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EVALUATION REPORT



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

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Disclaimer

The views expressed in this report are those of the evaluators. They do not represent those of UNDEF or of any of the institutions referred to in the report.

Authors

This report was written by Dieter Wagner, with contributions from Kali Sankar Ghosh. Ms Aurélie Ferreira provided editorial and methodological support. Mr Eric Tourres was Project Director at Transtec.



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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

(i) Background

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

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

(ii) Assessment of the project

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

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

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

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

The grantee's initially proposed target indicators allow for a preliminary assessment. Since the project fell significantly short of its ambition to strengthen the knowledge of citizen's rights, entitlements and responsibilities, a continued commitment of THP's animators will be crucial. On the other hand, the grantee presented data, which demonstrated an increasing presence of women advocating gender- and youth-specific concerns in the Ward Shavas. There is also quantitative and qualitative evidence of enhanced local government accountability and service delivery. On the basis of independently gathered first-hand anecdotal evidence, evaluators have also confirmed that **the project generated positive impact**. The introduction of regular interaction between UP representatives, government officers, and all segments of the local population has changed the way in which local governments make their annual budget planning choices.

Evaluators also found **promising signs of sustainability**. Volunteer animators, civil society group representatives and self-help group members, with whom evaluators have met, continue to mobilise local community members to participate in local governance, and to hold local decision makers accountable. There are, however, certain risks that require THP's attention, such as (a) a donor expectation caused by the grantee's cash payments to grassroots beneficiaries in compensation for transportation and subsistence needs, and (b) a lack of basic fund management skills among several self-help group and civil society initiative leaders, who had launched initiatives to support the solution of urgent community needs.

(iii) Conclusions

- The fact that THP's approach included the conduct of baseline research and the use of target indicators is highly commendable, as it confirmed the project's relevance and facilitated the evaluators' assessment of effectiveness and impact of the grantee's contribution towards the realization of participatory local governance. However, evaluators would have appreciated a **more rigorous approach to data analysis and a reporting** which is pertinent and fully responding to the project document's monitoring framework

- Given the increased involvement of the supported communities in local decision-making processes in the context of the Ward Shavas and the Standing Committees, and the anecdotal evidence about the results thereof, such as the agreements

on annual budget priorities and five-year development plans, there is little doubt that the project effectively contributed to improved provision of local services and resolution of social issues. It is, however, also clear that THP will ***need to organise complementary actions to secure the intervention's medium-term effects.***

▪ It is finally our strong belief that a ***wider dissemination of the UNDEF-funded project's approach*** to the almost 250 of the country's Unions, in which THP and BRAC have been active, will be ***essential to gradually support the aim of nation-wide implementation*** of the policies envisaged by the UP / local government act.

(iv) Recommendations

▪ In accordance with our ***observations on effectiveness and impact, we recommend to the grantee to*** design monitoring frameworks, which ***make consistent use of baseline and target indicators***, as this could enable THP to improve its current assessment in qualitative terms and thus enhance the organization's strategic objectives. This may also help the grantee to attract new donors and implementing partners for an expansion of the original project.

▪ ***Based on our comments on impact and sustainability, we recommend to the grantee to:***

(1) Undertake measures securing the intervention's medium-term effects:

- Consider ways to abandon the current practice of compensating beneficiaries' transportation and subsistence needs in cash, in order to eliminate misleading expectations and foster the understanding that engagement in participatory democracy is rewarded by an improved quality of life;
- Rapidly organise capacity building for self-help groups and civil society organisations representatives who have established community-owned funds, in order to enable them to transparently and securely manage the funds they have been entrusted with;

(2) Investigate long-term options introducing enhanced cooperation in local governance to a wider circle of beneficiaries:

- Improve the existing qualitative evidence of case studies of the project beneficiaries' achievements, and actively disseminate it to facilitate efficient replication for the benefit of sustainability elsewhere;
- Reflect on how to enhance the long-term relevance and implementation of the newly established five-year development plans.

II. INTRODUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT

i. The project and evaluation objectives

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

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

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

(ii) Evaluation methodology

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

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

beneficiaries.

(iii) Development context

The constitution of Bangladesh stipulates “[...] local government in every unit of the Republic shall be entrusted to bodies, composed of persons elected in accordance with the law”. In order to give “full effect” to this provision, the constitution also foresees that the parliament by law shall confer powers to the local government bodies, concerning:

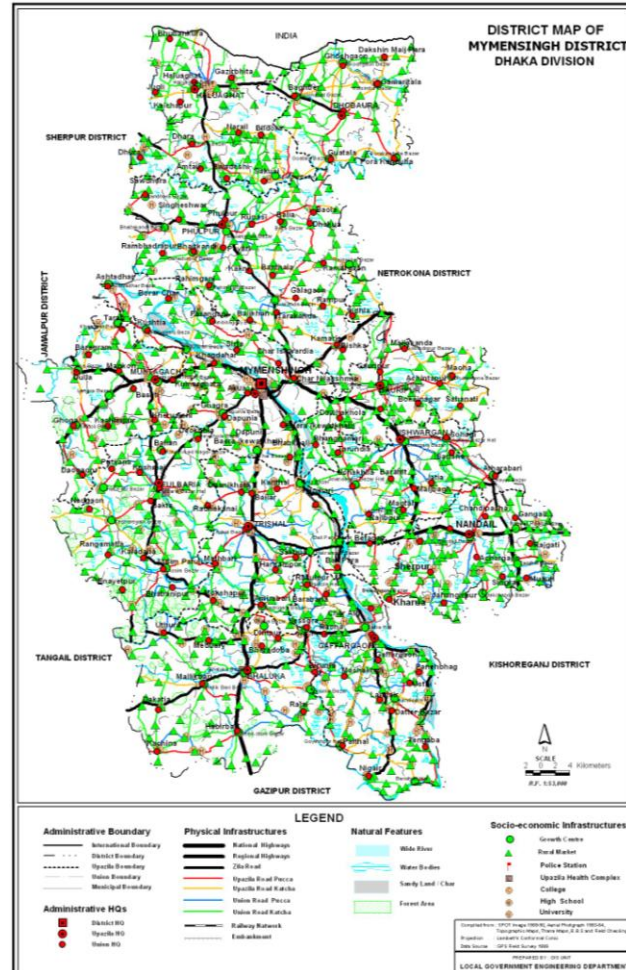
- The administration and the work of public officers;
- The maintenance of public order;
- The preparation and implementation of plans relating to public services and economic development.

