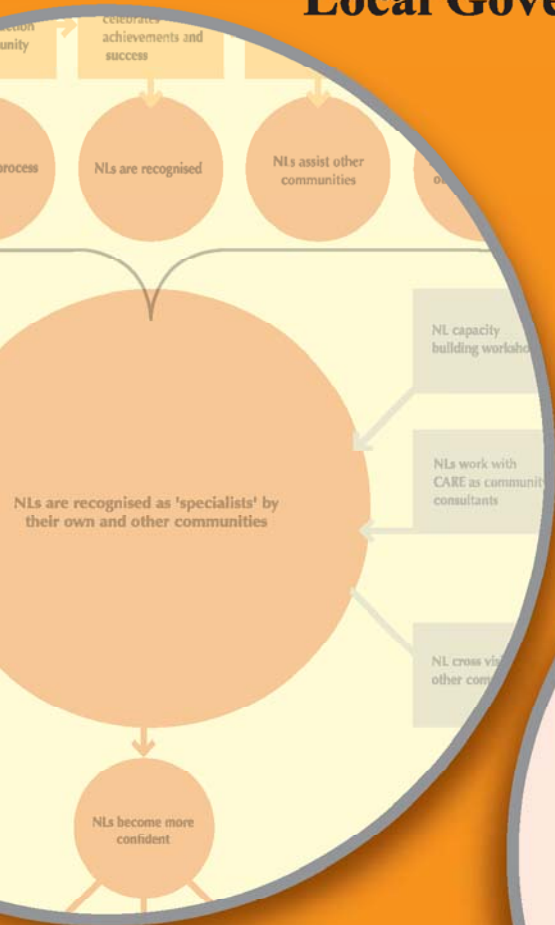


# Poor and Extremely Poor Women's Engagement in Local Government Development Initiatives

November 2012



Local Governance (EC-NSA) Project



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**November 2012**



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## Executive Summary

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With a gradual move to right-based approach that began in 2001, CARE Bangladesh considers governance as one of its priority areas. CARE has identified weak governance as an important cause of poverty obstructing people living in dignity and security. Through different development projects, CARE is trying to address weak governance and unequal power distribution by building the capacity of citizens, and especially women and the extreme poor, to be able to voice their concern, participate and influence decisions that shape their life.

One of the main objectives of the “Building Pro-poor, Inclusive and Gender Sensitive Local Governance” project is to enhance the capacity, voice and agency of extreme poor and marginalized women’s so that they can actively engage in governance process and bring about change for women and the wider community. The project is implemented in 35 Union Parishads in 7 upazilas of Gaibandha and Lalmonirhat districts since July 2009 that will continue up to December 2012. This project is funded by the European Union (EU) and directly implemented by two partner organizations: South Asia Partnership-Bangladesh (SAP) and SKS Foundation.

One of the components of the learning agenda of this project is to document *Good Practices* from the project in order to inform other development practitioners and to improve future project design and approaches. Present research, through direct field visits, face-to-face interviews with project staff, beneficiaries and other stakeholders and review of relevant documents, has analysed and documented the process of extremely poor and poor women’s engagement in local government development initiatives. The research used critical narrative analysis technique that was helpful in developing a critical insight referring to the CARE theory of change (ToC) and the CARE Governance Programming Framework.

The research defines good practice as more of a process—that comprises vision, objectives, and the manner or techniques of action carried out—than an independent act or case. Good practices are acts or cases confirming program objectives aligned with organizational vision. Good practices are those acts that help achieving objectives preferably in a sustainable way.

The research has identified several good practices under three broader categories, namely-policy and approach, tools and strategic area. Drawing on good practices from other development projects and appropriate them in the context of present project is an important policy level good practice. The Building Pro-poor, Inclusive and Gender Sensitive Local Governance project has appropriated several learning; social analysis, self-assessment, etc. that was previously used by other CARE projects. It has been found that the issues that attract other stakeholders, mainly government, attention are likely to be more successful than others. Participatory inclusive budget formulation and declaration is an example, for which Bangladesh government has a supportive law, and government officials are keen to have it implemented.

A number of tools and techniques used in this project have the potential of increasing and strengthening women’s engagement in local government development initiatives. Social

analysis, self-assessment, emergence of natural leaders (NLs), participatory and inclusive budget formulation & declaration are significant tools are important in this context. Practicing these tools have shown the potential of bringing a cognitive transformation required for acquiring a deeper knowledge about the community and the nature of actual poverty,- its causes and extent. Social analysis leads to improved personal rationale to reflect and come up with pragmatic action. This is also pivotal for building solidarity. Self-assessment increases the capacity of individual of groups to be more self-critical and committed. NLs represent their community in social, economic and political bargain with formal leaders like UP and traditional leaders like those with social capital. Gradually in collaboration with community-based organizations (CBO), NL emerges as a supporting leader who by representing extreme poor and marginalized women's interest becomes potential in reconfiguring the existing power nexus. UP members are recognizing the emergence of NL as a complimentary force.

