



Village Development Committee- *Helping Thysel*



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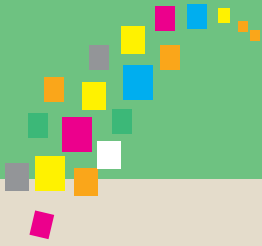


**NGO FORUM
FOR PUBLIC HEALTH**



Village Development Committee- Helping Thyself

NGO Forum for Public Health



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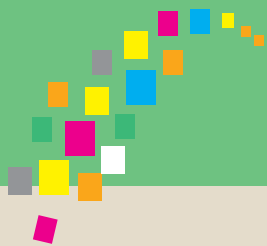
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Foreword

The culture and institutionalization of CBOs has been a subject of debate since its journey started in Bangladesh. To what extent these CBOs has been capable of playing roles has been monitored, evaluated and analyzed by numerous organizations involved in the nurturing of the entire process. NGO Forum has a rich history of working at the grassroots with the CBOs known as the Village Development Committees. From time to time changes have been brought into the nature of their work for better results. The results have been documented and studied as part of evaluating their contribution. The present Study attempts to look into the CBO process from a different perspective. Rather than telling individual success stories the Study narrates the actions and the results spawned from it. It brings together the stories woven by the VDCs towards a meaningful change in their surrounding environment.

The institutionalization of the Village Development Committees has been another unsettled issue for the development actors. The present Study analyzes the extent of community actions identified and carried out by the village level committees that could provide an argument in favour of institutionalization of village level committees. The inclusion of Village Development Committees into the working structure of Union Parishad is a new experience for NGO Forum as well as for the communities. It is a significant indication of their efforts being recognized by the local government institutions (LGIs) which in turn is contributing to WaSH governance and beyond.

The Study identifies the priority areas of different communities which has prompted them to work beyond WaSH. This is also a new experience for the organization and thus, it has looked forward to document the community efforts beyond WaSH. The Study tries to understand what priorities and potency impelled the Village Development Committees as representatives of the communities to take up other issues as their agenda for working and to what level they have succeeded. It also tries to understand what value it has added to the lives of the village people living in the difficult settings of a hard-to-reach union; what does this effort and change imply to their lives is something that needs to be internalized by any development actor. The Community Action Plans (CAPs) of the Village Development Committees creates communities' linkage with other service providers and LGIs. They have expanded their network with



agricultural department, community clinics, family welfare, youth development department and many other departments to avail certain services. It reflects the strengths of the community people derived from the Community-managed Approach.

The Community Action Plan provided a successful platform to address rural women and adolescent girls' health and social issues through formal planning and actions. These are contributing to bring desired changes in the social environment besides health and education of girls. Issues such as child marriages, eve teasing, girls' education, dowry culture and health risks are picked up by the Village Development Committees and incorporated into their Community Action Plans. In Bangladesh, the NGOs have brought commendable results in the areas of women empowerment. NGO Forum presently looks to initiate an effective approach to empowering women through WaSH intervention. The community action planning and its implementation is the catalyst for rural women to come into leadership & decision-making role and is increasing their mobility regarding various services and market opportunities.

I would like to thank NGO Forum's implementing partners, community beneficiaries, local allies, local administration and all involved for putting together their energy and efforts in paving way for a meaningful change in the rural development process.

It is a pleasure for NGO Forum to share new perspectives in the field of community action planning with our potential readers. I anticipate that the *Publication* would provide with insights acknowledging the enhanced role of village level institutions and establish its claim for a formal institutionalization.

S.M.A. Rashid
Executive Director
NGO Forum for public Health



Abstract

The Study explores the extent of Community Action Plan in rural development. It is an attempt to understand the implications of Community Action Plan as a tool long used under the NGO-driven Community-managed Approach. With years of experiences added, the CAPs have encompassed goals beyond WaSH expanding the Village Development Committee's working horizon in overall development of respective rural settings. The background and history of CBOs under NGO Forum intervention sheds light on the gradual evolving of the CBOs and their way towards governance. The diversification addressed under the CAPs, the potential it holds for the rural poor in hard-to-reach areas & people and the lessons derived from it have been unraveled for the interest of the readers.

The Case Study publication portrays evolvement of CBOs as a change agent in the hard-to-reach rural settings mostly unserved by the Government. It upholds the role of social cohesion of the poor and disadvantaged communities as a driving force and unique characteristics for sustainable rural development. Results spawned from the CBO operated Community Action Plans is carefully analyzed in the Study to draw conclusions on the effectiveness of the process. Finally, this *Publication* accumulates the lessons learnt from the entire process to develop understanding and review the CBO status of the village level institutions based on its gradual evolvement.

Chapter 1 Introduction

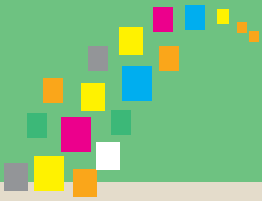
NGO Forum adopted CBO formation as an instrument of community management long ago when it started implementing the Community-managed WatSan Programme back in 1999. The pursue for an effective alternative leadership at the rural settings was the core idea of CBO formation. Initially the objective was to develop CBO as a pressure group to ensure promotion of WatSan in the respective unions under the leadership of Union Parishads. The village level institutions have walked a long way. There have been structural reforms, distinction in working periphery both in physical boundary and theme-wise under various programmes of the Organization. These changes took CBOs under several experiments which has helped these to nurture alternative development thoughts. The Community Action Planning of the CBOs (VDCs) under present governance-focused WaSH intervention is a more matured stage of this alternative development thoughts and ideas. It covers a wider sphere of development and contributes to growing of CBOs into a stronger platform with the recognition of the LGIs.

Since 2009 the Forum has been promoting demand-responsive sustainable safe water supply, hygienic sanitation and hygiene programme in the hard-to-reach areas of the country. It has led two nation-wide advocacy campaigns with government affiliation supporting the hard-to-reach areas' people's rights to safe water and sanitation. The hard-to-reach



areas face distinctive socio-political characteristics than that of the plain land. Along with it is the challenge of the changed climatic conditions in these eco-zones resulting to environment degradation. NGO Forum's WaSH intervention consequently entered into a more complex nature blending water, sanitation, health & hygiene and environmental issues. This attempt to address the emerging challenges in the WatSan sector has brought changes in approaches to the promotion of WaSH at the ground. The

The country's geophysically climate vulnerable unions require separate allocations to secure people's WatSan rights. VDCs have been a major element in this grassroots advocacy

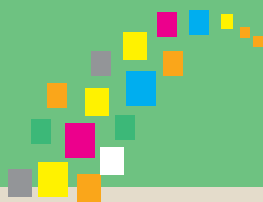


underserved and unserved hard-to-reach areas were brought into the focus of national attention. Besides, climate change and governance issues like transparency, integrity and accountability in relation to people's safe water and sanitation rights is experienced as a major concern in Bangladesh, especially to ensure poor people's rights in the hard-to-reach areas.

The present CBO i.e. the Village Development Community has been more and more engaged with governance tools and approaches. This change in approach underlines the rationalization of bringing CAP under Study. It is an attempt to identify the progression of VDCs as an initiative of alternative rural development approach and VDCs' areas of strengths and potentials in sustainable rural development.

Presently NGO Forum looks forward to institutionalizing its VDCs with a more visible and strong mandate. The term 'institutionalization' refers to the process of embedding something such as a concept, a social role, a particular value or mode of behavior within an organization, social system, or society as a whole. It is also used to refer to committing a particular individual or group to an institution, such as a mental or welfare institution. The term may also be used in a political sense to apply to the creation or organization of governmental institutions or particular bodies responsible for overseeing or implementing policy, for example in welfare or development. Institutionalization under the Forum's current governance-focused WaSH intervention has encompasses the first two definitions. The VDCs have developed capacities to act beyond WaSH which has guided the rural poor to stand up for their own rights and development. The Community Action Plan (CAP) contributes to this process of institutionalization. VDCs' interaction with LGIs and different service providers progressed with the implementation of the CAP. The Study also tries to discuss the value added to NGO Forum's Community-managed WatSan Programme.

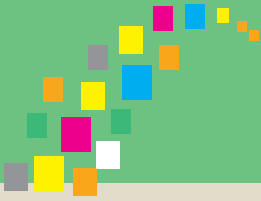
The Study covers diversified cases of VDCs in total from five different eco-zones. UP chairmen, members, UP WaSH Standing Committee members, relevant ward members, female UP members were interviewed to identify the extent of UP-CBO alliance. The *Book* exclusively focuses on the success and extent of CAP while digging through all interrelated developments of VDCs.



- The analysis of CAP brings forth different dimensions of poverty, hardship and poor people's efforts in overcoming their crisis in the hard-to-reach areas. It portrays the unique feature of social cohesion among the hard-to-reach people which plays the foremost part in building community resilience and sustenance. There are differences within eco-zones which is an interesting learning to understand the parameters of a successful community initiative.

