

Evaluation of the Improving Local Level Governance Project in Bangladesh

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USAID Bangladesh Evaluation: Evaluation of the Improving Local Level Governance Project in Bangladesh
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Farheen Khurram: Thank you all, before I start, I just wanted to thank a special person in the room. Dr. _____. So I sort of learned M&E through her. Having said that let me introduce you to Bangladesh's local governance evaluation. As most of you know Bangladesh is a tiny country, but a huge population of – guess what? How many millions are we talking about? 150? Close. 161 and increasing as we speak. So it does have a lot of development challenges and local governance is one of them. One of the challenges with local governance is that it is controlled by the local police. So we are talking about generations and generations of local police controlling the local governments.

Citizens have very limited access to the resources or to have access to the local governance structure. So there's a patronage channel that they're talking about. And there's a silent relationship between bureaucracy and political parties when we talk about local governance. This is the scenario in 2002. That's when USAID planned and thought that they will start a new project called Improving Local Level Governance Project.

It started off with \$1 million in 2002 but it was phased out in three phases until 2011. And it added up to a \$3.8 million dollar project. No the most interesting thing about this project back in 2002 before USAID Forward, before many other rules and regulations by the Agency, it was implemented by a local, a Bangladeshi NGO called

Rupantar. And here's as map of Bangladesh. The purple and the green area is the area where ILLG worked. So it wasn't in Dhaka. It wasn't in the city. It was in the northwest and southwest region of the country.

The blocks that you see over there are the unions. So throughout my PowerPoint presentation I'll be taking about UPs, Union Parishads and there are 4,500 UPs in Bangladesh. This \$3.8 million project worked with 210 UPs. So what were the objectives of ILLG? Well it was to build local governance unit capacity, train the UP chairmen as members, provide mentoring, and coaching services. It was also to enhance the accountability to citizens. And that meant improving interaction from elected officials to citizen groups to citizens.

It formed a vehicle called the citizen's committee where we had key citizens, key local folks in that committee. And then the other objective was to also manage local resources. And that meant you know having open budget meetings where locals could participate. And finally the most interesting part about this project was that it had a campaign on citizen's rights. And this campaign was done using folk arts, using folk drama, folk music.

So the information about local governance, the rights that locals had, was embedded in these dramas and songs. So here's a snapshot. See on the lower right, all those heads? These are people who are gathered to see the local dramas. See the women over here? They're listening to someone singing a folk song on talking about local governance.

So the purpose of the evaluation: well quite clearly it was to review the objectives - if performance

met the targets. It was to see the challenges of the project and if there was any post-project sustainability built into the project. And to investigate if the ILLG method really worked or were there any other alternatives to it? The methodology used was the team reviewed documents. There was a rapid governance assessment. It was a semi-structured questionnaire. They had focus group discussions with UP members, citizens, committees.

They also interviewed Rupantar for staff in Khulna. And there were a few visits in all the unions. The samples frame consisted of eight unions in one of the regions and four unions in another region – the Rangpur region. There was a loose attempt to doing a treatment and control group. So there were like eight unions out of the twelve that were regarded as a control group and four that were regarded as a treatment group.

Again a map: you can look at the areas where the evaluation team went. I do want to say one thing. ILLG ended in 2011 and this evaluation, this summative performance evaluation was contracted out in 2012, 18 months after the evaluation. And so a lot of the information that came out of it was at a more impact level. It wasn't exactly immediately after the project or while the project was in the field. But overall the findings were that they found that the project was successful in achieving social/political mobilizations.

The cultural vehicles, the cultural songs, the folk dramas had a lasting impression on the citizens. And it was found that ILLG UPs are more likely to display fairness in selecting candidates for households or social safety net programs. For example they gave money to widows or to senior

citizens. And one interesting thing that came out was we saw more active and higher participation of women served by Rupantar. And that could be because one of the project's strategies was to have women be part of standing committees.

By government law, each of the UPs are supposed to have 13 standing committees. Rupantar made sure that women were part of these standing committees. So they became more – They played a decision making role. And as a result later on we found them to be active in their social life as well as in the village life. One example would be the shalish. Shalish is a semi-formal dispute resolution system. You know you have someone stealing something in rural Bangladesh. They won't take you to the court.

