women leaders, have been engaging more with the community in terms of proactively participating in the open budget meetings. The UP has also started the practice of regularly printing a budget booklet and making it available to the public. This type of practice appears to have made a significant difference in the way the community contributes to the budget sessions. The booklet serves as an official record that is accessible to all. The local community members feel this is a very good initiative. “We do not always get sufficient money in our budgets, so it is important to let the people know where this money will be spent”, says a local UP Member. The people themselves are now more knowledgeable about the functions and limitations of the local governance system. They appreciate the open approach in which the UP is engaging with them. Community members we spoke to echo this sentiment. “I was not present at the budget this year, but I found all the information in the booklet provided by the UP”, says Khaled Huq a local entrepreneur. Small initiatives like this, are part of the process through which UPs are beginning to engage more effectively with the community. This is leading to visible changes in unions like Gopaya, where local governance is transforming into a truly community driven process.

4.1.5 UDCC meetings

The Union Development Coordination Committee (UDCC) is a government organisation formed to raise awareness in the local community regarding governance and development. Organising regular UDCC meetings is one of the responsibilities of the UP. These meetings are attended by the UP representatives, local government officials, NGO staff (if applicable) and most importantly, members of the community. The purpose of these meetings is to raise awareness among the masses, and also to discuss relevant governance and development issues pertaining to the community. This study explored the status of UDCC meetings in the treatment and comparison unions and found the following results. Table 38 represents the treatment unions and Table 39 for comparison unions.

Table 38. UDCC meetings in treatment unions

	No. of meetings	No. of UP Reps	No. of Government officials	No. of NGO Staff	No. of Community people
Kishoreganj	5	17	11	2	8
Habiganj	3	13	5	5	20
Bagerhat	5	10	5	5	17

Table 39. UDCC meetings in comparison unions

	No. of meetings	No. of UP Reps	No. of Government officials	No. of NGO Staff	No. of Community people
Kishoreganj	No records	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Habiganj	13	11	5	6	40
Bagerhat	6	13	11	0	10

It is interesting to note that the number of community people attending UDCC meetings appears to be higher in comparison unions, as opposed to treatment unions. Following interviews with the community people in the comparison unions, it was found that people did not really have a good idea of these meetings, and it was usually the community elites who attended such events.

UDCC meetings are not a part of the SLGP. The UDCC is more of a public-sector initiative that is to be spearheaded by the UP and other relevant government bodies. However, it is encouraging to see that such initiatives are indeed taking place.

4.2 Evaluating rural citizenry involvement to hold UPs accountable and to take a proactive role in addressing local development needs

Community driven governance is the central theme and objective of the SLG programme. As seen in the previous section, community participation has been the key difference in creating better governance and development practices in the treatment unions. This is more apparent when we explore the comparison unions, where the UP-community relationship is not as well established.

In order to invigorate community trust and involvement in local governance, the SLG project trained selected individuals from the local communities. They include animators, youth leaders and women leaders. These individuals act as a bridge between the UP and the people. They educate the local community on their rights and responsibilities and ensure their participation in forums such as ward *shavas* and Vision, Commitment and Action Workshops (VCAWs). They raise voices about the concerns of the people to the UP Chairmen and Members, and also encourage their engagement with the community. They play a key role in achieving the programme's objectives, by facilitating the process of community driven governance.

For the end line study, we also explored in detail the roles played by these trained community volunteers and how their work is bringing about positive changes at personal and community level.

4.2.1 Community engagement activities of animators

The animators in the project consist of both men and women of varying ages and professions. They work as local change agents in invigorating the cooperative relationship between UP and community. Animators are people from the local community, who are trained by the programme on various issues pertaining to local governance, including citizen rights, and services provided by the UP. Animators in turn use this knowledge to educate their fellow citizens. They play a more important role when it comes to acting as a liaison between the UP representatives and the community. This liaising role is considered very important in ensuring community cooperation.

The SLG project trained a total of 2,240 animators in 61 Unions. The men and women trained as animators are in turn using this training and knowledge to make a difference in their communities.