The above has been widely interpreted as an intention to ensure democratic governance, or local democracy at the grassroots.¹

Accordingly, the Local Government – Union Parishad Act 2009 tasks the Union Parishads (UPs, i.e. the village councils comprising of elected members) to:

- Establish a five-year development plan;
- Elaborate annual local budgets applying participatory processes;
- Hold open budget meetings to publicly present and finalise the draft budget;
- Conduct annually two public assemblies (i.e. Ward Shavas) in each ward of the UP;
- Publish a citizen charter, which provides the details of all available local services, including the cost, timing, conditions and procedures involved in their provision.²

Despite the existence of the above participatory local governance framework, the grantee’s assessment at the outset of the project was that its implementation was weak. Realities on the ground did not reflect the law’s intention to establish effective local government bodies and implement accountability



¹ Source: Article 59 and 60 of the constitution of the Republic of Bangladesh, as summarized and interpreted by Badiul Alam Majumdar, in: “Local Governance and Political Reform, Keys to Poverty Reduction”, published by Osman Gani of Agamee Prakashani, pp.19-21, March 2010.

² Sources: Sections 4 and 5 (Ward Shavas), 49 (citizen charter) and 57 (open budget meetings) of the Local Government – Union Parishad Act of 2009, as summarized by Pranab Kumar Panday in: “Local Government System in Bangladesh: How Far is it Decentralized”, Lex Localis – Journal of Local Self-Government, Vol. 9, No. 3, pp. 205 - 230, July 2011; and the UNDEF project document UDF-BGD-11-445.

mechanisms. Instead, local governance lacked oversight and capacity, and citizens lacked adequate knowledge and skills to socially mobilize, to get involved, and to claim participation in informed decision-making. The grantee also established that newly elected representatives did not obtain systematic training or guidance on these provisions. They hence did not feel empowered to work with civil society, which in turn perpetuated constraints such as centralized control over local revenue.

According to the grantee's initial analysis, no practical arrangements had been made to enable local participation through the Ward Shavas or to promote other accountability mechanisms. The right to civil society engagement would not be exercised unless effective measures would be put in place, such as capacity building efforts and explicit devolution to local government. Instead, historically bred attitudes of alienation, dependency, and powerlessness persisted in rural areas, where more than half of the population is poor and where hence traditionally marginalized communities would particularly benefit from training and participation.

III. PROJECT STRATEGY

(i) Project strategy and approach

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

The project’s approach foresaw to (1) train both local government representatives and a group of potentially active citizens, including women, men, youth and ‘ultra-poor’, (2) conduct baseline and follow up studies, (3) jointly develop a five year development plan for each Union, and to (4) mobilize citizens and local government to closely collaborate during its implementation. In addition, the project’s ambition was to raise awareness of the wider public and to provide targeted information to policy makers, by publicizing the results of the collaborative approach through the media.

Accordingly, the project’s three key outcomes were defined as follows:

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

Established in 1991, THP-Bangladesh is the country’s largest volunteer-based NGO³. Its strategy is based on the principles of self-reliance, gender equality, human dignity, sustainability, volunteerism and local leadership. Grassroots training and on-going support for more than 156,000 volunteer animators are the core elements of its approach to community-led development. These animators (40% of them are women) focus their actions on their Unions, by both organizing mass action campaigns and working closely with UP members, to encourage decentralization and increased access to resources and services.

³ Sources: <http://www.thp.org/our-work/where-we-work/bangladesh>; Organizational Profile, THP-Bangladesh (2015)

(ii) Logical framework

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

Project Activities & Interventions	Intended outcomes	Medium Term Impacts	Long Term Development Objectives
<p><u>1. Democratic local governance and active citizenry</u></p> <p>Conduct baseline and annual Union level surveys; consider survey findings during the participatory planning process</p> <p>MoUs with the ten UPs, then train respective UP representatives and government functionaries</p> <p>Train a critical mass of animators and organize them into ward action teams</p> <p>Establish active Standing Committees to work towards achieving the MDGs</p> <p>Hold Ward Shavas to incorporate inputs, then finalize five-year Development plans, for approval by each UP</p> <p>Carry out mass action campaigns to support the achievement of the five-year plan</p>	<p>Awareness of and attitudes towards basic rights improved</p> <p>Public participation mechanisms at UP level established</p> <p>Five-year development plans operationalized</p> <p>Local population mobilized</p>	<p>Capacity of UP representatives and functionaries strengthened</p> <p>Knowledge of the public and the youth developed</p>	
<p><u>2. Empowerment of civil society, especially women; and actions to reduce violence against women</u></p> <p>Establish active local civil society units of distinguished citizens, youth and the poor in each of the ten Unions</p> <p>Training a cadre of women leaders to prepare them for working in their Unions</p>	<p>Girls' and women's rights pro-actively campaigned</p> <p>Ward Shavas significantly attended by women</p>	<p>Participation of women increased</p> <p>Actions towards</p>	<p>Rural Unions experience:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced social and economic development • Progress with MDGs

<p>Activate civil society units of women leaders and of the National Girl Child Advocacy Forum (NGCAF) to work in each Union</p>	<p>Bikoshito Nari Network and NGCAF operationalized</p>	<p>achievement of the MDGs undertaken</p>	<p>achievement</p>
<p><u>3. Clarification of the difference a stronger UPs and regular Ward Shavas can make</u></p> <p>Arrange press conferences, disseminate good practices and success stories</p>	<p>UP development activity presented in the media</p> <p>Awareness raised among policy actors and civil society members</p>	<p>UP / local government performance perceived as relevant for improving the quality of life</p>	

IV. EVALUATION FINDINGS

(i) Relevance

Baseline Situation

The grantee's initial assessment of the baseline situation was the result of a combination of THP's experience and analysis, which included findings from its own previous project interventions and research undertaken among the project's target population. This way of insight prompted the grantee's concern that a lack of practical, participatory arrangements left local governance in the targeted Unions uninformed of the needs of its grassroots populations. THP's sources included (a) previous collaboration with UPs, district administrations, the local government department, and UNDP; (b) the piloting (with funding support from BRAC) of four MDG Unions; and were complemented by (c) the UNDEF project's baseline survey which was comprised of questionnaire-based household interviews, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews. These inputs confirmed that despite the existence of a policy framework for participatory governance (i.e. the 2009 Local Government / Union Parishad Act), its weak implementation had left (i) local governance without oversight and capacity, and (ii) citizens without adequate knowledge and skills how to socially mobilize, get involved and claim participation in informed decision making. Given the fact that newly elected representatives did not obtain systematic training or guidance on these provisions, they did not feel empowered to work with civil society, which in turn perpetuated constraints such as centralized control over local revenue and employment decisions. Instead, historically bred attitudes of alienation, dependency, and powerlessness persisted in rural areas, where more than half of the population is poor and where hence THP concluded that traditionally marginalized communities would particularly benefit from training and participation.

The project response

The grantee's pilot action in four Unions demonstrated that increased initiative among grassroots citizens, who participate in budgeting processes and monitor service delivery of local governments, empowers communities to activate and hold their leaders accountable,

Selected baseline findings

- Most UP representatives did not obtain comprehensive training in participatory local governance.
- Ward Shavas and Open Budget meetings were rarely held. 53% of the respondents had no knowledge what the functions and the processes of Ward Shavas are. About 58% responded that no Open Budget Meetings were held in their UPs.
- Although established, Standing Committees were not functional, since its members were unaware of their roles.
- Officers transferred by central government to UPs failed to participate in the UPs' monthly general meetings.
- Although 34% of the interviewed UP representatives claimed that a planning document exists, they failed to present it – and in the majority of UPs no long-term plan existed at all.
- Most of respondents reported that no citizen charter is on display in the UP.
- The management of local key data (education, health, early marriage, animal husbandry, sanitation and government program beneficiaries) lacks integration.

