

SHOUHARDO

CARE Bangladesh



Institutional Mobilization, Governance and Accountability **Thematic Study**

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Foreword

This Thematic Study concerns the systems and approaches employed for enacting accountability, governance and institutional mobilisation within CARE Bangladesh's SHOUHARDO program.

The study reviewed reports and spoke to key informants. Field work was undertaken in three settlements preselected by CARE – two rural sites in the char and haor regions, and one urban slum in Kishoregonj. Noting that SHOUHARDO is operational in 2,205 villages and 137 slums across Bangladesh, this study restricts itself to discussing findings based on the sites visited, and makes wider generalisations only if supported by findings from elsewhere.

Field work for this study was undertaken concurrently with the Thematic Study on Disaster Preparedness by a joint team. The field team comprised:

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This is one of seven Thematic Studies commissioned by CARE Bangladesh.

Finally, this study could not have been carried if without the valuable support and insights provided by the many HQ and field staff of CARE Bangladesh, USAID, partner NGOs, government officials, and, most importantly of all, the communities we met with and who CARE seeks to serve.

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Acronyms

ADPC	Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre
CAP	Community Action Plan
CBDRM	Community Based Disaster Risk Management
CCC	Chittagong City Corporation
CDMP	Comprehensive Disaster Management Program
CEGIS	Centre for Environmental and Geo-graphic Information Services
DER	Disaster Emergency Response
DMB	Disaster Management Bureau
DSCC	Divisional Coordination Committee
DV	Disaster Volunteer
DP	Disaster Preparedness
DRR	disaster risk reduction
EKATA	Empowerment, Knowledge and Transformative Action
FFP	Food For Peace
FFWC	Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GoB	Government of Bangladesh
HA	Humanitarian Assistance
HFA	Hyogo Framework for Action
HH	Household
IGA	Income Generating Activities
MoFDM	Ministry of Food and Disaster Management
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MTR	Mid-Term Review
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
PDMC	Pourashava Disaster Management Committee
PEP	Poor and Extreme Poor
PIO	Project Implementation Officer
PNGO	Partner NGO
PWD	People With Disabilities
RRM	Risk and Resource Map
SAR	Search And Rescue
SDC	Slum Development Committee
SHOUHARDO	Strengthening Household Ability to Respond to Development Opportunities
SMC	School Management Committee
SO	Strategic Objective
SOD	Standing Order on Disaster
SSO	Sub-Strategic Objective
TOR	Terms of Reference
UDMC	Union Disaster Management Committee
UNO	Upazila Nirbahi Officer
UP	Union Parishad
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USCC	Upazila Coordination Committee
VGD	Vulnerable Group Development
VDC	Village Development Committee

Introduction

Institutions comprise organizations, rules, regulations, policies, norms, values and recurrent practices. Institutions shape actors' behavior by setting the standard, scope and limit of interactions and engagement among different actors. Institutional mobilization highlights actions to activate, strengthen and link various institutions within a particular policy domain.

In the context of SHOUHARDO, 'Institutional mobilization' denotes a range of activities to activate, capacity build and link relevant organizations at national, regional and local levels. The concept includes the formation of community level informal organisations to mediate demands and supply between duty-bearers and communities in general, and Poor and Extremely Poor (PEP) beneficiaries in particular. Institutions determine the pattern and scope of engagement for actors, and outline the distribution of authority and power among various actors.

The issue of governance emerges at this point. A lack of good governance hinders growth and investment, and aggravates poverty and inequality. Weak governance can prevent efforts to improve the quality of life of the citizen in a country. Governance also underlines the coordination between various government and non-government actors.

Within this Thematic Study, 'governance' denotes a process of exercising authority and using institutional resources to manage society's problems and affairs with a view to ensuring betterment of all stakeholders, and in particular those who are poor and marginalized.

Enacting good governance in Bangladesh faces many challenges. These include¹, among other things: limited accountability and transparency; public sector constraints including a 'top-down culture'; and corruption. The 2009 CARE report, 'Accountability Relationships in Local Governance: Integrating the extreme poor'², discusses the challenges of enacting governance programming in Bangladesh. It states, 'Many government, donor, and NGO initiatives seek to reform governance in Bangladesh. However these reforms, designed with a linear logic, are in reality impacted by national and local political economy characterised by complexity, innumerable patterns of relationship shaped by power inequities ... In many contexts modern state architecture ... have often been adapted by "traditional" or informal political, social and economic power, and the modern state has become simply an illusion through which these dominant forms of power are maintained.'

¹ Source: Emerging Governance Challenges in Bangladesh, speech given by Hua Du, Asian Development Bank, 27 September 2007 at the Bangladesh Public Administration Training Centre

² CARE Bangladesh commissioned report, 2009

SHOUHARDO

The SHOUHARDO Program is funded through USAID's Food For Peace (FFP) Title II Program, operating from October 2004 to May 2010. SHOUHARDO's overall goal is to 'Sustainably reduce chronic and transitory food insecurity of 400,000 households (HHs) in 18 districts of Bangladesh'. The Program specifically targets the poorest and most disenfranchised populations of Bangladesh, a fact underscored by the 2007 Mid Term Review (MTR) of the Program which found that, 'SHOUHARDO has succeeded in establishing a presence in some of the most difficult and remote regions of the country and has effectively defined a target population that is among the most vulnerable in Bangladesh.'

The Program therefore is attempting to address not only the availability, access and utilization issues that lead to food insecurity, but also the underlying issues that contribute to vulnerabilities such as a lack of participation, social injustice, and discrimination that hold people back from realizing their full potential in leading healthy and productive lives. To these ends the MTR concluded that, 'SHOUHARDO has been largely successful in its attempt to address fundamental constraints to food security in Bangladesh.'

SHOUHARDO's total resource is just under USD 130 million, comprising both cash and commodities, making this USAID's largest global food security program. The Program operates in both the rural (493 Unions) and urban (16 municipalities and 1 City Corporation) areas. A total of 11 ministries and 4 government departments are involved in the Program. They are: Primary and Mass Education; Finance; Education; Forest; Fisheries; Local Government; Health; Land; Agriculture; Women and Child Affairs; and Food Distribution.

SHOUHARDO builds on earlier food security initiatives and operates in four of Bangladesh's major regions: Kishoregonj, Rangpur, Tangail and Chittagong. 95% of the implementation is through 44 local partner NGOs, the remaining 5% through direct delivery. Each of these four regions possess their own unique topography, but are consistent in that the beneficiaries within are some of the most marginalised groups in Bangladesh.

