


## Learning Document Series

# 11-13

Sharing development practices to create space  
for critical learning and discussion

December 2012





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Programme Quality and Impact (PQI)  
ActionAid Bangladesh

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December 2012

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# Prologue

'Learning Document Series 11-13' is the fourth in the series after LDS 1-5 (December 2009), LDS 6-8 (December 2010) and LDS 9-10 (December 2011). The underlying concept of these Learning Document Series (LDS) is to portray few credible rights-based alternatives and development practices, facilitated by ActionAid and its partners, which have brought about changes in the lives of the people living in poverty as well as in their social, economic and political sphere as a whole.

The present series depict three such development alternatives. The first model is about how participatory video making by the youth can harness their inner power for self-development and simultaneously garner awareness campaigns and social movements for policy change. The second one shows how grassroots women leadership and individual initiative shapes collective vision of establishing schools in a hard-to-reach char land where no education existed and thus enlightening path of hundreds of children. The third one portrays how grassroots people's organizations through a conscientization process can self-organize to grow into a higher level organization and lead social, economic and political change at multiple layers towards community empowerment process.

It is those grassroots people and community who documented their experiential knowledge, experiences and processes in Bangla through number of write-shops. Later those were translated into English and brought together to produce this bilingual version. We hope that these rights-based alternatives, based on ground realities and sound testing, should certainly be scaled up and out context-wise to create opportunities for evidence-based programming and policy work.

I must acknowledge the efforts of ActionAid Bangladesh and its valued partners for collectively facilitating the development efforts in solidarity with the people living in poverty. Last but not the least, I must express gratitude to the grassroots people without whose efforts, these development initiatives would not have been possible to thrive and succeed.

Wish you joyful reading through the following pages for your professional and personal learning.

**Reefat Bin Sattar**

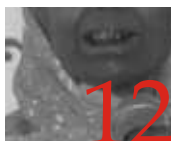
Director - Programme Quality and Impact (PQI)  
ActionAid Bangladesh



## Learning Document Series-11

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*Md. Helal Uddin and Abu Said Md. Juel Miah*



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## Learning Document Series-13

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*Zakir Hossain Sarker, Saad Ahmed Shamim*

*Rubayat Ahsan and Abu Said Md. Juel Miah*

Learning Document Series-11

# Participatory Video

An Effective Technique for Awareness Building and Campaigning

*Md. Helal Uddin*

*Abu Said Md. Juel Miah*



Policy makers are not always well aware of the critical social realities that the community faces regularly. Lack of community awareness about their own problems also allow the policymakers to be reluctant in addressing those problems. If the causes and consequences of a particular social problem can be evidenced and examined with sound analysis and presented before the policymakers, it is more likely to convince and oblige them to address those problems and come up with solutions. Though media sometimes plays important role in reporting issues and justifying solutions, conventional mainstream media devoid of participatory research may not always be that successful in capturing problems of the most excluded and marginalized communities and presenting those before the concerned authorities. Participatory video is useful to identify problems of disadvantaged communities, analyse and capture the findings in a video document. This video document eventually could convince policymakers to provide solutions or way forwards, thus, this technique is proved useful in many instances. Bangladesh Institute of Theatre Arts (BITA) has been working on youth development programme through participatory video in association with ActionAid Bangladesh (AAB). BITA had initiated activities with group of young boys and girls at Pahartali and Lalkhan Bazar in Chittagong in 2001. Therefore, BITA has been contributing to the local development process through such participatory videos addressing causes and effects of community problems and has achieved significant success at bringing communities' problems in front of respective duty-bearers.

This Learning Document Series has been prepared with the thoughts from a writeshop, which was held during July 19-20, 2011 at BITA Office in Mehendibag, Chittagong. **Md. Ibrahim, Morshed Alam** and **Farzana Akhtar** of participatory video team, **Md. Abdul Karim (Shah Alam), Md. Rabiul Haque** and **Mukta Akhtar** of adolescent group, and **Mahtab Alam**, Programmeme Officer, BITA participated in the writeshop.



