PROVISION FOR POST PROJECT EVALUATIONS FOR THE UNITED NATIONS DEMOCRACY FUND
Contract NO.PD:C0110/10

EVALUATION REPORT

UDF-BGD-08-250 - Active Citizens and Accountable Local Government (Bangladesh)

Date: 29 November 2012

Table of Contents

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 1

II. INTRODUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT 3

i. The project and evaluation objectives 3

ii. Evaluation methodology 4

iii. Development context 4

III. PROJECT STRATEGY 7

i. Project strategy and approach 7

ii. Logical framework 8

IV. EVALUATION FINDINGS 9

(i) Relevance 9

(ii) Effectiveness 11

(iii) Efficiency 12

(iv) Impact 13

(v) Sustainability 16

(vi) UNDEF Value Added 17

V. CONCLUSIONS 18

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS 19

IX. ANNEXES 20

ANNEX 1: EVALUATION QUESTIONS 20

government structure, the Union Parishad (UP) hence represents the local government layer closest to citizens living in rural areas. The UP is an elected body of 13 members. It includes one chairperson elected by the total electorate of the Union, nine members, one elected from each of nine wards[5], and three seats reserved for women, each drawn from three wards.[6]

Improved, consistent and effective local government has

services they are entitled to obtain from local government authorities and are often confronted with mediators (personal assistants) when trying to reach out to their elected representatives. It is still common practice to exclude the poor, and especially female citizens, from access to resources.

In 1998 BRAC introduced Polli Shomajs (PS), as ward-level organizations (covering the territory of 3-4 villages), which are open to all members of the local community. Their mission is to inform and build awareness among the rural poor, promote democratic practices and participation of the poor in the rural decision-making process, and engage in collective action to ensure local government accountability.[13]

III. PROJECT STRATEGY

(i) Project strategy and approach

project was to create an enabling environment for greater engagement of rural citizens in local decision-making processes. Three specific key objectives constituted the project's

IV. EVALUATION FINDINGS

(i) Relevance

Baseline Situation

The socio-cultural, economic and political issues described above and the fact that the UP Act (2009) recognized the importance of community participation, transparency and accountability confirm the relevance of the project's specific key objectives and intended activities. In line with the NRDP (2001) and the constitutional mandate (Art. 9), the project made a deliberate effort to reach out to socially disadvantaged communities.

chairmen's responsibilities, the seats reserved for women, the standing committees, and the involvement of citizens in ward meetings. Evaluators were impressed by popular theatre performances, during which actors directly involved and exchanged with the audience, in order to demonstrate how proactive pro-poor good governance by the local government and active citizenship and participation by community members can foster community development and social welfare.

3. Mobilizing planning and local service delivery

Grassroots, Upazila and district-level advocacy workshops aiming to strengthen mechanisms for local government accountability were implemented according to plan. In

(iv) Impact

Due to a misunderstanding, the grantee's approach to data collection remained incomplete, thus limiting the evaluators' analysis of impact to a review of anecdotes. BRAC assumed its independent Research and Evaluation Division (RED) would carry out the post-project evaluation, using the M&E budget reserved for use by UNDEF. BRAC claims it did not undertake a second survey to determine the project's impact, as it had planned for RED to conduct an impact assessment of the ACALG project in the context of the post-project evaluation. According to the grantee, no clarification was provided that BRAC's proposal to engage RED for the post-project evaluation[21] would not be given further consideration.

BRAC has, however, undertaken notable efforts to document impact by other means. These included the recording of impact prospects through post-training questionnaires[22] among advocacy workshop participants, in which e.g. UP member trainees were asked to indicate which local issues and UP service activities they are going to prioritise next. Evaluators were also presented with short success story abstracts established by local project staff and with

On the basis of the success stories gathered in the context of site visits and discussions with some 62 former project beneficiaries, evaluators have independently formed the view that the project indeed had positive effects. The following examples[23] have been selected and

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UP members' roles and responsibilities