To reach its goal, SHOUHARDO has four Strategic Objectives (SOs), of which SO1 explicitly engages in governance, ie 'enhancing accountability of service providers'. All four SOs, with Sub-Strategic Objectives (SSOs) and Intermediate Results (IRs) for SO1, are as follows:

SO1: Improved availability/economic access to food through strengthening livelihoods, entitlements and enhancing accountability of service providers

SSO1.1: Targeted institutions effectively mobilise and manage resources to reduce vulnerability to food insecurity

IR1.1.1: Capacity of participating institutions to effectively mobilise and manage resources enhanced.

SSO1.2: Enabling environment of high risk areas supports people's ability to improve their food and livelihood security

IR 1.2.1: Communities aware of legal provisions and mobilized around entitlements (land tenure, access to khas land, eviction, fishing and local government.)

IR 1.2.2: Community people's access to different services and common resources increased and service provider's accountability enhanced

IR 1.2.3: Improved infrastructure facilities to protect livelihood and reduce vulnerability

SSO1.3 Vulnerable HHs are engaged in new or enhanced economic activities that increase their production/income and build assets.

IR 1.3.1: Capacity of HHs to identify new income options enhanced

IR 1.3.2: Market access enhanced

SO2: Sustainable improvement in the health and nutrition of project participants

SO3: Enhanced empowerment of 400,000 women and girls from targeted vulnerable HHs

SO4: Targeted communities and institutions are better able to prepare for, mitigate and respond to natural disasters.

Objective of the Study

The Terms of References states that, 'the thematic study will concentrate on the 'approaches' and 'systems' introduced by the SHOUHARDO Program to achieve the concerned Program Strategic Objective (SO), which in turn contributes to the overall Goal. The study aims to:

- 'Assess how effectively the approaches are contributing to positive change, and how sustainable these changes are
- Examine other approaches, if any, being used by other projects in CARE Bangladesh to achieve the same end point
- Provide recommendations on how the approaches can be improved for future programming, especially in relation to the 'Impact Statement' and 'Impact Groups' CARE has committed to.'

Methodology

To achieve some degree of focus this thematic study identified the 'governance dimensions' of 'key institutions and stakeholders'. The governance dimensions identified are:

- Accountability

- Transparency
- Participation
- Access to Services
- Changes in the local power structure.

The key institutions and stakeholders are identified as:

- Local Government Bodies: Union Parishad, City Corporation and Pourashava
- Project Advisory and Coordination Committee (PACC)
- Village Development Committee (VDC) and Slum Development Committee (SDC)
- Village/slum (local community)
- PEP Households
- Marginalised women, including EKATA groups.

The above criteria were used to formulate a matrix, with indicators developed. The matrix can be found in Annex One. The matrix was presented to the SHOUHARDO Senior Management and agreed as the basis for data collection.

This Thematic Study therefore focuses primarily on SO1, in particular relating to the formation of community level structures, the linkages between various stakeholders and actors, linkages to government bodies and service providers, and the impact of governance improvements on households and communities.

Other governance related issues concerning other SOs are addressed in other Thematic Studies, for example studies concerning community and women's empowerment, and the Thematic Study on disaster preparedness which primarily addresses SO4.

Fieldwork

Field work was undertaken in three sites, preselected by SHOUHARDO. It should be noted that SHOUHARDO works in 2,205 villages and 137 slums. Non-SHOUHARDO projects were not visited.

The sites selected were in accordance with the Terms of Reference, 'where implementation and approaches have had sufficient time to mature.' Two rural sites were selected, one in Rangpur in the char region and another in Kishoregonj in the haor region. A third urban site was selected, also in Kishoregonj.



Village focus group meeting



UDMC meeting

Activities comprised key informant interviews, focus group discussions and meetings with a variety of stakeholders, which included:

- Marginalised women
- PEP Household members
- Disaster Volunteers
- Village and Slum community members (SHOUHARDO and non-SHOUHARDO beneficiaries)
- Executive Committee Members of Village Development Committees (VDC) and a Slum Development Committee (SDC)
- Local Government Bodies (LGBs): Upazila Parishad, Union Parishad (UP) and Pourashava
- Members of different committees under the purview of LGBs including standing committee, Union Disaster Management Committee (UDMC), Pourashava Disaster Management Committee (PDMC) and Violence Against Women (VAW) committees
- Upazila Co ordination Committee (USCC) and District Co ordination Committee (DSCC) members
- Field based and senior staff in CARE Bangladesh
- Partner NGO (PNGO) SKS
- Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre (ADPC)
- EKATA groups.

The programme of activities identifying groups and numbers met with is given in Annex Two.

Scope and Limitations

As noted, the study conducted field work in three preselected locations. The report therefore does not generalise findings unless substantiated by wider key informant observations.

This study benefited from being carried out at the same time as the Disaster Preparedness thematic study, and employed the same team.

By the nature of SHOUHARDO to work in remote regions, access to sites took significant travel time each day. Site visits were limited therefore 3-4 hours each day.

Finally, the aim has been to achieve depth over breadth. To these ends the study does not look at projects outside of SHOUHARDO. It does not also cover several important elements of SHOUHARDO's institutional mobilization activities at the central level, for example the effectiveness of PACC in ensuring good governance and of advocacy work.

Field Sites Visited



Kalasona Village is located in the char region. The chars are sandy formations and low-lying flood-prone areas at the river's edge that are deposited, eroded, and re-deposited by the Jamuna and Brahmaputr rivers. Most of the land in chars are known as 'Khas' land, which is inhabited by poorer people. Khas land are mostly new formations on which land tax has not been paid and accordingly come under the jurisdiction of the Land Ministry.

Such land becomes a source of conflict as elites and organised crime groups occupy such land by force, once again marginalising the poor. This land is particularly susceptible to flooding.



Rishipatti slum is located on the edge of the town of Bhairab in Kishoregonj district. The town is one of the historic riverine ports in Bangladesh and was established as a municipality in 1958. In recent decades light industrial area grew-up in the town.

Rishipatti is inhabited by a low Caste Hindu community known as Rishi. Many of the population work as cobblers while some work in a nearby tannery. Education levels are low and access to civic amenities is limited due to their status.



Kewarejore village is located in the haor region. These are large expanses of low-lying flat land dotted with elevated mounds on which communities live. During the wet season the flat lands become flooded, leaving communities living on the mounds, which become islands. The only means of transport during these times is by boat.