## Background

Due to lack of trash bins, atmosphere at hospital and the neighboring households at Pahartali in Chittagong became polluted, unhygienic, and a breeding ground of diseases. People in the area used to dump waste haphazardly and eventually the area became a dumping zone of waste materials. Children and adolescents living in the area were often caught by diseases. Person walking by the area used handkerchief to get rid of the bad smell and air pollution. Nonetheless, the wastes dumped in the area are further scattered by dogs, crows, geese and chicken. Youth members of theater group, video team, and artists from Bangladesh Institute of Theatre Arts (BITA) conducted a survey among the community people of the area in 2004. The unmanageable waste in the area came out as a major problem in the survey. Youth theater group shaped a drama containing problems that arose because of the absence of trash bins and guideline on how to solve such problem. In addition, group of artists had sketched pictures and video team had produced video document. A show was arranged for presenting these art works where ward councillor was invited in addition to the dwellers of the area. Firstly, the drama team staged drama, secondly, artists' group presented their drawings; and finally video team showed the documentary. The audience including elected people's representatives was stunned by the findings.

After watching these presentations, residents of the area raised their voice to solve the core problem of waste disposal as an immediate priority. Pressed, the Ward Councillor instantly promised to solve this problem within next eight days time. He installed three trash bins in the area before the promised deadline. Also, the community residents became aware of the problem since then. Now they do not dump waste here and there but rather use trash bins. After being ordered by the Ward Councillor, the City Corporation has allocated vehicles to collect waste from the trash bins regularly.

This demonstrates how participatory video could serve as a strong tool to bring the problems of the ignored and forgotten communities to the forefront for solutions. Participatory video was initiated as part of AAB-supported adolescent programme, which engaged a group of young boys and girls. Thus, BITA and the youth groups contributed to place people's opinions and analysis around social issues in front of the policy makers and subsequently worked for reasonable solutions.

## What is Participatory Video?

Analysing problems, difficulties, despairs, hopes and expectations of poverty stricken and disadvantaged communities in a participatory manner and eventually



capturing that analysis into a video document and broadcast accordingly for wider public awareness would be termed as participatory video. This tool could be utilized to highlight the rights-deprivation of children, adolescents and women and could guide towards promoting as well as protecting human rights for these deprived communities. Participatory video

is an alternative media for the underprivileged communities who do not usually have access to mainstream media for expressing their hope, expectation, problems, opinions, creative ideas or success stories. Thus, participatory video is undoubtedly a creative medium, which would build awareness in an easy way alongside influencing policy makers on informative decisions based on video evidences.

BITA perceived the concept of participatory video to encourage creativity among children and adolescents. BITA observed that children and youth in India and many other countries contribute through media house and open news. Applying participatory video by engaging adolescents towards social development is quite new in the context of Bangladesh. BITA found 'participatory video' an interesting technique to engage children as well as adolescents for producing documentary on critical social issues, thus, BITA initiated it through AAB-supported adolescents development programme. The objective of the project was to create safe and enabling atmosphere for young boys and girls. Participatory video team became stronger through gaining training, experience of documentary production, and arranging shows. The team produced 16 documentary films.

## Creating Participatory Video Team

Selection criteria for forming different groups in BITA include adolescents from disadvantaged family, primary education, spontaneity, creativity, voluntary attitude, and permanent residence in the area. On the basis of these criteria, BITA selected 25 adolescents aged 10 to 18 and divided them into four groups. Then BITA created a participatory video team out of these four groups. Eight participants out of 25 were selected for the participatory video team after interviewing them. This programme was initiated on 2001. Before engaging them parents' consent was taken. The team was provided with intensive training on participatory video. The

training was designed two hours per day for 17 days initially and 10 day residential training later.

## Issues for Participatory Video Team

The participatory video team works closely with the children, adolescents, and women living at Pahartoli and Lalkhan Bazaar in Chittagong. The team researches difficulties and problems, which the inhabitants of the area encounter, for example, discrimination in education, child labor, unfair wages, health crisis, torture and violence, discrimination between men and women, drug, sexual violence, water crisis, environment pollution, solid waste and hygiene, and human trafficking etc. The video team has produced some documentaries based on advocacy successes. The team justifies selection of the stories each time to make sure that the production would influence decision makers. In fact, they begin asking questions to justify issue for video documentary. For example,

- How do the problem affect majority in the community?
- What are the types of problems and to what extent they have been affecting people?
- To what extent children, adolescents and women are affected?
- Should the video help analyze the problem to get better insight?
- Are these current issues?
- Will the video build wider awareness and public opinion?
- Would it be useful to hold policy makers accountable?
- Would it trigger human conscience through process to look for alternative solutions?