“The animator training, we received from the Hunger Project covered many topics, including the dangers of child marriage, the importance of education, and on the various services and facilities that people are entitled to have from the UP. We use this knowledge to educate people in our community and to encourage them to work with the UP.” – (Interview with animator, treatment union)

Animators also play an active role in terms of awareness building on various, social, health, education and development related issues in their communities

“There are animators in every ward of our union. We do not only teach people how to get services from the UP, we also raise awareness on health and sanitation in our wards, and talk about the importance of education, and the dangers of child marriage.” – (Interview with animator, treatment union)

The role played by animators in engaging with the community, has proven to be beneficial for the UP itself. Increased cooperation from the community, is making it easier for UP representatives to carry out their official mandates.

“The animators and volunteers trained by the SLG project have been very helpful in encouraging the community to work with the UP. It is now easier to hold events like ward shavas, as people actively participate, thanks to the encouragement of the project volunteers” – (Interview with UP Chairman, treatment union)

Community volunteers such as animators are part of the SLG project. They are not present in the comparison unions where the project is not implemented. This is perhaps an important factor behind the lack of community participation in governance. In section 4.1, this report talked about the general lack of community participation in matters of local governance and development, and it appears this can be attributed to the lack of community volunteers in these areas. The SLG project areas on the other hand seems to have benefitted greatly from the animators and other community volunteers, who not only encourage the community to work with the UP, but also raise awareness on various issues related to community development, including education, health/sanitation and livelihood activities. This active level of community engagement is a key difference between the treatment and comparison unions, and perhaps a driving factor behind the lack of community driven governance in the comparison unions.

“Even though this is our area, as local people we are hardly involved in matters of governance. The UP does not bother engaging with us on these matters, and there is no one in the community to speak on r behalf to the authorities” – (Interview with local community member, comparison union)

“The truth is, people in our area are not aware of many of the challenges that the UP faces. We ourselves lack knowledge on many subjects like this. Awareness building is very necessary, and we also, need a better way to engage with the community”– (Interview with UP Member, comparison union)

The above quote, along with the accounts shared in section 4.1, reflect the general situation and attitude in the comparison unions. The problem of weak UP-community relationships is a prominent issue in these areas. Without community volunteers, there is no bridge between the community and the UP. Consequently, the sense of cooperation that is present in the treatment unions, is virtually non-existent in the nearby comparison unions.

Animator preventing child marriages in the community

“My first action as an animator was stopping a young girl from getting married. It happened on the day I finished my training” says Utpal Barua, as he talks of his experience with the SLG project.

Utpal is a *madrassa* teacher from Fakirhat, and an animator with the SLG project. In 2014, on the final day of his animator training, Utpal returned home to find his neighbour hosting the marriage ceremony of his fourteen-year-old daughter. The girl’s mother had passed away some time ago, and the father wanted to marry off his daughter. “The dangers of child marriage are one of the topics we discussed during the training. My wife, and I decided to talk to the father about stopping this marriage” says Utpal, as he recalls the incident. Utpal and his wife spoke to the father, but could not change his mind. “When I saw, talking was no use, I threatened to call the TNO (Thana Nirbahi Officer) and the local police” adds Utpal. This threat scared the groom’s family. They promptly left, calling off the wedding. Afterwards Utpal talked with his neighbour and convinced him to let his daughter finish school and come of age before getting married. The young girl now regularly attends school, and has been given a second chance to continue her education. The incident also raised a lot of awareness on the issue of child marriage in the community. As for Utpal, he is proud to have made a positive contribution to his community. His experience reflects the core essence of the SLG programme; small positive individual actions can make a positive difference at the community level. Collectively, a community that is empowered by knowledge and positive action, can influence local governance and their own development.

4.2.2 Community engagement activities of youth leaders

In engaging and working with the local community, the SLG project is also devoting their efforts in creating future leaders from the youth of the community. The Youth Leaders trained by the project are responsible for facilitating Vision, Commitment and Action Workshops (VCAWs), a platform for facilitating the practice of community mobilisation. Community members are given lessons on being self-reliant and how they can work together for their own development. These sessions are meant to introduce the idea of social mobilisation and grassroots action among the community. It lays the foundation of the participatory local governance model this project is looking forward to create. The SLG project has trained and created a total of 1,670 youth leaders in its project areas.