In the dry season the water subsides to leave large expanses of dry land. The mounds are susceptible to wave erosion and mounds not protected by permanent walls require expensive annual protection construction using bamboo and sila grass.

Governance-related Activities of SHOUHARDO³

SO1 concerns 'Improved availability/economic access to food through strengthening livelihoods, entitlements and enhancing accountability of service providers.' To achieve this, SO1 focuses on:

Formation of Village and Slum Development Committees (VDCs/SDCs) and enactment of Community Action Plans (CAPs)

VDCs/SDCs are community institutions designed and implemented by SHOUHARDO, comprising 11 community members, five of whom are women, and who are 'poor and extremely poor'. The formation of VDCs/SDCs are 'the core feature of the SHOUHARDO program⁴'. CARE's FY2008 Results Report notes that 'The Village Development Committees (VDC)/Slum Development Committees (SDC) are key to sustainability' (page 5).

The primary activity of each VDC/SDC is to implement a CAP for community-led actions for improvements. The development of CAPs includes undertaking a wellbeing analysis, problem prioritisation and problem analysis, which is followed by implementation. The intention of the CAP is therefore 'not only to design a community development blueprint, but also to enhance the capacity of the VDC/SDC, and the community as an active problem-solving group⁵.'

³ Core Occupational Groups (COGs), which are within SO1 are described in the Thematic study concerning Food and Economic security, and are therefore not included in this study

⁴ SHOUHARDO MTR (2007), page 9

⁵ SHOUHARDO MTR (2007), page 9

Linkage Building

The SO1 Operational strategy states, 'The SHOUHARDO program will support the creation or strengthening of functional linkages between participating groups (VDC/SDC) at the village/slum level and leaders, representatives (community skill persons, who working as community change agents) and service providers (e.g. health, vocational training, HIV/AIDS, etc.) related to key livelihoods issues as identified by the groups.

'In the process, the VDC/SDC and the selected resources persons/community change agents will build linkages with respective service providers or duty bearers. The purpose of this "linking" is to establish communications channels likely to be sustained beyond the life of the program so that community groups will be able to voice their opinions and needs as well as obtain ideas and mobilize support for new or expanded livelihood activities⁶. VDCs/SDCs in particular link with UPs/PSs/CC, on which two members from the VDC/SDC sit.

Formation and activation of Coordination Committees

Program Advisory and Coordination Committees have been formed at each level of government to facilitate linkages and engagement in SHOUHARDO. Each committee includes representatives of 11 ministries and four government departments. The committees are as follows:

- One National Program Advisory and Co ordination Committee (PACC)
- Four Divisional Co ordination Committees (DSCC)
- 18 District Co ordination Committees (DSCC)
- 103 Upazila Co ordination Committees (USCC)
- 1 City Corporation Coordination Committee.

Activation of Local Elected Bodies (LEBs)

SHOUHARDO has been active in reactivating non-functioning LEBs, namely Union Parishads (UPs), City Corporation (CC) and Pourashavas (PSs). SHOUHARDO provides training to the elected representatives of LEBs and builds office compound for UPs. Concerning the latter, there are a number of initiatives taken around this. One example is that SHOUHARDO has built several UP offices, and then worked to populate this with different service providers, which then become a 'one-stop' service point.

Activation of Committees

SHOUHARDO has also engaged in the reactivation of LEB standing committees and sub committees. SHOUHARDO engagements have been offered with Pourashava Sub Committees, City Corporation Ward Level Committees and Special Committees, UP Special Committees and UP standing committees. At each level of LEBs, SHOUHARDO

⁶ Operational Strategy SO1 1.2.2, page 1

focuses mainly on the 5 most important standing committees that are directly related with essential services to PEP communities including agriculture, health and sanitation, education, women and child welfare committees. SHOUHARDO has also engaged in the reactivation of disaster management committees and Violence Against Women (VAW) committees.

The diagram on the following page identifies the various committees, participating Ministries, LEBs and LEB standing committees.

Achievements of SHOUHARDO Concerning Governance

From progress and review reports, governance-related activities of SHOUHARDO under SO1 include, but are not limited to:

VDC⁷ Formation and Implementation

- 2,223 Village based organizations formed
- 24,453 are poor/extreme poor members
- Approximately 45% are female
- 3,858 representatives from the VDC and EKATA groups have been co-opted to a number of Standing, Special and Other Committees under the Union Parishad (UP).

CARE's FY2008 Results Report notes that, 'VDC/SDCs are already demonstrating their ability to identify and prioritize their problems and find ways to solve these, both at a HH and at a community level' (page 5). This study found this to be the case in the three sites visited, which is discussed later.