The research has identified some areas of good practice that includes pro-poor and women-friendly contributory matching fund (where both Union Parishad and project contributes), NLO and CBO linkage. Through women-friendly projects UP is creating income generating activities for women. It has been seen that the coalition of NLO and CBO is nominating female UP members some of whom were elected in the last election. The fact that they have jointly nominated female UP members is an unexpected change from this project. Besides, marginalized women are taken into UP's standing committees some of which are presided by marginalized women. This is a clear development of female inclusion in formal leadership.

As a vision, CARE seeks a world of hope, tolerance and social justice, where poverty has been overcome and people live in dignity and security. Dignity is established when people are given a space to engage in all aspects of life. The Building Pro-Poor, Inclusive and Gender-Sensitive Local Governance Project expands on the core belief of ensuring dignity by setting as one of its objective to include women in local governance development initiative. The research has identified and discussed some good practices that show the potential of such inclusion. The project's determinant factors lie in its strategy and implementation techniques, which aims for a cognitive transformation in people in order to improve on their relations to bring sustainable structural change.

## Acknowledgement

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Local Governance (EC-NSA) Project

CARE-Bangladesh

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## 1. Introduction

Due to prevalence of a patrimonial culture in Bangladesh, women have been marginalized from political processes and their engagement in governance has remained limited. CARE amongst many other development actors, recognizes that weak governance is an underlying cause of poverty. With a gradual move to right-based approach that began in 2001, CARE Bangladesh considers governance as one of its priority areas. CARE Bangladesh governance work has been focusing on improving service delivery at the Union Parishad (UP) level by creating and strengthening inclusive decision-making spaces. CARE is trying to address weak governance and unequal power distribution by building the capacity of citizens, and especially women and the extreme poor, to be able to voice their concern, participate and influence decisions that shape their life. CARE is also working with government representatives to strengthen their capacity to respond to citizens' demands through democratic and inclusive accountability mechanisms. The projects made a number of interventions to make the UPs more functional and responsive by supporting the constitution and functioning of UP Standing Committees, transparency and accountability; regular functioning of the Village Court; plans and budget preparation with the active representations of UP representatives and the Natural Leaders (NL). These initiatives have demonstrated that by working closely with local governments and simultaneously with civil society organisations and their representatives, the political culture and the behaviours of political leaders can be influenced to promote positive changes and improve development outcomes for the poor and the extreme poor.

Marginalized women are one of CARE's four target groups. One of the main objectives of the "Building Pro-poor, Inclusive and Gender Sensitive Local Governance" project is to enhance the capacity, voice and agency of extreme poor and marginalized women's so that they can actively engage in governance process and bring about change for women and the wider community. The project is implemented in 35 Union Parishads in 7 upazilas of Gaibandha and Lalmonirhat districts since July 2009 that will continue up to December 2012. This project is funded by the European Union (EU) and directly implemented by two partner organizations: South Asia Partnership-Bangladesh (SAP) and SKS Foundation. CARE Bangladesh is playing lead role and providing technical support. One of the components of the learning agenda of this project is to document *Good Practices* from the project in order to inform other development practitioners and to improve future project design and approaches. The example of the Good Practice selected for this documentation concentrates on the 'extreme poor and poor women's engagement in UP's different development initiatives' The documentation of good practices will allow CARE to evaluate one of the project outcomes and should provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors which influence women's engagement in UP governance. Through direct field visits, face-to-face interviews with project staff, beneficiaries and other stakeholders and review of relevant documents, significant data was collected and analysed in order to understand the key factors behind women's engagement in UP governance. It is worth to mention that this research is not an impact analysis, not an evaluation either; rather it identifies and analyses the good practices which have enabled women's engagement in local government development initiatives. Therefore, the concrete examples of success will only be discussed as evidence of good practice, while processes will be given the major emphasis.



## 2. Objectives

The main objective of this research is to reconstruct and document the process of extremely poor and poor women's engagement in local government development initiatives. This research will be based on examples from the Building Pro-Poor, Inclusive and Gender-Sensitive Local Governance Project.

## 3. Methodology

The research adopted a qualitative method that collected data through document review, field visits, interviews and discussions. The following data collection tools were used to carry out the assignment:

- a) **Review of relevant documents:** Review and analysis of project documents including periodic reports, proposal, and success stories were done with an aim to collect necessary background information and gain overall understanding.
- b) **Interview and discussions:** Both CARE and SKS and SAP officials and field staff were consulted through round table discussions and individual face to face meeting. Extensive discussions—in a form of FGD, semi-structured group meetings, and individual case study—were held with the project beneficiaries. The information for the research was based around: access to local resources, their linkage with various service providing agencies and their communication and collaboration with GOs, NGOs, CBOs and other projects stakeholders. Discussions with UP representatives and CBO representatives also took place to gain an understanding about the UP governance systems and to assess their abilities and commitment to carry out pro-poor development interventions.

Beneficiaries' data was collected from Shantiram UP (under Sundarganj upazilla) and Shibpur UP (under Gobindganj upazilla) of Gaibandha district and Bhelabari UP (under Aditmari Upazilla) of Lalmonirhat district. The research used critical narrative analysis technique that was helpful in developing a critical insight referring to the CARE theory of change (ToC) and the CARE Governance Programming Framework.