The youth leaders interviewed for the study all spoke of becoming more independent, and self-assured after becoming a part in the programme. This is reflected in the active role they play in their communities. One important example of this is the work they do in ensuring that children in the locality are staying in school and not dropping out.

“We go around our respective villages at the beginning of the school year, reminding families with children to send them to school. We even help families fill out and submit admission applications, when needed” – (Interview with a youth leader, treatment union)

“A ward in our union had a growing problem with children dropping out of school. The volunteer youth leaders trained by the SLG project have helped address this problem. In December, just before the new school year started, they went door to door in their areas helping to convince families to send their children to school, and even helping them with the process” – (Interview with community member, treatment union)

In addition to helping with important initiatives like the one mentioned above, youth leaders also help with the day to day interactions between the UP and the community.

“People in our area are sometimes hesitant about taking services from the UP. We help them out by going with them to the UP complex, and filling out the necessary paperwork. Sometimes when we explain how the process works, they go the UP themselves.” – (Interview with a youth leader, treatment union)

“Nowadays, we have seen an increase in the number of people taking services from the UP. The youth leaders and other project volunteers help out people in their locality in this matter. This has made it easier for us to work with our constituents” – (Interview with UP Chairman, treatment union)

The community has also responded positively to project volunteers like youth leaders and this has facilitated better cooperation and coordination not just within the communities themselves, but between the communities and the UP.

“Cooperation from the community is very important for our work. They support us, because they see how we are working for the betterment of everyone” – (Interview with youth leader, treatment union)

As in the case of the animators, the role played by the youth leaders appears to account for the better situation in the treatment areas, over the comparison ones. In the treatment unions for example, youth leaders help out people from the community when they want to access services from the UP. This type of assistance is not available in the comparison unions. For the average citizen in these unions, something simple as taking a birth certificate from the UP might seem like a difficult task.

“We are not highly educated in our village. We do not know the right way of getting services from the UP. We are hesitant to go, because we will only face harassment” – (FGD with local community members, comparison union)

“The UP Chairman and Members hold various public meetings where they talk about proper health and sanitation, but after all this talk they do not follow through or help us improve the sanitation problems in our area” – (Interview with local community member, comparison union)

The comparison areas again appear to be lacking in terms of community support and engagement. In the comparison unions, the UPs have various services and awareness building initiatives in place, however without the proper level of community engagement and follow-ups, these services and initiatives are not reaching the citizenry.

“It is important to work with the community, but it is not always so simple. When we hold meetings, where there should be at least 50% attendance from the community, hardly 30% of the people show up. It is difficult for us alone to engage with the community” – (Interview with UP member, comparison union)

In the treatment unions, the UPs can work better with the community, due to the efforts of the SLG project volunteers, including the youth leaders. The absence of such volunteers in the comparison unions makes it difficult for the UPs there to engage and work with the community. Consequently, the practice of inclusive local governance becomes all the more challenging.

Youth Leader affecting change on a personal and community level

Jahangir Reza is a young entrepreneur from Habiganj. He owns a small mobile phone servicing shop in the market near his home. Jahangir is also a youth leader with the SLG project. "I opened my business after receiving the youth leader training," he says when showing visitors his shop. He is proud of what he has accomplished, but says that it has not been an easy journey. Jahangir never got to complete his education. He dropped out of school before sitting for his HSC exams, and moved to Sylhet. There he got trained in mobile servicing, started working with many odd jobs. He was frustrated and felt like he was not going anywhere in life. Around this time, after talking to a friend, he took in the youth leader training organised by the Hunger Project at the local Union Parishad. "I learnt a lot through the training, but I think the biggest learning was discovering my own potential" says Jahangir as he talks about his experience. The training and his new responsibilities as a community change maker rejuvenated a sense of confidence and purpose in Jahangir. He started a small fish rearing business in his family pond. The money from this business was used in part to finance his new mobile servicing business. "After the training, I realised that if I was going to be a leader in my community, I will have to set an example by myself" he says. In this regard, it appears Jahangir has been successful. "Nowadays people come to me for advice and help on all kinds of matters from doing business to getting service from the Union Parishad. I was a high school dropout who was not going anywhere in life, but now I am trying to make something of myself, and I like to think this has inspired people around me to do the same" he adds. Jahangir and his fellow volunteers also encourage the people of their community to actively engage with the UP, and this has now become common practice. Many in the community are trying to take up small businesses, and ward shavas have become lively discussion forums where the people engage with their elected representatives. The community is realising its own potential in shaping its future. Jahangir's story is an example of how the actions of an empowered individual can in turn empower the community and inspire collective action for positive changes.