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

1. Democratic local governance and active citizenry

The wider purpose of *the training of UP representatives and government functionaries* was to activate the provisions of the 2009 Local Government / Union Parishad Act, i.e. the realisation of (a) regular Ward Shava meetings, (b) UP planning processes informed by ward level priorities, (c) Standing Committees (SC) which actively participate in the development of 5-year plans, and (d) publicly displayed citizen charters. Based on the trainings' outcome, regular *coordination meetings* between UP members and civil society representatives were meant to ensure the implementation of these four key activities.

Mobilizing a critical mass of participants for future Ward Shavas and mass action campaigns was the objective of the project's *training of animators and their organisation into ward action teams*. This project activity aimed to recruit participants from among the most motivated and committed citizens who attended THP's *vision commitment workshops*, and to achieve at least 40% of female and 20% youth representation. It therefore was well in tune with the grantee's empowerment approach and the participatory needs identified by the baseline study. The ultimate goal of *establishing SCs in each Union*, which were meant to develop (in accordance with Local Government Act) plans recommending actions related to key thematic areas such as health, education and economic development, was to function as a support mechanism providing UPs with advisory input towards five-year planning and MDG achievement.



Evaluators meet Marshedal Alam, UP Chairman and former trainee, Char Ishwardia

Methodology and contents of the above training modules were adequately designed to motivate, develop knowledge, and transfer skills. Participatory in approach and highly interactive during practice sessions, they helped UP-level participants to gain clarity. Subsequent coordination meetings were designed as follow up consultations to assist with maintaining a good governance process, in order to encourage and motivate officials and representatives to hold Ward Shavas and open budget meetings. Similar in their approach, the workshops supporting the establishment of SCs were, however, with one day given significantly less time than the UP-level training, to deliver a comparable quantity of contents.

The conduct of *Ward Shavas and open budget meetings* finally were intended to ensure a critical debate about the development of the community, and to lead to the joint setting of annual priorities, as well as the elimination of social issues such as early marriage and violence against women.

The above complex of activities subsequently was to be followed by (i) the *finalization of five-year development plans* (in order to serve each Union as the basis of their future annual development plans and budgets); and (ii) *mass action campaigns* advocating five-year plan implementation and the achievement of the respective targets.

2. Empowerment of civil society, especially women; and actions to reduce violence against women

The activities under this project component served to operationalize civil society units, mostly in order to achieve significant representation of women in the Ward Shavas, and to ensure that girls' and women's rights will be pro-actively campaigned.

With the *establishment of active local civil society units* of distinguished citizens, youth and the poor in each of the ten Unions THP intended to promote social responsibility, volunteerism, rights and entitlements, transparency and accountability. While *Distinguished Citizen Committees (DCCs)* were expected to monitor and evaluate UP performance (Ward Shavas, open budget meetings, local service provision), animators would *train ultra poor citizens to become 'barefoot researchers'* assessing their own living conditions to motivate claims for participation in local governance. In addition the grantee foresaw that *young animators obtain training in order to encourage them to form youth units* advocating rights and responsibilities from a youth perspective. For these activities at the Union level to last and generate solutions, *monthly social unit meetings* were designed as an opportunity for community members to regularly meet, review, plan and follow-up actions they consider critical to address local governance issues in need of improvement.

The objective of the *training of women leaders* was to prepare them for the challenges they were likely to meet when working in their Unions, such as gender-based issues analysis and advocacy in a male dominated environment, and to help increase the women's interest in Ward Shava participation, in order to achieve e.g. a reduction of gender-based violence, early marriage and dowry. Dedicated networks were ultimately meant to facilitate the *activation of social units advocating the concerns of girls* (National Girl Child Advocacy Forum, NGCAF) *and women* (Bikoshito Nari Network, BNN).

"Before, we used to be unaware of our rights. Today, we have become vocal to highlight the issues the underprivileged in our area face. We mobilize our community, and raise awareness among our peers that women can do anything, just like men."

**Women leaders,
Kustia Union**

3. Clarification of the difference a stronger UPs and regular Ward Shavas can make

Media activities aimed to increase the publicity of the work of the civil society units, their good practices and lessons learned, and to influence policy discussion and formulation. More specifically, (a) *press conferences*, were intended to inform about the Ward Shavas' priorities in terms of thematic and social issues and the related results anticipated by empowered communities; (b) *a project website, newsletters and investigative journalism* were meant to critically review the shortcomings discovered by active citizens throughout the

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

(ii) Effectiveness

According to the Final Narrative Report (FNR), the project's implementation faced a number of challenges. A first period of political unrest (between September 2013 and January 2014) and linked security concerns prevented the timely implementation of the project's scheduled *training programme for UP representatives & government functionaries*. During the project's final year, another period of political instability intervened (between January and April 2015), this time forcing the grantee to postpone the project's scheduled national-level *press conference and journalists' field visits* to the project's target areas. The above external factors drove THP to apply for a one-month extension of the initially agreed 2-year project duration. UNDEF granted the requested extension accordingly, which reportedly enabled the full completion of the project's plan of activities

Although evaluators noted variations at the level of the initially planned output indicators, their assessment is that the project in most cases achieved its objectives. Most importantly, the more than 2,000 self-motivated community volunteers (active participants, 50% of which are female, in Ward Action Teams, DCCs, NGNCAF, BNN, and youth units) generated by the project display promising potential for continued animation of their fellow local community members, thus ensuring that they keep taking actions to promote the achievement of MDGs and holding Union Parishads accountable in this respect.

1. Democratic local governance and active citizenry

Following orientation events and the conclusion of MoUs with the participating Unions, the *training of UP representatives and government functionaries* was held in each of the ten project locations, involving the participation of 203 (137 elected UP representatives and 66 government functionaries; planned: 210) participants. The project also held the foreseen 60 *coordination meetings* between UP members and civil society representatives. Trainee assessments reportedly demonstrated increased understanding of the UP act, awareness of roles and responsibilities, a positively transformed appreciation of female members, and an improved relationship between government functionaries and UP representatives. What impressed evaluators was the visibly high degree of commitment among interviewed UP chairs to advocate for decentralization, a policy change actually foreseen by the law.



Ward Action Team members from Kashimpur see themselves as their Ward Shava's watchdog and catalyst

The project's *training of animators*, which was held to prepare *their organisation into ward action teams*, involved 1,444 (planned: 1,500) participants. According to the grantee, community mobilization skills have improved, and from trainee feedback it is also understood that participants increased their knowledge related to citizen rights, women's rights, and citizen engagement with local government. Evaluators positively noted the

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

Holding the above mentioned regular coordination meetings between UP members and civil society representatives usefully facilitated the launch and conduct of 270 Ward Shavas, as well as the organisation of 20 open budget meetings, which were attended by an impressive number of 40,500 and 5,625 participants respectively. According to THP, these meetings did not only provide grass-roots input to the five-year planning process, but led also to the posting of citizen charter displays in all ten Unions supported by the project.

