



**PROVISION FOR POST PROJECT EVALUATIONS FOR THE UNITED NATIONS
DEMOCRACY FUND
Contract NO.PD:C0110/10**

EVALUATION REPORT



**UDF-BGD-11-445 - MDG Unions: Building Participatory Democracy
From the Bottom Up in Rural Bangladesh**

Date: 15 February 2016

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

(i) Background

The project ran from 1 May 2013 – 31 May 2015, with a total grant of USD 250,000. It was designed by The Hunger Project (THP) – Bangladesh, and was implemented in partnership with BRAC in ten Unions of the Mymensingh and Tangail districts under the Dhaka division. The target population consisted of local government actors, members of Standing Committees, members of civil society units, participants of village assemblies, and indirectly all other members of the community. As defined in the Project Document, the objective was to develop local capacity, in order to demonstrate to policy makers that improved governance at the level of local government (i.e. the Union Parishad, UP) – through close collaboration with a mobilized citizenry – can accelerate the progress of social and economic development, and hence the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Accordingly, THP's strategic approach aimed for three key outcomes:

- The capacity of the UP representatives and functionaries is strengthened and the knowledge of rights, entitlements and responsibilities of public and youth is developed for improving democratic local governance, and active citizenry;
- The local civil society, especially the women are empowered for increasing their participation in the public space, demanding transparency and accountability, and taking action to reduce violence against women and towards achieving the MDGs;
- Experiences and lessons learned regarding the differences that stronger UPs and regular Ward Shavas can make in development are expansively covered in the media to influence public opinion and policy actors.

(ii) Assessment of the project

The design of the project's training methodology was appropriate to transfer the necessary knowledge and skills to activate the provisions of the 2009 Local Government / UP Act. The approach to activate social units of distinguished citizens, youth and the poor, and to train female leaders, was appropriate to empower civil society and to ensure significant Ward Shava attendance, including women advocating gender and youth-specific issues. Media activities made it possible to raise awareness that local government performance is relevant for improving the population's quality of life. It is therefore our view that the **overall design of the project was relevant** to improve the awareness of Union Parishad (UP) decision makers and their attitudes towards basic human rights, and to achieve the establishment of participation mechanisms for the local population and groups representing their interests.

While only schedule modifications occurred to the planned project activities, evaluators noted that the project in most cases achieved its objectives. The visibly high degree of commitment among interviewed UP chairs to advocate for decentralization impressed the evaluators. Trainee assessments evidenced successful clarification of the roles and responsibilities of Standing Committee members. Ward Shavas did not only provide grassroots input to the annual budget and the five-year planning process, but led also to the posting of citizen charter displays in all ten Unions supported by the project. Given these significant achievements, and considering the utility of the project's civil society units and the grassroots' participatory action research, which connected the local population with

government authorities, evaluators are of the view that **the project was effective**.

Capacity building activities represented the project's principal focus. Accordingly, 46% of the grantee's expenditure covered the project's training programme and follow-up meetings supporting participatory planning, budgeting and citizen rights' and services monitoring. With 33% of combined spending for project staff at District and Union level, staff training, and baseline survey inputs, the nominal human resources spending of the grantee appears rather costly. This was partly offset by the highly effective and efficient coordination between the field staff and the grantee's head office, whose management and executive staff time was not charged to the project's budget. **Although not particularly efficient, evaluators**

The grantee's initially proposed target indicators allow for a preliminary assessment. Since the project fell significantly short of its ambition to strengthen the knowledge of citizen's rights, entitlements and responsibilities, a continued commitment of THP's animators will be crucial. On the other hand, the grantee presented data, which demonstrated an increasing presence of women advocating gender- and youth-specific concerns in the Ward Shavas. There is also quantitative and qualitative evidence of enhanced local government accountability and service delivery. On the basis of independently gathered first-hand

II. INTRODUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT

i. The project and evaluation objectives

This report contains the evaluation of the project entitled “MDG Unions: Building Participatory Democracy From the Bottom Up in Rural Bangladesh”. The project ran from 1 May 2013 – 31 May 2015 (including a 1 month extension), with a total grant of USD 250,000 (out of which UNDEF retained USD 25,000 for monitoring and evaluation).