4.2.3 Community engagement activities of women leaders

Participatory local governance is not fully achievable without the active participation of women, both at the community and UP level. Traditionally, women in Bangladesh have not had a strong voice in different spheres of societal discourse, but this is gradually changing. In the context of local governance, the participation of women at the grassroots and community level has been limited. Women participate in the system at the official level, serving as UP Members and sometimes Chairmen, however this too is a male dominated world where they have to struggle for respect and recognition. This is a recurring theme that was observed during the baseline study. Several women Members who were interviewed, spoke of facing an almost systematic form of gender discrimination that limited their effectiveness. At the same time, there were also instances of women members raising their voices and claiming their rights. While gender based barriers do exist for women in the local governance system, there is still potential for change. Recognising this potential for change, the SLG project has components aimed at empowering women both at the UP and community level. The project has trained selected women from the unions it works in, with the aim of creating women community leaders. These women leaders are meant to play a strong leadership role in the community, and to ensure that other women in the community are aware of their rights, and not left out of the local governance system. During the baseline, the women's leader training was also wrapping up. One year later, during the end line, we have observed many instances of these women leaders playing proactive leadership roles in their community, and inspiring other women around them to do the same.

"The women leaders trained by the SLG project, work closely with us to raise awareness on women's rights in our area. They recently helped us stop two child marriages in our community, and regularly work with the UP to stop cases of violence against women" – (Interview with UP Member, treatment union)

Women leaders, like animators and youth leaders work on facilitating the working relationship between the community and the UP. However, they play a more important role in educating, empowering and upholding the rights of women in their respective areas.

“In order to reach out to more women in our area, we prepared a Social Action Plan with the help of the trained women leaders. In the past the UP was not proactive about these issues, but now with the help of women leaders we are able to get women involved in our work” – (Interview with UP Chairman, treatment union)

“As a woman I used to think I cannot get anything done without the help of my husband. After my training, I no longer think this. I have realised my own potential, and now I am helping other women in my area do the same” – (Interview with a woman leader, treatment union)

The proactive roles by women leaders in their communities appears to have had a positive effect on women’s participation in local governance and development matters. This includes increased participation in various forums and *shavas*.

“We have been seeing increased interest and participation from women in ward shavas and other forums. This was not the case even a year ago. This has a lot to do with the encouragement women in the area are receiving from the women leaders” – (Interview with UP member, treatment union)

In addition to helping empower women in their communities, the women members also play an important role in supporting women UP members. During the baseline, several women UP members had talked about their lack of power and authority, and the gender discrimination faced from their colleagues. During this endline study, the women UP members spoke of how the SLG project training was leading to a change in this situation, and how the volunteer women leaders were helping them in their daily activities.

“After the training we got to know that we women members are entitled to 30% of the work that comes to the UP. We are now claiming this right. We try to include more women in our work, and the volunteer women leaders help us reach out to them” – (Interview with woman UP member, treatment union)

“The volunteer women leaders have not only helped us educate women in our area, they also play a proactive role in stopping child marriages. When they are unable to prevent these marriages, they come to the UP for help, and we intervene. This has made it easier for us to take action on this issue.” – (Interview with a female UP member, treatment union)

The comparison unions, as mentioned extensively before, do not have volunteers like women leaders. Consequently, the level of engagement and awareness building among women that was observed in the treatment unions, is not observed in these comparison areas. Community participation in governance in these areas is limited as it is, and by extension, the participation of women is also limited.