You have someone having extramarital affairs they won't take you to the court. They'll take you to a shalish. A shalish consists of local respected men who sit on a panel. And they decide your fate. And women are hardly – I've hardly seen women be a panelist. But through this project, through the sites that we've done the evaluations, we've found women to serve in the shalish and they're still serving in the shalish.

The other thing is use of locals as union facilitators helped ILLG credibility and effectiveness. We did find out that there was little focus on post-project sustainability. And that could be because it was never built into the project design. So we didn't really ask our partners to have a post-sustainability built in. There was little attention given to quantitative measurements. There was an M&E plan. We did have a results framework. There were targets that were met but they were all output targets but nothing beyond that.

And there was insufficient integration between ILLG and LGSP. LGSP is the Local Governance Support Project funded by World Bank. The future direction that came out from the evaluation is that we keep the same model with modest additions, given that it was pretty successful. To have a post-project sustainability component built in; and to have alternative approaches to organizing training groups. Basically the evaluation team thinks that the training should be expanded not to just two to three members from a community but to many more.

Utilize new UP information services. Since 2002 Bangladesh has become digital Bangladesh. So there are a lot of new services through websites, SMS, phone services, that can be utilized, and to expand to a larger coverage. Now since 2011, before the project ILLG ended USAID did award another organization on local capacity – a local level governance capacity building. And that's through SDLG Tetra Tech ARD. It's a \$19 million project and it builds in most of the recommendations that came out of the evaluation. So SDLG, the \$19 million project, now expands to 600 UPs across Bangladesh.

And finally the key takeaways would be local governance capacity. We see that if you get buy in from UPs, you get engagement from the Union Parishad chairmen, you can get better results. One thing that SDLG, the new local governance project is doing is that they're using these cultural vehicles. But what they're doing is they're getting the UP chairmen to also be one of the performers. So imagine being a local, seeing a drama where your chairman is also a performer in that drama. That's engaging them at that level.

The other thing is effective M&E integration in project implementation. Through this project we've realized that local organizations have the potential to engage directly with USAID. However USAID must raise the profile of M&E in making sure that it is being implemented by local organizations. I would say they didn't really give much guidance on M&E so we cannot hold it against them as to why the M&E was weak. USAID played a role and I think this is where we need to gear up.

And finally on active women's role: well we could see that you include these women in citizens groups – you give them trainings. Not just trainings but give them a role to play, a decision making role to play and they become emerging leaders. They have a more empowered, active role. And we only hope that this would lead to better education, better sanitation, and better help publically. And that's the end. [Applause]

Moderator: Questions on this activity? Folks? Did she do a good job?

Female 2: Of course.

Moderator: Of course.

Female 2: But I do have a question about – [laughter]

Moderator: Uh oh, the teacher. She's got –

Female 2: lessons learned about the methodology. If you were to evaluate it again or set up systems what would you do differently?

Farheen Khurram: In fact, yeah I skipped it. One thing that we would do is definitely have a baseline. This project did have a baseline but they never used it. The M&E – the Evaluation team looked at the baseline but the

project never used the baseline. So if we were to do this again we would do a baseline. We would make sure that there was a treatment group, a control group, without contamination. But yeah that's something that we would use.

Male: So the baseline was used by the evaluators –

Farheen Khurrum: Correct.

Male: It was? By the evaluation team?

Farheen Khurrum: The evaluation team did look at the baseline data.

Male: But they used the data in their evaluation?

Farheen Khurrum: They used the data but they couldn't exactly – You see when we developed the SOW for the evaluation it wasn't based on the baseline data. So it was based on, oh 18 months have passed and we need to know what has happened and was it really an effective project or not? So I would say they read it. They've used bits and pieces of it. But it wasn't used as the only source of information.

Male: For example, they changed active role of women. So maybe the baseline indicates how – or women's participation at the start and then at the end, so that we can see that there is an increased participation or active participation. All statements there may be based on the same conditions of the baselines. Maybe the information team made use of that also.

Farheen Khurrum: True. Yes but also if you remember I did say that the evaluation team made a very loose attempt on having a control and treatment group. So you know there was that eight and four groups that they were doing with one where Rupantar had -- Eight unions had intervention from Rupantar and four never had any intervention from Rupantar. So

they sort of like cross-checked the data between those eight and four units.

Male 2: It's my comment to get more data from _____. But what is the – You said the performance evaluation you don't need a control group. It is – the control group is only part of the impact evaluation.