Background of VDC as an NGO approach

NGO Forum's Community-managed WatSan Programme was designed to focus on the grassroots level institution building to aware & empower the community people for keeping them actively involved in development initiatives. For involving the entire community into the WaSH development actions and in turn making coordinated efforts in attacking multifaceted problems of the respective community, the villagers used to form a community-based organization (CBO) namely Village Development Committee (VDC). Designed in line with the spirit of the *National Policy for Safe Water Supply and Sanitation 1998*, the Community managed WatSan Programme approach of NGO Forum appeared to cover the vision and ultimate goal of the GoB in the WatSan sector. The implementation strategy was in-built mechanism of both structural and functional attributed as part of programme. The socio-economic development by reducing vulnerability to health hazards, households' cost reduction for health services and keeping human being as active work-force were the thrusts of the programme to ensure the demand-based facilities and its sustainability the utmost priority. The Community managed WatSan Programme created scope for building community level organizations that led to institutionalizing the process of the programme implementation and its success. The first step of such institution building was formation of the Village Development Committee. NGO Forum believes, in initiating any development programme, an appropriate institutional set-up is essential. This realization guided NGO Forum to design Community-managed WatSan Programme as "model village approach". NGO Forum facilitated its partner NGOs to implement the programme using VDC as the community-level catalyst group. It pushed forward to establish a philosophical basis of the approach and to build a community organization with the long-term development vision. Considering these issues, NGO Forum and its partners moved forward to collective action for translating the vision into action. It developed the mission that led to reach the goal through the intervention process.

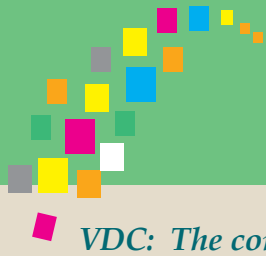


■ In the process of implementation of the Community-managed WatSan Programme, people's participation is a key concern. That is why the community people needed to organise themselves for building such an organization as to be initiator, actor as well as mentor of development initiatives as per the need of the respective community. In making the things happening the implementing agencies - partner NGOs & CBOs facilitated the community in formation of Village Development Committee involving all section of irrespective of sex, class and religion. Being involved in the process of the programme they became oriented and capacitated to take the role of action at the village level. Accordingly, the VDC established effective control over the society as an agent of actions. It built an organisational mechanism that supported the programme operation and developed a support system on which the community people got confidence. As a result, VDCs finally got an institutional shape and yet has been functioning in line with the set objectives of the Community-managed WatSan Programme. However, with the initiative of rural people, institution building process at the grassroots level got a substantial shape for ensuring community participation in development activities.

The institutional capacity building and strengthening support to the community people ensured social mobilization and smooth operation of the programme by the community-based organization. The Community-managed WatSan Programme of NGO Forum was started to be implemented following the demand-responsive approach, where the Software Services contributed immensely to the creation of awareness & demand among the community people. NGO Forum felt that the grassroots level institution building might be effective for sustainable programme implementation and that in turn drove NGO Forum for institutional building as well as capacity building of the VDCs at grassroots level. NGO Forum's Community-managed WatSan Programme followed the approach to establish community-based institutions who have already become proven for initiating own development with sufficient managerial capacity. The Community-managed WatSan Programme was found different from the traditional water and sanitation programme operated in Bangladesh.



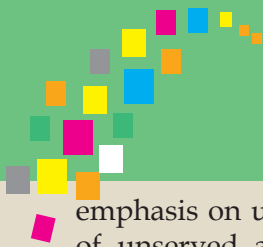
VDC and hygiene group members monitoring progress of CAP using participatory monitoring chart



VDC: *The community institution*

NGO Forum initiated the Community-managed WatSan Programme putting emphasis on bottom-up approach of development at the village level. The Community-managed WatSan Programme was designed keeping the Village Development Committee (VDC) at the centre expecting that the community would be the key development mentor as well as mediator of all relevant development efforts at village level. The programme philosophy based on the expectation that the VDCs would be mobilized & capacitated through active participation and implementation process and would act as community institution even after phasing out of the respective programme.

With institutional building motives through VDC, NGO Forum has gone through the process of programme intervention and its assessment while it has been evident that process of VDC formation and inclusion of appropriate members in the VDC were determinant factors for sustainability of the community initiatives. The commitment of involved members seemed key factor for continuity of structure and functions of VDC. The community people from all sects actively participated in VDC formation to address their common needs i.e. water and sanitation coverage of the respective village. The VDC meetings were attended by the respective members, where they discussed about water and sanitation programme relating to health, hygiene and household expenditure. This created enthusiasm and interest among the community people and this process influenced people to participate in overall implementation of the programme. In the Village Development Committee representation of different segments of people like various professionals, community leaders, elected representatives of Local Government, women representatives, irrespective of affiliation of political parties were ensured. A combined effort pushed the process bringing a comprehensive change. NGO Forum has experienced that the implementation of WatSan programme became successful with the active involvement and participation of cross-section of people in VDC. While implementing the Community-managed WatSan Programme NGO Forum put



emphasis on unserved and hard-to-reach community. Considering the criteria of unserved and hard-to-reach area appropriate villages were selected for programme implementation. Community people conducted various type of motivational activities being guided by the respective VDC with assistance from NGO Forum's partner NGO.

The VDC formation followed steps and process like motivation of villagers on safe water and sanitation, sound health and the benefits of maintaining hygienic life. The general structure of Village Development Committee (VDC) is around 15-member. Of them, inclusion of female, poor & disadvantaged members is a pre-condition. The people of different professions were included in the VDC by common consensus of participated members in the community meeting at village level. The committee members took part in conduction of motivational activities to let people know about the negative impacts, traditional beliefs and practices regarding the water and sanitation issues.

After community meetings, followed by VDC formation, the Committee in assistance with the responsible partner organization conducted the participatory rural appraisal to identify the existing situation of resources and problems. Water and sanitation situation was identified as the most hazardous and acute problem in many of the respective areas. The community people in assistance with partner NGO prepared a Community Action Plan (CAP) to encounter WatSan & other prime problems for ensuring better health and environment. The action included various issues e.g. resource mapping, identification of constraints, capacity enhancement of community people, identification of potential sources of resources for their community development. To implement the CAP VDC members were given separate responsibilities and target to enhance WatSan coverage and change hygiene practices through motivation of the community people. VDCs used to review the constraints frequently for achieving the target according to the CAP and identified possible ways to overcome the challenges. The community people had extended cooperation to VDC because they accepted and recognized VDC as community level organization. So, the community people supported VDC for effective programme implementation. The process of programme implementation by VDC created enthusiasm among community people in achieving the goal of the respective programme and in turn the development of the community.



NGO Forum has experienced that the creative role of VDC has generated immense change in overall development scenario with the achievements following the CAP in their respective community. The inclusion of different group of people of the society in the implementation process has created an immense impact in making success of the Community-managed WatSan Programme. From the VDC formation to programme implementation, it followed inclusive process of accumulating knowledge and ideas to enable the process of generating comprehensive results of the programme. However, throughout the process of Community-managed WatSan Programme implementation the VDC has got an institutional shape as well as functional with a customized form and structure at the community level.

Gradually NGO Forum has scaled-up its Community-managed Programme approach to other difficult areas keeping its focus on the poor and disadvantaged communities. This is ensured through a high level of motivation and sensitization of the service providers. As for the poor beneficiaries making them realize that safe WaSH is their rights, motivating and mobilizing them under the platform of VDC has been a big task to draw the results produced. Communities' involvement in making social maps, Community Action Plans (CAPs) under VDCs has helped in the mobilization process. Through the process of delivering the designated services among the entitled poor and disadvantaged communities, the UPs are upholding their commitment in improving governance in their activities as they are taking the community demand into consideration as raised by the VDCs. Being included in the VDCs as direct members the poor & excluded population are organized under VDCs mainly through the CAP development process. In this regard, the poor, disadvantaged & hard-to-reach people, who have been living in accessible areas but could not be reached due to other factors including poverty, physical disability, cultural backwardness, social exclusion, environmental degradation, gender discrimination, etc have been mobilized in association with the VDCs through various community level activities under NGO Forum's programme. The VDC formation & functioning as a local institution have strengthened the governance mechanism at the local level addressing the poor & excluded people's voices in the community demands. Alongside the community -management approach in WaSH promotion & other community development efforts mentored by the VDC, the participation & acknowledgement of UPs has depicted an optimistic state at promoting pro-poor service delivery at the union level under NGO Forum's programme.

Chapter 2 The Community Action Plan

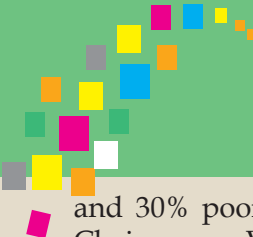
Rural development implies public participation in planning, resource allocation and decision-making process. Mobilizing the community is the key to ensuring such active participation. It is not easy or convenient in a rural setting of Bangladesh with more than sixty percent of the people living in extreme poverty in particular unions identified as the hard-to-reach. Economic hardship remains the biggest challenge associated with other socio-political and cultural barriers. But this hardship also acts as the binding force for the people of the hard-to-reach eco-zones.

