

Sharique Case Study: Gender Responsive Budgeting

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Acronym List

BIGD	BRAC Institute of Governance and Development
BRDB	Bangladesh Rural Development Board
BUPF	Bangladesh Union Parishad Forum (BUPF)
CORBEC	Committee on Reforms in Budgeting and Expenditure Control
DDLGN	Democratisation, Decentralisation and Local Governance
FMRP	Financial Management Reform Programme
GRB	Gender Responsive Budgeting
IDS	Institute of Development Studies
IPF	Institute of Public Finance
LFPR	Labour Force Participation Rate
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transsexual
LGI	Local Government Institutions
LGSP	Local Government Support Programme
MMR	Maternal Mortality Ratio
MoLGRD&C	Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives
MP	Member of Parliament
MTBF	Medium Term Budget Framework
NAPD	National Academy of Planning and Development
NILG	National Institute of Local Government
PFM	Public Financial Management
RCGP	Recurrent, Capital, Gender and Poverty
RIBEC	Reforms in Budget and Expenditure Control
SDC	Swiss Development Cooperation
SIB	Socially Inclusive Budgeting
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UP	Union Parishad

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We would like to thank all of our key informants, especially the elected representatives of Gogram Union Parishad and Kismotgonkoir, various NGO, research organisations and civil society members who have contributed to Gender Responsive Budgeting both nationally and locally and officials of the Bangladesh Swiss Development Cooperation office and Helvetas for their valuable inputs which contributed to the completion of this case study.

1. Introduction:

This case study was prepared as part of a learning process on gender-responsive and socially inclusive budgeting with the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex, and Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation. The specific objective of the case study was to explore what works in effectively integrating gender responsive budgeting practices within the local governance process, particularly on the expenditure side of public finance management.

Bangladesh and Kirghizstan were selected as country case studies. In Bangladesh, the Sharique local governance programme, which works to incorporate participatory and gender responsive budgeting within the local government, was selected. From the very beginning Sharique had a pro-poor approach, worked in partnership with local government bodies, and focused on both the 'demand' and 'supply' side of governance. It has evolved over years and currently is in its fourth phase; the continuity and intensity of the approach makes it an interesting case to document.

Methodology:

The case study design was developed collaboratively by IDS and the BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD) with inputs and feedback received from Helvetas, Dhaka Office. The latter also provided names and contacts of key informants and access to relevant project documents. Data collection methods included secondary document review and key informant interviews. Project design documents, monitoring, evaluation and appraisal reports and state policy documents on local government were reviewed for relevant information on GRB.¹ In total fourteen key informant interviews were conducted. In Dhaka (head quarter level and the capital) the interviewees included: the Sharique project staff, SDC Dhaka office staff, Sharique project partners, former officials at the Ministry of Finance, and civil society actors working on GRB. (The latter interviewees were included to develop a fuller picture of GRB activities in Bangladesh and to understand the kinds of allies and networks the Sharique programme is involved in). Key informant interviews and participant observation was carried out at the selected field sites: Gogram Union in Godagari Upzala and Kismotgonkoir Union in Durgapur Upzila in Rajshahi (Northern part of Bangladesh).

The two Union Parishads (UP- the lowest tier of local government) were selected based on their performance on GRB work in phase three of the programme out of the 207 Unions where Sharique project is being implemented. The unions were also selected taking into account the following criteria: poverty level; presence of minority groups (including indigenous groups), distance from the city of Rajshahi (details of sites provided later). Interviews conducted at the field level² included the current and former Union Parishad (UP) Chairpersons of the selected unions, the current UP Secretary, the UP members elected in the general seats, and women members

¹ List of documents reviewed in Annex A

² Map in Annex B

elected to the reserved seats.³ We also met with the beneficiaries of support schemes which were identified through GRB processes. We observed group meetings being conducted at the Union Parishad office to supplement our findings. The time frame of the fieldwork was from March 25 to April 4, 2018. As a part of the validation process we held a debriefing at the Helvetas Office on April 4th 2018, which provided the chance to verify findings with the Sharique project staff and the Helvetas team.

The report is structured in the following manner. Section 2 discusses the national context which includes the system of governance, the constitutional and legal framework, the policy framework for GRB and how that fits within the broader public finance reform process. Also as part of the national context we will discuss the present status of women in terms of the progress made on key indicators. Section 3 presents the Sharique project itself, its objectives and target group and how GRB fit within the overall programme. Section 4 provides the description and analysis of the GRB/SIB experience of Sharique including processes, monitoring system and GRB activities; and results and impacts of the programme. Finally section 5 presents the lessons learnt from implementation of GRB under Sharique programme.

2. National Context:

Bangladesh is a lower-middle income country, located in South Asia, with 6 percent annual growth rate. In recent years it has experienced significant levels of reduction in extreme poverty. Ready-made garments and remittance are the two key income earning sectors. Bangladesh has made significant gains in social development, particularly in education and health. Aid dependency has dramatically reduced over the years although a significant portion of the annual development budget is provided by the donors. Bangladesh also has a large number of non-governmental organisations that deliver services and also engage in awareness raising and advocacy (Hossain, 2017).