## 4. Conceptual framework

For a critical narrative analysis one needs to have operational understanding of the concepts pivotal for a given research. Operational understanding for this research will eventually generate a conceptual framework required for identifying and explaining the good practices related to women's engagement in local government development initiatives. In the following section first we will develop operational definition of the key concepts that will later be brought into line with the vision of CARE.

#### 4.1. Good Practice:

For any program, developmental or anything, a good act requires to be aligned with the objectives of the particular program that generates such act whilst confirming the vision of the organization that the program is part of. Seen in this way, good practice is more of a process—that comprises vision, objectives, and the manner or techniques of action carried out—than an independent act or case. Following is a diagram that explains the understanding of good practice.



*Pyramid model of good practice*

It is a pyramid comprised of several manifested acts or cases confirming program objectives aligned with organizational vision. We argue that good practices are those acts that help achieving objectives preferably in a sustainable way.

#### 4.2. Engagement:

In the case of this research, engagement is understood as women's active participation in local government development initiatives. Within this engagement, women are using their voice and agency to push for positive changes.

#### 4.3. Governance:

CARE seeks a world of hope, tolerance and social justice, where poverty has been overcome and people live in dignity and security<sup>1</sup>. CARE Bangladesh's programming framework technical strategy<sup>2</sup> has identified weak governance as an important cause of poverty

<sup>1</sup> *Introduction to Strategic Impact Inquiry on Women's Empowerment*, CARE Bangladesh

<sup>2</sup> *CARE Bangladesh governance technical strategy document*. August 2009

obstructing people living in dignity and security. By adapting from the Global Commission on Governance definition, CARE understands governance in the following way:

In its broadest sense, governance is the extension of power in the management of public affairs. Governance is the sum of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, manage their common affairs. Governance is a dynamic, political process through which decisions are made, conflicts are resolved, diverse interests are negotiated, and collective action is undertaken. The process can draw its authority from formal written codes that have the power to enforce compliance, as well as from informal processes based on unwritten but broadly accepted cultural norms, or from the charismatic leadership of an individual.

For CARE, good governance is the effective, participatory, transparent, equitable and accountable management of public affairs guided by agreed upon procedures and principles, to achieve the goals of poverty reduction and increasing social justice. CARE further believes that good governance leads to improved developmental outcome and, therefore, sustainable development is only possible in contexts where good governance exists. A precondition of good governance is capacity, which in the context of state means the ability to provide political goods and public services. The capacity will determine the quality of the procedures and institutions—the formal and/or informal relations that exist between state and citizen—of governance. Through the nature of relations between state and citizen developmental outcomes are negotiated. It is believed that people’s—irrespective of gender and economic status—engagement in governance is the precondition for sustainable development.

#### **4.4. Women empowerment:**

In unraveling the problem of women empowerment in relation to participatory governance, CARE believes that women’s engagement in local government development initiatives occurs when women exercise greater choice of decision both at home and outside and when violence against women is reduced.<sup>3</sup> Here it would be good to refer to CARE’s global women’s empowerment framework

CARE, as stated in SII Women’s Empowerment Global Framework, June 2006, sees women empowerment depending on critical changes on three inter-related dimensions as agency, structure, and relationship. Three dimensions are defined and understood in the following ways.

Every individual is an agency capable of contributing in bringing change in ones own life and as well in the society. It is a micro level realization of woman’s belief in her ability and actual ability to effect change in the world. Agency reflects the aspirations, resources, actions and achievements of women themselves. Every woman has agency capable of analyze and decide without CARE being involved. In doing so a woman may challenge gendered power inequities; sometimes, in ways that reinforce them. Empowerment is a continuous process of strengthening agency. Agency has the following sub-

<sup>3</sup> CARE Bangladesh governance technical strategy document.2009

domains: self-image; self-esteem, legal/rights awareness information/skills, educational attainment, employment/control of labor, mobility in public space, decision influence in HH finance & child-rearing, group membership/activism, material assets owned, and body health/integrity.