The project was designed by The Hunger Project (THP) – Bangladesh. It was implemented in partnership with BRAC in ten Unions of the Mymensingh and Tangail districts under the Dhaka division, which belong to the Upazilas of Sadar (Baera, Char Ishwardiya, Kustia, Dapunia, Bhabkhali), Bhuapur (Falda, Nikrail, Aloya), and Gopalpur (Hemnagar and Jhaiwal). As defined in the Project Document, the objective was to develop local capacity, in order to demonstrate to policy makers that improved governance at the level of local government – through close collaboration with a mobilized citizenry – can accelerate the progress of social and economic development, and hence the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Accordingly, the target population consisted of local government actors, members of Standing Committees, members of civil society units, participants of village assemblies, and indirectly all other members of the community.

UNDEF and Transtec have agreed on a framework governing the evaluation process, set out in the Operational Manual. According to the manual, the objective of the evaluation is to “undertake in-depth analysis of UNDEF-funded projects to gain a better understanding of what constitutes a successful project which will in turn help UNDEF devise future project strategies. Evaluations also assist stakeholders to determine whether projects have been implemented in accordance with the project document and whether anticipated project outputs have been achieved”.

(ii) Evaluation methodology

The evaluation was conducted by a team of international and national experts, under the terms of the framework agreement between UNDEF and Transtec. In accordance with the agreed process, the evaluation aimed to answer questions across the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) criteria of *relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability*, as well as the additional criterion of *UNDEF value added* (see Annex 1).

The evaluation took place from November 2015 – January 2016 with the fieldwork in Bangladesh conducted from 13 – 17 December 2015. The evaluators reviewed available project documentation and contextual / background materials on issues surrounding local governance in Bangladesh (Annex 2). Initial and final interviews were held at the offices of THP-Bangladesh in Dhaka, involving its country director, deputy director, and programme manager. Other meetings focused on interviews and exchanges with the project’s staff (field officers), with volunteer animators, and other representatives of the target groups from various Unions of the Dhaka division, to confirm the project beneficiaries' experiences and to obtain updates of their most recent activities. These interviews and group meetings were carried out in the Mymensingh district, involving 17 project staff and 125 project

III. PROJECT STRATEGY

(i) Project strategy and approach

The objective of the project “MDG Unions: Building Participatory Democracy From the Bottom Up in Rural Bangladesh”, as defined in the Project Document (UDF-BGD-11-445) in April 2013, was to develop local capacity, in order to demonstrate to policy makers that improved governance at the level of local government (i.e. the Union Parishad, UP) – through close collaboration with a mobilized citizenry (in the form of village assemblies, the Ward Shavas) – can accelerate the progress of social and economic development, and hence the achievement of the MDGs. As established in the previous chapter, a government policy framework for participatory governance existed at the outset of the project in the form of the Local Government / UP Act 2009, but its implementation was weak. THP saw therefore a need to

(ii) Logical framework

The Project Document translates THP's programmatic approach into a structured plan of project activities and intended outcomes. The framework below aims to capture the project logic systematically, and attempts to link activities and intended outcomes with medium-term impacts and long-term development objectives, which evaluators observed dispersed over different sections of the grantee's Project Document.

**Project Activities &
Interventions**

Activate civil society units of
women leaders and of the

IV. EVALUATION FINDINGS

(i) Relevance

Baseline Situation

thus facilitating the achievement of MDGs. THP following the UNDEF grant award therefore decided to apply the new funding to expand the MDG Union approach to ten Unions within the project's two target districts. The grantee's approach relied on three elements, i.e. social mobilisation (grassroots participation in civil society development), women's empowerment (promotion as key change agents), and strengthening of local democracy (participatory action research and the formation of ward action teams). The *baseline study* served to confirm that the selected communities lacked interaction with UP duty bearers therefore creating an accountability gap. Within this framework, evaluators found various examples of relevant project design, addressing the baseline aspects and involving a variety of relevant stakeholders:

1. Democratic local governance and active citizenry

The wider purpose of *the training of UP representatives and government functionaries* was to activate the provisions of the 2009 Local Government / Union Parishad Act, i.e. the realisation of (a) regular Ward Shava meetings, (b) UP planning process

The conduct of

project's target Unions, to paint a picture of the project's progress, and to shape the public's and policymakers' opinion in this respect.

stronger (47%) than planned (40%) female representation among the members of the 90 formed ward action teams, which altogether have held 1,620 (planned: 2,100) meetings during the project's implementation period. Ten workshops with 623 participants (F: 172 and M: 451) members facilitated as planned the *establishment of seven SCs in each Union*. Trainee assessments evidenced successful capacity building in terms of clarifying the function of SCs and their members' roles and responsibilities, thus facilitating a more effective outcome of the bi-monthly SC meetings. As planned, the grantee subsequently organized 60 meetings with the standing committees' membership to support their continuous functioning (refresher courses, follow-up on local issues).