Local Governance system

In the 1980s, systematic measures were taken to introduce decentralisation which led to the creation of the Upazila system (i.e., second tiers of local government –the sub districts). The Union has been a functional tier for a longer period compared to the other tiers. It is the lowest tier (shown below):

Table 1: Tiers of Local Government

Tier	Numbers
Zila (district councils)	64
Upazila (subdistrict councils)	487
Union Parishad	4573

³ List of KII in Annex B

The Union Parishad, Upazila Parishad, Zila Parishad (district), Municipalities and City Corporations are the local government bodies (LGBs) under the Local Government division of Ministry of Local Government. These are elected bodies. Despite the elaborate decentralised structures, the centralised control over resource allocation and decision making remains strong. Given the 'partyarchal' system in Bangladesh (Hassn, 2013) means that party control over local bureaucracy (even at the local level) is a key factor that influences the effectiveness of the bureaucracy and elected officials to be able to deliver services.

Each Union is composed of nine wards. Each Union Parishad has: one chairperson (elected by all wards of the union), nine general members (one from each ward), and three female members in reserved seats (3 general wards create a reserve constituency). Thus, each ward is represented by an elected ward member and a female member elected in the reserve seat.

The UPs are mandated to deliver services such as conflict resolution (arbitration), issuing birth certificate, character certificate, and nationality certificates and to coordinate with the local state agencies over services such as road maintenance, water supply, electricity, drainage, waste removal etc (Rahman et. al 2016). The main sources of revenue for local level Union Parishads are tax collection and Local Government Support Programme (LGSP) Block Grants. The UPs also receive allocation from the central government for social protection schemes and grants for special programmes such as water and sanitation.⁴

Legal Framework on local government

The Bangladesh Constitution includes provisions for local government (Chapter 3, part IV Articles 59 and 60) explicitly stating that 'every administrative unit shall be entrusted to bodies composed of persons elected in accordance with law' (Article 59) and outlining their functions and conferring power to collect taxes, prepare budgets and maintain funds. The Constitution also states that one of the functions of these local bodies relates to the preparation and implementation of plans relating to public services and economic development (Article 59, section 2c). Moreover, the local governance bodies referred to in Article 59 has the power to impose taxes for local purposes and to prepare budgets and maintain funds.

Bangladesh enacted various acts for devolution of power which include: the Local Government (Union Parishad) Act of 1997, the Upazilla Parishad Act of 1998, and the Zilla Parishad Act of 2000. However, there are contradictory laws and policies that restrict devolution of power and control to the local level. The 2009 Local Government (Union Parishad) Act introduced *ward shavas* and open budget meetings which gave legitimacy to participatory planning and budgeting.⁵ The 2009 Act made UPs more transparent through increased access to information

⁴ Gogram UP Chairman, 31st March 2017

⁵ Article 5 of the law stated that every ward must have two *shabas* or meetings each year to discuss development activities, current progress and annual reports. One of the women members elected to the reserve seats must be one of the advisors in the meeting.

in the form of a Citizen Charter which outlines the UP's responsibilities in terms of providing services (issuing documents and certificates) and rights of citizens.

Policy Framework for GRB:

The 1997 National Policy for Women's Advancement (amended 2011) stressed the need for representation of women within the national and local government. The Seventh Five year Plan reaffirms the Government's commitment to establishing strong local government institutions at various levels. The areas identified for strengthening included improved transparency, planning and budgeting capacity; ensuring mechanisms are in place to deepen participatory planning; and prioritisation of the needs of the poor. Among the proposed activities for the 7th Five Year Plan period GOB prioritises the consolidations of the acts, rules and laws under a local governance legal framework, building capacity of local government bodies, expanding the role of citizens' committees, strengthening the participation of citizens from different groups, including women and the poor, increasing citizens' role in planning, budgeting and monitoring.

Public Finance Reform processes and GRB at the national level

Public Finance management reform in Bangladesh can be dated back to 1989 when the Committee on Reforms in Budgeting and Expenditure Control (CORBEC) was formed. Since then various committee have been constituted and several projects such as the Reforms in Budget and Expenditure Control (RIBEC) and the Financial Management Reform Programme (FMRP) have been implemented. The Government has published the second Public Financial Management (PFM) Reform Strategy for the year 2016-2021 which aims to institutionalize the past achievements and strengthen the existing PFM practices.⁶ This has created an opportunity for engaging with the government on linking national level budgeting processes to the local level.⁷

At the national level, the work on demanding and developing a gender responsive budget analysis began long back with the involvement of various technical experts, international agencies, civil society organisations and gender activists.⁸ In Bangladesh, the Government not only carries out gender sensitive budget analyses (i.e. assessment of how budgets respond to differentiated needs of group) but has progressed to undertaking gender-sensitive formulation of the sectoral and national budgets (taking gender as a cross cutting criteria to plan activities and allocate resources).⁹ The three most important developments in respect of gender budgeting are as follows: a) the inclusion of gender and poverty analysis in the budget preparation phase as a part of the Mid Term Budget Framework (MTBF) ; b) the development of the Recurrent, Capital, Gender and Poverty (RCGP) Model or data base where all expenditures are

⁶ Public Financial Management (PFM) Reform Strategy 2016-2021 (http://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/page/710cb4b9_e331_4036_812e_8fb8e36cb2a0/PFM%20Reform%20Strategy%202016-21%20Final.pdf)

⁷ Interview, IPF, March 2018

⁸ Interview, former BIDS researchers; Interview, BNPS; Interview; Steps Towards Development, March 2018.