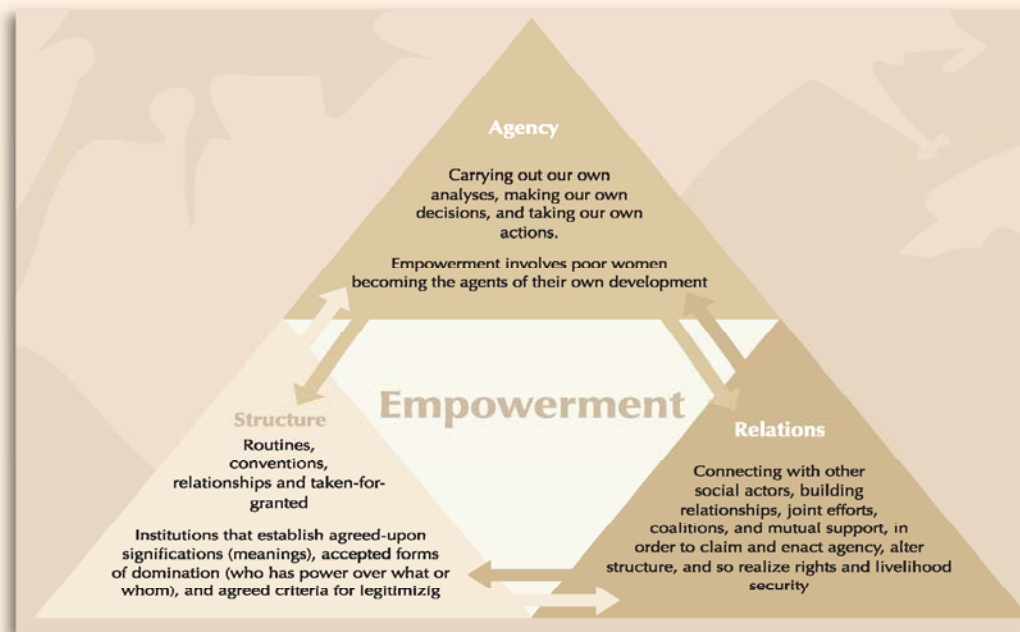
Structure is a macro level component of women empowerment that has to do with socially constructed (cultural, social and political) institutions, norms, values, attitudes and beliefs which affect women's agency. Structures are the accepted rules, norms and institutions that condition women's choices and chances. Structures can be both tangible and intangible; behaviors and ideologies. Examples include kinship, economic markets, religion, caste and other social hierarchies, educational systems, political culture, forms of organization, and many, more. Sub-domains of structure includes: marriage/ kinship rules & roles, inclusive & equitable notions of citizenship, transparent information & access to services, enforceability of rights, access to justice, market accessibility (labor/credits/goods), political representation, and share of state budgets.

Agency operates through networks and relationships with others and this is called relations. Relations are the means through which women negotiate their needs and rights. Empowerment largely depends on individual women building relationships, joint efforts, coalitions, and mutual support, in order to claim and expand agency, alter inequitable structures, and so realize rights and livelihood security. Relation includes density of civil society representation, consciousness of self / others as inter-dependent, negotiation/ accommodation habits, alliance/coalition habits, pursuit/acceptance of accountability, new social forms.

Women empowerment understood in a triangulation of structure, agency and relations is illustrated in the following diagram.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> SII Women's Empowerment Global Framework, June 2006



*Source: SII Women's Empowerment Global Framework, June 2006*

In a triangulation of relation agency, structure, and relation one component contributes in strengthening the others. Together they are structured into a whole. By bringing change into different domains development initiative is expected to bring change in agency, structure and relations. Such change in the context of women's empowerment or more specifically of enhanced engagement in governance will be visible.

## 5. Inclusive and Gender Sensitive Local Governance Project

The Building Pro-Poor, Inclusive and Gender Sensitive Local Governance in Gaibandha and Lalmonirhat districts of Bangladesh project specifically addresses issues like access, participation and influence of citizens, especially the poor and the extreme poor at Union Parishad (UP)<sup>5</sup>. The initial project proposal states:

This project seeks to improve the accountability and responsiveness of local government in Bangladesh, specifically the Union Parishads (UPs) through a two-pronged strategy of enhancing the capacity of UPs, the lowest tier of local government to respond to the needs and demands of their constituents and to demonstrate pro-poor tendencies in resources and services allocation and clear developmental leadership; and through enhancing the capacity and opportunity for citizens, particularly the most marginalized and poorest citizens, to participate in political and development processes, therefore creating an environment favorable for improved dialogue and representation of the interests of the extreme poor in local government decision making at UP level.

<sup>5</sup> . Bangladesh has a three-tier local government system comprising of Zila Parishad (district council), Upazila (sub-district) Parishad and Union Parishad (UP), which is the lowest tier of local government

The project specifically targets to achieve the following objectives:

- Increased in the number of poor and extreme poor, including indigenous people and women, receiving government/union parishad services and resources (e.g. safety nets, health, education, markets) during the project period
- Increased participation of the poorest and marginalised in UP affairs;
- Improved equity and social inclusion.

Any objective is successfully achieved when aided by an appropriate process comprising necessary tools, techniques, and acts. In the context of the Building Pro-Poor, Inclusive and Gender-sensitive Local Governance Project, we need to identify and examine such process, which in other word is good practice, which positively contributes or have the potential to contribute in helping women gaining voice capable of negotiating for their material and nonmaterial entitlement.

## **6. Good practices**

We will discuss the good practices of this project under three categories, namely- policy and approach, tools and techniques, and strategic areas.

### **6.1. Policy and approach**

#### **6.1.1. Building on learning from previous projects**

One of the best practices as well as strength of this project is to draw on the best lessons from different CARE projects like BUILD, SHARIQUE which includes but not restricted to participatory inclusive budget formulation and declaration. It also adopted the experience of supporting the emergence of natural leaders from the NIJERA project while also drawing on SHOUHARDO's experience of supporting interaction between state-run service providers and community members. The project also adopted several methods from SETU, namely the improvised participatory poverty analyses (PPA) tools.