Holding the above mentioned regular coordination meetings between UP members and civil society representatives usefully facilitated the launch and conduct of 270

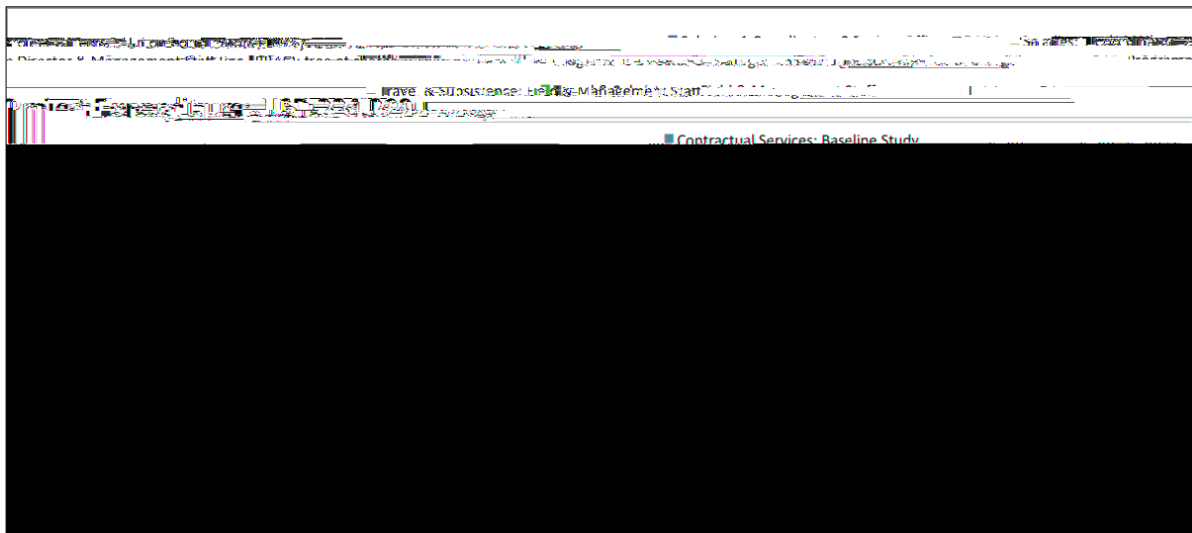
rights of citizens, and citizen's responsibilities.

In

(iii) Efficiency⁴

Capacity building and activities supporting grassroots-oriented policy implementation in the form of participatory planning, budgeting and citizen rights' and services monitoring represented the project's principal focus. Accordingly, the *training of beneficiaries and organisation of subsequent follow-up meetings* accounted for about 46% of the budget, which related to expenditure committed to (i) raise the capacity of UP and government representatives, SC members, and grass-roots level Ward Shava participants; (ii) facilitate the elaboration and finalization of the five-year development plans; (iii) prepare and launch civil society units (barefoot researchers, youth, distinguished citizens), and groups (women leaders, NGCAF, and BNN); as well as (iv) disseminate relevant information and practices via mass action campaigns, press conferences, and press field visits.

Breaking the same amount over the reported total number of approximately 62,000 direct and indirect beneficiaries results in an average cost of less than USD 1.70, which was spent per project activity participant to enable grassroots-oriented policy implementation in the form of participatory planning, budgeting and citizen rights' and services monitoring. Existing disaggregated budget data made it also possible to distinguish expenditure by training output category, which similarly displays low unit costs, e.g.: USD 6.90 per participant to capacitate UP representatives, government functionaries and support the completion of five-year plans; USD 1 per participant to enable grass-roots monitoring and inputs to annual budget and planning, as well as five-year plan preparation. Given that training costs usually differ between the different categories (and number) of beneficiaries, even an average USD 22.60 per press conference and field visit participant is still deemed an acceptable unit expenditure to inform and influence policy making and implementation.



