

LEARNING-01**TRAINED WOMEN LEADERS CAN PLAY LEADERSHIP ROLES IN CSO-LED MOVEMENTS IN THE COMMUNITY AS CHANGE AGENTS****CONTEXT**

The status of women in Bangladesh has been subject to many significant changes over the past few centuries. Bangladeshi women have made remarkable progress since the country's independence in 1971 when women in the region experienced increased political empowerment, better job prospects, increased opportunities for education, and the adoption of new laws to protect their rights through Bangladesh policies in the last decades. In this context, The Hunger Project Bangladesh is implementing the Right2Grow project, ensuring women's leadership in local Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in 14 unions in Dumuria Upazila, Khulna. The project focuses on sparking and amplifying the voices of communities, their organizations, and local civil societies for ensuring access to nutrition, WASH, and child and mother healthcare services based on their needs so that every U-5 child in the community becomes able to reach their full potential. To achieve the goal the project is working through a strategic partnership between civil society, the private sector, and governments to approach the issues in an integrated way. The Hunger Project Bangladesh has included many women, about 60%, in the 265 local Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to voice their community child needs and be ready to contribute their part to the solution of the topics that matter. Focusing on prioritizing the women leadership in CSOs, it is significantly found that Trained Women Leaders are playing Leadership Roles in CSOs-Led Movements in the Community as Change Agents due to their meaningful involvement and ownership in the Right2Grow project.

ACTIONS TAKEN BY WOMEN LEADERS

Out of 94-trained leaders, 75 women leaders are actively working toward the goal of U-5 children reaching their full potential. Two (2) leaders of them have been elected as UP members for playing their strong leadership and acceptance in the community. Moreover, 13 women leaders have been included in Union Parishad (UP) different standing committees who are playing an active role in carrying out policy and context analyses, pressurizing UP to allocate budgets, collecting and analyzing data on UP budget allocations, actual expenditure, and quality the of WASH and nutrition service delivery from duty bearers. They are doing continuous lobbying and advocating with the Local Government (UP) for claiming rights, services, and adequate investment for children. Moreover, sixty-eight (68) women leaders are the president of CSOs working for community mobilization and development. They are



Women Leaders are Analyzing Community Situation

monitoring community clinic-based growth monitoring and health promotion sessions at the Open Learning Center (OLC) and providing IYCF counseling to the caregivers of under two children. They lead campaigns against child marriage; host human chains in honor of National Girl Child Day; participate in other campaign programs like Growth Monitoring Promotion (GMP), Breast Feeding Week, Sanitation Month, and Safe Motherhood Day.

SIGNIFICANT CHANGES/ACHIEVEMENTS

In the last UP open budget session of 2022-2023, the trained Women Leaders (WL) raised their voices to allocate a significant percentage (%) of the budget for purchasing GMP tools and other required accessories regarding child health and nutrition for Community Clinic (CC) from UP. Almost all unions have allocated a good portion of the budget based on the voices and demands raised by Women Leaders (WL). The Rudaghara union has declared the highest amount of (BDT) 1265000 (12823 Euro) for child health and nutrition for 2022-2023. A total of BDT-7,989,400.00 (80990 Euro) has been budgeted by the 14 Union Parishad (UPs) of Dumuria, Khulna for WaSH, child health care, and nutrition due to the effective leadership role of Women Leaders in CSOs and UP standing committees for the year 2022-2023. The Women Leaders have stopped fifteen (15) early marriages in communities.

THE ROLE OF THE R2G PROGRAM IN THE ACHIEVEMENTS

The Hunger Project Bangladesh provided three days long leadership training to 94 women leaders of CSOs to increase their skills and capacities, lead advocacy efforts, do UP budget-expenditure tracking, meaningfully participate in decision-making processes for addressing issues/problems raised by the

communities, and voice the concerns of the most vulnerable people. The Women leaders got a clear understanding of the underlying determinants of malnutrition, which include WASH; nutrition; child health care practices; health; education; social protection; gender norms; and other socio-economic

livelihood engagement. Moreover, women's engagement in home-based income-generating activities and their leadership in communities ensure the full and equal participation of women in mainstream socioeconomic development, and it is bringing up women as educated and skilled human resources.



Women Leaders Participation in a Meeting

factors. They were trained to identify their needs and claim rights to respective departments and local governments (UP). Moreover, the women leaders were also sensitized to mobilize the community and collaborate with the local private sector to tackle insufficient access, availability, and use of nutrition and WASH products and services for the community. Finally, the women leaders were guided to develop a comprehensive action plan to bring desired changes to their neighbors and to work on priorities and solutions for them.

WHY THE LEARNING IS SIGNIFICANT

The learning is significant in the context of the R2G program for the acceptance of women's leadership in society and in the Local Government Institutions (LGIs). The Right2Grow project targets to achieve all children are well nourished, which requires budget, and changing behavior of improved access to and use of WASH, nutrition, and maternal and child health care. Therefore, the role of women leaders is taking a significant space for claiming those rights to UP and the other respective departments and access to services of WASH, nutrition, and primary health care access, particularly for women and children.

According to Didarul Alome, Chairman of Kharnia Union, Dumuria, "A special sensibility has developed in the society towards women leadership, and when women speak in Union Parishad meetings, they are considered and sanctioned with respect."

Women leaders can invest much more time in community awareness raising and HH development than men leaders because most of the men leaders are involved in income-generating activities for their families, and move to different places based on

One of the Women CSO Leaders of Rangpur Union, Shadona Rani Mondol says, "Leaders like me have been involved in various development work for a long time, and we have gained acceptance in the community, and since the Right 2 Grow project is mother and child-centric, we can easily work with mothers and make them aware on the issue of child malnutrition."

CHALLENGES

The exercise of women's leadership and power role varies from community to community. There are still some communities in the working unions of the R2G where women's involvement in social activities and access to the decision-making process are not well accepted. The factors that have been found working behind the issue are lack of women's education, poverty, and the wrong perception of religious beliefs among the community.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

If women leaders are capacitated, they will be able to continue to be represented in the political and economic decision-making process in the communities, UP standing committees, and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). Women's participation will strengthen the process of achieving the Right2Grow goal as improving women's power, status, and education may reduce child malnutrition, income, and decisions controlled by women has positive effects on child nutrition and development.



Women Leaders Participation at Open Budget Meeting