⁹ Interview, IPF and former Ministry of Finance Official, March 2018.

disaggregated to show the percentage of allocation that goes to women; c) the preparation of a gender budget report by the Ministry of Finance that accompanies the national budget.¹⁰ The Ministry of Finance has been driving the GRB agenda as a part of the MTBF process which began in FY 2006 with four ministries and now covers all the ministries. It requires all ministries to explicitly relate their budget proposals with the policy priorities of the government and the ministries' mandates. Line ministries are asked to prepare their budget proposals in two parts: part one outlining the strategic aspects and part two the resource component. The ministries are asked to give explicit consideration about the impacts of their budgeting decisions on women and the poor (budget Circular 1, MoF). The ministries have to identify the impact of the strategic objectives on poverty reduction and women's advancement and assign a percentage to each of their programmes indicating what percentage of the expenditure is expected to have a direct benefit for the poor or women. A set of 14 criteria are used to assess if the impacts are pro-women.

Starting in 2003 the Ministry of Finance took the initiative to establish a monitoring and reporting facility on financial resources allocated to poverty and promotion of gender equity. The system allows users to enter estimates in terms of percentages for recurrent, capital, poverty and gender information. The system provides a yearly trend analysis by ministry for recurrent, capital, gender and poverty expenditures.¹¹

In fiscal year 2009/10 for the first time the Finance Minister placed before the Parliament a report analysing the budget from a gender perspective. The report in FY 2011/12 covered twenty ministries. This report continues to be produced but the technical analysis and inputs into the preparation of the budget analysis is not as thorough. There have been demands from the women's movement actors that there should be an analysis of actual allocations and expenditures against the gender budget allocations. However, the government stated that this was not possible with the kind of financial data management systems in place.¹² Actual expenditure data needs to be sex-disaggregated so that expenditures for women and men can be tracked and monitored. Also RCGP data base need to be updated periodically and assumptions made for calculations should also be reviewed and updated.¹³

Situation of Women in Bangladesh:

Bangladesh has made significant progress in several areas critical to gender equality. The country is on track to meet the Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education, with net enrolment rates of 98% for girls and 96% for boys in 2013.¹⁴ The maternal mortality ratio (MMR) was estimated to be 170 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births in 2013, less than

¹⁰ Interview, IPF; Interview former governor of Bangladesh Bank; March 2018

¹¹ Interview, IPF, March 2018.

¹² Interview, BNPS, March 2018

¹³ Interview IPF; March 2018; Interview former BIDS researcher; Interview, former Governor of Bangladesh Bank.

¹⁴ BANBEIS online Educational Database (<http://banbeis.gov.bd/data/index.php>), Basic Statistics/Statistics 2013/Summary Statistics and Key performance indicators/Participation indicators, Table 4.1.0.

one-third of the ratio of 550 in 1990.¹⁵ Women’s participation in the ready-made garments sector, and the importance of this sector to national exports and economic growth, has contributed to changed perceptions of women’s economic and public role.

In terms of women’s representation in decision making there has been a gradual increase. In Parliament there are 300 MPs and 50 reserved seats for women. At the local level (union) in 2011, 25% of all union parishad members were female although less than 1% of Chairmen of either the union parishads or the upazila parishads were women.

Table 2: Situation of Women

Category	Status
Representation in Parliament	18 percent (300 general seats; 50 seats are reserved)
Representation in local government	25 percent (each Union has 9 general seats and 3 reserved seats for women)
Literacy Rate	56 percent adult women
Labour Force Participation	35 percent.
Women’s Ministry Established	1979
Prevalence of domestic violence	high

Source: Nazneen et al. 2011

Despite progress in the condition and position of women a number of challenges remain and women face discrimination in a number of areas. For example violence against women is a major constraint for women’s political and economic participation, as is the non-recognition and non-valuing of most of women’s unpaid care work. In spite of tremendous progress in health two areas interrelated areas remain very problematic: early marriage and malnutrition among women and girls. Women at both local and national level are negatively affected by the prevailing political culture and find it difficult to adjust to it and express themselves or participate fully.

Definition of Socially Excluded Groups

The Bangladesh Constitution recognizes that although all citizens have equal rights the State may take special measures “for backward groups” which has been interpreted to mean women, ethnic minority, extreme poor and persons with disability. Sharique follows the definition of

¹⁵ WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA World Bank and United Nations Population Division Maternal Mortality Estimation Division. *Maternal mortality in 1990-2013, Bangladesh.*

socially excluded groups as defined by Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) which divides them into two categories:

- i) poor people defined as people who earn less than USD 1.25/day ¹⁶
- ii) Disadvantaged people defined as “people who are excluded or marginalised i.e. women, ethnic and religious minorities, people with special needs, LGBT, HIV/AIDS and TB affected, affected by climate change or natural disaster, abandoned elderly, etc.” (Swiss Cooperation Strategy Bangladesh 2013-17)¹⁷

The definition of socially excluded groups has changed over the programme’s life cycle. The changing definitions have been a challenge for the Sharique programme, as the staff had to develop a new set of indicators to measure how far they have been able to include the socially marginalised groups as their beneficiaries.