## The Way Participatory Video Team Works

After receiving necessary training and skills, these adolescents direct and produce video documentary. The team usually takes technological assistance from production houses for editing purposes. Although the video team is not graduated from a film institute, they are able to produce informative video document after receiving this kind of hands-on training and are capable to contribute to the local development process.

Members of the video team visit an area to discuss with people in the community and then select topics. They also talk to local leaders for identifying problems faced by the communities. The team prioritizes problems in the area and collect information accordingly. After identifying topic or problem for the video, the team researches on the topic and starts writing script. The video document characterizes

actors who are basically victims of the difficult circumstances among children, adolescents, women, and men in reality. Sometime guest artists are invited as role model in the video. When the story and scripts are ready, the team selects actors and informs them accordingly.

The audience for video documentary, on one hand, is the community, and on the other hand, duty bearers such as policy and decision making authorities who could provide solutions. The duty-bearers include local government institutions, people's representatives, civil society, NGOs, journalists, teachers, religious and political leaders who could potentially facilitate necessary public services for the communities that they are entitled to. The video team conducts interviews, group discussions, video programmes briefings, footage collection, and facilitates community engagement with the video programme for getting both victims and the local authorities onboard.

### Different Phases of Participatory Video

Phases	Activities
Structuring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research for selecting topic</li> <li>• Determining goal</li> <li>• Identifying audience</li> <li>• Timeline</li> <li>• Setting language for video documentary</li> <li>• Identifying production name through participatory process</li> </ul>
Preparing plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research for narration</li> <li>• Selecting subject for the video</li> <li>• Arranging screenplays</li> <li>• Script writing</li> <li>• Organizing scripts for video capturing</li> <li>• Visit for site selection</li> <li>• Schedule for video capture</li> <li>• Distribution of responsibilities among team members</li> </ul>
Video recording	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contacting community people</li> <li>• Briefing screen plays to actors</li> <li>• Recording video</li> <li>• Reviewing video records</li> <li>• If there is error, repeating video records</li> <li>• Sound recording</li> </ul>

Phases	Activities
Editing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Editing all video records</li> <li>• Sharing and discussion with video team</li> <li>• Final editing</li> </ul>
Presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shows (audience are community people, govt. and non govt. officials, policy makers etc.)</li> <li>• Discussion with audience</li> <li>• Public dialogue, collecting public opinions, and evaluation</li> </ul>

## Necessity of Participatory Video in Social Development

The necessity of participatory video could be examined in the context of priority based participatory development. The idea of participatory video is to engage people and community to identify their problems and eventually find ways forward to solve that. In addition, this approach would help to make government and non-government service providers accountable about their duties and responsibilities. Thus, this process ensures people's participation and participatory video is proved to be an effective communication medium after gaining wider acceptability. Participatory video, as a medium, has audio-visual impact, which is useful for greater social development through participatory process. And because of its audio-visual impact it has efficacy in sensitizing participants and policy makers.

Right to development has already been recognized as human rights. People need to sit at the driving seat from a participatory development perspective. Participatory video would be used as tool for such practices.

Participatory video team presents information through video about the problems, situations, circumstances and stories of a community in their respective areas. Decision makers of local government authorities, people's representatives, civil societies, and community people attend these video presentation sessions. After the presentation session, open discussion takes place and people's representatives then promise solutions of the presented problems. Members of the video team and participants in the session then monitor whether people's representatives are taking appropriate actions or not. These videos are also disseminated in other national and international dialogues, seminars, and awareness programmes. The video is also shown in the training and capacity building programmes.

The goal of AAB is to address equity and justice that prevail in societies and eventually working to uphold human rights. As a result individuals and institutions

become aware of their responsibilities and step forward to protect and promote human rights. Participatory video has significant success in this regard to educate people about their rights and to change their mindset for community improvement. Through this process, not only people got awareness on how to seek public services from institutions but also local government institutions become aware about their duties and responsibilities towards people.

## Impacts of Participatory Video

The video team is originated from the Lalkhan Bazaar and Pahartoli at Chittagong City Corporation area. The members of this team have brought positive changes among themselves besides inspiring their communities. And this ripple effect of change has positively influenced government and nongovernment service delivery institutions in the area. Some impacts of participatory video programmes are:

### *Awareness on education increased:*

Participatory Video has made children and parents conscious about the need for education at Lalkhan Bazaar and Pahartoli. Thus, after being aware through this process, parents are now sending their children to schools and as a consequence, rate of enrollment in schools has increased. Adolescents have been helping children at their education alongside doing their own study. Therefore, children and adolescents are boosted up with confidence through this process.