Before their participation in the ACALG project, members of the ***Kalerpara UP*** used to perform their duties without consultation. Once trained and following an approach by the local CC, the UP chairman and the other UP members began to understand the useful effects of collaboration with and involvement of the local population in the decision-making process of the UP. CC members made concrete project proposals (roads, bridges, sanitation, water supply) that should be given priority in the local budget. Consequently, citizens are now invited to participate in UP committees and public meetings, in particular in the context of the annual budget's preparation. Since then, almost 90% of the Union's population regularly pay their local taxes, compared to 50-60% in earlier

Enhanced male/female and UP/PS interaction and cooperation

A Polli Somaj member from ***Garidaha Union*** abandoned her traditional family roles, determined to invest her time for the benefit of the local community. Years of PS engagement helped her to gain confidence and win a seat during the past UP elections. Her first effort as UP member was to ensure the reconstruction of a local road section located next to the Korotoa river, washed away by rain in August 2011. The road was of particular importance to pupils of a local school and patients of a local community hospital.

(v) Sustainability

Following the completion of its capacity building programme the ACALG project has introduced sub-district level forums for female

meetings female members from different UPs meet regularly and have been brought in personal contact with upper tier government officials, with a twofold purpose:

V. CONCLUSIONS

(i) Based on our assessment of

and lasting potential, thus representing a good strategy to ensure sustainability. The -districts not covered by the present project and to provide training to newly elected UP and/or Polli Shomaj members further enhances sustainability.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

To strengthen the outcome and similar projects in the future, evaluators recommend to UNDEF and project holders:

(i) The conclusions left no doubt about the project's effects. However, proper measuring of ***impact*** will be indispensable to identify remaining (and new) needs of the beneficiaries. Limiting the baseline study effort to a representative sample (e.g. pre-training interviews with 33% of the planned trainee population) could have freed the time and resources needed for a post-training survey. The existence of and the project's embedding into BRAC's long-term SDP/CEP strategy is highly commendable, but future capacity building support for UP/PS members and/or Upazila forum activities should be designed on the basis of accurate information about specific and local needs. We therefore recommend to ***rapidly conduct a second survey among a representative sample of former UP/PS trainees to assess the outcome applying the project's original baseline indicators.*** Covering achievements systematically and beyond 10 narrative case studies will improve BRAC's current assessment in quantitative and qualitative terms. It may also help to attract new donors and implementing partners, thus enhancing the strategic objectives, when expanding or replicating the original project.

(ii) Based on our comment in the conclusions on impact we also recommend to ***UNDEF to ensure grantees are clear about the modalities of post-project evaluations and to assign increasing importance to the integration of project monitoring mechanisms*** into project proposals to facilitate the capture of performance and impact.

(iii) Concerning the conclusions derived from findings related to ***impact and sustainability*** greater importance should be assigned to the improvement of awareness about and acknowledgement of examples of women's leadership, going beyond the recent publication of 10 success stories and the reporting of project-promoted events in the press. We therefore recommend to exploit existing relationships with the ***local media present in rural areas targeted by the ACALG project, to secure them as a steady partner for the promotion of achievements of individual female UP and PS members.*** More frequent reporting about individual stories of female leadership will help to sustain the public debate of persistent issues and thus foster the democratization process and social change.

IX. ANNEXES
ANNEX 1: EVALUATION QUESTIONS

DAC criterion	Evaluation Question	Related sub -questions
Relevance	To what extent was the project, as designed and implemented, suited to context and needs at the beneficiary, local, and national levels?	Were the objectives of the project in line with the needs and priorities for democratic development, given the context? Should another project strategy have been preferred rather than the one implemented to better reflect those needs, priorities, and context? Why? Were risks appropriately identified by the projects? How appropriate are/were the strategies developed to deal with identified risks? Was the project overly risk-averse?

ANNEX 3: SCHEDULE OF INTERVIEWS

A detailed list of persons interviewe

ANNEX 4: ACRONYMS

ACALG	Active Citizens and Accountable Local Government
CC	Citizen Committees
CEP	Community Empowerment Programme
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NRDP	National Rural Development Policy
PS	Polli Shomaj
RED	Research and Evaluation Division
SDP	Social Development Programme
UNDEF	United Nations Democracy Fund
UNO	Upazila Nirbahi Officer
UP	Union Parishad
VGD	Vulnerable Group Development scheme
VGF	Vulnerable Group Feeding scheme