“People in our area do not attend the UP meetings. When they do, it is usually the men. We women have no business going to such events” – (FGD with female community members, comparison union)

“When we need any service from the UP, my husband goes. I do not think I can get any services if I go.” – (Interview with a female community member, comparison union)

The above quotes are a good representation of the attitudes observed among women in the comparison unions. This is quite similar to what was observed in the comparison areas during the baseline study, indicating that there has been little or no progress in advancing women’s’ participation in governance, in these areas.

Additionally, with the absence of women leaders, there is also little support for women UP members in the comparison areas.

“As a woman member, I know I have certain rights and responsibilities, however that does not mean I can carry them out. I do not get the necessary support from the UP or the community.” – (Interview with a woman UP member, comparison union)

“The female member of our ward asked me to pay 2000 Taka for a VGD card. If we as women cannot count on our women members to help us, where do we turn?” – (Interview with a female community member, comparison union)

In the SLG project unions, women leaders are playing important leadership roles. They are helping educate and empower women around them, and ensuring that women also have voice in matters of governance and community development. Additionally, they are providing support to women UP members. As women, they still face challenges, working in a traditionally patriarchal society, however they continue in their work. The observations and accounts from the treatment and comparison unions, show the positive impact this type of initiative can have. Creating women leaders from the community is therefore essential for ensuring greater participation of women in the governance process.

Woman Leader advocating for equal rights

Training women leaders is a component of the SLG project, and that is of great importance, given the status of women in Bangladesh. Tahera Begum of Habiganj is one such woman leader trained by the programme. Tahera is a small business owner, who along with her husband owns a small tailoring business. She also works at a local beauty parlour. Habiganj, where Tahera lives, has traditionally been and still is a rather religiously conservative area. Tahera claims that before she used to be constantly harassed by the village elders and others in the community for choosing to work. She had even considered leaving work because of this. However, when asked about the training she received from THP, she says, “It gave me a lot of confidence and taught me the value of being independent, and not relying on others for my livelihood.” After the training, Tahera started working actively in the community. She holds regular meetings with her neighbours at her home, educating them on various issues including women’s rights, child marriages, health, and education and on how they can contribute for the betterment of the community. Tahera is a member of her local Ward Citizen Committee, and actively works to encourage her fellow community members to work with the UP and each other to solve their problems. However, she still faces a lot of challenges.

“Many village elders have expressed displeasure, when we organised a meeting for the community women out in public. They claim that women should stay indoors and conduct all their business away from public places.” This is the type of challenge that women in the area face on a daily basis.

However, this has not discouraged Tahera. She still holds her meetings, but she does it in a way that will not offend the village elders. She feels this is a necessary compromise that must be made if she is to get any work done. Still she believes things are changing for the better. “Our Chairmen and Members are now better informed, and so are we. They know they have to work with us, and that there is no scope for cheating. There is still a lot of work to be done to ensure equal rights for women, but it is possible” she says optimistically. Tahera’s optimism is not unfounded. Following her example, women in her community are slowly starting to realise their own potential. She is already training several young women in tailoring and salon work, something that was not imaginable a few years ago. Women in Tahera’s area, and in Bangladesh still face an uphill battle when it comes to equal rights. However, initiatives like this that create leaders like Tahera, and help women find their own voice, show that change is possible. Despite all the challenges she faces, Tahera has realised her potential as a change maker and hopes to help others do the same.

4.2.4 Community engagement activities through ward citizen committees

During the baseline, it was found that community involvement in local governance occurred when the UP itself played a proactive role in engaging with the community. However, due to a general lack of both awareness and interest from the local community, this did not always work out. During the end line survey, the most considerable change observed in this regard, was the new proactive initiatives from the communities themselves. The key driving force appears to be the level of awareness in the community. In the treatment unions, increased awareness among the community seems has led to increased participation in the governance process. This report has already discussed the role of the community volunteers (animators, youth and women leaders) in building bridges between the UP and the community. It has also touched on the various platforms including ward *shavas* and standing committees, through which the UP and the community actually work together. Another important platform in this regard is the Ward Citizen Committee (WCCs). Each ward has a WCC, whose members are citizens of the wards themselves. They often include leaders trained by THP. The WCCs are an important body, as they allow the community to work together amongst themselves and with the UP.