Spending about USD 48,770 for project staff at District and Union level, and USD 26,700 for staff training and baseline survey inputs, the nominal human resources spending of the

⁴ Quantitative assessments made in this section are based on the total amount of project expenditure, which excludes the budget amount reserved for evaluation by UNDEF.

first cases of full family member presence irrespective of gender (15%), cases in which male presence was inferior to female presence (12%), as well as a 40.9% (target: 35%) overall rate of women's Ward Shava attendance.

On the basis of group interviews held with 17 project staff and 125 project beneficiaries, evaluators independently formed the view that the project generated some positive effects. Selected anecdotes, grouped along key issues identified at the outset of the project (= baseline, cf. section on relevance), are provided below⁵:

Acquisition of knowledge and skills to effectively implement the provisions of the 2009 Union Parishad / local government act

During a meeting *elected UP representatives and government functionaries of the Char Ishwardia*

Need to combine participatory efforts with the involvement of government officers and the i

Widow, old age and disability pensions were always paid to the needy in the **Char Ishwardia**, but the process of identifying and prioritizing beneficiaries now takes place in a more organized manner. Making use of the Ward Shava meetings, **government officers and elected representatives work closely together** to determine the most vulnerable members of the community (currently 1,600 elderly persons, 200 widows, and 99 persons with disability benefit from these pension payments).

the form of Five-Year Development Plans

The Char Ishwardia UP's chairperson sees in the Five-Year Development Planning Document yet another **example of successful cooperation**. According to his account the plan's preparation relied on wide range of contributions, including Ward Shava suggestions, statistical data and contextual input from government officers, and in-depth review by the Standing Committees (SC). A special planning committee coordinated the completion of the document, which obtained the UP's approval in 2015. While he admitted that there are

(v) Sustainability

In view of the project's achievements (cf. sections on effectiveness and impact), evaluators at the time of their field visit mainly focused on (a) the continued use of the consultative mechanism the project introduced as a tool to allow the grass-roots to identify and to guide local governance actors to jointly address social issues and local service needs; (b) the expansion of this approach to communities where this concept is not yet implemented, i.e. UPs which lack operational Ward Shavas and Standing Committees; and (c) the extent to which access to financing affects the feasibility of realising the service needs identified by the UPs' five-year development plans.

a. Continued use of the consultative mechanism the project introduced to solve social issues and address local service needs

V. CONCLUSIONS

i. The project approach was based on research findings, which the grantee, The Hunger Project - Bangladesh (THP), sourced from its previous project interventions and research conducted among the project's target population. Accordingly, the project was designed to demonstrate to policy makers that improved governance at the level of local government – through close collaboration with a mobilized citizenry – can accelerate the progress of social and economic development, and hence the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

ii. While this was addressed through capacity building, there was also a need to publicize the results of the collaborative approach through the media, in order to raise awareness of the wider public and to provide targeted information to policy makers. It is therefore our view that **the project represented a relevant effort** to improve the awareness of Union Parishad (UP) decision makers and their attitudes towards basic human rights, and to achieve the establishment of participation mechanisms for the local population and groups representing their interests.

iii. Our findings related to the **capacity building components show that the project's training methodology and contents were designed to transfer the necessary knowledge** and skills to activate the provisions of the 2009 Local Government / UP Act, i.e.: to mobilize a critical mass of participants for bi-annual public ward assemblies (Ward Shavas), and to establish Standing Committees meant to recommend actions related to health, education and economic development.

iv. Aiming to empower civil society, it was appropriate to activate local civil society units of distinguished citizens, youth and the poor, and to train a cadre of female leaders, in order to ensure significant Ward Shava attendance, **including women advocating gender and youth-specific issues**. Activities disseminating information via the media finally aimed to ensure that local government performance is generally perceived as relevant for improving the population's quality of life.

self-help group members, which evaluators have met, continue to mobilise the local community members to exploit the legally provided opportunities to participate in local