The Building Pro-Poor, Inclusive and Gender-sensitive Local Governance project did not only replicate good practices from other successful projects, it also adopted an integrated or holistic approach supporting awareness raising about rights and gender equality among men and women. The project made effort in facilitating social change through collective action and greater joint responsibility of government and larger groups. Such integrated approach called for a sound understanding of power structure and relations within the Union Parishad in order to build the capacity of women to challenge prevailing discrimination which undermines their participation in decision-making spaces at the UP.

#### **6.1.2. Issues of common interest**

Prioritizing and addressing issues important and interesting to different stakeholders, community and government, has been proven as a good practice for the Building Pro-Poor, Inclusive and Gender-

sensitive Local Governance Project. UP budget formulation and declaration is an example, for which Bangladesh government has a supportive law, and government officials are keen to have it implemented. Hence, it was no wonder that inclusive open budget declaration became popular.

## **6.2. Tools**

Success of any project and task largely depends on the tools and approaches it uses. A number of tools and techniques used in this project have the potential of increasing and strengthening women's engagement in local government development initiatives.

### **6.2.1. Social Analysis tools**

People in general possess tacit knowledge without having deeper and concrete information; which is a common cognitive feature of human information processing. Such superficial knowledge fails to generate effective action. The Building Pro-Poor, Inclusive and Gender-Sensitive Local Governance Project used a social analysis tool to acquire a deeper knowledge of community people and the nature of actual poverty, its causes and extent. In doing social analysis, primary participants' groups are formed through a cognitive exercise called *participatory poverty analysis (PPA)*. The PPA is comprised of social mapping, wealth being analysis (WBA), seasonal calendar, and community action plan (CAP).

Social analysis is particularly used to initiate dialogue into community irrespective of class and gender around persistent poverty, local resources and opportunities. It is the means of sensitizing the people to understand local power structure, and way of allocation of resources. It also helps building capacity of emerging alternate leaders to influence and advocate for the poor necessary for social transformation towards equality and justice.

The process of Community members participating in the PPA has proven to be an eye opening practice which allows community members to gain a deeper understanding about their situation, how their rights are infringed and the potential possibilities to fulfill these rights. PPA brings cognitive transformation leading to improved personal rationale to reflect and come up with pragmatic action. These changes were demonstrated during the FGD with poor women. Integrating project participants to social analysis in such a systematic and sound analysis is one of the particularities and the factor of success of "Building Pro-Poor, Inclusive and Gender Sensitive Local Governance project"

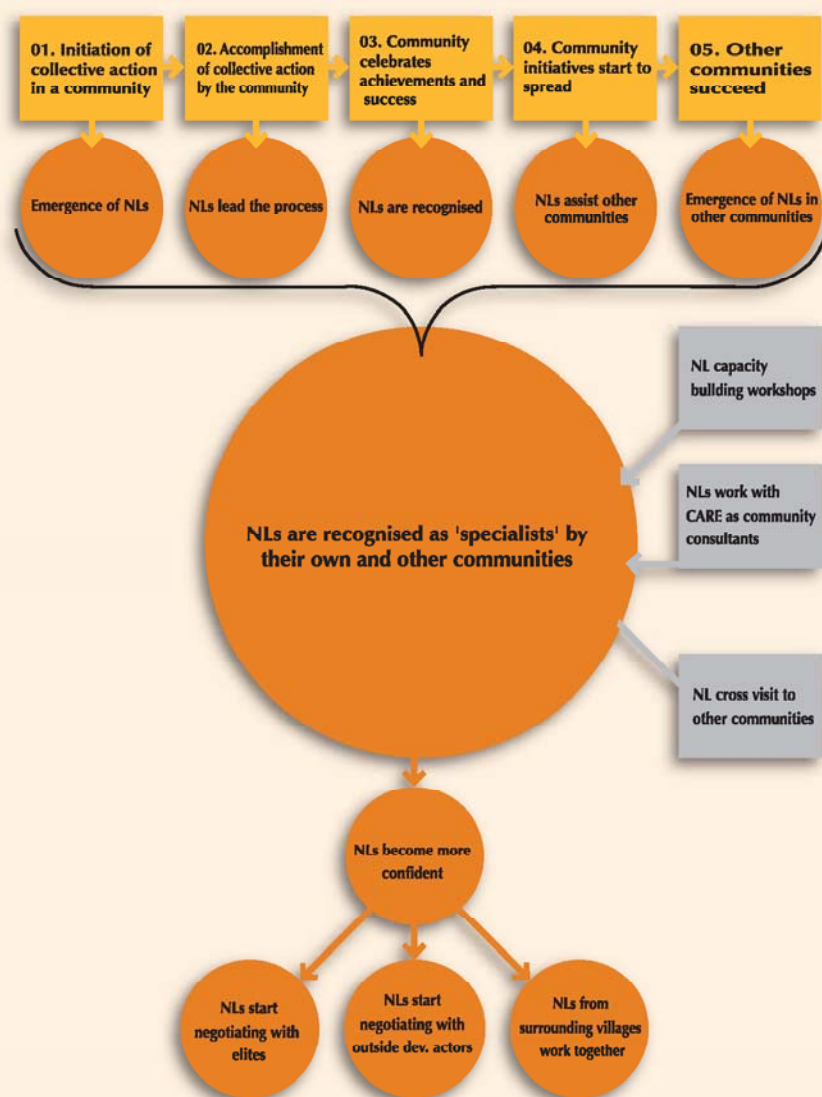
### **6.2.2. Self-assessment**

Another good practice is the self-assessment done by community members, natural leaders (NLs), community based organizations (CBO), and UP bodies. By using the self-assessment tool, each individual or groups critically assess their existing governance situation, actions/practices and can draw an action plan to address some of the issues. This process

increases the capacity of individual of groups to be more self-critical and committed. This especially helps UP in delivering improved services, especially to poor and extreme poor marginalized women. Besides, such understanding helps capacity building of both the community people and the UP leaders since self-assessment shows one the strength and weakness one possesses.

