



SUMMARY OF BANGLADESH CASE STUDY: SHARIQUE

The Bangladesh case study focuses on the Sharique programme that works to incorporate participatory and gender responsive budgeting within the local government. The objective of the case study was to explore what works in effectively integrating gender responsive budgeting practices within the local governance process. This was one of the components of the 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 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. Data collection methods included secondary document review and key informant interviews conducted in Dhaka and in two Union Parishads (lowest tier of local government) in North Bengal.

The Union Parishads (UP) are composed of 12 elected members (with three women members in reserved seats) and mandated to deliver services such as conflict resolution (arbitration), issuing birth certificates etc. and to coordinate with the local state agencies over services such as road maintenance, water supply, drainage, waste removal etc. The UPs also receive allocation from the central government for social protection schemes and grants for special programmes such as water and sanitation.

Gender responsive budgeting at the local level is not wide spread in Bangladesh. At the national level GRB has been conducted for the last two decades. 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).

The state recognizes the following groups as “backward groups” that require special measures which include women, ethnic minority, extreme poor and persons with disability. The Sharique programme targets these groups and also LGBTs, persons affected by HIV/AIDS / or TB, those affected by climate change or natural disaster, abandoned elderly, etc.” (Swiss Cooperation Strategy Bangladesh 2013-17)

The Sharique programme covers 207 unions in four districts in Bangladesh and is currently in its fourth phase. Its work on GRB is a part of a more holistic approach to the strengthening of local governance. 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. The programme is implemented through partners. The programme works in close cooperation with government organisations.

Sharique’s work on inclusive budgeting focuses on three key areas: 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. Gender is included into this process through the following: 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.

The programme has been largely successful in mobilising women and representing their needs at each points of the budget cycle. The programme staff raise awareness and motivate women and the marginalised groups to present their priorities at ward level meetings (where elected women member in the reserved seat, the ward member elected to the general seat and the secretary are present). The needs of different groups are sorted and complied and allocations are proposed at open budget meeting where the programme staff, marginalised groups and women are present to monitor the activities of the UP. After six months the budget is revised based on actual allocation and the programme staff track allocation made to address the needs highlighted by women and marginalised groups. These allocations are made public, so groups are able to demand answers.

The following strategies worked effectively to mobilise women and to build capacity of the elected representatives to conduct inclusive budgeting processes.

First, the programme specifically targeted women (and marginalised groups) and raised their levels of awareness and built 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 before the ward level 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 ward level meeting ensured the presence of women, and the presence of the women member meant that general women felt comfortable to present 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 on budgets and laws but also exchange visits to other unions to see how they raised revenues to address the needs of the population. Raising awareness was a key strategy for change, particularly of the elected UP representatives 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 (including women's) engagement to the elected UP representatives, motivated the officials to change their culture of practice. The staff also assisted the UPs in conducting gender budget analysis which enabled the UP's to function better.

Fifth, the performance monitoring system with its specific indicators that tracked allocation for women and marginalised groups allowed the staff and the elected UP officials to assess the kinds of progress made on addressing the needs of these groups.

Sixth, 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. These exchanges have created space within the local government to reflect on budget process (including GRB) at the local level could be effectively linked to the national level (including GRB processes).

While the programme has been largely successful there are challenges that need to be addressed. Some of these challenges are gender specific others arise from changes in the wider context.

The gender specific challenges include lower numbers of women participating in open budget meetings compared to ward level meeting. This is largely due to times when the meetings are held and also women feeling shy given large numbers of men being present from other wards. The other challenge is that of limited revenues, which means that specific priorities that are identified only by women may not be met as other concerns raised by the majority (including women themselves) are given importance. In addition, the women UP members elected to reserved seats may not always put forward proposals that address the needs of women even though they are entitled to put forward proposals for 30 percent of the block grants. This is due to the fact that women as a group has not been identified as a separate constituency by the elected UP members, whose support can win them elections.

Apart from these challenges, Sharique's links at the national level is weak which needs to be strengthened in order to create synergies between the efforts on GRB at the national level and the activities at the local level. Lastly, the recent changes in the rules on local level elections meant that the candidates ran on a party ticket for the first time and the elections were rigged by the ruling party. This has limited the space for supporters of the opposition to engage in local governance process. This shift in the political economy may limit the space for citizens (including women) to engage in processes that demand accountability (including GRB processes) as the control of the ruling party is consolidated.

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