One WCC members we interviewed had this to say “We hold regular WCC meetings in our ward, usually in someone’s house or courtyard. We discuss a lot of issues amongst ourselves, and this makes it easier for us to express our concerns and opinions at ward shavas.”

Ward citizen committee facilitating dialogue between community and UP

“Lately, our WCC meetings have been experiencing more attendance. Before we used to get around 17 to 18 people, now it is more like 25 to 30,” says Anik an animator and WCC member from Bagerhat. Community organisations like WCCs were not common in this area before, but this has changed since the SLG project started working in the local union of Fakirhat. The WCC acts as a first line of contact between the UP and the community. This citizen based committee discusses the various issues pertaining to their development, before bringing these up with the UP. “People have started coming to the WCC meetings, as they are interested in gaining knowledge and contributing to their community. “One of the things we do at these meetings is to decide who in the community should get benefits like VGD and VGF cards. This was not done before, and people are happy to be part of this process” adds Salma, another member of the local WCC. The WCC forms the platform where the community can work together, before working with the UP. As seen by this experience, the WCC plays a crucial role in helping the UPs engage with the community, and more importantly in ensuring that the community itself has a strong united voice.

Chapter 5. Conclusion and recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

The BRAC-THP partnership led SLG project aimed to strengthen the system of local governance at the Union *Parishad* level. It pursued an inclusive model of local governance that is led 'by the community and for the community'. This project was evaluated through both a baseline and end line study, over the course of a year. The study set out to explore the systems of governance in the SLG project unions as well as similar non-project comparison (treatment unions), unions. The issue was explored through official UP records, as well as interviews and discussions with UP representatives, community members and project staff. The findings and observations from the field appear to indicate that the project has had a positive effect on knowledge, attitude and practice in both the community and the UP, in the project areas. In these areas, it was observed that the UP representatives are now successfully carrying out their officially mandated functions. They are regularly organising UP-community forums like ward *shavas*, and ensuring that official bodies like Standing Committees are functioning as mandated. This has all been made possible, due to the positive response from the communities themselves. The SLG project volunteers, including animators, youth and women leaders are playing proactive roles in their communities engaging with people and encouraging them in turn to work with the UP and take control of their own development. This appears to be a substantial shift from what was observed during the baseline study. In order to compare the situation, similar adjacent non-project unions were also visited. The situation in these areas appeared to be largely unchanged from the baseline period. The relationship between the UP and the community in these unions is still not very strong. Events like ward *shavas* are not regularly held, and there is very limited engagement with the community from the UP. The community for its part also appears to be uninterested in working with the UP. This stands as a contrast to what is seen in the SLG project unions. The different results observed in the treatment and comparison unions, might be considered as an indication of the project's positive effects on the practice of community empowerment and effective inclusive governance through mobilisation of community under a definite approach which has been shown as the 'theory of change' in the initial chapter.

The essence of the approach is engaging different strata and streams of people with certain common goals to pursue and also equipping them with enlightened knowledge and ideas that satisfy practical needs. Only teaching and preaching of ideals do not work. Ideas have to be supported with actions and action should also bind to produce results. In this case relentless efforts were deployed with multiple actions backed inspirational impetus. That ignited people's hidden potentials and sparked in concrete result oriented actions. A new culture of trust, confidence and mutual cooperation has been ignited replacing distrust, frustration and mutual conflicts. That may be the most important learning from the SLG project led by BRAC and the THP. The approach in theory only is also futile if a committed cadre are not behind the implementation of the theory. The commitment of the project personnel is also very important. The commitment of the staff has been a driving force behind the positive achievements of the project at the field level.

While the project does appear to have fulfilled its objectives, it is not without its challenges. Although the observations in the project areas have been largely positive,

there are still other factors to consider. These are discussed in more detail in the following section.