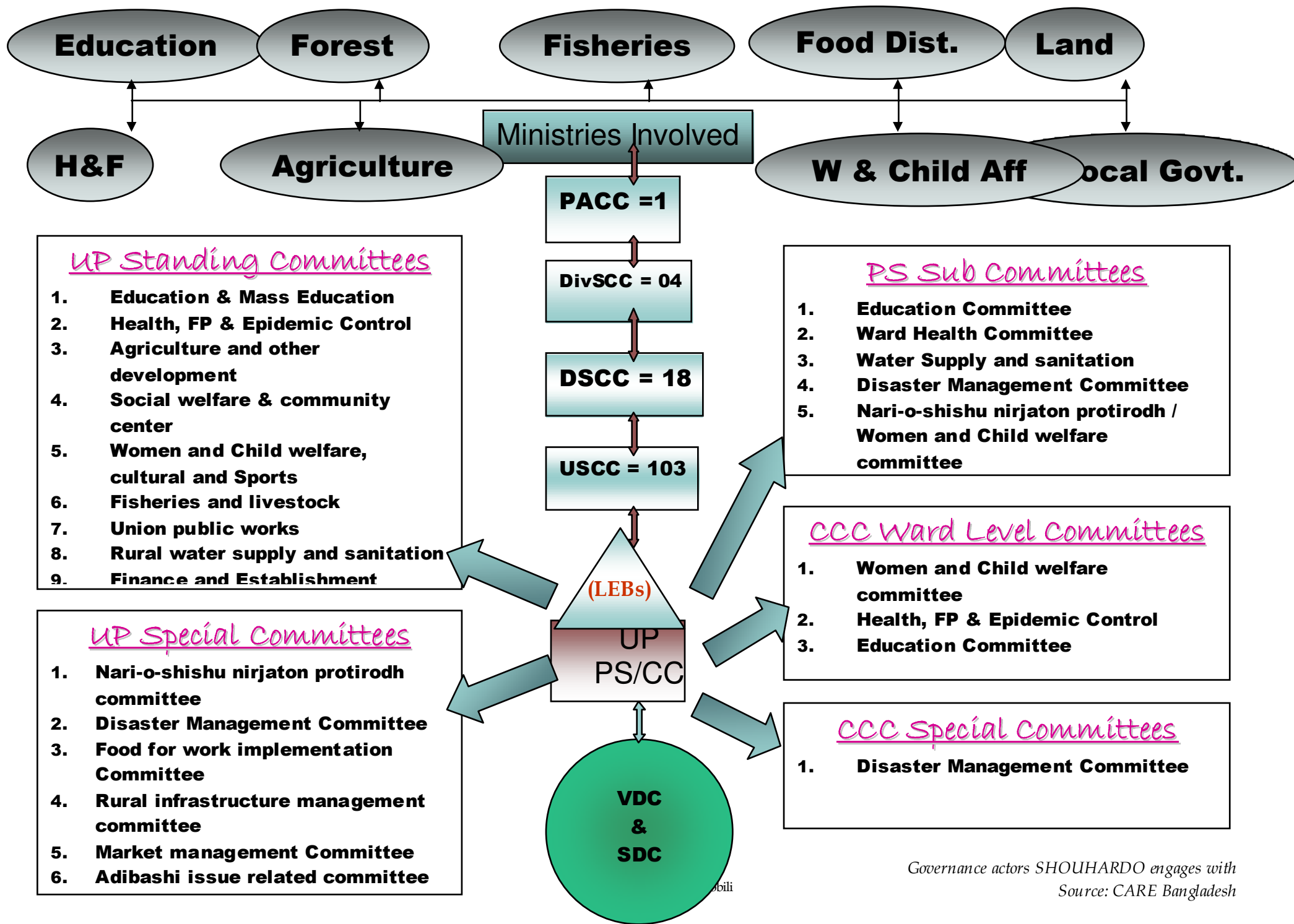
SDC Formation and Implementation

- 137 Slum based organizations formed
- 1,507 poor/extreme poor are members
- Approximately 45% are female.

Union Parishads (UP)

- 6,888 elected representatives of 493 UPs are involved in the program and received training
- 1,476 women members involved in leadership development
- 12 Union Parishad Complexes have been constructed (as of December 2008), to foster better links between levels of government.

⁷ Source: presentation on Strategic Objective 1, CARE offices, 17 May 2009



PACC, DSCC, Dist SCC and USCC

- 1,116 GoB high officials of 11 Ministries are involved in the program
- Four GoB Training Institutions to train elected representatives and government functionaries.

Governance related activities also take place under other SOs. For example under SO4, Disaster Risk Reduction and Humanitarian Assistance (DRR-HA), SHOUHARDO is engaged in the reactivation of Disaster Management Committees (DMCs), mandated by the government Standing Order on Disasters (SOD). SHOUHARDO has provided training to DMC members in 493 Union DMCs. Other activities include ensuring bi-monthly meetings are held, and facilitating meetings.

Key Observations and Findings

Union Parishad

The Union Parishad has been placed in a central position in the overall implementation strategy of SHOUHARDO. The Union Parishad fulfils two key roles: to benefit stakeholders; and to provide a supportive institution that reaches out to poor and extreme poor communities in the project areas. To these ends the institutional capacity building of Union Parishads has been a major activity for SHOUHARDO. There are currently 493 UPs involved in the program. Altogether, 6,888 elected representatives received training on various governance and human rights issues, which included roles and functions of standing committees.

The study team observes that the overall capacity of UPs for being responsive to the needs and demands of Poor and Extreme Poor communities has increased in the visited sites. This is evidenced for example through a higher awareness of the status of the Poor and Extreme Poor, and the allocation of budgets for projects identified by Poor and Extreme Poor communities. For example, in Uria the Parishad introduced an open budgeting system that allows its citizens to examine and comment on the proposed allocation of budgets.

In the sites visited the UPs conduct monthly coordination meeting of the Parishad regularly. The UP Chairmen and members keep contact with and monitor the activities of union level government service providers e.g. Sub-Assistant Agriculture Officer, Health Assistant and Livestock Assistants. UPs also prepared Risk and Resource Maps, under the disaster preparedness component of SHOUHARDO.

The team also finds that, in the sites visited, that standing committees however are not yet functional. Standing Committees are important for enacting UP decisions. Most of the members in Uria, Kewarejore union failed for example to name the committees when they were asked. They also reported that the meetings of different standing committees do not take place regularly.

This finding appears to be indicative of what might be happening elsewhere, and is something which SHOUHARDO is seeking to address. Recognising the importance of Standing Committees and their relative inaction, SHOUHARDO undertook national level advocacy on the issue, resulting in the GoB issuing a gazette notification to all UPs stressing the roles and functions of Standing Committees

In one of the sites visited UP members had received training on more than one occasion and several (13 out of 21) have experience of more than 10 years of membership in the Parishad. This suggests in the sites visited that there has been relatively little change in the attitude and practices among UP Members and Chairs regarding the role of Standing Committees. The Standing Committees are not considered as an important decision making body amongst the UP leaders. This observation illustrates the point that while training and awareness raising is important, affecting change in attitudes and beliefs can be difficult.

It is observed in the sites visited that the knowledge and attitude of Women Members was strong. Ms. Meherose Begum of Kewarejore reports: "I am the Chair of *Nari O Shishu Nirjatan Protirodh* committee. We sit regularly and review women's problems". Ms. Zorina Begum of Uria also reports that she takes part in *shalish* very often. Women members have been found prompt, confident and aware.

Travel distances however in remote areas is an issue. It is evident that many of the UP members do live in remote areas, far away from the UP headquarters and they do not receive financial assistance to participate in the meeting. Moreover, the resource distribution decisions are not made in the Standing Committees. Thus, there are few good reasons for members to value it.

It is noteworthy that besides Standing Committees there are several other committees such as *Nari O Shishu Nirjatan Protirodh* Committee (Committee for Resisting Violence Against Women), and the Union Disaster Management Committee (UDMC). These committees appear to be more active than Standing Committees.