Bringing communities and service providers together

The hard-to-reach unions have scattered landscape with the highest number of poor and disadvantaged population. Unawareness of rights, poor education, poor communication and civil amenities keeps these unions lagging behind from national progress scenario. WaSH was the entry point for NGO Forum while working in selected hard-to-reach unions under five eco-zones namely the coastal belt, the *char* lands, the *haor* region, the drought and flood-prone areas which are also nationally identified as climate vulnerable. Community mobilization was initially driven at the ward level. Ward-wise Village Development Committees were developed comprising of 11 to 15 members with 30% female



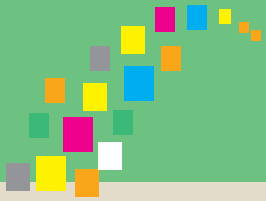
A VDC in Shibalaya, Manikganj updating its CAP in bi-monthly meeting



and 30% poor representation in each committees. Each VDC comprises of a Chairperson, Vice-chairperson, General Secretary, Treasurer and 5 to 11 members. It is mandatory to ensure female representation in at least position of Chair, General Secretary and Treasurer. The purpose of forming VDCs was to ensure continuation of WaSH promotional initiatives even after phasing out of projects and continue constant collaboration and communication with the UPs. The VDCs are working in rural isolated locations with minimum educational status, poverty rate of 70 to 80% comprising of day labourers, farmers, fishermen, and others. Promotion of equity as a central focus of WaSH governance has been introduced at the community level also to ensure pro-poor service delivery by the LGIs. Within the prospect of equity & human rights, geophysically unreachable, economically poor, climate refugees, women in vulnerability, socially excluded persons & communities, and persons with disability have been addressed. Representation from poor, female, physically challenged and socially excluded communities have been mandatory in the VDC formation.



VDC members following up community applications approved by the UP Chairman



■ The Project works with Union Parishads and its WaSH related committees at the union level; with Upazila Parishad, upazila administration, DPHE, and LGED at the upazila level; DPHE, LGED, DC and Civil Surgeon office at the district level. The VDCs are at the central of NGO Forum's rooted advocacy that targets to bring UPs out of their traditional practices in WaSH promotion. Under the present intervention VDCs are closely interacting with the Ward WatSan Committees (WWCs). Their primary point of communication is the relevant UP Member of the WWCs through which the community demands are reached out to the Union Parishads.

Preparing Community Action Plan

The Community Action Plan is a bi-annual or annual plan of actions put down in a format that contains the list of planned activities, target achieved so far & target to be achieved, timeline (month of implementation), way of implementing the planned activity, responsibility and remarks. The responsibility is specified for community people, relevant UP and NGO.

The VDCs play a central role in leading and organizing the respective communities right from the entry point of intervention. A Transect Walk is done by the VDC members in 3 to 4 days to assess the actual scenario of the community. The Transect Walk is done by the VDCs to obtain door-to-door information of poverty status, WatSan status, etc. The committees played active role in assessing wealth



VDC draws map showing community resources, HHs and situation



ranking, community need, and preparing CAPs accordingly which is later translated into community demand through written application to the respective Union Parishad.

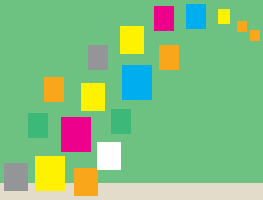
The Community Action Plan is prepared by the VDC members in the presence of Union Extension Workers, Programme Facilitators, UP Member representing respective wards, and local allies from the communities. The Plan is drawn based on the analysis of the Social & Pollution Map which depicts the existing WaSH, health & environment situation, wealth ranking of community people, community resources, its functioning and non-functioning status, available infrastructure, etc. The Map development process gives the Village Development Committee a complete picture of its respective village and wealth ranking of each household. Even the respective UP members consider the information beneficial to their work.

Extent of Community Action Plan in rural development

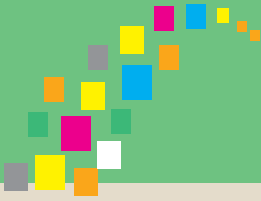
The extent of Community Action Plan has covered many areas of community concerns crucial for their development. Safe WaSH remains the entry point of community development under the present intervention. All the communities have their initial planning centering ensuring drinking water supply, improved sanitation facility, improving hygiene practices at personal and household levels, maintaining food hygiene, repairing tubewell platforms, stopping open defecation, controlling households waste dumping into a fixed place, etc. As the VDCs followed up and updated its performance regarding these targets at the end of the first year they gradually expanded their area of actions targeting communication facilities, preventing violence against women, ensuring education of children from the poorest families, infrastructure development, environment conservation, poor women's livelihood opportunities, and many other small initiatives. The gradual change in setting targets is incorporated in the CAPs. Many of the VDCs have also started taking initiatives to mobilize fund to ensure continuation of their initiatives.

Communication

Weak or poor communication is the general characteristic of the rural hard-to-reach areas. It is a primary concern for the community people who face daily difficulties in reaching the nearby town areas. The highest priority in Union Parishad budget is also often granted for the road construction activities. The VDC members are now working to ensure road communication for the most disadvantaged communities. They are collecting fund, rendering physical labour, knocking the Union Parishad members and chairmen, and placing demands in ward *sabha* of the Union Parishads.



■ The *haor* surrounded Purba Birgaon union is like an isolated island. The Beli VDC constructed a 50-foot long bamboo bridge on the Shonapur khal connecting the ward with the main road. Bamboo worth Tk. 1,500 was used in building the bridge. The VDC members collected Tk. 1,200 from the community people of two neighbouring wards while they themselves donated Tk. 300. Two members of the VDC were responsible for the money collection. As for the construction, physical labour was rendered by the VDC members. The bridge has made communication convenient for the school children to get to the main road to reach the government school in the area. School students walked more than 2 kms road to reach to the government school. Also people are benefitted carrying patients to hospitals situated in the main road. These are minor demands and efforts in terms of monetary involvement which the VDCs are carrying out themselves. Another 4-km mud road has been constructed connecting the ward with the main road covering the area from Pagla Birgaon to Shimer Khal. This was shared in the UP budget meeting which was included in the budget allocation. In three years the Shikhirdanga VDC in Perikhali union, Rampal upazila, Bagerhat has been able to ensure construction work of four roads in their area. They regard this to be their best work done. The UP Chairman of Balia Christian Para, 4 no. ward, Aloa Khowa union, Atwari, Panchagarh has sanctioned fund for the reconstruction of the Church for the Santals living in the Balia Christian Para. This community even receives much of the Social Safety Net services within the village. The Balia Christian Para was a very retrograde area once. Now the village got electricity. The VDC had contacted the UP for electricity. Two roads have been constructed with link to the main road through Kabikha programme.



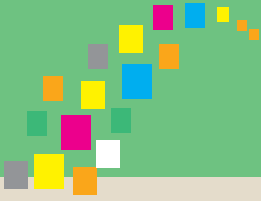
■ *Preventing Child Marriage and Multiple Marriage Practice*

Child marriage has been identified by many VDCs as a concern for their communities. Accordingly preventive measures centering child marriage entered into the Community Action Plan. The issue is discussed in the bi-monthly meetings of VDC. Action plans for preventing child marriage were also set in the meeting. Meeting resolutions are maintained in which these actions are documented. The hygiene sessions and door-to-door visits by female members of the hygiene groups and VDCs took part in disseminating messages.



Beli VDC discussing its Social Map in the presence of UP members

Besides awareness messages that discussed the negative consequences of early marriage, they also disseminated the decision of the VDC to prevent awareness raising among community people through hygiene sessions and community visits by female members of hygiene groups. Disseminating VDC decision to



- prevent child marriage within the respective ward is also a planned action of the members. It is interesting that the VDC decisions are widely accepted by the community people.


Minara Begum, Treasurer of Beli Village Development Centre of Purba Birgaon Khalpar, 4 no. ward, South Sumanganj, Sunamganj is also a health worker of BRAC. Enlightened with the social development activities of BRAC she raised the issue of preventing child marriage in the community. The issue was raised at the VDC meeting which came as a decision under their resolution and entered into the CAP. The VDCs are also utilizing the strengths of their networks with other service providing organizations which they developed through their initiatives and actions. Beli VDC members went to Rozina's (16 years) parents to urge them to stop the wedding. They then went to the Ward Member of 5 no. Ward S.M. Rabed and requested him not to sign the birth registration which is mandatory for registering marriages. The Kazi refused to carry on the wedding as birth registration was not available. The VDC members claim that the people are now aware of the consequences and the domino effect of early marriage.

There is practice of multiple marriages among the minority people of Balia Christian Para in Toria union under Atwari upazila in Panchagarh. The Balia Christian Para VDC took initiative to discourage the practice. They claim that the only family which had multiple spouses with the same man had left the community in the face of resistance. This is a reflection of how well the communities are organized under the platform and leadership of VDCs. The VDC decisions are well-accepted and followed by the community people.

The trend regarding early marriage is quite high in Patharia union, South Sunamganj, Sunamganj. Jui VDC stopped early marriage



Kamina Das, Treasurer, Balia Christian Para VDC is supported by her community as a possible election candidate for next UP election




of a girl child named Kalpana, 12 years old of Srinathpur, 5 no. ward, Patharia union. They went to the 5 no. ward member Joynal Abedin and together approached the UP Chairman. The Aarpara VDC operating in Shibalaya union under Shibalaya upazila in Manikganj claimed that child marriages did not take place anymore in the community. The VDC stopped at least 4 child marriages. They made announcements against child marriage and raised people's awareness on the issue. They are maintaining a strict position in this regard. They even went to the police station and stopped two marriages of such kind. The Union Parishad and village heads are involved in the process. The UP is not certifying birth registration without which the Kazi does not carry out the marriage. Marriage registration would thus, not take place. The UP even kept record of the incidence and the names involved with these child marriage attempts.