3. General Project description:

Sharique Local Governance programme is a project of Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) implemented by Helvetas. It has currently entered its fourth phase. The following table provides details of the time period and coverage area.

Table 3: Sharique Coverage

Phase/ Coverage	Year
Phase I (207 unions in four districts)	2006-2009
Phase II (207 Unions in four districts)	2009-2013
Phase III (total 207 unions; 77 new unions included in 2014 in four districts)	2013-2017
Phase IV (includes 167 new unions in two more districts)	2017-2019

Sharique’s objective is:

to contribute to the empowerment of local citizens to make and implement inclusive, gender sensitive and pro-poor collective choices about their lives and livelihoods through more democratic, transparent, inclusive and effective local government systems.

The **programme’s approach** is to work on both the *demand side (with the right holders)* and the *supply side (duty bearers)* on governance related issues.

On the supply side it works on:

¹⁶ “Official statistics are based on a “cost of basic needs” measurement methodology and define the poor as people who earn less than USD 1.25/day. Most Swiss-funded projects apply a more complex multi-dimensional understanding of poverty which takes into account elements of the local context. The target group of the Market Development portfolio is the “economically active poor”, who are likely to earn slightly more than USD 1.25/day

¹⁷ https://www.eda.admin.ch/dam/deza/en/documents/laender/cooperation-strategy-bangladesh_EN.pdf

- a) capacity building of the local government staff and elected representatives through training;
- b) engage with local representatives to perform their duties and roles according to the rules and procedures set out under the law;
- c) and engage with local and national level actors in dialogues to influence their practice using the learnings from the programme.

On the demand side, the programme facilitates capacity building of the citizens, mobilises citizens, particularly the poor and marginalised groups to engage in participatory spaces and processes at the local government level.

Sharique's **strategy** has been to strengthen various processes and procedures in the local government bodies that were mandated in the law but were not being implemented for lack of capacity, resources or follow-up and monitoring. This included ensuring that the UPs hold regular meetings, that the UP standing committees are functional, and that the UPs are able to generate revenue through tax collection, plan budgets, design projects and implement according to plan. The programme also aimed to increase accountability and transparency to the electorate by establishing the use of specific accountability tools and mechanisms such as information boards (on UP revenue and expenditure; annual plans etc), use of complaints boxes and social accountability mechanisms. The programme created space and opportunities for citizens to interact with the elected bodies and officials through various activities such as ward shavas and involvement of citizens' representation in standing committees.

In Phase IV, Sharique is aiming to institutionalise the programme and is working on building capacity of the government partners.

Target audience, partners and roles:

As mentioned earlier, the Sharique programme takes a specific approach to strengthening both supply and demand sides of local governance. The programme's **target audience** includes: citizens of the selected Union Parishads, their elected representatives and secretaries, government/ public service providers at the union level, Upazila Parishads, District and sub-district administrations, (Local) political party leadership and the Bangladesh Union Parishad Forum (BUPF). Sharique's works **in close cooperation** with government organisations such as National Institute of Local Governance (NILG) and partner NGOs. During phase III, Sharique partnered with 6 local NGOs to assist in implementation and BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD) to conduct research and advocacy. Close partnership with government agencies allowed the programme to present its learnings to the government and create opportunities for a wider cultural change.

In Phase IV, Sharique is collaborating with NILG under the Local Government Division, and National Academy of Planning and Development (NAPD) under the Ministry of Planning's to provide training to Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB) under the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives (MoLGRD&C). The Institute of Public Finance (IPF), an independent organisation established by the Ministry of Finance, along with

other development partners such as SDC and national civil society organisations (STEPS and Democracy Watch) will provide technical support for institutionalisation of the programme.

GRB/SIB position in the overall project:

Sharique's work on **GRB is a part of a more holistic approach to the strengthening of local governance**. The Sharique local governance project initially aimed to promote greater accountability and transparency at the Union level by involving the local community in the local governance process, specifically the budgeting process. Initially the focus was on creating an inclusive budgeting process, that later evolved into focusing on gender responsive budgeting activities.

Sharique programme staff pointed out that **inclusive budgeting included three key areas** of work:

- a) mobilising local community, including women and marginalised groups to be involved in the budgeting process;
- b) building capacity of the elected officials to plan budgets and to motivate them to share information;
- c) creating participatory space for citizens to discuss plans and budgets with the elected officials.

The staff were quick to point out that **gender comes into the process** through the following ways¹⁸:

- a) by ensuring participation of women in planning and budget process;
- b) by encouraging women representatives to highlight and address the needs of female constituents in the budget meetings;
- c) by tracking budget allocations targeted for women and socially marginalised groups.

It should be noted that the staff argued that these activities do not meet the expansive nature of GRB which requires one to track impact of budget spending and the focus of the programme has largely remained on participation.

4. GRB/SIB experience

Local Context

Both of the programme sites we visited were situated in Rajshahi, the Northern part of Bangladesh. Gogram, one of the union selected was a large union with a total population of 33,282. It was closer to the main road and the people were engaged in many diverse kinds of economic activities, including small businesses. Given that Gogram union also had a large

¹⁸ Interviews with Sharique programme staff in Dhaka; March 2018

village market, their levels of tax collection was higher compared to the national average.¹⁹ However it had a large number of Santal (ethnic minority) who were poor. Access to water given the arid nature of the area remained a key concern of the population. Kismotgonkoir, the other union selected, was of similar size, however much poorer as they did not have large markets or other revenue generating places within the union. The main livelihood of the people in this union was fishing²⁰. The population size was about 21,000 and while there were a large number of extreme poor within this union, the population was largely Bengali Muslim (see Annex D). In Gogram there were several hundred people who benefitted from the various social safety net schemes, while the number was very low for Kismotgonkoir. These schemes included: widow's pension, vulnerable group development (VGD-targets poor women); Vulnerable Group Feeding (targets extreme poor); old age pensions etc (see Annex D).