*Cleanliness in the community improved:* Video document portrayed how public health had been in danger due to lack of waste disposal and management systems. As a result Chittagong City Corporation installed three bins in the area. Now the community people are much aware about health and hygiene issues around waste

### Farzana: A Successful Documentary Maker

Farzana Aktar lives in the Wireless Colony at Pahartoli. She was a member of child theatre team. She became member of the adolescent team. She received training about video documenting from BITA. Her team produced videos on critical issues related to adolescents and showed that in many places. Farzana started gaining respect from all layers of society since then. She also produced documentaries on children, women and adolescents at other districts. She visited India and Denmark. She facilitated a training programme on video documentation among ten participants organized by BITA. Other girls were inspired by Farzana's skill on video camera. She feels now dignified and plays important role at family; in fact, family members depend on her income. She dreams to direct drama and documentaries in future.



disposal and they have learned how to dump wastes into the bin. Overall cleanliness in the environment has improved, which resulted in reducing health hazards that were previously caused by scattered wastes across the area.

***Water crisis reduced:*** Three deep tubewells were installed at Pahartoli and Lalkhan Bazaar as a result of showing video documentary on water crisis in these areas in addition to raising public demand for water. People living in poverty in the area now have access to pure drinking water, which reduces water borne diseases. Women and young girls do not have to walk a long way to collect water, which has freed them from sexual harassment. Availability and accessibility of water also has reduced disputes and violence among local residents.

***Violence against women and adolescent girls reduced:*** Number of violence has significantly reduced after showing films about violence against women in the area. Now adolescent girls can move freely in the community. The education through video documentary has helped reducing discrimination between man and woman. Parents in the area have gained positive attitude towards their adolescent girls after being aware on rights of children, adolescents and women.

### **Participatory Video for Change**

Pora Colony is a densely populated area, which had water shortage. Chittagong WASA did not have water supply support in the area. Residents of the settlement used to collect water from distant locations. Many children were dropped out of school because they used to stand in queue for long time to collect water. There were numerous incidences of disputes and violence around water collection. Women and adolescent girls had been victims of sexual harassment while standing in line all night for water. Community people did not have the courage to stand against the miscreants. Thus, they registered complaint to the chairman of Chittagong WASA and demonstrated peaceful procession at the office premise.

Participatory video team produced a documentary on this crisis and provided evidences how children, adolescent girls and women encountered sexual harassment as well as violence in connection to water collection. The video was shown to the people living in the area and to people's representatives. After the video show, general people started to get united. Since then, they have contacted several service delivery institutions. Thus, PSTC, a non government organization, came onboard and provided three deep tubewells in the settlement. Thus, conflict and crisis around water remarkably reduced in this densely populated colony.

### ***Public service delivery institutions are made accountable:***

Participatory videos have significant role in promoting and protecting rights of the marginalized besides influencing public service delivery institutions; for example, success has been achieved for cases such as birth registration, resisting violence against women, waste disposal and community hygiene, and availability and access to safe drinking water. A participant of a nonprofit organization, Gashful, was raped by a neighboring miscreant in 2003. The miscreant was suppressing this case with the help of political party affiliation and influences. In the meantime, participatory video team in association with Ghasful produced a video documentary about torture and inhuman treatment against women and adolescent girls. The team also revealed these cases of violence against women through video and facilitated open discussion at several places for building greater public awareness on the issue. Concerned government and nongovernment institutions were informed to take necessary actions, so that, incidences of rape, torture, and inhuman treatment against women could be eliminated from society.

The video team also assisted government initiatives. They produced a video while Chittagong City Corporation initiated birth registration programme teamed up with Ward Councillors. The team presented video at several places, which inspired adolescent boys and girls to assist in the birth registration programme.

***Self improvement and personal growth gained:*** The video programme has not only benefitted any particular settlement but also transformed the members who closely worked in a team to produce these video documents on critical issues. The members are confident that they could manage such participatory video programme and could earn livelihoods. Most of them have got jobs later; nonetheless, they feel dignified because of this skill besides gaining respect in the society for working on noble causes. They are now quite aware about their rights. They are now transformed into inspirator with positive attitude and behaviour. Most importantly, these members of the video team have achieved leadership quality.