In earlier times 80% of marriages were child marriage in Narayan Teota union under Shibalaya upazila in Manikganj. Narayan Teota VDC urged the UP to increase pressure in this issue. The UP is also cooperating in this regard. The Chowkidar is called by the VDC in case any incident takes place, mentions Md. Khabir Uddin, an elderly member of the VDC. They also arrange litigation involving the UPs. The UPs seek VDC's help to get information on the actual age of the child. They refuse to give birth registrations if the bride to be is below 18. The Teota UP Chairman Md. Anwar Hossian Badal also acknowledged Central Mosque's Imam and Ward WatSan Committee member Md. Ayub Ali's efforts in preventing child marriage. He also mentioned Md. Kutubuddin, Chairman, Narayan Teota VDC, Shibalaya, Manikganj' contribution in promoting various development initiatives in Teota union. The Chairman mentioned that every development is being made in a coordinated manner now.

Preventing Dowry

Fighting against the culture of dowry which is rooted into our customs and practices has not been easy for the VDC members. The VDCs have taken up the challenge to fight against this long-lasting culture existing in our societies and within communities. In Shibalaya, Manikganj, VDC members themselves have arranged marriages of their offspring with no involvement of dowry. They produced examples themselves to create a movement against dowry culture.

Ward Member of no. 7 ward in Aarpara, Shibalaya, Manikganj Akhtar Hossain was present while drawing the Social Map. They then set specific targets in the



CAP covering these areas along with health issues of adolescent girls, child marriage, dowry, etc developing a 6-monthly action plan. Morsheda Begum, a VDC member was involved with CCDB's development activities as well. She raised the issue of protecting girl adolescents' health and preventing child marriage and dowry. Incidence of dowry is still taking place privately. People are not paying in cash as they are aware of the dowry law. The VDC is holding discussions on the issue. However, Aarpara VDC claimed that no dowry-related women rights violation took place at a big scale in their community.

*"Our people are now aware about dowry.
At least there is no case of oppression."*

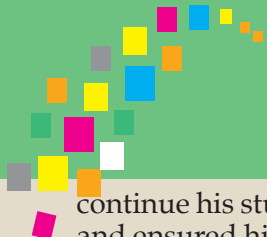
*Begum Monowara,
Female UP member, Teota UP,
Shibalaya, Manikganj*

The VDC members in Balia Christian Para, 4 no. ward, Aloa Khowa union, Atwari, Panchagarh have set examples themselves with not accepting dowry in their own children's wedding. They have ensured three weddings so far to take place without dowry which is a challenging thing to do in the rural context.

Promoting Environment for Education

Preventing dropout from school was found to be more or less a common mission of the VDCs. There are several examples of VDCs taking actions to resend children to schools or even raising fund to ensure children's continuity of studies.

An awareness raising event was organized by the Padma VDC operating in Purbo Birgaon union under South Sunamganj in Sunamganj in which 200 parents took part. The VDC tried to motivate parents of this under developed haor areas in sending each of their children to school. The Narayan Teota VDC in Shibalaya, Manikganj came to know of Md. Rubel Hossian who was the son of a widowed woman and was unable to continue his studies due to monetary crisis. The VDC members collected money and ensured his continuation of the studies. Md. Rubel Hossian's widowed mother maintains her household expensed through selling the milk of her two cows. Rubel is a student of HSC first year. His elder brother works in a garments factory. Rubel was unable to



continue his studies due to monetary crisis. The VDC members collected money and ensured his continuation of the studies. The VDCs regard themselves as the guardians of the villages. The Shikirdanga VDC in Perikhali union, Rampal upazila, Bagerhat is not allowing any child to leave school and stay at home or go to work. They have kept the community in pressure regarding this issue. According to them, these poor mothers are getting economic benefits from UP's Social Safety Net programmes such as VGF card, so there is no reason why the children should work too.

The Maligaon VDC members in Jagirpara village, Mirzapur union, Atwari upazila, Panchagarh communicated with the Madrasa Super, and guardians of some students and made sure that the students went back to school and the Madrasa allowed his re-admission. The VDC members monitor whether each and every child of the community is taking education or not. The members ask the community people to send their children to school as soon as they turn six. All the children of the community are going to school, says the VDC Chairman Md. Hazirul Islam with a soothing smile on his face.

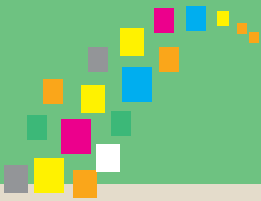


Maligaon VDC Chairman Md. Hazirul Islam is now a close contact of Mirzapur UP in Atwari, Panchagarh

IGA for women and women's health issues

The female members of the VDCs has been found playing a proactive role in trying to uplift lives of the poor women folks in their respective working areas. All the VDCs were found to identify the poor women-headed households in their areas and enlisting them for UP's Social Safety Net (SSN) benefits. Apart from SSN programmes, VDCs were also found to help poor women in generating income through poultry and goat rearing using their collected fund. Women's health is also considered under the CAP of the VDCs. Female members of some VDCs are communicating with the Community Clinic and Family Welfare department in this regard.

The Padma VDC ensured various IGA activities for the poor women in their areas. It has ensured Poultry development project for 25 poor women. It also organized sewing training for 2 to 30 women. Mst. Momina Akhtar comes from a hardcore poor family of Jagirpara village, Mirzapur union, Atwari upazila, Panchagarh. Her husband is a blind person and they have three children to feed. Momina Akhtar works as a day labourer earning Tk. 120 per day. This

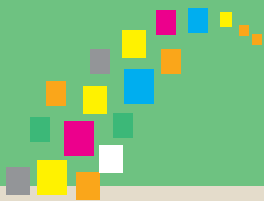


was not enough for her to meet her family expenses and ensure her children's education. The Maligaon VDC ensured a disability benefit card for Momina's husband and gave her a goat which they purchased with Tk. 1,700. The family will get Tk. 1,000 every three months under the disability benefit. The VDC is guiding Momina in rearing the goat for economic purpose. Domestic animals are a rural families' greatest asset. Altogether she expects that her economic crisis would reduce through these initiatives. "The goat follows me wherever I go. She is a part of my family; she is my happiness now", said Momina.



The goat is now Momina Akhtar's asset

The female VDC members of the Shikhirdanga VDC in Perikhali union, Rampal upazila, Bagerhat has been working to ensure expectant mothers are not missing the vaccination which is often ignored by the rural women in this remote coastal land. They are also working to prevent child marriage but in their area this is still a challenge. Lutfunnesa Begum, Vice Chairperson of the VDC took these initiatives. She maintains contact with the Community Clinic and health workers of Family Planning and Health departments. She is also an active member of UDMC of Perikhali union under Rampal upazila in Bagerhat.



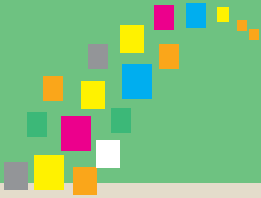
■ *Tree Plantation/Environment Conservation*

Keeping villages environment-free was the next thing that popped out in most of the VDC members' minds after they started the initiative to stop open defecation in their wards. Tree plantation, re-excavating old unused dug-wells with the knowledge gathered from ongoing WaSH capacity building programmes, etc included into the CAP as part of it. The VDCs even utilized their own fund besides applying to the respective UPs for tree plantation along the roadsides. There are interesting and encouraging references of initiatives to improve the village environment.



Many villages where the VDCs are operating are gradually developing a healthy environment as seen in this picture

The Aarpara VDC in Shibalaya, Manikganj has distributed some trees among the poorest of the community. They encouraged people in tree plantation. Now whenever people return from the *Haat* they come home with a plant sibling in hand. The VDC also made people aware of organized planting which was a neglected issue in the community. The community people have mostly inclined towards tree plantation and gardening of herbal and fruit trees. Another VDC

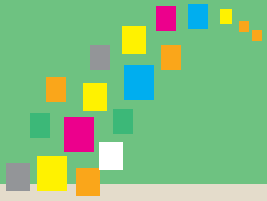


- named as *Char Payla & Baro Shibram Bari VDC* operating in ward no. 3 of Utholi union in Shibalaya, Manikganj mobilized fund and also made application to the Utholi UP for plant siblings. Through their own fund, the VDC members have planted 50 plant siblings along a newly constructed road in their area. The Treasurer of *Char Payla & Baro Shibram Bari VDC* and relevant UP members are jointly keeping account of the fund. The VDC collected Tk. 3,700 for tree plantation purpose. The Utholi UP has committed to distribute plant siblings.



A Union Extension Worker carrying out the initial hard work of mobilizing communities

The Narayan Teota VDC has made a fund for tree plantation in which the members contribute a monthly collection of Tk. 10. The initiative started since 2013 and presently the savings stand at Tk. 4,040. They spent Tk. 3,500 for tree plantation and supported education fees of four students whose parents couldn't afford their educational expenses. The families were not eager to continue their studies. The VDC bought them school books and also is paying Tk. 500 to two students and Tk. 250 to the other two students for a year.



■ The Maligaon VDC members operating in Mirzapur union, Atwari upazila, Panchagarh have motivated the four shared owners of a moldy khal of 10 katha land area to fill it up with land. The Khal is shown in the social map as “Moyla Doba”. They have also placed the demand to the UP in this regard. Applications submitted to the UPs by VDCs in Atwari upazila of Panchagarh also covered development of protection walls along the ponds. The respective UPs have approved fund for the construction of protection walls.