### 6.2.3. Natural Leaders (NL)

A remarkable good practice is supporting the emergence of the Natural Leaders (NLs) among the poor and extreme poor people. Natural leaders are usually identified while the community takes part in participatory poverty analysis. Natural Leaders are those who think rationally, have confidence and can translate their thinking in a well articulated language while committed to their community. They emerge and mature in a process as shown below.



*Source: Emergence of natural leaders in the Botlagari Union in Bangladesh, 2012*



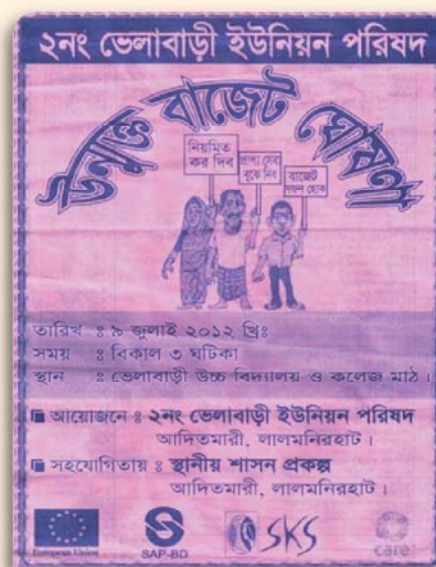
After having recognized by their own community and also noticed by the outsiders, NL gains further confidence and tunes her/his voice as appropriate for negotiation. They represent their community in social, economic and political bargain with formal leaders like UP and traditional leaders like those with social capital.

Gradually in collaboration with community-based organizations (CBO), NL emerges as a supportive leader who by representing extreme poor and marginalized women's interest becomes potential in reconfiguring the existing power nexus. UP members are recognizing the emergence of NL as a complimentary force. This was stated by Bhelabari UP members who mentioned that NLs are contributing their work by supporting the targeting process for the distribution of safety nets. Dozens of stories were heard from female community members confirmed how NL helped them to access safety net supports like VGD and VGF cards, elderly and widow allowance which would otherwise not be possible to access.<sup>6</sup> NL are even reaching beyond the boundaries of the UP to serve community's interests. They link their community with various government and non-government service providers, law enforcing agencies, and if needed with Upazilla Executive and District Commissioner. This clearly shows the change in their mobility, which in other words, is overcoming of provincial thinking. This shows that they understand their rights and the responsibilities of duty bearers and that they know where to demand better services. It shows they understand accountability mechanisms and how to influence and make their voice heard. It also shows that community mobilization has significantly improved.

#### 6.2.4. Participatory inclusive budget formulation and declaration

Budget declaration in front of all level of community people, popularly known as 'open budget' was recognized by the community members as a good practice. Poor people in general have traditionally been reluctant to interact with UP, and the UP budget was not something they were familiar with.

With the introduction of 'open budget declaration', i.e., sharing publicly the annual UP and proceeding with changes according to citizens demands (as much as budget allows), the community feel valued, empowered and confident not only to raise their demands but also to questions any budget discrepancy. Such practices strengthen and encourage the inclusion of extreme poor and marginalized women in local governance.



A poster announcing declaration of open budget

<sup>6</sup> According to baseline survey of 2009, 76.4% safety net support was not given properly.

The baseline survey conducted for the project in 2009 reported 73.8 percent extreme poor and marginalized women being excluded from any kind of governance activity and 81 percent were not aware about their roles in local governance. In a community where only 7.6 percent of extreme poor and marginalized women can attend primary education, exposure to budget is a rare invitation for critical examination of public assets. Such examination, if practiced regularly, is likely to develop cognitive skill of the mass. Stronger cognitive ability makes positive impact on agencies ability to negotiate with counter agency and thus reconfigure the existing relations and structures.

### **6.3. Strategic area**

Some of the strategies employed within this project can also be considered as good practice. Women-friendly income generating projects, for which project give partial fund to UP when rest of the fund is to be matched by UP, is a good practice. Match-funding is a good practice not just a combined fund is used for generating income for women, it is a good practice also as the way beneficiaries are selected with the help of NL and CBO's suggestion. Women with actual needs are identified for social safety net allowance. NLO does the selection and they can do it more efficiently as they generally know their own community, whom they now know better with the help of PPA. Economic disadvantage is a curse that obscures all other avenues. Marginalized women, the poorest of the poor, severely suffer from economic problem, yet because of weak relation they stay deprived from their right of being protected by safety net. As the way it is practiced in the project, NLOs support strengthens marginalized women's relation to structure, a prerequisite for engagement in local government development initiative.