### **Documentary Film for Protecting Right to Education**

Participatory video team produces a documentary video regarding quality of education. The subject of the video is to reflect thoughts and opinions of children who do not go to school. Faruk is one of the children who had been interviewed. While interviewed Faruk said that he would like to be a teacher in future. At that time he was not a school going children. During video show, Faruk's parents and elderly leaders in the area were present. After the show, Faruk's parent promised in front of the audience that they would send Faruk to school. Later Faruk was enrolled in UCEP School and has now completed class eight.



## Challenges and Limitations

Although participatory video team has significant success in terms of upholding social justice but the team has also experienced difficulties, which are:

- Lack of ability to purchase and use advanced technological equipment
- Lack of skill and equipment for video editing and often depending on other institutions for this purpose
- Gap to align with mainstream media
- Dropout of members from team
- Video documenting process is expensive and time consuming
- Difficulties due to absence of legal documents and lack of institutional recognition
- Negative social perception about video document and engagement of women into this programme.


## Scope of Participatory Video

Participatory video team has proved that the idea of 'participatory video' could potentially contribute more to development activities. The ideas are:

- Capacitating nongovernment organisations on participatory video skills
- Upgrading participatory video team with skill, modernised equipment and expanding space for participatory practices
- Incorporating participatory video into core programmes within organisations
- Broadcasting participatory videos at local and national level TV channels
- This technique for documenting critical social concerns through participatory video could be utilised to raise public opinion on local and national issues
- Incorporating as well as aligning participatory video programme with the activities and plans of local government institutions for public awareness building on needed issues
- This technique could also be used to organise people at human rights based programmes to promote and protect their rights
- Wider institutional recognition of the skill of video documentation as alternative profession and ensuring growth of participatory video programming as an occupation.

## Conclusion

The participatory video team of BITA has produced 16 documentaries and they showed these videos numerous times at different locations. The team has contributed significantly to bring positive changes in the communities by portraying social concerns through videos. National level media is seemingly



concentrated into the bigger issues that are of paramount importance to the nation, thus, community or local level problems are seldom reflected in the national level print and audio-visual media.

Participatory video team has successfully influenced policy makers and concerned institutions to provide solutions at communities. On the other hand, in the mainstream media, people do not come with their own research and videos, rather journalists use to cover news or reports that may not always capture the root causes of problems in a community and the sufferings of people in reality. Considering the limitation of mainstream media in this regard, participatory video could engage community people who are the victims of rights violation or deprived of public services to produce and present video in front of concerned institutions. Therefore, the video technique ensures meaningful participation and proactive engagement of community people including women, adolescents and children. Participatory video is essentially a useful technique to ensure development through participatory process.

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Learning Document Series-12

# Leadership Development at Grassroots

**An Effective Way to Establish Right to Education in  
Remote Char Areas**

*Rayhan Sultana Toma*

*Abdul Aziz Munshi*

*Khandakar Lutful Khaled*

*Zinat Hasiba*

*Abu Said Md. Juel Miah*



Char Montaz Union, a densely populated island, is situated in Galachipa upazila under Patuakhali district. Children of poor households of this island who had to get involved in child labour are now going to school; they are not deprived of their right to education anymore. Around twelve years back, there was only one school in this union with only one teacher. SAP Bangladesh, a nongovernment development organization, started implementing education programme at Char Montaz for the adults especially the women who were deprived of education. Saleha Begum was most proactive among the women who got involved in this education centre. “Village will be developed, if children of the char become educated” – stated Saleha Begum while she proposed to establish a school for the children of the char. She inspired other women to get involved in her initiative. That move resulted in establishment of eight primary schools in Char Montaz. The schools also got government’s registration by virtue of her impetus and heroic leadership with the assistance of SAP Bangladesh and ActionAid Bangladesh.