A protection wall along the pond in Atwari, Panchagarh

Access to Social Safety Nets

In many areas members of excluded communities have gained access to UPs’ Social Safety Net programmes. The fact is also admitted and recognized by the UP chairmen. They have openly mentioned about this change in their working process. Through the intervention Beli VDC operating in 4 no. ward, Purba Birgaon union under South Sunamganj, Sunamganj gained work for 25 poor community people under the Kabikha programme.



Bhojpatia UP Chairman conducting a meeting on the distribution of VGD cards in which the VDC Chairman is present

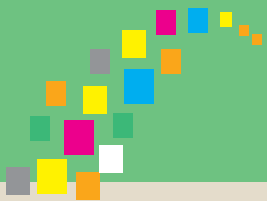


The Purba Birgaon UP mentioned that this wouldn't have been possible without the engagement of the VDCs. Beli VDC also proposed two names for widow allowance. The Shikhirdanga VDC in Perikhali union, Rampal upazila, Bagerhat assists the UP in selecting beneficiaries for widow allowance, maternity allowance, etc. It is their claim that none can anymore lie to get the benefit. The Union Parishads inquire it. The Nezampur VDC provided list of possible beneficiaries for the agriculture card to the Sub-assistant Agriculture Officer.

It requires UP member's signature to authenticate whether the person is a farmer or not. UP members are taking the help of VDC in this issue as well. The VDCs have gradually gained themselves the position where community and UP both consider them as the contact point. This has increased their credibility and enthusiasm to sustain their identity as village level institution. The UPs receive only 15-16 VGD cards per ward which is insufficient in terms of the number of households. Here, the VDC helps UPs to select the households. UPs are selecting beneficiaries based on their provided information which in turn is benefiting the poorest sections of the community.

Ensuring tax collection

Many VDCs have mainly worked on behalf of the Union Parishads to spread awareness among the community people to pay tax. This is an increasing priority area of Union Parishads also and an activity in which the VDCs played a supportive role. VDC members made announcements and also delivered door-to-door messages which have brought positive results in generating awareness among people about paying their taxes. The Union Parishads too have started applying techniques such as not giving birth certificates to household members until their holding taxes are paid. Together the village communities are slowly growing a culture of paying taxes which still remains a challenging area for the Union Parishads. The VDCs operating in South Sunamganj upazila were found to be active in collecting tax on behalf of the UPs. Matin Mia, Chairman, Jui VDC, 5 no. ward, Patharia union motivated the community people in paying tax as it will benefit them.



■ Promoting WaSH

Increasing WaSH coverage was the primary and foremost target of the VDCs. This was the starting point for the VDCs which brought them close to UPs and other service providers. This has been their major area of success as well. They update their progress against the target in their respective CAPs and place demands through written applications to the UP Chairman through WWC accordingly.


Knowledge on latrine usage was quite poor in the Aarpara ward in Shibalaya union under Shibalaya, Manikganj. The Aarpara VDC started its work with pollution scenario of the village. They brought sanitation, repairing of road, tree plantation, etc in their Social Map. VDC members paid Tk. 20 as a monthly collection and purchased latrines. The VDC also



Aarpara VDC's updated CAP for 2013-'14 time period

received 5 latrine sets against the demand made for 15. They also made applications for repairing road which was affected during a flood. The Ward Member recommended the application. The UP Chairmen gave his commitment of conducting brick soiling in this regard in a meeting. The community people are now getting habituated in maintaining hygiene, especially handwashing with soap. Even if anyone cannot get soap at least they will keep wheel powder instead. 80-100 sets of latrines are planned and registered under the 4 no. ward of Purba Birgaon union. This is displayed in the Ward Planning Board. Planned water options for the ward are also registered and displayed in the Board. In Nezampur, Nachole, Chapai Nawabganj the people had to travel 8 to 10 kms to purchase materials for latrine sets which was not very encouraging for them.

There was 189 polluted TWs and 17 hanging latrines in Narayan Teota ward, Teota union, Shibalaya, Manikganj which is a river-erosion prone area situated by the Jamuna river. 95% of the community people are poor living their expenses through hawker (floating vendors) in the ferry *ghat*, farming, and such. The community people eagerly took this volunteer initiative and formed the VDC

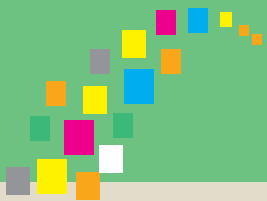


thinking that they want to be self-sufficient in supporting themselves. The VDC received 5 sets of latrines against 17 sets demanded. They constructed the TW platforms of 36 TWs in their community. The Char Payla & Baro Shibram Bari VDC received 19 latrines against their application for 28 latrine sets. They managed the remaining latrine sets from other service providers. Through this, they claim that there is a latrine in every household of their villages. The Nezampur VDC received 5 Tubewells against its applications and also repaired two dysfunctional Tubewells.

Nasirabad VDC operating in Nachole union, Nachole, Chapai Nawabganj finds its satisfaction in bringing pipe water service to all households. They arranged fund to purchase a motor and distributed water through pipeline consisting of 36 stand posts. VDC members collect Taka seven per head from the households to afford the electricity bill. The Upazila Parishad Chairman visited the cluster habitat of 435 households in March 2012 and later paid for the cost of the motor while the community shared the installation cost. Nasirabad VDC received 28 latrine sets against its application for 35. At the time when VDC started its operation, there were 361 households with unhygienic and no latrine sets. Presently, only 10 are left without latrines.



Pipeline water supply through initiative of Nasirabad VDC in Nachole, Chapai Nawabganj



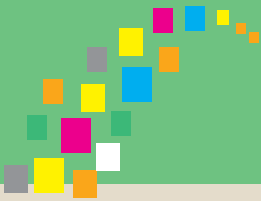
■ *Disseminating awareness messages*

Some VDCs have begun disseminating messages on different health, WatSan, even livelihood related issues through announcements. They are arranging folk songs in public places such as school field, bazaar or chataal. The rural women can attend programmes arranged in school fields at evening time. These are also considered by the VDCs. The Nezampur VDC of Nezampur union, Nachole

“We made people aware against open defecation through arranging Gambhira in school fields, bazaars and chataal situated near the railway station. We also took initiative to make the public toilet in the Madrasa odor-free.”

- Nezampur VDC, Nachole, Chapai Nawabganj

upazila, Chapai Nawabganj are trying to motivate farmers to produce crops other than paddy such as wheat, potato, and other varieties that would consume less water considering the gradual lowering of water table in this Barind Tract area. This VDC members even conducted meetings with the deep operators of irrigation pumps and asked them to motivate the farmers enlisted in the schemes. They have communicated the BMDA, agriculture department, DPHE in this regard. They even organized Gambhira on misuse of water resources. 3 to 4 members of the VDC also went to experience the Eco-san Toilet installed in adjacent Jhenaipukur village (The Eco-village) in Nezampur, Nachole, Chapai Nawabganj . They have promoted the benefits of the Eco-san Toilet to their people also.



■ *Village arbitrations*

Many VDC Chairmen, Vice-chairmen and secretaries were found being a part of the village arbitrations often insisted by the UP Chairmen themselves. They conduct the primary stages of the arbitrations. In cases where the conflicts cannot be dismissed through mutual understandings, the UP Chairman is approached.

The Balia Christian Para VDC has litigated three village arbitrations. They also took initiative to prevent smuggling in their locality which is adjacent to the Indian border. They called up the Atwari Police Station and informed about a smuggler in their area. The police had arrested two accused smugglers in this connection. The Maligaon VDC chairman of Mirzapur union under Atwari upazila in Panchagarh took part in village arbitrations called by the Union Parishads. He has assisted the Union Parishad in 4 to 5 arbitrations as a VDC chair. These were mostly familial conflict related. In case when the conflict could not be dismissed, the arbitration committee calls upon the UP Chairman who would then join the committee often putting an end to the arbitration.

Demand raised for pond ghat

The demand of *ghats* for ponds is high among the rural communities. This ensures ease and safety of women and children who have to use the pond water for various purposes. The demand for a pond *ghat* was raised by the Nasirabad VDC in the union's *ward sabha*. The pond was given to the cluster habitat by the government. But it was too risky for especially women, adolescents and children to use the pond with no *ghat* built. The UP Chairman approved the demand in the open budget which cost Taka 45,000. The VDC looks after its maintenance. A Sweeper has been arranged who cleans the *ghat* once a week. They also made free arrangements for the Sweeper to stay in the nearby indigenous community's village.

Maligaon VDC in Mirzapur union under Atwari upazila in Panchagarh took lease of the pond in the middle of 2012. In one and a half years' time they had a total of Tk. 4,885 in their savings account of which Tk. 4,400 has been spent. The money spent was used to buy a goat worth Tk. 1,700 for a hardcore poor woman

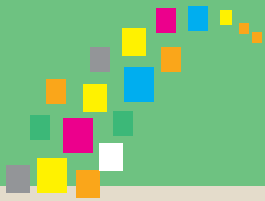
named Mst. Momina Akhtar; to pay Tk. 1,500 as first installment of the pond's lease agreement for fisheries purpose (Tk. 3,000 in one year) and Tk. 1,200 to buy fish diet. The UP is aware of the initiative. So far there has been no conflict centering the pond's leasing.



