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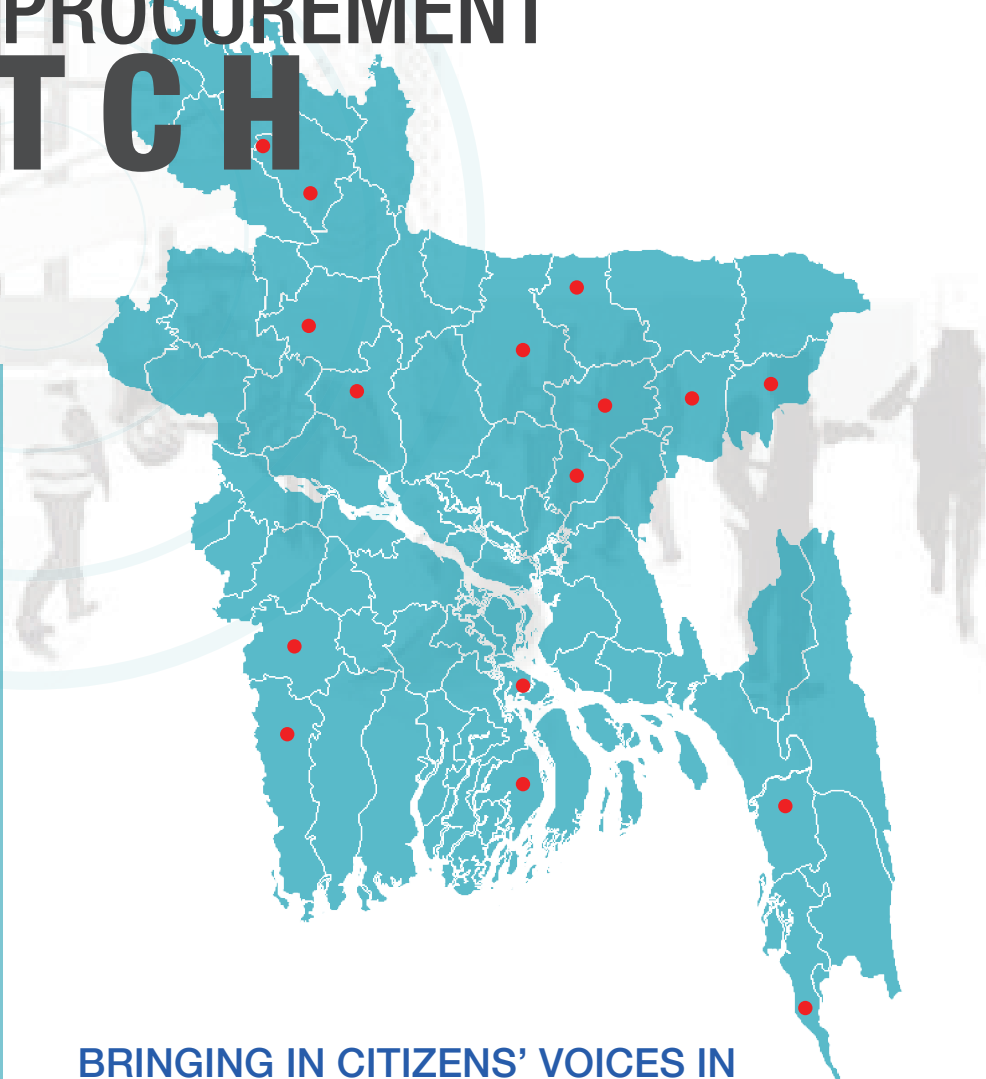
PUBLIC PROCUREMENT WATCH

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BRINGING IN CITIZENS' VOICES IN DECISION MAKING: THE DIMAPPP EXPERIENCE

On May 11th, an article authored by Mohammed Shoheler Rahman Chowdhury, Director General of the Central Procurement Technical Unit (CPTU) and Dr Imran Matin, Executive Director of BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD) was published in The Daily Star. A shortened version of that article has been shared on the next page.

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The Central Procurement Technical Unit (CPTU) of the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) was awarded the prestigious World Bank's Directors Award on March 23—as recognition for its leadership in institutionalising a highly innovative and citizen-friendly public procurement practice in the country through the Digitising Implementation Monitoring and Public Procurement Project (DIMAPPP). According to the World Bank award committee, the project is a “most innovative, collaborative and impactful governance global practice operation.” While we celebrate the achievement, it is useful to look back and reflect on its journey to understand the process better, recognise the factors behind its success, and identify the remaining challenges in the domain of public procurement in the country.

In the GoB initiated public procurement reforms in 2002 through the Public Procurement Reform Project (PPRP), the development partners, especially the World Bank, played an important role by providing technical support and funding. In two phases of the PPRP, the government made far-reaching legal and administrative reforms. It created the Central Procurement Technical Unit (CPTU) as a nodal body to steer the reform, developed and operationalised a unified legal procurement framework, and strengthened the management capacity of the procurement entities. All these initiatives were aimed at ensuring transparency, accountability, fairness, and better value for money in the procurement processes. Introducing digitised or the electronic government procurement (e-GP) system has been another crucial piece in achieving the aims of the reform. Last but not the least, the reform attempted to institutionalise the voices of the citizens, arguably the most important but generally ignored actor in the system, by allowing them to engage in monitoring development projects.