A significant good practice is linking NL and CBO. It has been seen that the coalition of NLO and CBO is nominating female UP members some of whom were elected in the last election. The fact that they have jointly nominated female UP is an unexpected change from this project. Beside, marginalized women are taken into UP's standing committees some of which are presided by marginalized women. This is a clear development of female inclusion in formal leadership. Both in Lalmonirhat and Gaibandha marginalized women expressed their plan of nominating female candidate for UP chairman in the next election. Such aspiration is the result of their confidence. Likewise, women are progressively included in village arbitration, where they exercise their judgment in giving verdict. Such progress in inclusion was made possible mainly because of poor men and women are now organized into a platform led by NL and CBO who represent their own community and as well own interest.

## 7. Cases that shine

### 7.1. Ratna Jahan Bonna: A natural leader with difference



Life seemed gloomy and days were suffocating to Ratna Jahan Bonna as she married her boyfriend at the age of 16. Her new husband was under 18 and unemployed. None of their family members accepted the marriage as it was an underage marriage. Bonna was eventually taken to her in-laws household. She underwent psychological sufferings and the wider community looked down at her for the choice she's made. Her husband knocked at every door for job but he couldn't find one; so he had to migrate to Dhaka from their village Malancha of Shibpur Union of Gaibandha to work for a garments factory. . A distant relative told Bonna about the possibility of volunteering for a CARE's Local Governance Project to, organise Participatory Poverty Analysis (PPA). Bonna joined the team. PPA opened to her a new horizon, she started understanding reality with a more critical mind.. The Community members chose her as their natural leader. As a leader Bonna showed all her potential and commitment In less than a year she lead on several tasks for her community. She negotiated with the UP to ensure poor women accesses VGD, VGF, cards and elderly allowance. This made her extremely popular among peer natural leaders who elected her as president of Natural Leader Organization (NLO). Bonna now has greater responsibility. She is now an important character in her UP; the chairman consults her for every development initiative. She helps the UP chairman negotiating at Upazilla and she concentrates her efforts to attract service provider's attention to her union parishad. She has managed to organize health camps, Youth Directorate's trainings, and livestock trainings – UP had failed up to that day to organize all of these. Bonna motivated her fellow community members to saving into a common fund. From their common fund now they have lent out Tk. 30,000 to six extreme poor in the community.

Bonna's self confidence and ability to speak in public has significantly improved. Her in-laws now value her and she plays an active role in decision-making within the household. Father-in-law was threatened by a vandal as he protested when her daughter was harassed. Bonna stepped in during an altercation between her father-in-law and a vandal and succeeded in pushing the vandals away from the scene. Bonna will not stop here. She believes women must earn an income, in order to be more independent and valued. . She wants to support job creation for the poor women in her community. She has already completed higher secondary certificate and she is now preparing for bachelor degree. Bonna aspires to become UP chairman so that she can contribute to greater social change.

### 7.2. Mosammot Rashida: A sharpe voice

Mossammod Rashida, aged 40, is a natural leader of Shibpur union of Gaibandha. She believes women in her community are remarkably more empowered since they joined Local Governance initiative launched by CARE in partnership with SAP and SKSF. It is the women who come first whenever there is any need in the community, be it funeral of a poor, protecting women from domestic violence, or stopping an underage marriage.

She took several initiatives that saved poor couples from probable break-up. In her locality a poor man used to bully/mistreat his wife so she would give her consent for second marriage. The support for consent had already been given by UPs. Rashida organized her fellow women, she presented her arguments to the UP. She managed to persuade the man and financially supported him to migrate with the family to Dhaka where he got a job in a garment factory. This has changed the fate of the family as both Rashida and her husband succeeded in getting a job. Their life has significantly improved and Rashida feels more valued and respected now that she works and has an income.



### 7.3. Monwara Begum: Female representation in UP

Monwara Begum from the village of Malancha is an elected UP member, who thinks her experience as natural leader made her qualified for this position. She actively contributed to UP meetings and village arbitration. Two other female UP members, who come from a rich family and use their husband's social



influence, show a contrasting picture. They are irregular in UP activities and do not have any voice. This is the information the villagers themselves attested. We found a similar scenario with a female UP members called Parveen in Santirampur. According to villagers Parveen is a symbolic extension of her husband's social capital. Her influence and commitment to the villagers go unnoticed. Whereas Monwara is a fighter, she does not let anything go astray.. A male UP member tried to deprive her ward duelers from VGD cards. Monwara confronted the member and defended the right of her community. She mobilized matching fund for the extreme poor and marginalized women. In the current year she convinced UP to distribute 20 rickshaw vans to 20 extremely poor women. She admits her gratitude to local governance project, especially appreciating its tools like PPA and self-assessment that she believes has made her analytical, focused, and confident. Previously she was involved with other NGOs projects, but she found the particular use of these tools unique and very useful.