VDC female members shows the ghat they earned through demanding to the Bhojpatia UDMC in Rampal, Bagerhat

Lease of Haat (village market)

The VDCs are targeting various fund mobilization activities within their capacity. Taking lease of ponds, village markets, etc are part of the mobilization efforts made. The Nasirabad VDC in Nachole union, Nachole, Chapai Nawabganj participated in tender call for lease of a *Haat*. The VDC received lease of the *Haat* for Tk. 23,325 including vat. The market assembles twice a week. In each *haat* day a highest amount of 400 to 450 Taka and lowest amount of 150 Taka is lifted. In six months around Tk. 15,000 has been deposited in the VDC's account. The amount is deposited in a bank account every alternative month. Last year the VDC had a profit of Tk. 6,000. Around 150 to 200 people come to the *Haat*. The members of the VDC have plans to provide poor households with loans for goat-rearing.



■ *Arranging permanent passenger shelter*

Several small development initiatives are taken by the VDCs. Applying for a passenger shelter (*Jatri Chhauni*) is one such tiny but encouraging initiative. These are examples of VDCs gradual growth as a development partner at the village level. It demonstrates its strength gained in bargaining with the UPs. The Nezampur VDC of Nezampur union, Nachole, Chapai Nawabganj lobbied with the Nezampur UP to arrange a permanent passenger shelter. Female passengers are especially getting the benefits of the Shelter.



A women passersby resting under the passenger shelter in Nachole, Chapai Nawabganj

Preventing trafficking of illegal goods at border

This is another example of the many small but important initiatives that the VDCs are taking. The VDCs are expanding their working sphere to whichever is within their capacity. But preventing trafficking or gambling is certainly a challenging task to target for any community. But some VDCs also showed their strength in taking up such targets. Trafficking of illegal goods at the border areas Members of the Balia Christian Para VDC in Toria union under Atwari upazila of Panchagarh informed the local Police Station and Toria UP Chairman about the smugglers. The police raided the house according to the information and arrested two persons. In Shikhirdanga village in Perikhali union, Rampal upazila, Bagerhat gambling is totally prevented by the Shikhirdanga's continuous effort. Now these VDC members were found trying to stop drug trafficking in the area which is another challenging target.

Chapter 3 Results Driven under Community Action Plan

- The Community Action Plans prepared, implemented and updated by the Village Development Committees not only depict the extent and aptitude of the Plans but also the capacity developed within the village level institutions in finding their own avenues for development. This capacity and strength developed is discussed in this chapter especially from the point of view of establishing WaSH governance.

Processing information as a part of knowledge management

Building a resilient community develops much on its capacity to organize and capacity to manage knowledge. In many areas the community people possessed information while in most areas people were not aware of rights related information. However, even where the people were informed they lacked the capability to process the information into action. The VDCs have made a tremendous progress in relation to knowledge management at the root level. VDCs are collecting and disseminating information regarding various services, market opportunities, Social Safety Net Programmes and available services of the Union Parishads. Now they know to deal with the service providers for availing the services.

“Previously none of the community in Narayan Teota was aware of open budgeting. Now UP members participate in the bi-monthly meetings which did not take place earlier. The Ward Sabhas and UP Open Budget sessions started after the intervention of VDC. So far, 2 Ward *Sabhas* and 3 Open Budgets took place.”

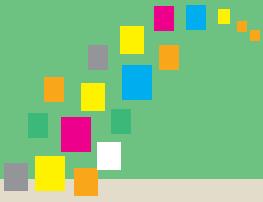
—Md. Kutub Uddin, Chairman, Narayan Teota VDC

“We take the support of VDCs as they have information about every HH in the ward.”

—Saleha Begum, Chair, Teota UP WaSH Standing Committee, Shibalya, Manikganj



The Balia Christian Para Santal community now enjoys its intimacy developed with the Aloa Khowa UP in Atwari, Panchagarh



■ *Establishing a mechanism*

Community elites usually made verbal applications to the UP chairmen or respective ward members. This had been the usual practice in rural setting of Bangladesh. But community people whom the Village Development Committees represent are now applying through written application. Verbal applications are no longer accepted by the UP chairmen also. It has turned into a formal system maintained both by the communities and the UPs. Each of the application is preserved at the respective UP office.

“The applications have to come through the VDCs and in written form. This has become the system now. We are abiding by this system. We have to value the system developed. The people are now very aware. They question us in Open Budget Session regarding any confusion they find. Even the women raising questions. They complain about early marriages. This is establishing transparency in our work. 1,500 VGD cards have been distributed maintaining transparency. I believe the system which has developed will continue.”

–*Nezampur Union Parishad Chairman, Nachole, Chapai Nawabganj*

Participatory budgeting is taking place

VDCs are engaged with informal monitoring which the UPs find to be encouraging for themselves as it is keeping them connected with the people. The UP believes the process has helped in their planning too. Earlier the UPs did not practice open budgeting in a substantial scale. The present practice of participatory budgeting process makes the selection process more convenient. It is increasing their acceptance to the people through upholding transparency and integrity. The process of UP budgeting has changed totally which is now a model system. It is also a fact that the VDCs are mainly taking part in Ward *Sabhas* which are held twice a year. In March a Ward *Sabha* is arranged for the planning of UP budget and in October another Ward *Sabha* is arranged for sharing the implementation and progress status of the UP budget. In a poverty-stricken community context, most of the people are earning hand to mouth



CBO-UP collaborations have been contributing to ensuring ethnic minorities' representation in UP Open Budget sessions



and cannot spend their whole day for a meeting. This is why often the VDC chairman and secretary are representing the UP Open Budget Sessions on behalf of the respective VDCs.

“The demand applications were in line with the actual needs of the community. The VDC submitted applications and list are getting priority by the respective UPs.”

–Saleha Begum, Chair, Teota UP WaSH Standing Committee, Shiblalaya, Manikganj

Date and time of the Pre-budget *Sabha* is put up in the UP notice board and all UP members are informed about the Pre-budget *Sabha*. The members invite the community people by making announcements through the Village Police and Chowkidar. The ward’s problems are discussed in separate sections followed by the common plan based on priorities. Members of the VDCs are participating in these meetings. The UP thinks that participation of the VDCs is helping the UPs in prioritizing the demands. This is because VDCs are more engaged in the overall development of respective wards. This is also a reflection of UPs’ recognition to VDC demands.

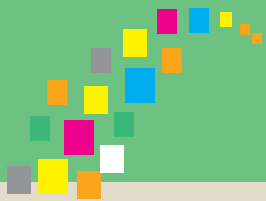
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VDC’s participation is quite enough. Through the Ward *Sabhas* UPs are aware of ward-wise problems. The VDCs play a major role in identifying the problems. Patharia UP Chairman claimed that VDC’s active participation has not created any sort of negative pressure for the UP, rather it is useful in identifying and prioritizing the problems and finding out possible solutions. The first priority is given to the recommendations that come from the Ward *Sabhas*. The major areas of priority in many unions are–communication, sanitation, education, health, training for poor rural women.

VDC’s participation has made it possible to ensure proper utilization of the UPs’ funds. It also lessens the burden of the respective UP members. They perform their duties through VDCs as well. The UP does not conduct much monitoring of the latrine sets distributed, whether the people are using it properly, whether they are breaking the syphoons or not. This is ensured by the VDC members.



Monitoring board of Purba Birgaon UP displaying resource allocations and sources



■ *Entry into UP's planning through committee membership*

This is perhaps the most significant progress for the VDCs working in NGO Forum's WaSH intervention. An encouraging number of the VDC members are now included in the UP WaSH Standing Committee as a member. This is a huge recognition of their development work at the grassroots level. The Purbapara Madhabdiya VDC (Aarpara VDC) Chairman Md. Abdur Rab Mollah has been a member of the UP WaSH Standing Committee since one year.

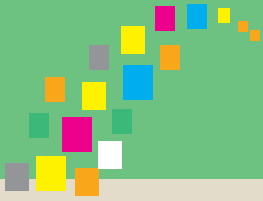


Names of VDC members displayed in Project Supervision Scheme Committee under LGSP-2 Scheme

Again, three members of the Shibram Bari Colony Village Development Committee, ward no. 3, Utholi union, Shibalaya, Manikganj worked in the Project Supervision Committee for a road constructed under the LGSP-2 scheme of the Government. Md. Sayedur Rahman, Chairman; Md. Mofiz Uddin and Md. Alam Sheikh, Members of Shibram Bari Colony Village Development Committee were proposed by the Union Parishad to be included in the Project Supervision Committee. The construction work was completed in two months. Besides supervising the construction of the road, the VDC members provided the Union Parishad and the Project Implementation Committee with information on the Highest Flood Level (HFL) to be considered while construction. Nazrul Islam and Julfiqar Ali Sheikh, Members, Shikhirdanga VDC, Perikhali union, Rampal upazila, Bagerhat are working in the LGSP 2 Supervision Committee. Also, Two members of the Nezampur VDC (Chairman and a female member) are included into the Nezampur UP's WaSH Standing Committee. Lutfunnesa Begum, Vice Chairperson of Shikhirdanga VDC, Shikhirdanga VDC in



Shikhirdanga VDC's Vice Chairperson Lutfunnesa Begum, an active member of the Perikhali UDMC in Rampal, Bagerhat



- Perikhali union, Rampal upazila, Bagerhat is also now an active member of the Perikhali UDMC under Rampal upazila, Bagerhat. The UP Member Sheikh Mahitur Rahman himself proposed her name as UDMC member.