The government started DIMAPPP in July 2017 with the objective of overall improvement in public procurement management. The project also aims to expand the depth of e-GP by developing and

adopting the electronic contract management system and digitising the project monitoring process. Institutionalising citizen engagement in the public procurement process is yet another crucial DIMAPPP agenda for fulfilling the aims of the overall reform.

Through this initiative, 285 small-scale development contracts on roads, schools, bridges, and upazila and UP complexes were brought under citizens' monitoring as of March 2021. The responsiveness of the local procurement agencies also helped. So far, citizens have raised 253 complaints, out of which 236 have been resolved. The local Government Engineering Department (LGED) is the key agency which welcomed this innovative strategy. More recently, other procurement entities such as the Education Engineering Department and the Health Engineering Department also agreed to try out this citizens' monitoring model in their local projects.

The citizen engagement component has played a critical role in paving the way for bringing in the voice of the citizen in the public procurement system. Simultaneously, it created an opportunity to demonstrate how research can help effective policymaking. In 48 DIMAPPP intervention upazilas, with support from CPTU, BIGD has been systematically evaluating the process to understand it better, identify specific pain points, and suggest improvements. Besides, BIGD is carrying out a rigorous impact evaluation, a randomised control trial, to determine if this model of citizen monitoring makes a difference in the project quality. The government and the global public procurement community can use these research findings in the future to make informed decisions in scaling up or replicating the model.

We believe innovative initiatives like DIMAPPP will indeed act as a role model for effective policymaking using research, helping us realise the cherished dream of a prosperous Bangladesh.

MD. AKBAR ALI

A UNIQUE EXAMPLE OF CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY AT NILPHAMARI

Md. Saiful Islam Rony

Field Officer (DIMAPPP), Nilphamari

I came across Md. Akbar Ali when I went to see the construction work of Kismat Charaikhola Dakhil Madrasa. I had met him earlier during a meeting on that very site. He gave a strong speech at that meeting.

Even though he is an ordinary citizen, he has been giving a lot of time during the construction of the building. He visits the site at least twice a day. He has been doing this tirelessly since the day the construction of the building began. When he was approached, he said that he thought of this madrasa as his own, and the development of this madrasa meant his own development. He was doing this because of his sense of responsibility towards the society. He also pointed out that although he is a small farmer, he is an active member of the mosque and other development committees of the union. His grandchildren study in this madrasa as well.

In context, he said that he was present during the site meeting of this madrasa and he listened attentively. His interest in the work of this madrasa has increased from there. It was surprising when he said that the government had given him the responsibility of this work. He keeps in touch with Md. Abu Taher, a BRAC employee and an engineer in the Department of Education. He also keeps in touch with the contractor.

Although he is not a member of the citizens' committee, the time and effort he is putting into the construction project are undoubtedly commendable. He alone is doing what many people on the committee have not been able to do. Every construction can be durable and strong if there is an Akbar Ali in every project.

FOR BETTER WORK

In 29th May, a site meeting was held in Moulvibazar sadar upazila. The name of the project was "construction of 27m long PSC girder bridge on Buddhimottopur-Hazirbazar-Amtoli road at ch: 2670m-under sadar Upazila." Due to the COVID-19 pandemic situation, only about thirty villagers were invited, but about sixty participants (11 female and 49 male) showed up at the meeting. Masks were allocated among the participants for ensuring health guidelines as well as maintaining social distancing.

The meeting started by explaining DIMAPPP. Then contractor's representative got a chance to introduce

the project. He urged the support of the citizens to complete the project well. He said, "It will be another good work for our company and I am sure all of you will help us." After that, Upazila Engineer described the project in detail to the people. He marked his mobile number on the signboard and requested them to report any grievances about the site to him. Then he made an oath that every grievance will be solved instantly. After that, the Chairman said, "We will do everything to develop this area. We also promise that we will help you and your team if you need it."



The meeting ended with Executive Engineer Md. Azim Uddin's speech, "You may know that every year LGED completes many projects, but most of the work is done by only one Sub-Assist. Engineer. That's why it's

difficult for him to monitor the work properly. I request everyone to supervise the ongoing work. Also, if you find anomalies, definitely call me. We are here to solve the problem. We want good work."

EQUAL PARTICIPATION OF MEN AND WOMEN IN THE PATH OF DEVELOPMENT

Two members of the Citizen Monitoring Group, along with two ordinary citizens were at the site of the construction of Kalatali Adarsh High School, located on the beach of Kalatali, Cox's Bazar Sadar Upazila, under construction by EED. The Citizen Monitoring Group members seemed quite satisfied with the quality of construction work done so far. They were also satisfied with the contractor as he was quick at resolving minor errors, whenever any occurred.

The women members shared that they visited the site from time to time to monitor the work and thanked the

BIGD and BRAC authorities for giving them such power along with the men.

Mr. Nurul Islam, LGED Engineer, Ramu Upazila and Sub-Assistant in charge visited the construction site of the one-storied roof casting work of the new building of Al Fuad Government Primary School in Ramu Upazila of Cox's Bazar District. They inspected the roof and staircase with members of the civic monitoring team and immediately instructed the contractor to rectify the shortcomings.