This kind of example has also been observed at Doi Khawar Char in Ulipur upazila under Kurigram district as well as at Barul village of Belgacha union under Jamalpur district. This document presents such examples of developing grassroots leadership and establishing effective linkages with government to establish right to education. This document is prepared through a writeshop. Relevant project staff of South Asia Partnership (SAP) Bangladesh, Esho Desh Gori (EDG), Bangladesh Association for Community Education (BACE), teachers of twelve schools of Patuakhali and one school of Doi Khawar Char of Ulipur upazila under Kurigram district, members of school management committees as well as the community initiators participated in the writeshop. They are **Khalilur Rahman, Abdur Rahim Chowdhury, Md. Ilias, Rafiqul Islam, Md. Shohag, Abul Kalam, Abu Taher, Sabuj Mia, Farid Uddin, Khaleda Begum, Kakoli, Saleha Begum, Kamrul Hasan Khandaker, Shafiqul Alam, Azizur Rahman, Abdul Mannan, Md. Kamruzzaman, Harunur Rashid and Moniruzaman Mamun.**

## Background

Twenty years back, the literacy rate of Char Montaz was around 3% to 4%. Parents as well as the children were not at all interested in education. Boys were mostly involved in income generating activities like fishing, harvesting etc. Distribution of local resources was concentrated to a few rich outsiders. Most of the inhabitants used to work as day labourer. They were deprived of fair wages. They were not aware of their rights due to lack of education. They were not even able to understand either the early warnings for natural calamities or do's and don'ts before, during and after the disaster broadcasted in radio television. They were not aware of the free services they are entitled to at the outdoors of government hospitals. They were even exploited by the cheats.

Most of the people in Galachipa and Rangabali upazilas of Patuakhali district were living in poverty. They were also deprived of the light of education. River erosion is a familiar phenomenon there. School buildings collapse in the aftermath but never gets rebuilt. 100% girls at Doi Khawar Char under Ulipur upazila had been the victims of early marriage. Girls were burdened with superstitious beliefs while growing up. Health hazard, divorce, conflict in conjugal life etc were day to day issues. Boys used to get involved in immoral activities. Very few of the parents sent their children to the schools located far-away. Observing behavioural differences of their children with other ones parents once realised the necessity of educating them. Nonetheless, parents started feeling ashamed for not knowing to sign documents. Then majority of the people of the village decided to establish a school and finally they made it true in 2000 with 20-30 students.

SAP Bangladesh initiated an adult education programme at Char Montaz aiming at building awareness on the necessity of education. Eventually the inhabitants of the village discussed with SAP Bangladesh on educating their children and they raised their voice for establishing a school.

## Establishing Schools

In the absence of government education services or schools, different nongovernment organizations were running some non-formal education programmes. With support from ActionAid Bangladesh, Bangladesh Association for Community Education (BACE) established eight non-formal schools in South Borul village of Jamalpur district in year 2001. They met the parents regularly to make them aware of the significance of education in their lives. In 2003, some individuals of the village decided in a meeting to establish a formal primary school. They formed a committee in 2005 to mobilize resources including lands for the



### Women Leadership in Establishing Right to Education in Char Areas

Saleha Begum, mostly known as Saleha Chachi, is a grassroots educationist of Char Montaz. She lost her husband in the tornado of 1970 and struggled to make her way with four children. Char Montaz was such a place where people did not know what the power is that comes from education. There was only one school operated by only one teacher. It was 1985 when SAP Bangladesh, a partner of AAB, started working in Char Montaz. Saleha Chachi was the first woman in Char Montaz who had been a member of a group of women made by SAP-BD. She herself joined Adult Literacy Centre and made some other women join there. She made people of the village understand that a school can pave the way to be developed for their village. With her own money and effort, though she was not well-off, Chachi started running a school in 1987. Nuron Nahar, a student of the adult education centre, took responsibility of 30 students as a teacher there. Eventually, the school started running in full swing with four teachers and a number of students.

Saleha Chachi faced many challenges while running the school. Establishing the school in a Khas land was the major one. Along with other women she managed to dig a pond for water supply and afterwards they started fish culture for

generating fund for the school. The school, however, remained stopped for ten years for financial problem. AAB started working in Char Montaz in 2001 in partnership with SAP-BD. Saleha Chachi again tried her best to get a support for her school to make her dream come true. In 2002, SAP and AAB started sharing the responsibility of her school. In 2010, she met the Education Minister of Government of Bangladesh in a programme organised by AAB. There she claimed registration of eight formal schools established by communities in Char Montaz and other adjacent areas. In 2011, all these eight schools got temporary registration and now are waiting for full registration.

As recognition of her works Saleha Chachi received Chand Sultana Literacy Award 2009.

school. As a result of their advocacy a rich person named Hasen Munshi donated 52 decimal lands for the school in January 2006. Then the committee with assistance from ActionAid Bangladesh and BACE established a school building.