In the three locations visited, the team finds little evidence of the participation of Poor and Extreme Poor communities in UP decision making. Standing Committees and Special Committees are the formal mechanisms that can accommodate external members in the formal decision making bodies and it is also found that VDC members are given membership in one Standing Committee. However, their participation does have little impact as Standing Committees are not functioning in the first place. Some members were found less confident to raise their demands and needs to the Chairmen or Members. "*amma goreeb manoosh, amma ki unader samne kich koite pari* (we are poor, should we question them)?" said one woman in Kewarejore.

Regarding accountability, the situation is similar in the sites visited. In fact, there may be probably currently no formal way for making UP leaders accountable to the Poor and Extreme Poor, something which SHOUHARDO, in the sites visited, is encountering.

Pourashava

SHOUHARDO took an innovative approach to work with urban local government bodies, namely building partnerships for better accountability and action. The study team finds this approach, in the urban settlement visited, an effective one to build the capacity of Pourashava officials and elected representatives in one hand, and on the other hand to seek to ensure sustainable interventions from the project. SHOUHARDO's partnership with Bhairab Pourashava demonstrates a positive reciprocal relationship that has been developed between the project and the city council. The field facilitator of SHOUHARDO reports, "while we were constructing drainage many local people resisted as they didn't want the drain to pass through their land. Pourashava councillors convinced the local elites and in some cases they used their legal authority".

In return, SHOUHARDO provides the Pourashava with financial support to build infrastructure, as well as capacity building support in the project community. SHOUHARDO receives technical and political support for its project and the Pourashava gains financial strength. Because of the reciprocity, the Pourashava owns the project and that has resulted in higher levels of engagement of the Pourashava leaders in project activities.

The Pourashava in the settlement visited is now more responsive to the needs of the slum dwellers. The Pourashava Standing Committees are also reasonably functional. The Ward Councillors have received training provided by SHOUHARDO. They are aware of their roles and responsibilities, and of the functions of Standing Committees.

The City Council provides water supply and primary health services to slums. It is found better prepared to face hazard risks such as floods and fire. Health Workers visit the slums regularly. Bhairab Pourashava has recently staged fire-fighting in participation with community people. In brief, service delivery has improved.

Communication between the elected representatives and marginalized communities has been strengthened through project activities. They now have easy access to the Ward Commissioners. Every year components from CAP are being incorporated into the Pourashava budget and are being jointly implemented by the Pourashava and SHOUHARDO.

There have not been many formal channels of participation for the Poor and Extreme Poor in the decision making process, however. Two members from SDC have been co-opted in two special committees of the Pourashava.

Village and Slum Development Committee (VDCs/SDCs)

Village Development Committee (VDC) and Slum Development Committee (SDC) are formed at the community level - the former is for rural and the latter is for urban areas. The structure and functions however are the same. Both organizations are formed by

primary beneficiaries (households) in their respective community. In effect, these organizations serve two purposes: primarily, to represent the interests of the beneficiaries to the government and project duty-bearers; and secondly to act as a tool of community mobilization and thereby a vehicle for project implementation for SHOUHARDO. Community members elect an executive committee of 11 members including one Chair and one Secretary from among themselves.

Benefits to the community

During the field work the study team observed, across the two rural and one urban site visited, that as an approach to community mobilization and empowerment, the VDCs and SDC visited have been successful in improving conditions within the respective communities. For example, before SHOUHARDO, access to Service Providers in Kewarejore village was limited, and has since been strengthened with increased visits from Livestock Officers; and in Rishipatti infrastructure was poor, and has since been greatly improved.

Ms. Shaheda Begum, 32, a widow with four children, of Kewarejore village of Kewarejore union, Mithamon upazila reports, "*amar kichhui chhilo na, ekhon VDC er maddhome jahok konomote kheyte pore bacchte pari.* (I had nothing, now I have something to eat and cloth ourselves because of VDC support)". Ms. Shaheda is landless; she built a small hut on her relative's land. Two of her elder children have been sent to Dhaka for working as domestic workers. Two years back she used to migrate to Sylhet for at least six months in a year to make her living. Now, through the VDC, she received 4000 Taka and is running a petty business, and sends her younger children to a SHOUHARDO run ECCD center. She is now confident that they will survive and be able to bring up her children.

The story of Ms. Shaheda illustrates that in this case the VDC has been successful in mobilizing individual benefits for poor and marginalized women.

Likewise, in the same village, under the leadership of VDC the practice of open defecation has been abolished, and several roads connecting different parts of the village have been constructed with support from the UP. Importantly, the VDC in Kewarejore in collaboration with UP and villagers from adjacent villagers has built a 7.5 km flood protection embankment for which they are now able to protect their harvest from the early flood. It means the VDC has also successfully created collective goods for the community. Also, the overall level of awareness of VDC members on issues such as health and hygiene, dowry, girl's education and early marriage has risen.

The study team found similar impressions regarding the SDC in *Rishipatti* slum in Bhairab Pourashava. The respondents from Rishipatti reported that the living condition in the slum was worse in terms of poor sanitation, health, housing and education services to the community before the project began. The formation of the SDC was the first major intervention of SHOUHARDO. The entire community was mobilized through the SDC. The SDC has been successful in mobilizing the whole community towards achieving the collective goods such as building a flood protection wall, improved health and sanitation practices, and pre-schooling in the community. At the same time, the SDC has distributed

Income Generating Activity (IGA) inputs including cash support for almost all of the community members. Therefore, the overall living standard for the whole community has increased to a significant level which is far better than before.

The SDC has prepared a Risk and Resource Map (RRM) and a Community Action Plan (CAP). Since there has not been any major disasters to hit the community in the last two years, the community has happily not had the need to apply the RRM in a real situation. However, the RRM is well known among the SDC leaders and is placed in a visible location.

Kalasona VDC

The VDC is currently thinking about the next couple of months, and have allocated responsibility to various people on actions. The village is very prone to flooding and to protect themselves they have undertaken homestead and road raising and repaired the school.

All VDC members know how to store food and where the flood shelters are. They have good linkages with the UDMC through Shofi (a female volunteer) who created a resource map. Not everyone in the community however understands the technicality of the map, but they have an understanding of where to go and who should go into which shelter. The capacity however of shelters is limited, ie there is not enough space for everyone.

When asked what would improve or strengthen their VDC, Kalasona members prioritised the need for more support, improve quality of education (cash for education), office space, for VDC and for other SP, to improve linkages, and registration, for recognition and access to other services.

VDC/ SDC processes and functions

Community Participation in Formation

In Kewarejore a key informant described the process of VDC formation: "The VDC first started with the Upazila, then the chairman and there was a meeting with all community members where a village profile was formed. The VDC members were selected (by the community). They then developed a CAP to identify problems. The RRM was then made - one made in each ward level, they will then be put together."