The *finalization of five-year development plans* involved the introduction of Planning Coordination Committees in each Union, which held altogether 188 consultation meetings pooling data (geographical and demographic status, survey findings, ward shava inputs, information about sources of available funding), considering the views of 3,760 participating community members, including various local stakeholders. The resulting ten plans were approved and published by the participating Unions as foreseen. Evaluators during their field visits have, however, noted that annual development plans and budgets are presently not yet based on, or connected to, the project's five-year development plans.

Mass action campaigns advocating the five-year plans' implementation focused on the themes of early marriage, tree plantation, sanitation and essential nutrition action. Street rally and drama, folk songs, public discussions and competitions were among the means employed, which were appreciated by participants who mostly admitted to have been unconscious of the possibility to address local issues by raising their voice, and of the opportunities that can emerge from locally owned, voluntary grass-roots action.

2. Empowerment of civil society, especially women; and actions to reduce violence against women

Under this project component three civil society units (DCCs, youth units, and groups representing the poor) were established in each of the ten participating Unions. Since then, *DCCs and youth units* have been meeting monthly to review the performance of Ward Shavas, open budget meetings, and monitor issues of local service provision. Participatory Action Research (PAR) workshops prepared 270 animators (as planned) to start *training ultra poor citizens to become 'barefoot researchers'*. Subsequently, 561 (planned: 270) citizenship workshops have been held, during which 11,241 (i.e. more than double of the planned: 5,400) community members obtained information about citizenship, citizen identity, basic constitutional



Self-confident women leaders say discrimination and security are still issues: "It's essential to continue"

rights of citizens, and citizen's responsibilities.

In accordance with the project plan 180 motivated women were selected from among the participants of the project's animators training, and have completed a *foundation course in women leadership development*. In line with the training's objective to inform about the causes of gender discrimination, and the aim to empower women and foster their leadership, trainees' reportedly developed the willingness to explore and analyse their own situation, the self-confidence to participate in meetings in public spaces (e.g. ward shavas), and displayed inspiration to become a visionary in the struggle against patriarchy as the main cause of gender discrimination. 131 follow-up meetings effectively ensured their provision with continuous advice on women's rights and women empowerment issues. The project finally successfully engaged 130 persons in the *activation of the National Girl Child Advocacy Forum*, and 180 women were signed up and trained to become members of the *unleashed women's (Bikoshito Nari) network*, BNN. Thanks to a total of 190 bi-monthly meetings held (as planned) across BNN and NGCAF, cases of e.g. child marriage, violence against women, and dowry were identified and tackled, the participation in ward shavas advocated, and the National Girl Child Day celebrated in 180 locations. 32,000 community members participated in the celebration of the International Women's Day.

3. Clarification of the difference a stronger UPs and regular Ward Shavas can make

Within the framework of the project the grantee undertook various activities informing the public about the work of the civil society units, and aiming to instigate policy discussion and formulation. During two district- and one national-level *press conferences*, policy actors and members of civil society, more precisely 92 national-level journalists and the president/secretary of districts press clubs and 300 "distinguished persons", among them district-level deputy commissioners, deputy directors for local government, Upazila Nirbahi Officers (UNO), and national-level local governance experts, high level government officials, were presented with good practices and the lessons learned. Organized visits to project areas facilitated *investigative journalism* and coverage of local governance issues, including early marriage, women's mobility within the local community, and the progress towards the achievement of MDGs by the initiatives of the project's volunteer groups.

"I was at liberty to freely move around to interview animators, beneficiaries, and to participate in meetings. I have noted a decline in child marriages."

"In Tangail, only the UNDEF-supported project areas conduct regular Ward Shavas, Standing Committees, and open budget meetings."

"Readership feedback from remote districts about practices reported from the project areas was enthusiastic. We were asked to supply additional copies."

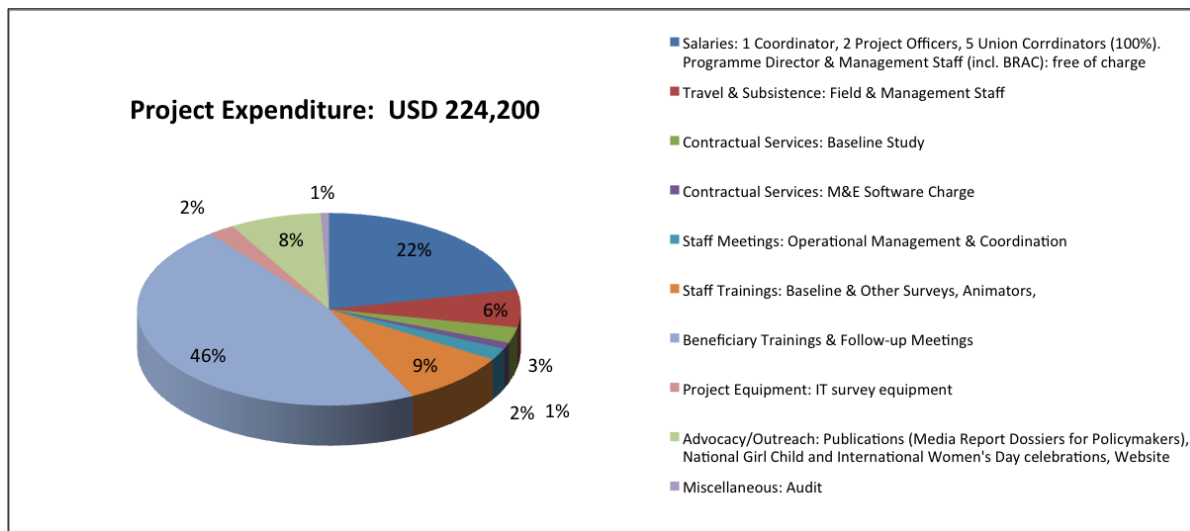
**Print media journalists,
national / local news**

Overall, it is the evaluators' view that the project's activities were adequate to propel positive change: reflective of the baseline situation the grantee (i) selected 10 UPs, and capacitated them to function effectively; (ii) empowered the citizens and ensured their participation in governance through ward action teams; (iii) trained and empowered women to become self-reliant and stand up against social causes like violence against women, child marriage, low literacy level, and (iv) arranged for media coverage of good practices in order to influence public opinion and policy implementation.

(iii) Efficiency⁴

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

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



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

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

grantee amounts to 33% of the total budget. While high, this is still acceptable given the fact that the time of THP's and BRAC's head office resources (programme director and management staff) were provided free of charge. Evaluators commend, in particular, the highly effective and efficient coordination between the grantee's field and office staff, which resulted in quality outputs. The approach to project execution was hence bottom-up, and internal transparency was observed accordingly at all levels.