The people at Rangabali upazila of Patuakhali district also took initiative to make sure formal education of their children instead of non-formal education. They established four schools at Majhneta village of Rangabali union, Bhuinyar Haola of Chhoto Baishdia union, Madhukhali of Boro Baishdia union, and Charlata of Chalitabuniya union in 2005. These schools were established on locally donated lands. A person named Fakizuddin donated 51 decimal lands for Bhuinyar Haola primary School. Inhabitants of the village Doi Khawar Char donated three acres land for schools in Kurigram

### **Registration of South Borul School: A Snapshot**

In 2006, School Management Committee (SMC) of South Borul School decides to apply for registration and started collecting necessary documents. The documents include population certificate of the area, teachers' recruitment circular, SMC committee resolution, teachers' recruitment letter, teachers' educational certificates, fixed deposit against the name of the school, preserved general fund account, document of 52 decimal land for school, documents of land mutation, consent letter from BACE, map of class rooms, map of proposed area, member list of SMC, sketch of the toilet, picture of the school building, recommendation from upazila education committee, demand order letter from relevant parliament member etc. The documents had been submitted to the District Primary Education Office (DPEO) getting attested by Upazila Education Officer (UEO). DPEO then sent the papers to the divisional office. Divisional Director



district. All of these schools were built with community initiatives and resources.

## Education and other Activities in the School

From the very beginning of the establishment of the schools they ensured quality education by recruiting trained teachers and following proper rules according to

the standard curricula. Members of Upazila Education Watch Group as well as the Business Forum helped a lot in monitoring and ensuring quality education at the schools. The parents also helped the initiatives through financial assistances.

In Kurigram district Esho Desh Gori (EDG) with assistance from ActionAid Bangladesh assisted in constructing a school building along with two latrines and furniture. They also provided allowance and training for the teachers. In 2008, they initiated income generating activities like cattle and sheep rearing, fish culture, vegetable cultivation in the school compound to generate funds on their own engaging the guardians living in poverty.

then visited the school in 2007 and sent the papers with recommendations to the parliamentary sub-committee for approval. However, the documents had been refused due to a complicacy about the age limit of the Headmaster. The papers were sent again in 2008 with correction and the schools got preliminary approval on 28 November 2010. After one year the school applied for a temporary registration through DPEO in Jan 2012 and got approval on 23 January 2012.

## Registration of the Schools

School Management Committee (SMC), parents, Union Parishad, Teachers' Forum, Reflect Circle, Lokokendra and the NGOs involved, played active role to obtain registration of the schools from the very beginning. Primary Education Department at upazila, district and divisional levels, Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, Social Audit Team, all of them worked directly or indirectly to move this community initiative ahead. Papers and

1. Application to Deputy Director
2. Picture of school with signboard
3. Mutation of school with ledger
4. Sketch map
5. Distance certificate
6. Information of inhabitants of the locality
7. Information of the students categorized according to classes they read in
8. Bank certificate for general fund and special fund.



documents required to be submitted to the relevant authority were:

According to an order from the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education of the Government of Bangladesh (Ref no. MoPME-3/5 R - 3/2002 (Part-2)/123), Divisional Deputy Director shall send a report within three months to the evaluation committee responsible for preliminary approval with the received applications, relevant documents, records and visiting report on selected site for school. Reviewing all the documents committee will inform the initiators about opening the schools. Without this approval no school can be established or opened. It is also

mentioned there that this preliminary approval will no way be considered as permanent approval. The schools having preliminary approval can apply for permanent registration after one year of running to be observed by the authority.

9. Fixed deposit
10. 100 taka treasury invoice
11. Attested copy of teachers' recruitment advertisement
12. Recommendation from Teachers' Committee
13. Copy of Managing Committee's organogram
14. Appointment letter as well as the joining letter of recruited teachers, with relevant certificates
15. Upazila Education Officer's visit report and recommendation letter
16. Teachers' and SMC members' list
17. Map and sketch of school building
18. Income and Expenditure of last three years

## Barriers to Registration of Schools

The initiators faced a number of challenges like bureaucracy, non-cooperation of government officials, poor communication etc.