Farheen Khurram: You are absolutely correct. We don't think this is an impact evaluation. But because this is taking place 18 months after the project has ended the evaluation team had to do some sort of comparison to see the difference in project impact. So this is not an impact evaluation by any means.

Male 3: Thank you for your presentation. A few main comments, clarifications, and questions. I noticed that the project started at \$1 million and grew to \$3.8 million, and now it's gone to \$19 million.

Farheen Khurram: Right.

Male 3: And so there is a _____ in terms of budget. But maybe the clarification I'm looking for – and I do believe it's looking at 603 now but I didn't get a figure in terms of the \$3.8 million. In a way it's good in saying you can grow UPs. In terms of lessons learned. You had a baseline. Now same question I think _____ was asking. If you're going to do it now again what difference? But when you're looking at a project the whole reason for doing a baseline also is feed-in - as part of M&E, the monitoring part of it – a feed-in into corrective action and the rest, which apparently had not been done. But has that been built into your new project now? So that's a question there.

And my other comment is yes when I worked with UN Agencies when I was working with UNICEF

and UNDP and was also _____, quite often that you have different agencies doing the same thing with the same government counterparts but they hardly talk to each other.

And now in this case you did mention that the new project. So is there an amount of integration between the two similar projects? Is that being now sort of addressed in the new project?

Farheen Khurram:

Very good questions. To start off. This \$3.8 million project started off with \$1 million. And then, you know in 2007 we had Sidr, Cyclone Sidr. The region where this project worked was exactly in the Cyclone Sidr region. So that's when USAID decided that they were going to provide \$2.8 million or more. That's where the extension of time happened as well as the project value increased. So all in all out of 4,500 UPs in Bangladesh ILLG worked in 210 UPs.

This \$19 million project – ILLG was a pilot project. And so it was lessons learned from USAID Bangladesh that there is a need for more work to be done. And so a \$19 million project was launched. We've started that. The baseline is actually already complete for SDLG. In fact all the local governance as well as other DG projects have gone through baseline and we've done a PMP-wide baseline on DG. So that was also done. The last question was on what? I'm sorry.

Male 3:

In terms of integration between the projects.

Farheen Khurram:

Right. So in fact SDLG – one of the components of SDLG is to also work with existing donor agencies in that area because it is a Sidr-affected area we do have lots of other donor agencies working there. And one of them is the one that I already talked about, local governance, a private

LGSP funded by World Bank. ILLG was not that successful in terms of integrating its efforts with LGSP, but SDLG, the new project, has a component built in and they're accountable for that to ensure that there's integration between both.

And we're working with the government on that too, to ensure that we're not overlapping too much, but basically maximizing, harmonizing it.

Moderator: Last question. We've got two hands. Now we're going to have to wrap it up.

Male 4: I don't know if _____ this concept of working in consortiums. There are at least five or six big consortiums in Bangladesh. So are you working only with one and two, even for this \$19 million project? Number one. And area you also working with some consortium sort of team?

Presenter: So we're working with one implementing partner, which is Tetra Tech ARD. But Tetra Tech ARD has several sub-grantees under them. And that includes Bangladeshi NGOs too. Consortiums – As I said earlier we are talking with the government as well as other donor agencies to ensure that we harmonize our efforts over there. I don't know exactly which consortium we're working with but the project is working with different agencies in terms of making sure that the sector - USAID is covering this sector, World Bank is covering that sector.

Moderator: Somebody else had a hand up there. She said in the interest of time she's not going to ask her question.

Male 5:

A follow up. You can put it off. A very quick follow up. I think the question I have here is why did you actually chose a new implementing agency and you've lost all the lessons learned from the existing – the old one? Yet actually picked up and it was very good. Is it only just a budget issue?

Farheen Khurram:

I dreaded this, but yeah. So it's \$19 million dollars. You're right. It's a budget issue. And we feel more comfortable – not comfortable, but let's use that. Rupantar – in its audit, we had one or two issues that came out. And that didn't really justify enough to give it to them. Having said that USAID also realizes that the audit issues that the project had were largely to do with USAID. We should have had a more active role in training them.

Some of the regulations, local NGOs are not aware of as much as American based organizations are aware of. So it's a big lesson learned for us. And so it's been passed over to Tetra Tech.

[End of Audio]