

An Evaluation Study on
BRAC-THP Partnership for Strengthening Local Governance Project

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ABSTRACT

With a vision of supporting the development of the Union Parishad as a strong and functioning institution, BRAC and The Hunger Project (THP) had undertaken a two-year's (2014-2015) collaborative initiative entitled 'Strengthening Local Governance Project (SLGP)' in 61 unions (within 14 upazilas of 4 districts under 3 divisions) across Bangladesh. The main objectives of the project are to (1) build capacity among Union Parishads for carrying out their mandated functions as defined in the UP Act, 2009 while also working to enhance transparency, accountability and peoples' participation in the delivery of public services, particularly to the poor and the marginalized; (2) create an active citizenry that holds the Union Parishad accountable and promotes the MDGs. Finally, the project seeks to (3) engage in advocacy with relevant local and national level actors, including policy makers, in order to ensure support from government in adopting project learning and institutionalizing best practices. In order to achieve its objectives, a well-designed set of interventions had been executed. Assessment of these interventions is an integral part of the project based on which future strategic plans will be developed. A study entitled "**An Evaluation on BRAC-THP Partnership for Strengthening Local Governance Project**" had been conducted with the main objective to assess capacity of UPs to carry out their legal mandate in a transparent, accountable and inclusive manner. Attempt was also made to evaluate rural citizenry to hold UP accountable and to take proactive role in addressing local development needs. Exploring challenges and recommendations from grassroots to strengthen local government towards participatory development was another important objective. This study employed both quantitative and qualitative techniques to explore the facts and underlying dynamics of strengthening local governance. In doing so, it found evidence of how the SLG project is making a positive difference in the unions it is operating in; strengthening the local government system by facilitating the process of community driven governance. It presents evidence of how the collective actions of the local community and their elected representatives can bring about greater local development that is both effective and inclusive. Conversely, it also attempted to assess the situation in comparison with few unions which did not receive project support, and found that community driven governance is absent in these non-project areas. It appears that the BRAC-THP partnership has been able to facilitate and enable effective participation of citizen in different UP

activities by deploying various tools of massive and robust citizen mobilization. These efforts helped in two ways- it made the UPs ready to respond to citizen needs and at the same time ensured that citizen are prepared to make demands of the system and are also willing to cooperate with the supply side institutions such as UP, and other service providing agencies for smooth delivery of their local government services.

The active involvement of the citizenry was promoted through a new approach, of training community based volunteers. This includes orientation and effective mobilization of animators, youth volunteers and women leaders, the formation of issue based citizen groups for promoting local development and raising awareness on issues such as child marriages. While the project appears to have been largely successful, there are some key challenges it must face on the road ahead. The biggest of these challenges is perhaps the limited financial resources and administrative autonomy that UPs continue to suffer from. Additionally, undue political influence and the unwillingness of the government to buy-in to the success of the project can pose problems in the future. Finally, the upcoming UP elections of 2016 will present another key challenge in maintaining the progress and momentum of the project. Therefore, as the SLG project moves forward it must be mindful of the formidable challenges ahead, if it is to continue to making a positive difference in the local governance system. For making local governance effective and meaningful, making local service delivery pro-poor and establishing LGIs as responsible citizen organizations, this project has engaged on massive citizenship building efforts at the grassroots level. This particular project has shown utmost commitment and proved to be an appropriate step to be followed and replicated in a larger scale for sustainable citizenship building at the grassroots levels.