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

To strengthen the outcome and similar projects in the future, evaluators recommend to UNDEF and project grantees:

i. The fact that THP's approach and methodology included the conduct of baseline research and the formulation of target indicators is highly commendable, as this enhanced the project's **relevance** and facilitated the assessment of **effectiveness and impact**. Evaluators, however, missed a more rigorous approach to data analysis (e.g. designing modest, realistically achievable target indicators, and assessing achievements by comparing these with (a) result indicators defined in line with the initial target indicators, and (b) national data from other statistical sources as initially foreseen), as well as a reporting which is pertinent and fully responding to the project document's monitoring framework (i.e. in relation to the targeted outcome "35% or higher women's attendance at Ward Shavas")

the UP / local government act. Based on our comments on ***sustainability, we therefore recommend to the grantee*** to:

- ***Improve the existing qualitative***

IX. ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: EVALUATION QUESTIONS

DAC criterion	Evaluation Question	Related sub-questions
Relevance	To what extent was the project, as designed and implemented, suited to context and needs at the beneficiary, local, and national levels?	<p>Were the objectives of the project in line with the needs and priorities for democratic development, given the context?</p> <p>Should another project strategy have been preferred rather than the one implemented to better reflect those needs, priorities, and context? Why?</p> <p>Were risks appropriately identified by the projects? How appropriate are/were the strategies developed to deal with identified risks? Was the project overly risk-averse?</p>
Effectiveness	To what extent was the project, as implemented, able to achieve objectives and goals?	<p>To what extent have the project's objectives been reached?</p> <p>To what extent was the project implemented as envisaged by the project document? If not, why not?</p> <p>Were the project activities adequate to make progress towards the project objectives?</p> <p>What has the project achieved? Where it failed to meet the</p>

ANNEX 3: SCHEDULE OF INTERVIEWS

13 December 2015	
<i>Grantee's Project Briefing (THP Office, Dhaka)</i>	
Jamirul Islam	Project Manager
Swapan Kumar Saha	Deputy Director
Nasima Akter	Deputy Director Programme
Sahidul Akhtar Majumdar	Director, Telangana Resource Centre
Badiul Alam Majumdar	Country Director
Tofil Ahmed	Director
Joyanta Kar	Regional Coordinator
Nazir Islam	Senior Programme Coordinator
14 December 2015	
<i>Field Staff Interviews, Mymensingh Regional Office</i>	
Syed Nasir Vddin	Project Officer
A.N.M Nazmul Hossain	Project Officer
AKSM Sham Sul Alam	Union Coordinator
Sultan Mahammad	Union Coordinator
Shamsul Alam Talukdar	Union Coordinator
Omar Faruk	Union Coordinator
Ashaduii Nonan	Union Coordinator
Anwar Hossain	Union Coordinator
Gias Uddin Babur	

Aburayel Sardar	Food Cooperation Office
Akab Uddin	Agriculture Office
Hajera Khatun	Agriculture Office
Rekha Rahaman	Member

Alifa Yasmin	Women Leader
Achlima Pusi	Women Leader
Tachlima Sultana	Women Leader
<i>Beneficiary Interviews: Ward Action Team, Kashimpur, Kustia Union</i>	
Najarul Islam	Member
Jiaur Rahaman	Member
Oashim Akram	Member
Sajid	Member
Rina Parvin	Member
Achma	Member
Rupa Khaleda	Member
Samima lasmin	Member
Aklima Parvin	Member
Ismat Ara	Member
Anowara Begam	Member
<i>Beneficiary Interviews: Grassroots SHG members, Kustra, Chowara, Kustia Union</i>	
Anwan Hossain	Member
Abu Zafar	Member
Anukul Kar	Member
Saddam	Member
Shibly	Member
Rafikul Islam	Member
Robbani	Member
Joynal Abedin	Member
Anis Ali Subho	Member
16 December 2015	
<i>Beneficiary Interviews: PAR Facilitator, Dapunia Union</i>	
Akhai Amin	Member
Johara Khatun	Member
Mustafi Rahaman	Member
Abdul Baki	Member
Shilka Akhtar	Member
Nasima Khatun	Member
Fatema Akhtar	Member
Lipi Khatun	Member
Salmin Akhtar	Member
Nurul Huda	Member
<i>Beneficiary Interviews: Grassroots SHG Members, Dapunia Union</i>	

Jharna Akhtar	Member
Khaleda Akhtar	Member

ANNEX 4: ACRONYMS

BNN	Bikoshito Nari Network
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DCC	Distinguished Citizens' Committee
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MoU	