It was additionally found that in several unions a member of the VDC is included in UPs' other Standing Committees also apart from WaSH. This is a silent movement into the working order of the lowest tier of the local government. This is helping to increase collaborations between the UPs and other service providers targeting pro-poor WaSH service delivery. Also it has contributed in reducing community's mistrust towards the UPs. With the recognition



Jamuna Begum talking in a seminar in Dhaka

of the UPs the VDCs acceptance among the community folks has also boosted. The VDCs are slowly developing leadership which will help them to continue further. For instance, the Shikhirdanga VDC claims to lead development work in its area. Jamuna Begum, Vice Chairperson of Bahadurabad VDC, Bahadurabad union, Dewanganj upazila, Jamalpur uttered, "We, the VDC members have made much progress. We did not know anything. But now we have earned



VDCs in Rampal, Bagerhat played a strong role in preventing eve-teasing and ensuring safe environment for girls' education

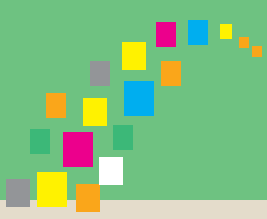
services from both government and private service providers as part of our right. We worked for the betterment of women's health even we ensured vaccination of expectant mothers, we stopped early marriages, we helped children to continue their primary education. The 15 VDC members are very successful. Previously, we did not even know how to go to Dewanganj upazila. Now we approach the UP Chairman demanding SSF benefits for our area's poor. We went to UNO office even. The UNO guided us with the right process. We stopped two early marriages, the adolescent girl herself came to me for justice. We earned 32 Tubewells and 50 latrine sets from the UP. We will accomplish our targeted tasks." Another encouraging example comes from the Nachole, Chapai Nawabganj where the VDC members in Nezampur union under Nachole upazila were found participating in the UDCC meetings. Ward-wise scenario is discussed in the meetings which are evaluated and undertaken for implementation by the UP.

Working as a partner of UP and Enhanced Collaboration of UPs

The VDCs in Baro Aulia, Atwari, Panchagarh have conducted thana-wise survey. They identified the economic status especially in case of WatSan which is submitted to and preserved by the Union Parishad. The community's households agree with the VDC's decision, honors their decisions and also brings various demands to the VDC members. They feel that going to the VDC means going to the Union Parishad. Last year (2013) the Union Parishad had given the responsibility of preparing the list for distributing winter clothing and blankets to the Maligaon VDC of Mirzapur union, Atwari upazila, Panchagarh. The chain of transition with the Mirzapur Union Parishad is very strong. UP member representing 8 no. ward Abdul Hamid is involved in many activities of the VDC. He was also involved in the formation of Maligaon VDC. The VDC has been formed with unanimous approval of the Union Parishad and all invited in the formation meeting. The Balia Christian *Para* VDC Chairman Tularam Das himself is involved in any supervision activity under the LGSP as a member of its Supervision



Balia Christian Para VDC having a discussion with their UP Chairman, Aloa Khowa union, Atwari, Panchagarh



Committee. "I oversee any activity implemented under the LGSP in our union". Tularam Das goes as far as to claim "We do not need written applications with our Chairman". This is a massive development in the context of UPs' relationship with indigenous communities especially traditionally disregarded communities such as the *Santals*, the *Baghdi* and others. UP Chairman of Aloa Khowa union where the Balia Christian *Para* operates mentioned, "The Balia Christian *Para* people are now very advanced. They raise their demands themselves. They have come over the hesitance to talk to UP Chairman which was in them earlier. I visit each of their homes whenever I come to this community." The Union Parishad Chairman of Mirzapur union under Atwari upazila, Panchagarh mentioned, "the more information we have, the more we can work in a well-disciplined manner. We take help of the VDC in this regards. We can take decisions regarding addressing 'priority'. It would have been better if therewere two committees in a ward. The VDCs are also helping to maintain the law & order situation of the village. As soon as a Committee has been formed, awareness on different issues increased. This has eased our work. We are getting this cooperation through the WWC . We regard VDC as our partner." UP member Abul Kalam Azad, Nezampur UP, Nachole, Chapai Nawabganj believes that the VDCs are a supporting hand for the relevant UP members. It was not possible for the UP members alone to cover development work of the entire union. It has become easier for the UP members to identify problems and priority areas. Besides, it is bringing credit for their work.

There has been a visible progress and a silent movement at the grassroots development where the VDC are operating. The Community Action Plans were found to create a momentum which also grew into new areas with time. It has helped the VDCs to work maintaining a consistency. They are gradually evolving and expanding their development efforts. In most of the working areas the Union Parishad, Ward WatSan Committee and the Village Development Committee—all three are working through coordination among themselves. The Union Parishads are depending on VDCs for more authentic information on the ward-wise scenario, people's needs & demands, etc. On the contrary, this is lifting the image of the elected representatives. They have come to a level of understanding where the UPs count on the information of the VDCs. This recognition by the local government is showing new dreams to these voluntary hard-working village people to continue their operations. In Shikhirdanga VDC's Vice Chairperson Lutfunnesa Begum's words, "The UP members and Chairman are acknowledging us after VDC operation started. Earlier they didn't give us such value. This is the main thing we achieved and we want to hold on to."

Chapter 4 Contribution of CAP to Rural Development Sustainability

- This chapter shares four different cases to understand the contribution of Community Action Plans and what opportunities it has created for the rural communities. Sustainability of the VDCs is a challenging target but some light of hopes have aroused as VDCs have been successful in entering into the working mechanism of the UPs.


VDC Chair Ensures 75% Tax Collection

Sajjadul Kabir, 29, Chair of Padma Village Development Centre, 5 no ward, Purba Birgaon union also works as a Ward Promoter of Unicef. He has studied till tenth grade. The Padma VDC has stopped open defecation and solid waste dumping that was blocking the village aisles. Padma VDC also initiated two herringbone road constructions in collaboration with the UP. Kabir claims that through their initiatives, communication with the UP has increased than anytime earlier. The nature of communication has changed. Previously he only maintained a personal relationship with the ward member. Being a VDC Chairman the communication is much more formal i.e. systematic now. As a VDC Chair he is constantly in touch with the UP and has updated information of the services available. Mainly the UP member keeps him informed if any VGD cards or facilities are in hand seeking his opinion in prioritizing the distribution. He recalled the difference mentioning that previously we used to come to know about any particular facilities after it was distributed, now we know it in advance.

The UP member has confidence in the VDC, claimed Kabir. He was rewarded by the UP that offered him to work as their Tax Collector. The Ward Member believed he could do this best as he was involved with developmental work for almost all the villages under the ward. Kabir is paid 15% commission of the collected tax as per the UP rule. He has been engaged in the work since March 2013 and is responsible for collecting



A proud VDC Chair talks about his experience working as UP's tax collector



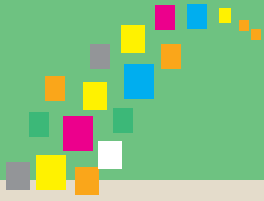
tax in the 4, 5 and 6 no. wards. In 2013-'14 he was able to collect 75% of the target taxes. What motivated the people to give taxes, Kabir mentioned that the community people now know about their benefits in the UP budget allocations. People believe their taxes are well utilized in the planning of their development. Besides this strong motivation, the UP is not giving agricultural cards to the houses with no holding tax. The UP is also more accountable to the community people through the tax collection process as they now feel their liability towards the people who are paying them taxes. The Purba Birgaon UP Secretary Phulen Shutrathar mentioned that they have not initiated a tax fair in their region which could be beneficial to motivate people to collect taxes but not much people can be expected to gather at the Fair if it is done in March-April when the haor people have money in their pockets. As an alternative, Sajjadul Kabir has done a tremendous work in motivating the village people to give their taxes which is a big challenge for UP. Kabir expects the union to be a model in tax collection.

Kasba Union Parishad designates O&M of Pipeline Water Supply System to Golabari VDC

Water is a scarce resource for the residents in Golabari village of Kasba union, Nachole, Chapai Nawabganj. The Tubewells fail to extract water let alone safe water. Water has to be extracted from almost 100 feet beneath the surface. Women collected pond water from a distance of 500 to 700 feet. A Pipeline Water Supply System worth Tk. 1,600,000 covering 1,350 beneficiary households has been set up in the village with community contributing Tk. 85,000 and the Kasba Union Parishad contributing Tk. 50,000. The Golabari Village Development Committee had called for a village meeting in which they called for the Union Parishad to come forward



Golabari VDC members with the Pipeline Water Supply System at the backdrop




with contribution. The Village Development Committee members supervised the installation work ensuring its quality. They are now supervising the operation and maintenance of the Pipeline Water Supply System. The Kasba Union Parishad's relevant UP member Md. Abdul Mannan encouraged the VDC members in this work. It is a gigantic project in the context of the hard-to-reach village. But ensuring the functioning of the Pipeline System is even more difficult. The Village Development Committee is collecting an amount of Tk. 4,000 per month for electricity bill purpose and Tk. 500 for repairing and maintenance purpose. Also there is a person engaged at every point of the Pipeline. The cost is maintained by the Water Point Management Committee (WPMC). The Kasba Union Parishad has adopted the WPMC working under its direct supervision. The Golabari Pipeline Water Supply System is registered in the Kasba Union Parishad as a rural asset. The VDC has grown as a central point of communication in the village. There are elite people involved in the VDC. The UPs are coordinating many of its development work with the Golabari VDC. It is noteworthy that initially the number of stand posts was 26 benefiting 450 Households. But considering community demand the VDC, WWC and Kasba UP together took initiative to further increase 12 more stand posts taking the present beneficiary coverage to 1,350 households.