With 12%, the grantee's combined budget for logistics and administration, i.e. *staff travel and subsistence (6%), M&E software charges (1%), management and coordination meetings (2%), project equipment (2%) miscellaneous administrative costs (1%)* appears rather costly.

In conclusion evaluators are of the view that the grantee's overall spending policy has been acceptable. While it was not particularly efficient, evaluators are still impressed, since - compared to related expenditure - achievements of the project's capacity building and awareness raising components among the grassroots were commendable.

(iv) Impact

The design of the project's results framework, and the grantee's monitoring of and reporting on some of the target indicators therein allow for a preliminary analysis of potential impact. A review of these indicators, paired with field observations, leads to the following assessment:

- *Strengthened knowledge about citizen's rights, entitlements and responsibilities:* in relation to its first objective, the project fell significantly short of its quantitative targets. At project completion, 45.7% (target: 70%) of those surveyed were confident they were capable of meaningful efforts to achieve change. 39% (target: 51%) were able to express more than 5 citizen rights. Qualitative evidence indicating the continued commitment of THP's animators therefore must be followed upon to ensure the results of related public awareness raising efforts multiply further.
- *Enhanced local government accountability and service delivery (school enrolment and dropout; child marriage and remedial actions; use of sanitary flash latrines; male violence against women; perception of women's involvement in local arbitration and social events):* While quantitative data reports and evaluators' field observations confirm a generally positive trend, the grantee did not compare as envisaged the progress achieved during and by the end of the project period with national progress rates (published by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, UNDP). The locally noted improvement in service delivery is, however, consistent with the extent to which citizens have made direct contact with UP authorities to seek assistance, which has increased from 17% (baseline) to 25% (at project completion).
- *Increased gender-sensitive policy implementation:* the grantee presented mixed data demonstrating an increasing presence of women in Ward Shavas, i.e. surveys reported



While voluntary initiatives of the SHG in Chowara village positively affected the areas' development, they also revealed a lack of fund management capacity

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

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

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

During a meeting *elected UP representatives and government functionaries of the Char Ishwardia* confirmed to evaluators that the project's capacity building support directly affected the way in which they approach their work with and for the community. "Before THP's intervention we had no knowledge of the purpose and details of the UP law" the chairperson openly admitted. "The 3-day residential training provided us with insight and instantly clarified our questions, which is something the central government previously has not offered to us." The participating UP representatives then went on to express their appreciation for opportunities of **regular interaction with all segments of the local population**, as it provides them with vital information about current issues the local community faces, including social (e.g. early marriage, violence against women), health (e.g. sanitation needs), education (e.g. school enrolment and dropout) and environmental (e.g. tree plantation needs) aspects. The conversation provided evaluators also with the impression that THP's strategy to jointly train UP representatives and government functionaries has generated team spirit and a reinforced ambition to improve the quality of the local government's service offer. "As a result, we have created a lot of small, but **useful infrastructure for the local community**", the UP chair said. "Electricity is now available along the main road, and thanks to solar panels the UP building's service structure is no longer affected by power cuts. We also planted trees in public places. These are some of the visible improvements and benefits our people enjoy." The chair of the UP also confirmed that the identification of needs in the Ward Shava meetings, and the subsequently enhanced local services, positively affected the level of local tax collection.

Necessity to improve knowledge of functions and processes of Ward Shava, Open Budget, and Standing Committee meetings – including the roles of its individual members

The **DCC members from Bhabkhali Union** made it their principal task to mobilize the local population, informing about the tasks of the UP and the purpose of the **Ward Shava meetings**: "We took our people along. They used the first opportunity to openly discuss damaged local roads and to request the utilization of budgeted funds for this purpose. Now the process is completely transparent to them." More recently, during a Ward Shava in June 2015 they raised the issue of water scarcity and requested the construction of 20 manual pump wells. Thanks to their initiative, by December 2015 the first 12 locations, which they selected, were already enjoying fresh water supply. Shortly another Ward Shava will be held, during which the remaining 8 pump locations will be determined.

Similarly, a series of **open budget consultation meetings**, which involved a cross section of citizens, elected members, and government officials, facilitated the identification of local issues, needs and priorities for incorporation in the 2013-2014 budget of **Aloya Union Parishad**. At the open budget meeting concluding the process, the **Upazila Nirbahi Officers (UNO)** highlighted: "The open budget discussion demonstrates how vibrant the UP is and I am really happy to see all of you contribute towards a transparent and participatory budget."

Need to combine participatory efforts with the involvement of government officers and the integration of local key data ...

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

... resulting in enhanced interaction, and ultimately in a joint vision taking shape in the form of Five-Year Development Plans

The Char Ishwardia UP's chairperson sees in the Five-Year Development Planning Document yet another **example of successful cooperation**. According to his account the plan's preparation relied on wide range of contributions, including Ward Shava suggestions, statistical data and contextual input from government officers, and in-depth review by the Standing Committees (SC). A special planning committee coordinated the completion of the document, which obtained the UP's approval in 2015. While he admitted that there are discrepancies between the plan and the current annual budget (the 2015-2016 budget preparations preceded the 5 year planning process), he also highlighted that due to the complexity of the Unions' income sources his area is not yet ready for full implementation of the plan: "Central government contributions are performance related. Measurement criteria include the conduct of regular Ward Shava and SC meetings, level of local tax collection, and the timely drafting of annual budget proposals. Central government contributions match local taxes collected, which however cannot be increased before the foreseen reassessment (legally scheduled for 2019)". He still intends to officially communicate the plan up the administrative path: "Although we lack access to sufficient funding for full implementation, we think that such an endorsement will be useful, because **for the first time we have a sound basis for our budget planning choices**; even for requests we make to the central government." He is confident to have an innovative and presentable tool in hand to drive change, and is determined to further align future annual budget preparation to implement the provisions of the five-year plan.

(v) Sustainability

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

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

Given the way conversations went with local community representatives and volunteers from the four Unions visited in the Upazila of Sadar (Char Ishwardiya, Kustia, Dapunia, and Bhabkhali) in the district of Mymensingh, evaluators have little doubt that the consultative approach has become an accepted and lasting method, as it jointly involves the population and all stakeholders in the identification of solutions to local areas' most pressing needs. At the time of the evaluation visit, local leaders and administrators alike highly appreciated and supported what had been achieved with the help of the Ward Shavas and Standing Committees. Most discussion partners explained their motivation with the satisfaction, which they have taken (1) from grassroots driven solutions to social issues, and (2) from the improved quality of life achieved through enhanced local service delivery.

“We are more active today than we used to be [during the UNDEF supported period]. As volunteers we consider continuation as a social responsibility. We still monitor, observe and mobilise. It is our duty not to keep, but to disseminate the knowledge that UNDEF provided us with.”