#### **7.4. Bhelabari Union Parishad: A model for local government development initiative**



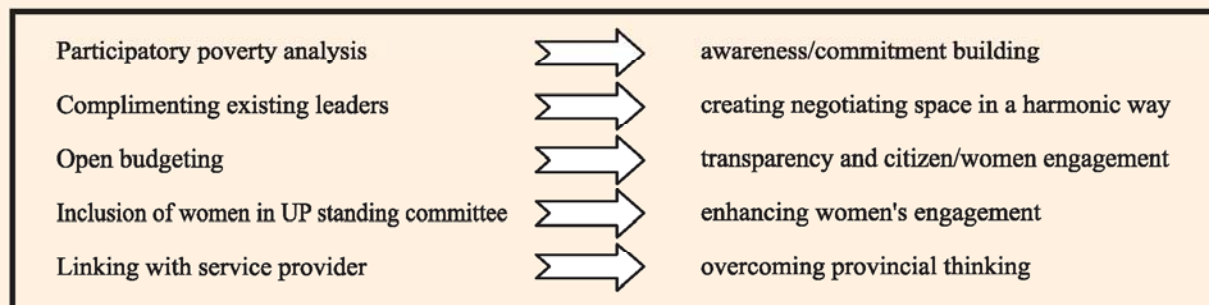
Velabari Union Porishad in Aditmari upazilla of Lalmonirhat district is recognized for being a community and women-friendly UP. It is headed by Mohammad Ali, who is chairing the UP for the fourth time. Ali is a chairman with vision who values the local governance project because it has helped him to build the capacity of UP members. Velabari UP has a higher rate of tax collection ranging from 60 to 70 percent to what must be collected yearly. This percentage is higher than in most other UP. Velabari UP members consider that the open public hearing of budget contributes in higher tax collection. In such hearing UP officials get the opportunity to rebuild their credibility and demonstrate how transparent, effective and responsive they can be. This has a significant impact on tax collection. .. In the past, there used to be a gap and hostile relation between the community and UP, which is no longer the case since UP and community leaders are harmonically discussing and creating solutions for the UP, and especially the poor and the extreme poor citizens.

In Velabari female members are viewed as individuals with the potential to contribute in governance. The women's Up members' Husband are strictly prohibited to attend meeting on behalf of their wives. This union has supported numerous women-friendly projects like the distribution of 30 rickshaw vans and 15 sewing machines to the poorest women. One of the most remarkable initiatives is cap sewing project. The UP is giving training in phases to 2500 to 3000 poor women. The product of these women will be marketed by the UP as well. To design and implement such development initiative besides increasing tax collection the UP needed to improve its capacity. The NLO and CBOs collaboration with the UP has helped improve the capacity and made their work better organized.

## 8. Synthesis

As a vision, CARE seeks a world of hope, tolerance and social justice, where poverty has been overcome and people live in dignity and security. Dignity is established when people are given a space to engage in all aspects of life. The Building Pro-Poor, inclusive and gender-sensitive Local Governance Project expands on the core belief of ensuring dignity by setting as one of its objective to include women in local governance development initiative. The research has identified and discussed some good practices that show the potential of such inclusion.

Good practices that were identified in this research can be schematized in the following diagram showing what makes such practices good or the merit such practices hold.



The research has identified a set of acts—tools and techniques—capable of generating positive outcome. In other words, we have seen the Building Pro-Poor, Inclusive and Gender-Sensitive Local Governance Project practicing some good practices as they are the pathways to change. The above diagram links the pathways on the left to the change on the right. We see that the participatory poverty analysis is a pathway for bringing change in raising awareness required for commitment. So it is also the case with inclusion of women in the UP standing committees that enhances women's engagement in local government development initiative. Such changes, when set into the pyramid model of good practice, are aligned with the project's objective—increased participation of the poorest and marginalised in UP

affairs, whilst conforming to CARE vision of a world of hope, tolerance and social justice, where poverty has been overcome and people live in dignity and security.

The reasons for success of this project lie in the way project was designed and implemented. The strategy was not to challenge the existing power nexus by confrontation; instead it was carefully designed to holistically influence the interaction between power holder and citizens in a reformative and harmonic way. Within this interaction, CARE made sure women gained agency and played a significant role in representing their communities and improving services delivery for the poor and the extreme poor. Participatory Poverty Analysis is a good practice that helps community members see beyond the usual norms. This is a cognitive method of transforming community members' ways of understanding is crucial to bring sustainable change. The emergence of parallel leaders, i.e. NL, has an outstanding merit and impact. The NL works as the catalyst for raising poor and marginalized women's voice and networking among different agencies. Furthering NLs self-confidence made it possible for the poor and extreme poor to approach duty-bearers and service providers even beyond UP over to upazilla and district.

## **9. Conclusion**

The Building Pro-Poor, Inclusive and Gender-sensitive Local Governance Project has a significant potential to contribute to eradicating poverty by enhancing women's participation in local government development initiatives. Its determinant factors lie in its strategy and implementation techniques, which aims for a cognitive transformation in people in order to improve on their relations to bring sustainable structural change. Continuation of such effort by appropriating good practices in different socio-cultural context, one can be commendably confident of transforming the existing power nexus towards an egalitarian one that will accommodate poor and extreme poor marginalized women's voice as it ought to be.