Programme Activities on GRB

The programme level activities in Gogram and Kismotgonkoir were similar. The previous section highlighted that the gender responsive budgeting activities are a part of Sharique's programme's inclusive budgeting work. There are several steps through which the Sharique programme staff ensure women's engagement in the budgeting process and prioritisation of demands made by women. The staff also track allocation made for addressing these demands (the following page uses the budget cycle diagram to illustrate the activities that take place during different stages of the cycle).

With the **right holders (local citizens)**, the programme staff in these unions started by mobilising the local community to attend ward shavas which is a space for citizens to interact directly with their elected representatives. The programme staff also conducted **separate meetings (or pre-meets)** with marginalised groups (indigenous groups in Gogram) and women to raise their awareness and also to strategise about the issues these groups may want raise at the ward level meetings. It should be noted that in these two unions, Sharique had introduced this practice much earlier, but the 2009 Act mandated that ward shavas were to be held at least twice a year, provided further legitimacy to the process. The ward shavas are conducted to identify priorities of each ward. The programme staff **ensure that the UP Secretary, elected ward members and the women member for that ward** are present during these meetings. The representation of women and disadvantaged groups are ensured in the ward shava so that they can make their own proposals and the various citizens groups present also can make proposals which benefit women.

After the ward level meetings the demand from different groups are collated and presented at the **open budget meeting which is held** at the UP office. This is where citizens of different wards are encouraged to participate to observe and participate in the process of compilation, screening and prioritisation of proposals from different wards. Women and marginalised groups are specifically encouraged by the programme staff to be present at these meetings. The

¹⁹ Interview, Gogram UP Chair and UP Secretary, March 2018

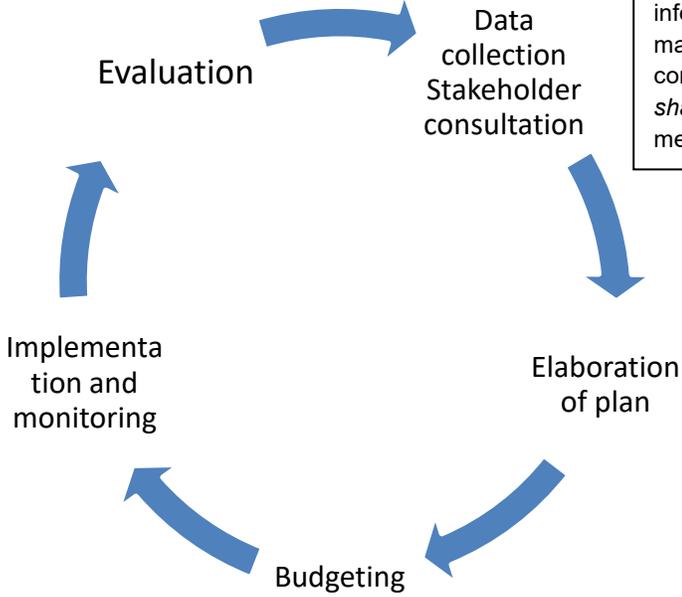
²⁰ Interview UP Chair, Kismotgonkoir, April 2018

budgets formulated at the open budget meeting is **revised after six months once the actual allocation from the government and tax collections are realized**. The revisions are made public. Once the allocations are made **the Sharique programme staff monitor the actual resource allocation for women and for disadvantaged groups** using the regular monitoring system set up to track the impact of the programme. This practice was conducted up to Phase III of the project.

The diagram on the next page graphically presents the process discussed above.

Regular evaluations are conducted. The results show that UPs in Sharique intervention areas allocated 10.17 % and 30.62 % of the budget to women and poor in 2015, respectively. Out of 10.17 %, 7.35 % was spent for women and 35.90 % spent for poor

Socially excluded men and women identified based on a set of criteria and are mobilised by staff and they are provided information. The marginalised groups and consulted through *ward shava* and open budget meetings



The demands of various groups are collated, prioritised and percentage of the budget allocated and spent for women and poor

Sharique was implemented through raising awareness, training (developing training modules) and capacity building of the elected officials. The project has specific indicators to measure specific outcomes which are monitored annually through annual monitoring reports

Priorities of women, disadvantaged groups and poor people are considered by listening to their demands in the ward meetings and including them in the budget formulation process