**DCC Member,
Bhabkhali Union**

This assessment would, however, be incomplete without reporting further interview findings that showed evaluators that many of the project's volunteers, and in particular the animators working with women, the youth and the ultra poor (i) appreciated the way in which THP financially supported the process, which is why they (ii) expressed their hope that the grantee would remain involved. It transpired from these discussions that the transportation and subsistence needs of grass-roots beneficiaries participating in a range of project activities used to be compensated in cash, and that THP animators have experienced significantly reduced participation levels following the completion of UNDEF's funding period.

b. Expansion of the approach to communities lacking operational Ward Shavas and Standing Committees

It is fully understood that the present project represented an expansion of THP's pilot, and that it addressed only a fraction of the grantee's existing collaboration with the country's grassroots, UP members, and other key stakeholders, which stretches across 185 of the country's 400 Unions and which dates back as far as 1991. The strategy of the organization has been and is to train and empower volunteer leaders to mobilize their villages and strengthen the institutions of local democracy so that people can meet their basic needs. Evaluators therefore were pleased to learn that:

1. It is THP's intention to continue its work in the present project's area (10 Unions) with the help of its volunteer-led low-cost approach.
2. THP is committed to gradually expand the UNDEF project's participatory approach to more of those Unions, in which the grantee is already present, now with a view to the realization of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.
3. THP's partner BRAC is determined to gradually expand the UNDEF project's participatory approach, in order to continue applying methods consistently with THP's approach in another 61 Unions, when collaborating with the grassroots, UP members, and other key stakeholders.

c. The extent to which access to financing affects the feasibility of the UPs' five-year

development plans.

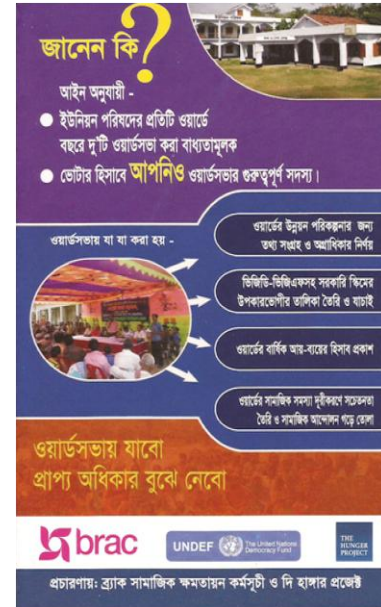
The fact that budgeting is usually based on annual cycles always comes to play when new social issues or service needs are discovered. In addition to the time factor, existing but not sufficiently catered needs may face, like in any other place, circumstances that render the availability and flexibility of public financing to a limited amount (as a reminder, increased local tax collection is a pre-condition for Unions to obtain increased, matching central government contributions). These are among the reasons, why evaluators during their field visits have noted that annual the Unions' budgets are presently not based on, or connected to the project's five-year development plans.

In some instances it holds, however, true that local governments and/or the local population have managed to put in place approaches or instruments to secure additional financing for new, jointly identified needs. Examples included, among others, (i) the hiring of more local tax collector personnel - in combination with an improved local tax payment moral (an effect attributed to Ward Shava and open budget meetings), and (ii) the financial contribution of self-help group members to joint community-owned funds. These approaches and instruments aimed to finance e.g.

community-led initiatives responding to the needs of poor community members to enable e.g. the purchase of cattle, work equipment, school materials, or to cover the cost of household sanitation measures, wedding celebrations, etc. In a number of cases it has, however, also been noted that self-help group members lack skills to ensure proper and transparent recording of these community funds, which in some cases was aggravated by the fact that the funds were apparently held in cash instead of being safely placed in bank accounts.

(vi) UNDEF Value Added

The project and its products were transparently branded as supported by UNDEF. Given its positive track record and reputation in the country THP, however, did not see the necessity to further exploit the UNDEF label to promote the progress of its project activities.



Visibility of UNDEF's support. This sticker (explaining the Ward Shavas' purpose) was on display in various project locations.

V. CONCLUSIONS

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

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

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

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

v. Apart from schedule modifications, **no changes were made to the planned project activities. Although evaluators noted variations at the level of the initially planned output indicators**, their assessment is that the project in most cases achieved its objectives. Most importantly, the grantee generated more than 2,000 self-motivated community volunteers (50% of which are female) in Ward Action Teams, and a variety of local civil society units. They display promising potential for continued animation of their fellow local community members, thus ensuring that Union Parishads will be held accountable beyond the lifetime of the project. The visibly high degree of commitment among interviewed UP chairs to advocate for decentralization (a policy change actually

foreseen by law) equally impressed the evaluators.

vi. Trainee assessments evidenced **successful capacity building in terms of clarifying the roles and responsibilities of Standing Committee members.** Ward Shavas did not only provide grass-roots input to the annual budget and the five-year planning process, but led also to the posting of citizen charter displays in all ten Unions supported by the project. Given these significant achievements, and considering the utility of the project's civil society units and the grassroots' participatory action research, which connected the local population with government authorities, evaluators are of the view that **the project was effective.**

vii. **Some of the grantee's reporting on the target indicators allows for a preliminary analysis of potential impact.** As far as strengthened knowledge of citizen's rights, entitlements and responsibilities are concerned, the project fell significantly short of its ambitions, which is why the continued commitment of THP's animators will be playing a key role to ensure awareness raising efforts multiply further. On the other hand, the grantee presented data, which demonstrated an increasing presence of women advocating gender- and youth-specific concerns in the Ward Shavas. There is also quantitative and qualitative evidence of enhanced local government accountability and service delivery, which is also consistent with the increased extent to which citizens have made direct contact with UP authorities to seek assistance. In addition, evaluators have independently gathered first-hand anecdotal evidence, which established that the project introduced change in the form of regular interaction between UP representatives, government officers, and all segments of the local population. This has changed the way in which local governments make their annual budget planning choices, and has established a joint basis for the preparation of the newly introduced five-year development plans. Evaluators therefore conclude that **the project generated positive impact.**

viii. Capacity building activities represented the project's principal focus. Accordingly, 46% of the grantee's expenditure covered the project's training programme and follow-up meetings supporting participatory planning, budgeting and citizen rights' and services monitoring. Breaking the same amount over the reported total number of approximately 62,000 direct and indirect beneficiaries results in an average cost of less than USD 1.70, which was spent per project activity participant to enable grassroots-oriented policy implementation in the form of participatory planning, budgeting and citizen rights' and services monitoring. With 33% of combined spending for project staff at District and Union level, staff training, and baseline survey inputs, the nominal human resources spending of the grantee appears rather costly, but this was partly offset by the highly effective and efficient coordination between the field staff and the grantee's office management and executive staff (whose input was not charged to the project). **Although not particularly efficient, evaluators are still satisfied in view of the project's achievements.**

ix. In addition to the positive results, evaluators also found **promising signs of sustainability.** All the volunteer animators, civil society group representatives and

self-help group members, which evaluators have met, continue to mobilise the local community members to exploit the legally provided opportunities to participate in local governance, and to hold local decision makers accountable. There is, however, a risk that the grantee's practice to compensate the transportation and subsistence needs of grassroots beneficiaries in cash has generated what is commonly referred to as "donor expectation", as THP's animators reported to evaluators reduced participation of grassroots people since the completion of UNDEF's funding period. Evaluators were also in a position to confirm that several self-help group members had launched initiatives to support identified service needs privately, should they face limited availability or flexibility of public financing. They were, however, concerned about the fact that many initiators lacked basic fund management skills, such as the transparent recording of fund movements and the secure operation of a bank account.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