Community Action Plan (CAP)

The VDC formation was therefore a 'top-led' effort in Kewarejore. The poor and extreme community really did not take a lead in decisions regarding the leadership; rather, at some point of time they endorsed it. To these ends it is not surprising that the study team finds at Kewarejore the VDC Chair is a rich - but pro-poor - local elite who has a career of about two decades of being a UP Chairman. Similarly, two other members, by economic category, do not represent the poor and the extreme poor; though "they are always acting on behalf of us," as one respondent commented.

The situation is different in Kalasona where the VDC leadership was elected by community members. The Executive Committee of VDC is elected by raising hands which, according to the VDC, happens every two years. At Kalasona the VDC is divided into four separate sub committees with each committee taking on specific responsibilities. They are health, communication, shelter and management.

The study team visited one SDC in Bhairab Pourashava. This SDC is found to be very organized and active. Ms. Shuktara Rani, a SDC member, reports that, "we all community members came together on a day and had meeting in presence of CARE brothers and selected the committee leaders". During our household interview the team finds all of them know who is the chair and secretary of the executive committee of SDC, which is an indication the leaders were selected in a participatory manner.

Linkages

In Kalasona village VDC we found good linkages with Service Providers. For example, the Livestock Committee helped community members to vaccinate their cattle. These links appear to be stronger in this village than the other two locations visited. They hold an Annual General Meeting (AGM) and bi-monthly meetings, and additional emergency meetings if anything else arises.

In Kewarejore the VDC has a strong network with good links to government service providers. One member of the executive committee of the VDC stated, "we brought the Upazila Agriculture Officer to this village with the support from CARE. Now he visits us

often. Any time we can call him.” Similarly, the VDC has established a network with the Livestock Department and Upazila Health Complex.

Local Elite and Power Relations

The study team observed the relation between local elites and VDC/SDC. The power relations vary across the three sites visited.

In Kewarejore the VDC is strong and has every indication of building on its successes. An issue however concerns the pros and cons of the VDC make up, on which as mentioned the former UP Chair currently sits. On the plus side the presence of such a powerful figure provides a strong power base for the VDC to achieve results. On the other side however, the risk is that existing power structures are reinforced, leading to a lesser voice of those in the community who are already less empowered. In discussion with field staff on this issue, the prevailing view was that the presence of a mixed group in the VDC was a strength, providing opportunities for building greater cohesion among village members.

The SHOUHARDO MTR discusses its own findings based on a study of 30 VDCs/SDCs. They recognised the benefits within some committees of engaging non-poor members, for example, “if they are able to facilitate the committee’s own growth in confidence and ability to undertake such initiatives on their own⁸”. However, they also found that, “the more homogeneous committees (i.e. uniformly poor or a minority ethnic group) were more likely to develop effective committees⁹”.

Similarly the Thematic Study on Community Empowerment (Jahan and Magar, 2009) found that at least three of the five VDC/SDCs the researchers visited were “dominated by non-poor i.e. key position holders and decision makers are non-poor” (page 4). They concluded that, “apparently sympathetic pro-poor elites of the community may in fact become patrons for the poor and extreme poor. As a result, instead of breaking the unequal power structure, they may reinforce and sustain it. In four of five sites, other than dominant non-poor VDC/SDC leaders, VDC/SDC members could not adequately answer the questions related to their collective level agency and relationships. Instead, they frequently referred to the non-poor leaders for answering such questions” (page 4).

Rights and Entitlements

The team finds in the three visited field sites that the VDC and SDC leaders are aware of the roles and responsibilities of government service providers. They have their contacts and invite them to visit communities when problems arise. However, some of the wider community members were found to be less aware of their rights and entitlements, e.g. how much rice or wheat they are entitled to get from the VGD/VGF program; or what is the amount of stipend (under food for education) girls should they get from the government school. Community members also indicated that they feel that they are not

⁸ SHOUHARDO MTR (2007), page 10

⁹ SHOUHARDO MTR (2007), page 10

able to question the local elites (e.g. Chairmen, Members) or government service providers, due to their own self confidence in relation to established hierarchy.

This finding indicates that, although the VDCs and SDC visited have enhanced awareness of the members, improved health sanitation practices and infrastructure, they have not as yet been successful in making them aware of their rights and entitlements and existing uneven power relations within their respective wider communities.

The Thematic Study on Community Empowerment (Jahan and Magar, 2009) provides an explanation. They found that, “the poor perceive this unequal power structure as a given phenomenon. Thus, when the poor approach local elites, the implicit hierarchical aspect of their relationship does not decline”. Jahan and Magar (2009, 5) also discuss the potential results on a community, “in sites where the SDC/VDC leaders are in a better economic and social position than that of most SHOUHARDO participants, the pace of positive pro-poor change has been slower.”

Project Advisory and Coordination Committee (PACC)

The PACC is an innovative approach to attain better coordination and accountability. The PACC acts as the advocacy forum for SHOUHARDO. The national PACC, chaired by the Secretary of the Local Government Division (LGD), is attended by senior representatives from 11 participating ministries and four GoB Departments¹⁰. The PACC has Divisional, District, Upazila and City Corporation level bodies. The PS Chairmen also attend this PACC at the District level. Upazila and District level PACCs have been renamed the Upazila SHOUHARDO Coordination Committee and District SHOUHARDO Coordination Committee. The Divisional level coordination committee is relatively less active.

SHOUHARDO's FY2008 Results Report (page 13) states, “good progress has been made with the PACCs. Of notable achievement are the discussions held at the National PACC which prompted the GoB to issue a government circular (gazette) stressing the importance of the ‘Roles and Functions’ of the UP Standing Committees. This is a significant achievement, not only within the SHOUHARDO working area, but at a national level as a ‘systemic’ change has been brought about where the Standing Committees are now mandated to operate”.

Despite the significant achievement at the national level¹¹, the study team focused only on the USCC and DSCC to understand the role of such bodies in ensuring accountability of service providers. The team found that in Fulchhori Upazila the USCC is very active. The

¹⁰ The level of participation of GoB ministries and departments is another barometer of success. At the start of SHOUHARDO, there were ten ministries and three GoB Departments as part of the National PACC. By FY 2008, this had expanded to thirteen Ministries and four GoB Departments.