Monitoring on GRB

The Sharique program staff performed annual monitoring and evaluation based on specific indicators set for measuring outputs, outcome and impact of the programme. The performance monitoring targets (PMT) allowed for specific tracking of programme achievements—particularly in the area that focused on LGI practices (such as budget meetings being held, union council meeting being organised etc—see next section). On GRB, specific indicators developed so that a gender analysis of the allocation was possible. This is the last indicator used to measure the second outcome²¹ of Phase III which is the percentage of budget allocated and spent for women, disadvantaged and poor. According to the Sharique Annual Report 2015, about 10.17 % of the annual budget of UPs under the Sharique project was allocated to women (an increase from the 2014's 5.30 %) of which 7.35 was actually spent for women in 2015. Similarly, 30.62 % was allocated for the poor but 35.90% spent at the end of the year.²² Our interviews with the UP elected representatives confirmed that they found this form of analysis useful for their work. The staff also confirmed that the annual monitoring was effective in keeping their activities 'real.'²³

The monitoring on GRB for Phase IV will be different as the indicators will be measured at the impact level and not monitored regularly²⁴. One of the Impact indicators of the overall outcome of Phase IV measures the satisfaction of women, men, disadvantaged group and poor people with basic local governance services. Another indicator incorporates GIB/SIB by tracking the amount and percentage of UP annual budget spent on women, disadvantaged and poor (target being 12%, 2% and 30% respectively).²⁵ How effective these indicators will be is too soon to tell.

Results and Impacts

Making UP-Citizens engagement regular:

The overall impact of the programme (specifically for the two unions we studied) have been that during the programme's life cycle, ***the processes through which citizen's engaged with locally elected representatives have become a routine activity***. Although the 2009 local government legislation mentions the need to have two ward Shavas each year not all UPs follow this. However evaluation of Sharique programme reveals that in all 207 of the Sharique partner UPs ward shavas and open budget meetings were held. In both unions, the elected

²¹ Second outcome: LGI, in particular Union Parishads and Upazila Parishads, and line agencies in Sharique area implement their mandates in a more effective, transparent, accountable and inclusive manner

²² Sharique Annual Report 2015

²³ Interview, programme staff, Dhaka office; March 2018.

²⁴ Interview, SDC staff; Dhaka Office; March 2018.

²⁵ Phase IV Log Frame

members and the Secretaries interviewed pointed out that the budget making process had changed from being a closed process--something that the elected officials sat and prepared without consultation to an open one where citizen's effectively engaged. One elected members pointed out that 'consultation, engagement with the citizens, being open about the processes have become a natural process; a habit (*obhaysh*)—that will continue even after the programme ends. There is a cultural shift in the way we do things.'²⁶

Following are some of the key results from Phase I-III:

- All 207 of Sharique's partner UPs organized *ward shava* and open budget meetings;
- In 2016, a total of 479,822 citizens participated in ward shavas and 117,924 citizens in open budget meetings;
- 95% of Sharique partner UPs conducted Union Development Coordination Committee meetings regularly;
- 100% of Sharique partner UPs regularly conduct council meetings;

Increased Transparency

In both unions, under Sharique's facilitation the ***budgets were prepared*** at the beginning of the fiscal year, which is not the usual practice in many UPs. The budgets were then ***reviewed*** after a certain period to reflect actual resources allocated to the UP and tax collections realized.²⁷ A more realistic assessment and adjustment was made and these changes were made public. Our discussion with the beneficiaries revealed that ***budget information was readily available*** and local representatives more forthcoming about the work of the unions.²⁸ One of the former chairpersons interviewed stated that engagement with the programme made him understand the value of being transparent –that it reduced the risk of elected officials being accused of being corrupt and brought him closer to the people.²⁹ The beneficiaries we spoke to also confirmed that they were more aware about the activities undertaken by their union officials. They also pointed out that information boards and open meetings allow them to raise questions which they were not able to do before.³⁰

Increased capacity

Both the ***capacity of the citizens to demand answers*** and capacity of the union elected representatives have increased. The capacity of the citizens have increased through ***close engagement with the programme staff*** who provided information on their entitlements and also motivated them to engage in the local governance processes. In fact, we witnessed in Gogram, a group of indigenous people vociferously making demands to the UP Chairperson for

²⁶ Interview, women member, Gogram, March 2018

²⁷ Interview UP Chair and Secretary, UP women members; Gogram and Kismotgonkoir; March-April 2018

²⁸ Field notes Gogram.

²⁹ Former UP Chair, Kismotgonkoir; April 2018

³⁰ Field notes; Gogram.

better water supply to their area. Considering the social distance that existed between the current UP chair and the members of the poor indigenous community—this is definitely a big change. We also heard stories from the beneficiaries about the demands they made for livelihood and skills training from the union and that allocations of budgets for these activities were made later on.³¹

On the supply side, the union officials pointed out that the programme had **increased their capacity** by making them aware about the governance processes mandated in the law and increased their knowledge about the various regulations made in the law. The various **trainings** also increased their capacity for being able to understand central allocation, maintain records, and the use of different methods for information dissemination to the public. Their interviewees mentioned that their capacity was also increased through **learning visits** to other UPs who were doing specific things better than them (such as provision of water; collection of revenue etc).³²

In fact, Sharique (phase I –III) programme evaluation document reveals that the Sharique UPs have increased their own source revenues (from 2012/13): 19% increase in 2013/14; and 66% in 2014/15; and 45% in 2015/16 as a result of the stronger link between UPs and their citizens. In the two unions we studied, Gogram had made significant improvements in raising taxes whereas Kismotgonkoir had made improvements but not as well compared to Gogram. It should be noted that the recent elections have brought in a new chairperson and a new board, and we were informed by the beneficiaries and also former members that the UP was more active during the previous programme cycle (discussed later under challenges section).