5.2 Challenges

The SLG project has been able to create a platform for community led governance in its project areas. In the 61 Unions where the project worked it is expected that those will sustain for another period of at least five years. But they will need some more advanced level of training and knowledge support for further sharpening their active citizenship. The support either from government or alternatively from professional CSO/NGO is needed. One cannot think that a big push once in life time make cart moving forever is untenable. Bringing sustained socio-political and economic changes is not a single shot game. It needs planned continuity. This is a big challenge for a project.

The UP Elections. All the UPs in which the project worked are going to have fresh elections in 2016. There are two big challenges associated with the elections. (1) The elections if they are not held in a free and fair atmosphere, the UPs may not get credible leaders and therefore they might also lose credibility as a people's institution. In that case the project outcome, may suffer. (2) Even with free and fair elections, the present leadership may be changed in many cases, this creates another imperative for orientation of new leadership. The challenge in this case will be to keep the momentum of the project moving forward, especially with a new batch of UP representatives. The SLG project has made good progress in the unions it is working in. In order to maintain this progress, it must carefully explore the challenges and opportunities that will arise in the post UP elections landscape.

Funding Challenges. As the lowest administrative unit in the country's governance system, Ups are struggling for appropriate funding. This was an important factor observed during the study. UP Chairmen and Members often have to spend huge amounts of money during elections and over their five-year term of office. In many UPs Chairs and Members spend money out of their own pockets for holding events like ward *shavas*, standing committee meetings, open budget meetings etc. (Ahmed *et al.* 2015). This poses a challenge for the sustainability of these events.

Limited administrative autonomy. UPs also suffer from limited administrative autonomy, which might limit their effectiveness. The SLG project has addressed this issue through inclusive governance, however on a larger scale, this remains a challenge for the project and the local governance system in general.

Limited Capacity. The capacity building efforts for UP is a major function of the government. The government lack a consistent, concrete and sustainable capacity development policy for the local government institutions. Only training is not sufficient and training is not an independent input for having balanced capacity of an organisation. It is very much related with staff support, financial support and policy support. All these vital capacity aspect is missing from the very concept of capacity building support.

The political capture of the local government system. Political influence in the local governance system is nothing new. While this did not appear to be a harmful factor in the SLG project unions, it is a challenge worth considering. The political capture of the system means misallocation of already scarce resources, and might cause strains on UP- community relations. The partisan election under the current Chair dominated system may become very dangerous in future. UP's social role and Village Court system may suffer a big blow.

Project learning has no buyers. Projects of this nature are designed to create examples for wider replication of innovative ideas generated out of their intensive efforts. Unfortunately, the innovations generated out hard works of the experimental projects like this has had very little government buy-in.

Advocacy challenges. Advocacy has a significant role to play in projects of this nature. This is linked quite closely to the previous point of limited project buy-in from the government. One key challenge faced by the SLG project was the limited time and resources for carrying out extensive advocacy related activities both at the national policy level and at the grassroots level. Moving forward, there should be an increased focus on advocacy in projects aimed at local governance.

5.3 Recommendations

- I. Independent funding for UPs – Several UP representatives interviewed spoke of the importance of UPs being financially independent. To this end, they suggested that UPs should be allowed to initiate income generating activities. They should be allowed to invest their own money in profitable ventures in the locality to accumulate their funds, and re-invest in their own development work. These may also help to venture new service areas.
- II. Formation of a Local Government Commission – The Commission established during the last Care Taker government should be restored. This would be an official body dedicated to contribute in developing appropriate law, rules, initiate enquiries against irregularities also take measures for empowerment and capacity development and finally managing the funding and finances of local government institutions like UPs, UZPs, ZPs and Pourshava and City Corporations.
- III. Scaling up the SLG Project - The BRAC -THP initiative should find ways and means to continue the efforts in larger canvass. It should work all the districts of the country, if not in all Unions at least 1000 UPs and fifty *Upazila Parishads*. Then it could be able to make nationwide influence. A concrete plan needs to be formulated to replicate the citizenship creation approach through a project for sustainable local governance to promote.

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