¹¹ A meeting of the research team with the national PACC was planned, but was subsequently cancelled. This was because the incoming Secretary of the Local Government Division was new to his post and hence had little knowledge to offer the team

UNO and other government officials put value to the USCC. They sit in meetings every two months.

The team also met two DSCCs at District Commissioner's Offices in Gaibandha and Kishoregonj. The coordination committees at Upazila and District level appeared to have generated better relationships between the government and the project officials. The forum reviews project activities by the government officials. It provides government officials with the chance to know more about the project activities. Indeed, they also respond to various problems faced by the SHOUHARDO or its partners in the field in implementation of their activities.

The study identifies two possible concerns regarding the Upazila and District Coordination Committees. Firstly, the sustainability of such a committee after the project ends, and secondly, the implementation of some of the decisions taken by the committee. One UNO said that, "we have a monthly coordination meeting at the Upazila, so I don't think we need one more once the project is over". Similarly, the Gaibandha DC reports that "they hardly look at the USCC meeting resolutions." It may be therefore that some GoB may give little importance this kind of forum.

Empowerment, Knowledge and Transformative Action (EKATA) groups

A key element concerning capacity concerns the building and use of social capital to strengthen and promote reliance on fellow householders. The study finds in the sites visited very strong social capital among members of EKATA groups. EKATA members were carrying out a variety of activities, e.g. helping members to learn to write. Also to build confidence: several members stated to the international research team members that, before EKATA, they would not have had the confidence 'to speak to foreigners.'



Rishipatti EKATA group

Concerning marginalised women, we found in Rishipatti that those interviewed had benefited generally from community improvements, e.g. from flood protection measures leading to reduced flood and also improved environments.

However, some of the more marginalised women interviewed in Rishipatti were unable to access the EKATA group, due to age and/or circumstance. Four widows were interviewed. Three were elderly and living with their families. They were not members of EKATA, but all stated that they would like to join. One had been told that she was too old to join by a member of the group; another had been invited but had not yet taken up the offer to join. Two of the widows stated that they were cared for by their families, one living with her sons and another taking turns to live with each of her respective three sons and their families in monthly cycles.

A third elderly widow however, living with her son and his wife, was clearly distressed. In tears she reported to the researchers that she was neglected and ignored by her immediate family.

A fourth, younger widow, and the mother of three young children (photo below) had been invited to join EKATA, but said that she was unable to attend meetings at the times they met (3-5 pm each day) because she was working as a maid at that time. Her house was the most humble in the immediate neighbourhood. It was the impression of the researchers who interviewed her that she was especially struggling to maintain her children and herself in difficult circumstances.



Young widow and her two of her children, Rishipatti

While the EKATA groups visited therefore are displaying clear and substantial benefits in terms of their achievements, an issue may concern the inclusion of more marginalised women, who may not be able to attend meetings because of work commitments or say infirmity.

Magar and Jahan's 2009 Thematic Review on Women's Empowerment found that, "EKATA's relationships to external actors such as Standing Committees, VDC, and the Union Parishad vary. When elite men are represented in the VDC or Union Parishad, EKATA members often fall back in an acquiescent role, rather than claiming their rights" (page 5).

Recommendations

The following recommendations concern how systems and approaches can be improved for future programming, and are in relation to CARE Bangladesh's Impact statements and impact groups, which are as follows:

1. The Most Socially, Economically and Politically Marginalized Women are empowered
2. People in the 'lowest' category of the wellbeing ranking (as assessed by poor rural communities), especially those people trapped in a set of unequal power relations, sustainably overcome the barriers that prevent the fulfilment of their rights
3. The Most Marginalized Groups in urban areas have secure and more viable livelihoods and are increasingly treated as equal citizens by the state and society
4. The most vulnerable people and communities prone to disasters and environmental change build resilient livelihoods.

Recommendations are as follows:

- To build long term change, ensure SDCs and VDCs are made up of, and represent, Poor and Extreme Poor community members. To these ends VDCs and SDCs need constitutions and formal mechanisms to reduce the risk of co option by local established elites
- Explore approaches to strengthen SDCs and VDCs, for example through government and/or community-led formalization and/or federation. A VDC/SDC forum could be held to discuss options
- For SDCs and VDCs, provide/facilitate training in management skills, eg negotiation, record keeping, consensus building and conflict resolution to achieve stronger and more effective entities
- To strengthen SDCs and VDCs, consider continuation funding for CAPs that are managed by SDCs and VDCs, for example via a competitive grants scheme, administered by CARE in partnership with UPs
- Ensure the most marginalized within PEP communities have access to safety net support, eg monthly cash support for widow, PWDs, freedom fighters, VGD and VGF etc

- Encourage EKATA groups to seek out and engage with the most marginalised women in their communities, eg widows and those unable to attend sessions due to work commitments
- Strengthen the UP as the institutional focal point for improved local level governance, with stronger and more effective upward and downward linkages, in particular to the Upazila level
- Strengthen the functioning of Standing Committee, e.g. through continued national level advocacy, for example for resource increase, regular interaction with UP bodies and Union coordination forum
- Initiate advocacy for including the Union/Upazila level government officials with a status of 'member secretary' of the respective standing committees at the UP
- Increase and strengthen partnerships that focus on the most marginalised with and between local government bodies, in particular with Union Parishads.

Annex one

GOVERNANCE MATRIX FINAL

Key Institutions/ stakeholders		Institutional mobilization/Governance/Accountability Dimensions				
		Accountability	Transparency	Participation	Access to Services	Changes in the local power structure
Local Government Bodies	Union Parishad	<p>If the UP members are accountable to the communities/ Extreme poor, women</p> <p>How demands are transferred to the next level e.g. Upazila</p>	<p>If the UP key decisions e.g. budget are accessible to the poor, women</p> <p>Communities aware of UP activities</p>	<p>Whether EP, women are incorporated in standing committees and General Committees e.g VAW committee</p> <p>Integration of poorer women</p> <p>VDC/SDC members on formal standing committees</p> <p>Change in attitude/behaviour towards poor</p>	<p>Whether the UP has pro-poor service provision</p> <p>Advocacy for enhanced services for poor and extreme poor</p>	