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

i. The fact that THP's approach and methodology included the conduct of baseline research and the formulation of target indicators is highly commendable, as this enhanced the project's **relevance** and facilitated the assessment of **effectiveness and impact**. Evaluators, however, missed a more rigorous approach to data analysis (e.g. designing modest, realistically achievable target indicators, and assessing achievements by comparing these with (a) result indicators defined in line with the initial target indicators, and (b) national data from other statistical sources as initially foreseen), as well as a reporting which is pertinent and fully responding to the project document's monitoring framework (i.e. in relation to the targeted outcome "35% or higher women's attendance at Ward Shavas" the grantee presented not directly matching data, while the actual corresponding result indicator was included in a different report section). Based on the above **we recommend to the grantee to design monitoring frameworks, which make consistent use of baseline and target indicators**. Exploiting the results of progress monitoring more systematically facilitates the identification of remaining and new needs. This could enable THP to improve its current assessment in qualitative terms and thus enhance the organization's strategic objectives. It may also help the grantee to attract new donors and implementing partners for an expansion of the original project.

ii. Given the increased involvement of the supported communities in local decision-making processes in the context of the Ward Shavas and the Standing Committees, and the anecdotal evidence about the results thereof, such as the agreements on annual budget priorities and five-year development plans, there is little doubt that the project contributed effectively to the improved provision of local services and the resolution of social issues. Despite these achievements it is, however, also clear that THP will need to organise complementary actions to secure the intervention's medium-term effects. Based on our observations on **impact and sustainability, we therefore recommend to the grantee** (1) to consider ways **to abandon the current practice of compensating beneficiaries' transportation and subsistence needs in cash**, in order to eliminate misleading expectations and foster the understanding that engagement in participatory democracy is rewarded by an improved quality of life; and (2) **to rapidly organise capacity building for self-help groups and civil society organisations representatives who have established community-owned funds**, in order to enable them to transparently and securely manage the funds they have been entrusted with.

iii. With a view to the long-term, it is our strong belief that a wider dissemination of the UNDEF-funded project's approach to the almost 250 of the country's Unions, in which THP and BRAC have been active, will be essential to secure enhanced cooperation between UP-level stakeholders, government officers and the local population, thus gradually supporting the aim of nation-wide implementation of the policies envisaged by

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

- **Improve the existing qualitative evidence of case studies of the project beneficiaries' achievements, and disseminate it to facilitate efficient replication for the benefit of sustainability elsewhere.** More specifically, consider the following:
 - (a) The case studies currently held by the grantee focus mainly on women empowerment, and the efforts of individuals, self-help groups, and civil society groups to address issues such as early marriage and violence against women. While this is indeed important, there is a lack of case study coverage of results and successes concerning other dimensions of the MDG spectrum, which have been achieved thanks to enhanced interaction between the grassroots and local government. Active dissemination (and not just collection) could further improve transparency and increase the extent to which good practice subsequently be showcased to local communities from other Unions. Could such effort even include Unions not yet supported by THP or BRAC, but interested in trying to apply this approach themselves?
 - (b) Would the introduction of a platform for exchanging knowledge and experience among previously supported Unions (e.g. in the form of regional or national level associations or networks, to connect animators, or even UP-level actors) inspire and hence accelerate the identification of solutions to common social and service provision issues?

- **Reflect on how to enhance the long-term relevance and implementation of the newly established five-year development plans.** More specifically, consider the following:
 - (a) As current annual budgets are rarely based on these plans, motivate Standing Committees to push UP chairs to ensure the establishment of closer links. For this purpose it will be necessary to regularly update the five-year development plans – on the one hand to take into account future development progress made, and on the other hand to set financially achievable targets, which are based on prioritised needs.
 - (b) Animate Standing Committees and UP chairs to work with Ward Shavas, aiming to include social MDG dimensions (e.g. supporting women empowerment, child rights) into the five-year development plans. This in order to transform them into fully inclusive documents, to which implementation-wise also the grassroots could relate and take pride in.

IX. ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: EVALUATION QUESTIONS

DAC criterion	Evaluation Question	Related sub-questions
Relevance	To what extent was the project, as designed and implemented, suited to context and needs at the beneficiary, local, and national levels?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Were the objectives of the project in line with the needs and priorities for democratic development, given the context? ▪ Should another project strategy have been preferred rather than the one implemented to better reflect those needs, priorities, and context? Why? ▪ Were risks appropriately identified by the projects? How appropriate are/were the strategies developed to deal with identified risks? Was the project overly risk-averse?
Effectiveness	To what extent was the project, as implemented, able to achieve objectives and goals?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To what extent have the project's objectives been reached? ▪ To what extent was the project implemented as envisaged by the project document? If not, why not? ▪ Were the project activities adequate to make progress towards the project objectives? ▪ What has the project achieved? Where it failed to meet the outputs identified in the project document, why was this?
Efficiency	To what extent was there a reasonable relationship between resources expended and project impacts?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Was there a reasonable relationship between project inputs and project outputs? ▪ Did institutional arrangements promote cost-effectiveness and accountability? ▪ Was the budget designed, and then implemented, in a way that enabled the project to meet its objectives?
Impact	To what extent has the project put in place processes and procedures supporting the role of civil society in contributing to democratization, or to direct promotion of democracy?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To what extent has/have the realization of the project objective(s) and project outcomes had an impact on the specific problem the project aimed to address? ▪ Have the targeted beneficiaries experienced tangible impacts? Which were positive; which were negative? ▪ To what extent has the project caused changes and effects, positive and negative, foreseen and unforeseen, on democratization? ▪ Is the project likely to have a catalytic effect? How? Why? Examples?
Sustainability	To what extent has the project, as designed and implemented, created what is likely to be a continuing impetus towards democratic development?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To what extent has the project established processes and systems that are likely to support continued impact? ▪ Are the involved parties willing and able to continue the project activities on their own (where applicable)?
UNDEF value-added	To what extent was UNDEF able to take advantage of its unique position and comparative advantage to achieve results that could not have been achieved had support come from other donors?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What was UNDEF able to accomplish, through the project, that could not as well have been achieved by alternative projects, other donors, or other stakeholders (Government, NGOs, etc.). ▪ Did project design and implementing modalities exploit UNDEF's comparative advantage in the form of an explicit mandate to focus on democratization issues?