Mobilising Women and Marginalised groups

In the unions we visited, women and socially-excluded groups (such as ethnic and religious minorities, abandoned elderly, differently-abled people) were **separately mobilised** by the programme staff and the elected officials. This was a time consuming process which needed many visits by the staff. The staff also involved women members elected to reserved seats and those volunteering with the programme to motivate these groups.

Awareness raising activities included explaining the role of the local government bodies, the entitlements of the citizens, the processes through which one can engage with the local government. It also focused on identifying the needs of the people and what the local government can do to address these needs. The female UP members we interviewed stated that at the beginning women were not motivated to join the meetings, but repeated attempts would lead women to engage with the process.³³

³¹ Field notes, Kismoptgonkoir, April 2018

³² Interview, UP Secretary, Gogram; March 2018; Interview, former UP Chair, Kismotgonkoir, April 2018

³³ Interview, women UP member, Gogram; interview, women UP member; march 2018; Kismotgonkoir; April 2018

There were specific **gender barriers to participation**, one being the timing of the meetings given women's responsibilities for unpaid care work. So times were set in a manner for ward level meetings that avoided the times when women were likely to be engaged in household tasks. These changes enabled women and join the meetings. In order to disseminate information to the marginalised groups and women, **public announcements** would be made in places where they were likely to be able to access it (i.e., not just in mosques and local markets where women do not go). In Kismotgonkoir the former chairperson stated that during the meetings, specific space were made women to be able to voice their concerns. The elected female representatives also pointed out that separate meetings with the women before the ward shavas took place meant women were better prepared to place their demands. Moreover, the programme **staff monitored the participation by women and marginalised groups** within the local governance process using specific indicators in Phase III, which then alerted them to signs of lower participation by these groups and allowed them to take steps to rectify.

Challenges

While the Sharique programme has considerable successes, it also faced various challenges in its attempts to implement gender responsive budgeting. Some of these challenges are gender specific, and some of them have risen given the changes in the programme design and also the changed local and national contexts.

Gender Specific Challenges

In terms of gender specific challenges the following are the two key ones.

First, while women's engagement in ward level meetings is high, women's presence during **open budget meetings is low**. Our attempts to explore the reasons behind this revealed the following. Women interviewed that **the timing of the meeting was inconvenient** and the presence of a large number of men made it difficult for them to participate.³⁴

Second, most of the demands made by women were around livelihoods training with the majority centered on demands for training in sewing, poultry raising etc. In majority of the cases the interviewees at the two unions reported that **women's demands were met after the budget was allocated for other demands that were viewed as key priority** such as roads maintenance, repairing boundary walls for the ponds etc were met.³⁵ The reason behind this was these were also identified as priorities by women and the UP's had limited budgets which meant that they had to address the needs to the majority. It should not be read as an unwillingness to address the needs of women but that priority lay elsewhere given the limited funds and claims made by many. A question arises in terms of whether availability of specific grants that was yearmarked for women would have changed the practice.

³⁴ Fieldnotes, Gogram and Kismotgonkoir; March-April 2018.

³⁵ Interview former UP chair, Kismotgonkoir; Interview, women UP member; Kismotgonkoir; Interview; Secretary, Gogram. March-April, 2018

Third, the **LGSP block grants has the provision that 30 percent of the proposals could be forwarded by the female representatives elected to the reserved seats.** However the rules does not specify that these proposals would have to target women as beneficiaries. In many instances these are spent to meet general concerns. A key concern of the staff was whether women could be motivated to make different decisions.

Partnerships and alliances at the national level

Apart from the gender specific challenges mentioned above, the programme faces different kinds of challenges when it comes to linking up with the agencies at the national level. Sharique's work at the local level is unique. It has close relationship with research organisations and works in partnership with Steps Towards Development and Democracy Watch. Both of these organisations have a strong track record in working on gender responsive budgeting and participatory budgeting. However there are other civil society actors that have long track record on GRB such as Bangladesh Nari Progoti Shangho (BNPS), Unnoyon Shamonoy (which has budget cell inside the parliament) with whom Sharique has had limited interactions. ***In order to strengthen its national presence closer interactions with these agencies may be needed.*** In addition we found that given high level staff turnover meant that at present the links with government agencies such as NILG is limited.

Changes in programme design and its challenges

Apart from the weak presence at the national level, another challenge for the programme in Phase IV ***will be the institutionalisation of the programme within the government.*** The government partner chosen, Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB), does not have a mandate to work on local government. In terms of training and building their capacity will take a long time. The current phase is for three years and the timeframe may be insufficient.³⁶

Political Economy shifts

³⁶ Interview, SDC staff and Sharique staff, Dhaka Office; March 2018.

Lastly, the functioning of the local government may see major shifts given that the nature of the local level elections has changed. The last round of elections was the first time when chairpersons were allowed to run on a party ticket, which was not the practice. This has changed the nature of electoral competition where generally members were elected based on their performance and not based on which party they were nominated by. Force was used so that citizens supporting the opposition could not vote.³⁷ In our interactions with the current chair we were directly told that their accountability was to the party and not the people.³⁸ The space for engagement by those not belonging to the ruling party is shrinking. While these may not have specific implications of gender analysis of budgets, the changes will mean that the space for any practices that challenge practices of the party, including measures that enhance accountability, may shrink.