Key Institutions/ stakeholders	Institutional mobilization/Governance/Accountability Dimensions				
	Accountability	Transparency	Participation	Access to Services	Changes in the local power structure
Pourashava	<p>If the Pourashava members are accountable to the communities/ Extreme poor, women</p> <p>Service providers accountable</p>	<p>If the Pourashava key decisions e.g. budgets are accessible to the poor, women</p>	<p>Whether EP, women are incorporated in standing committees</p> <p>Commitment to pro-poor development</p> <p>Integration of poorer women</p> <p>Change in attitude/behaviour towards poor</p>	<p>Whether the Pourashava has pro-poor service provision</p> <p>Service providers accountable</p>	<p>How many poor are elected in Pourashava/how many poor are incorporated in standing committees</p>
Project Advisory Coordination Committee (PACC)	<p>How engaged in process</p>	<p>Strategy and intent clear to others (communities)</p>	<p>Manner of engagement with others (communities)</p>	<p>Improved linkages with community structures and/or households and most</p>	

Key Institutions/ stakeholders	Institutional mobilization/Governance/Accountability Dimensions				
	Accountability	Transparency	Participation	Access to Services	Changes in the local power structure
				marginalized women Benefits from advocacy	
Village Development Committee (VDC)/Slum Development Committee (SDC)	Linkages with VDC/SDC	Knowledge and perception of VDC/SDC	'informal' power structures? Bazar Committee SMC Parents Teachers Association Engagement with VDC /SDC	Awareness of legal provisions, eg around land, fishing, local government Negotiating for improved services and/or resources Engagement in local groups, eg UDMCs Enactment of CAPs (link to DP thematic study)	(Successful) engagement with service providers, government, NGOs Demanding entitlements and/or rights Impact of VDC/SDC on local power structure Impact on existing power structure Conflict??

Key Institutions/ stakeholders	Institutional mobilization/Governance/Accountability Dimensions				
	Accountability	Transparency	Participation	Access to Services	Changes in the local power structure
Village/slum (local community)	<p>CAPs beneficial</p> <p>Attitude towards girls education, women employment</p>	<p>Knowledge</p> <p>Entitlements</p>	<p>Influencing decision making (any/all levels)</p>	<p>Negotiating for improved services and/or resources</p> <p>Better access to services, eg health care</p> <p>Access to information that improves livelihoods</p>	<p>Women's position in the household, power over resources/ decision making</p> <p>Demanding entitlements and/or rights</p>
Households	<p>Hold service providers to account</p> <p>CAPs beneficial and accessible</p> <p>Inclusion of most marginalized women</p>	<p>Clear leadership mechanisms and processes</p>	<p>Influencing decision making (any/all levels)</p> <p>Linkages to regional/ national women's networks</p> <p>Women's group</p>	<p>Negotiating for improved services and/or resources</p> <p>Access to information that improves livelihoods</p>	<p>In positions of influence and/or power in community</p> <p>Participation in SMCs/PTAs</p> <p>Demanding entitlements and/or</p>

Key Institutions/ stakeholders	Institutional mobilization/Governance/Accountability Dimensions				
	Accountability	Transparency	Participation	Access to Services	Changes in the local power structure
				<p>Better access to services, eg health care</p> <p>Enhanced access to schools and markets</p> <p>Access/ mobilize resources (women's groups)</p>	<p>rights</p> <p>Greater voice in policy, e.g. on reproductive rights</p>
Most marginalized women (EKATA)	Improved Accountability	<p>Improved transparency</p> <p>Information about the inputs and supplies under different NBDs</p>	<p>Awareness of roles and responsibilities of NBDs</p> <p>Entitlements</p>	<p>Increased access</p> <p>Confidence, Perception of services</p>	<p>Bias to the local rich</p> <p>Bias to the most marginalized women</p>

Annex two

Programme of activities

Date	Activity	People met with
16-22 May	Orientation in CARE office Meetings Key informant interviews Finalisation and agreement of research methodology Desktop research	Senior team, CARE HQ USAID 6 x key informants
23 May	Travel to Rangpur	
24 May	Presentation and discussion with CARE team, Rangpur office Fieldwork, Kalasona village, meetings with: Community VDC Executive Committee Community focus group discussion Volunteers Village beneficiaries Key informant interviews	18 staff from CARE and SKS (PNGO), including Regional Coordinator, RPM, PM, livelihoods and governance TM, HA TM, 70 village members 6 members, 3 male, 3 female 20 females 8 volunteers, 4 male and 4 female 17 members 1 female DV
25 May	Fieldwork, Kalasona village, meetings with: Government service providers, UDMC Members, Uria Union Parishad Key informant interview Upazila SHOUHARDO Coordination Committee	17 members, 3 female, 14 male RTM, TM, HA UP Chair; Upazila Nirbahi officer and Chair, USCC 7 members, 1 female, 6 male
26 May	Household interviews	6x household interviews
27 May	Debrief with CARE team Travel to Kishoregonj, Haor region	11 staff
28 May	Orientation meeting, CARE field office Fieldwork, Rishipatti, Bhairab, meetings with: DVs SDC EKATA group Savings group	5 members, 3 male, 2 female 18 members, women

	FGD	14 females
29 May	Fieldwork, Rishipatti, Bhairab Household interviews Focus group discussion	12 x household interviews
30 May	CARE team group discussion Pourashava PDMC meeting	6 CARE staff including Regional Coordinator Mayor and 8 councillors of Bhairab Pourashava 14 PDMC members
31 May	Fieldwork, Kewarejore village, meetings with: EKATA group VDC Household interviews Key informant interviews	30 women 12 members 3 households 2 key informant interviews
1 June	Fieldwork, Kewarejore village, meetings with: UP Government service providers DVS Household interviews	11 members and Chairman 4 members, 4 male, 1 female 6 DVs from 3 Wards, 4 male, 2 female 8 household interviews
2 June	Meeting with DSCC Debrief with CARE team Return to Dhaka	District Coordinator district commissioner (DC) ADC (general) DDLG ADC (Revenue) Exec engineer Regional Program Manager and 8 CARE staff

Sites Visited

Location	Population	Disaster related issues	DP related interventions
Char region Kalasona Village, Uria Union, Gaibanda District, Rangpur	365 households	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flood 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DVs formation Active UDMC Active VDC Enactment of CAP ADPC forecasting and early warning pilot project Plinth Raised HHs
Urban slum Rishipatti, Bhairab, Kishoregonj District	123 households	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flood Fire 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DVs formation PDMC SDC Enactment of CAP Early warning initiatives
Haor region Kewarjore village, Kewarjore Union, Kishoregonj District	445 households	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Haor flood (May/June – Nov) Flash flood 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mound flood erosion protection walls DVs formation Active VDC Enactment of CAP Active UDMC Early warning initiatives