ANNEX 2: DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

UNDEF

- Final Narrative Report
- Mid-Term Progress Report
- Project Document
- Milestone Verification Reports
- Financial Utilization Reports
- Project Officer's Evaluation Note

The Hunger Project - Bangladesh

- Baseline Report
- Training Manuals (Union Parishad, Standing Committees, Women Leaders, Active Citizens)
- Case studies
- THP project presentation
- Images
- Project website, <http://www.mdgunions.org>
- Website THP Bangladesh, <http://www.thp.org/our-work/where-we-work/bangladesh>
- Organizational Profile, THP-Bangladesh (2015)

Laws, conventions:

- Constitution of Bangladesh, http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/pdf_part.php?id=367
- Local Government – Union Parishad Act 2009, <http://www.lgsplgd.gov.bd/?wpdmdl=1095>

Other sources:

- Badiul Alam Majumdar, Local Governance and Political Reform, Keys to Poverty Reduction, published by Osman Gani of Agamee Prakashani, March 2010.
- Pranab Kumar Panday, Local Government System in Bangladesh: How Far is it Decentralised, Lex Localis – Journal of Local Self-Government, Vol. 9, No. 3, July 2011, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/235983586_Local_Government_System_in_Bangladesh_How_Far_is_it_Decentralised

ANNEX 3: SCHEDULE OF INTERVIEWS

13 December 2015	
<i>Grantee's Project Briefing (THP Office, Dhaka)</i>	
Jamirul Islam	Project Manager
Swapan Kumar Saha	Deputy Director
Nasima Akter	Deputy Director Programme
Sahidul Akhtar Majumdar	Director, Telangana Resource Centre
Badiul Alam Majumdar	Country Director
Tofil Ahmed	Director
Joyanta Kar	Regional Coordinator
Nazir Islam	Senior Programme Coordinator
14 December 2015	
<i>Field Staff Interviews, Mymensingh Regional Office</i>	
Syed Nasir Vddin	Project Officer
A.N.M Nazmul Hossain	Project Officer
AKSM Sham Sul Alam	Union Coordinator
Sultan Mahammad	Union Coordinator
Shamsul Alam Talukdar	Union Coordinator
Omar Faruk	Union Coordinator
Ashaduii Nonan	Union Coordinator
Anwar Hossain	Union Coordinator
Gias Uddin Babur	Union Coordinator
Rejaul Koran	Accountant
Nuruzzaman	Senior District Manager
Joyanta Kar	Regional Coordinator
Jamirul Islam	Program Manager
15 December 2015	
<i>Beneficiary Interviews: Elected Representatives and Government Functionaries, Char Ishwardia Union Parishad</i>	
Marshedat Alam	Chairman
Shamsher Ali	Member
Rahima Khatun	Member
Rokeya Barek	Member
Soukat Hossain	Member
Modosha	Member
A.Aziz	Member
Aslam Uddin	Member
Mansur Ali Sardar	Member

Aburayel Sardar	Food Cooperation Office
Akab Uddin	Agriculture Office
Hajera Khatun	Agriculture Office
Rekha Rahaman	Member
<i>Beneficiary Interviews: Youth Leaders, Char Ishwardia</i>	
Nasir Hussain	Member
Sahidul Islam	Member
Sakib	Member
Raja Ul Karim	Member
Tufal ahmed	Member
Moumoni Akhtar	Member
Runa Akhtar	Member
Sabina Akhtar	Member
Al Amin Raj	Member
Rajan Mia	Member
Shamshul Aheamed	Member
Ilias Hussain	Member
Sharmin Aktar	Member
Eity Akhtar	Member
Shobnom Pravin	Member
<i>Beneficiary Interviews: Early Marriage Halting Committee, Char Balia (Ishwardia)</i>	
Shahidul Islam	Convener
Musida Khatun	Member
Runa Akhtar	Member
Tipu Sultan	Member
Sahadat Husain	Member
Anisur Rahaman	Member
Parul	Member
<i>Beneficiary Interviews: Women Leaders, Kasim Pura, Kustia Union</i>	
Shamina Yasmin	Women Leader
Aklima Parvin	Women Leader
Jahanara	Women Leader
Suma Aktar	Women Leader
Sultana	Women Leader
Jetsin	Women Leader
Anowara	Women Leader
Rani Bala das	Women Leader
Nur Zahan	Women Leader

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

Sabina Iasmin	Member
Shika Akhtar	Member
Monowara Khatun	Member
Karina Begam	Member
Rani Begam	Member
Khudeja Begam	Member
Taniya Akhtar	Member
Takjina Akhtar	Member
Jamena Khatun	Member
Najma Khatun	Member
Moshish Begam	Member
Chakhina Khatun	Member
Sadiya Akhtar	Member
Rekha Khatun	Member
Sajeda Khatun	Member
Bibi How	Member
Marjina Akhtar	Member
Sahanaz	Member
Parul Akhtar	Member
Nilufa Akhtar	Member
Chadra Akhtar	Member
Anowara Khatun	Member
Sahida Khatun	Member
Manra Khatun	Member
Hasina Khatun	Member
Jahana Khatun	Member
Chaleha Begam	Member
Fizaja Khatun	Member
Majibar Rahaman	Member
Mahaluda Khatun	Member
Jarina Khatun	Member
<i>Beneficiary Interviews: Civil Society Units (DCC, NGCAF, BNN), Bhabkhali Union</i>	
Arun Akhtar	Member
Hasina Khatun	Member
Soma Akhtar	Member
Lovly Akhtar	Member
Anowar Hussain	Union Coordinator
Afroja akhtar	Member

Jharna Akhtar	Member
Khaleda Akhtar	Member
Ripan Siya	Member
Hamidul Haba	Member
Abdulla All	Member
Akraul Alam	Member
Safikul Islam	Member
17 December 2015	
<i>Beneficiary Interviews: Media Representatives (THP Office, Dhaka)</i>	
Santosh Dutta	Tangail Press Club
Rashed Ahmed	Jahan Daily, Mymensingh
Tanvir Sohel	Senior Reporter, Prothom Alo Daily, Dhaka
Kamran Siddiqui	Reporter, Samakal Daily, Dhaka
<i>Implementation Partner Interviews: BRAC (THP Office, Dhaka)</i>	
Azizur Rahman	Project Manager - CEP
Mostaque Ahmed	Manager
Zakir Hussain	Senior Specialist
<i>Grantee's Debriefing (THP Office, Dhaka)</i>	
Jamirul Islam	Project Manager
Swapan Kumar Saha	Deputy Director
Nasima Akter	Deputy Director Programme
Badiul Alam Majumdar	Country Director
Joyanta Kar	Regional Coordinator

ANNEX 4: ACRONYMS

BNN	Bikoshito Nari Network
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DCC	Distinguished Citizens' Committee
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGCAF	National Girl Child Advocacy Forum
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SC	Standing Committee
PAR	Participatory Action Research
THP	The Hunger Project - Bangladesh
UNDEF	United Nations Democracy Fund
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UP	Union Parishad
UNO	Upazila Nirbahi Officers
USD	United States Dollar