"Amra Ekhon Chati Shikhichhi" (We Have Learnt to Demand Now)

The Bedkata VDC operating in 6 no. ward, Bhojpatia union, Rampal upazila in Bagerhat claims to increase sanitation coverage to 98% which was 50%. Also, open defecation has totally stopped. People are now purchasing and using latrines. The people in the village possess a poor awareness level. Conflict centering water is very high in the salinity-affected coastal village. According to the UP Chair Sheikh Nurul Amin Bedkata VDC has helped to increase people's awareness on various issues including

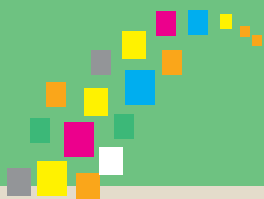


Proactive and enlightened Bedkata VDC members



livelihood and overall community development. VDC Chairman mentioned that they have been working on getting VGD cards for the community's hardcore poor; ensuring that every child in the community goes to school; encouraging women folks to start duck and hen rearing; preventing eve teasing; road construction; ensuring a *ghat* for a government-owned pond in its area which the women use; demanding brick soiling for the road to a Temple of the area's *Hindu* community in the area; applying for a culvert to put an end to the sufferings of 60 to 70 families who remain water-logged during the monsoon; etc.

At least 20% of the community's children do not go to school. The VDC members claimed to be able to send children back to school of at least 10 families. The members also managed 7-8 cards against their target of 10. The VDC members are trying to encourage people in investing in other areas apart from fisheries and shrimp farming. The VDC contacted the UP to ensure a well-trained expert who can provide them appropriate advices for fisheries through examining the soil and water. In response to that the UP Chair has submitted a resolution to the Upazila Nirbahi Officer with the request to approve recruitment of union-wise Fisheries Officer for ensuring improved aquaculture in the upazila. The VDC's female members divided ten households each covering the 138 households in their ward. They have been working to increase women's awareness. The VDC members were able to stop three family conflicts with the help of UP Chairman. Eve teasing was strictly handled by the Bedkata VDC. The parents approached the VDC to do something against the eve teasers. The VDC contacted the UP Chairman regarding the matter who took very strict actions against the goons brining relief to the school going-girls and their parents. Brick soiling has been done of a 500-feet road from Kader Fakir's house up to Daya Anam's house covered by the UP budget. 40 Households live by the road. The work is worth Tk. 1,30,000 listed in the UP budget for the year 2013-'14. The VDC also stepped outside its working periphery to get fund for forming a *ghat* in a large government-owned pond in the area. They contacted the Disaster Management Committee for the *ghat* and also has it established now. The UP Chairman Sheikh Nurul Amin invites the VDC Chairman Anil Mukherjee by name through a formal letter of invitation to the UP Open Budget Session. This comes as a reward for this proactive VDC.



■ *Patharia UP Chairman Recognizes Development Efforts of the VDCs*

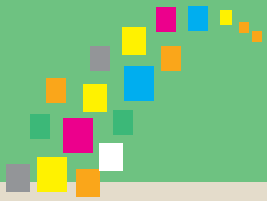
Md. Aminul Rashid, UP Chairman, Patharia Union Parishad recognizes the development efforts of the VDCs operating in his area. The UP is aware of the interventions of the VDCs and maintains collaboration with the VDCs as well as the field staffs of NGO Forum and its implementing partner NGOs. This intervention has ensured meeting with the VDC chairs for the first time as representatives of the communities. Discussion on site selections of the WatSan technologies were done in the meetings. Even VDCs' female members actively walk to the UP chairman with applications. Such as in Patharia Union Parishad.



Md. Aminul Rashid, UP Chairman, Patharia Union Parishad

The respective ward members were present during the formation of the VDCs. VDCs maintain coordination with the WWCs. They conduct meetings between themselves. Applications reach the Union Parishad through the WWCs. The UP members are aware of each progress. The VDCs no more give the UPs verbal applications, rather all the applications are submitted in written form and are filed up at the UP office. Now the practice has become so established that even other NGOs are following this written application process. A copy of the applications is also preserved by the VDC Chair. The UP Chairman approves it and has his signature on it. This is helping the UPs to keep the demands into their consideration. The UP Chairman renders his overall support in the process.

The Patharia UP organized meetings in very informal manner previously, mostly at the UP Chairman's home. This took place for 7 years since 1992. Meetings were organized according to UP Chairman's wish. Everything depended on the Chairman. After Md. Aminul Rashid took office as the UP Chairman on 29 July



2011, he rented a house and made affairs more official. Open budgeting started from his tenure. Previously NGOs did not operate in this area. People's awareness remains less due to lack of any development activity. Tax collection did not take place in the union before. People do not have the habit of paying taxes. For the first time the union people will be paying taxes this year. The UP motivated people with the cooperation of the VDC members and also took some techniques such as telling people that the more you pay taxes the more allocations will be given by the government.

The UP Chairman uttered, "It does not be possible for the Ward Member to be aware of each affair. Moreover, he usually gives away facilities to his voters. The VDCs check and balance. Common people are benefiting from it. That is why existence of a village level committee is needed. The VDC also has interest in other development activities such as road construction, repairing in primary school infrastructure, etc."

Joyaln Abedin, 5 no. UP Member, Patharia UP mentioned, "There is no safe pond, *khals* or *beels*. Water crisis in huge. Communication isolation is the foremost criteria in *haor*. Only a construction of 150 feet road has brought immense happiness to the people. The WWCs and UPs faced no problems in maintaining coordination with the VDCs. All technologies are distributed in coordinated manner. The people were not habituated in maintaining the syphoons of the hygienic latrine sets. 5 WWC members, 3 VDC members and the UEWs walked the whole union. UP allocated and distributed 30 latrine sets

with syphoons worth Tk. 1,500. The issue was raised by the Jui VDC. Joyaln Abedin believes that the VDC in his area will sustain through their communication with the Ward Member and UP Chairman. This network will help the VDC to sustain. The enhanced communication is the driving force for VDCs' survival."



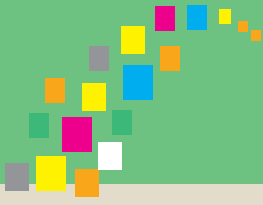
Joyaln Abedin, 5 no. UP Member, Patharia UP



Chapter 5 Conclusion

■ The Village Development Committees operating under the NGO Forum WaSH intervention are going through a transition. It can no longer be said that the VDCs are in its primary stage of intervention. This claim is justified as they have taken their initiative beyond WaSH. They have moved on to a point where they have learnt to perceive development as a whole. The entire process of forming and engaging rural representatives in the VDCs has helped to develop leaders among these people. The idea of promoting WaSH governance has thus, started from the grassroots which is ideal in the context of rural Bangladesh where people's awareness of rights is very poor. Their involvement in WaSH intervention has brought forth new ideas and the knowledge needed to capitalize their potentialities in other fields apart from WaSH. From WaSH they have moved on to protecting their environment, targeting pollution-free surroundings of their respective communities. From that the VDCs then moved on to taking up social issues such as preventing early marriages, dowry culture, eve teasing, promoting women's health, and so on. With the capacity developed through making written applications for WatSan options, the VDCs then brought up demands for infrastructural constructions and re-constructions seeking communication and education benefits for their communities. With time the horizon of VDCs' development work has expanded. This is a demonstration of their advanced thinking and their enhanced strength and capacity to lead their communities.

Rural communities in Bangladesh have its own characteristics. Social cohesion perhaps, would be the most highlighting of it. It is this social cohesion which has brought unity and voluntary energy within the rural community people to work for their own development. It is their realization that their development depends on their proactive roles. This realization has prompted the VDCs to reach out to all possible service providers for their targeted tasks as per the Community Action Plans. Some VDCs even worked beyond its CAP. These portray their willingness to become a centre of development in the rural set up. The Union Parishads are well aware of the village development efforts made and carried out by the VDCs and have recognized these efforts. Many VDCs now believe that they are prepared for a formal registration as an institution. They believe that this would establish their position and increase their recognition to the local government.



■ This *Publication* has tried to understand the potentiality of the CBOs as to find the answer to the debatable issue of its institutionalization which was mentioned at the start of the *Book*. Through exploring Community Action Plans and its implementation in five different eco-zones of the country, the VDCs were found willing to continue their voluntary services. They regard the local partner NGO and Union Parishads as their greatest strength in this battle ahead. If put in the words of Md. Anwar Hossian Badal, UP Chairman, Teota, Shibalaya, Manikganj, “We come through elections and voting. We might not make it in the next term. But VDCs will stay.” The battle is continuous and difficult to sustain through voluntary services, but capitalizing on the leadership developed and inclusion of rural people in UP’s planning process could provide the development actors the workable model for ensuring grassroots development.

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