Beneficiary story

The following is a narrative of how the programme strengthened women's leadership capacity and also how programme practices on GRB addressed specific training needs of women in Kismotgonkoir union. Farida Begum, is from a poor family whose husband is a farmer. She was engaged by then Sharique programme staff to volunteer her time in motivating the community members, particularly women. Farida became engaged in learning about citizen's engagement processes. She went around to motivate others to join her and later became a regular at the ward level meetings. After the initial year, she and others in her neighbourhood decided to raise the need for livelihood training at the ward level meeting. The pre meeting helped them to set their arguments clearly for presenting their needs to the larger meeting. Their suggestion was picked up by the then UP Chair. At the open budget meeting, Farida motivated her group to be present, and the programme staff encouraged them to speak. Budget was allotted for employing a trainer who would teach them how to operate a sewing machine. Farida along with other 200 women benefitted from this training. Training was provided over a few years by different batches. Later Farida was able to get money by the UP to secure her own machine, which she used to generate a steady stream of income. Her positive experience of engaging with the UP and her activities led to Farida being noticed by the local party. She was encouraged by her family to run for the UP member position in the reserved seat. Farida became a UP member of Kismotgonkoir Union Parishad for the first time in the last election.

5. Lessons Learnt and Recommendations

The Sharique programme illustrates the following lessons.

First, the programme was able to effectively mobilise women and marginalised groups given that they had focused on specifically targeting these groups and raising their levels of

³⁷ Interview, former UP chair, Kismotgonkoir; April 2018

³⁸ Interview, UP Chair, Gogram, March 2018

awareness and building a relationship of trust. The programme included local women to motivate these groups which helped to create a better understanding.

Second, the programme also created separate channels for women to develop their voice. The preparatory meetings helped women to identify their concerns, develop strategies for representation and instilled confidence in them.

Third, attention to gender specific barriers such as times of meeting ensured the presence of women member's presence meant that women were able to participate and effectively place their demands to one of their own.

Fourth, the approach the programme took to build capacity of both the citizen's but also the duty bearers made the programme effective. Capacity building not only included provision of various trainings but also exchange visits and other learning tools.

Fifth, raising awareness was a key strategy for change, particularly of the UP elected officials about the mandates in the law and how systems could be more effective. The approach taken by the staff to demonstrate the benefits of direct citizen's engagement to the elected officials motivated the officials to change their culture of practice. The staff also assisted the UP in conducting budget analysis which enabled the UP's to function better.

Sixth, the performance monitoring system with its specific indicators allowed the staff to monitor their progress. This also enabled to identify specifically where the gaps were and what they had achieved. The specific indicators developed to track allocation for women and marginalised groups allowed the staff and the elected officials to assess the kinds of progress made of addressing the needs of these groups.

Seventh, the collaborations and partnerships that the programme had built with the local government bodies allowed them to exchange with these bodies learnings from the programme, particularly the challenges around budgeting at the local level and the capacity gaps. In our interviews with IPF we were informed that the Sharique's programme experience (along with other participatory budgeting programmes) have been useful to create space within the government to reflect on budget process at the local level could be effectively linked to the national level.

In terms of recommendations there are two key areas that need attention.

First, there is a need for linking up with partners and like minded groups working on GRB to create pressure on the government so that the budget systems at the national and local levels are better linked up.

Second, given plans for institutionalisation of the programme within the government, there is a need to carefully think whether the shifts in the political economy conditions (given spaces

shrinking for deliberation) may mean that sustainability of the achievements so far may be at risk.

Annex A

Interviewee List:

1. Tirtha Surathi Sikder, National Coordinator, Helvetas
2. Alip Kumar Das, Monitoring and Quality Assurance Manager, Helvetas
3. Sabina Yasmin Lubna, Senior Officer, Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) Bangladesh
4. Ranjit Kumar Chakraborti, Former Additional Secretary, Ministry of Finance
5. Wazed Feroz, Deputy Executive Director, Democracy Watch
6. Protima Pal, Former Senior Researcher, Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS)
7. Rokeya Kabir, Executive Director, Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha (BNPS)
8. Sydur Rahman Molla, Programmeme Manager, Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) Bangladesh
9. Mr. Ranjan Karmaker, Director , Steps towards Development
10. Dr. Atiur Rahman, Chairman, Unnayan Shamannay (former Governor Bangladesh Bank)
11. Current Union Parishad (UP) Chairman, Secretary, Gogram
12. Current UP Chairman, Secretary, Kismotgonkoir
13. Nasima Begum, Old UP member, Kismotgonkoir
14. Masud Rana, Former UP Chairman, Kismotgonkoir

Annex B: Documents Reviewed:

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Annex C: Field Map



Annex D: Unions visited and their data

Category	Quantity	
	Gogram	Kismotgonkoir
Total land	27.49 km	31 km
Total Population	33.282	21138 estimated
Ultra Poor	3707	
Poor	1539	
Ethnic population	1121	
Population of Women	16354	10218
Population of Men	16928	10920
VGF Beneficiary		35
VGD Beneficiary	240	15
Elderly Stipend	510	27
Widow Stipend	232	
Disabled Stipend	52	10
Freedom Fighter Stipend	18	
Maternity Period Stipend	20	