***Lengthy procedure at Upazila and District Education Office:*** Lengthy procedure for approval of file often results in a delayed registration. Six months interval between meetings of parliamentary sub-committee is another reason for

Steps for Establishment and Registration of Schools	
Call a meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collective decision making about land and finance for establishment of the school</li> </ul>
Land registration, school building and furniture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Formation of SMC</li> <li>Preparing legal documents and mutation of land</li> <li>Construction of school building (according to government)</li> </ul>

delay. During the Caretaker Government the interval was even longer. Due to lack of preservation of documents at District Education Offices same papers had to be submitted more than once. Some of the officials asked for speed money to provide visit reports with recommendation letter that also made the procedure complicated.

**Lack of eligible teacher:** In remote areas it is hard to get an eligible teacher according to the requirement criteria. It is also difficult at this stage to follow government requirements of having proper infrastructure of schools. It also delays the registration procedure. Non-availability of books and education materials is also a problem.

**Postponement of registering new school:** Sometimes the government decides not to register schools any more within a defined timeframe. It is also a big problem for getting registration of schools.

Steps for Establishment and Registration of Schools	
	measurement) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Making furniture for school</li> </ul>
Teachers' recruitment and students' admission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Advertisement in the newspaper according to government regulations</li> </ul>
Running school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Organise training for teachers</li> <li>▪ SMC and parents' meeting and implementation of decisions made by the committee</li> <li>▪ Coordination with UP, NGO and DoPE</li> </ul>
Preparation for preliminary approval	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Submit application with required attachments to DPEO</li> <li>▪ Organise visit by DPEO and submit visit report with recommendations to Director General of Primary Education</li> </ul>
Temporary registration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Submit application for temporary registration along with preliminary approval to Deputy Director</li> <li>▪ Arrange visit by Deputy Director and collect visit report</li> </ul>

## Recommendations for Easier Registration Procedure

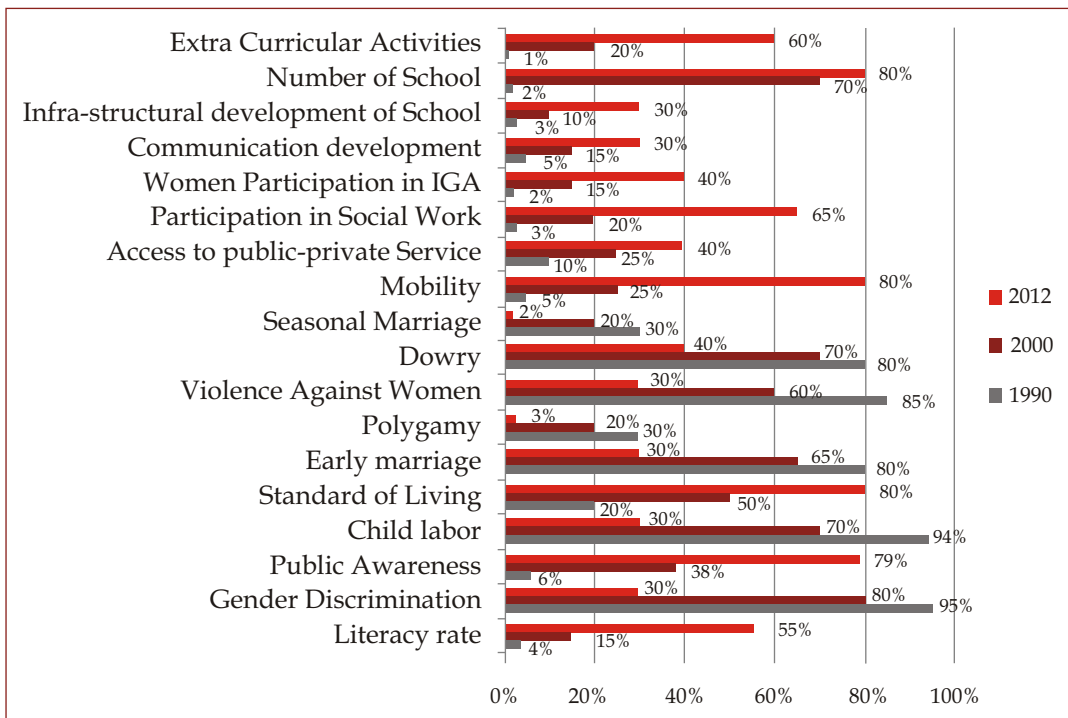
The stakeholders who have experiences in getting registrations of their schools suggested some points, which are important for speeding up the registration procedure:

- Ensure regular and timely visits by responsible government officials
- Ensure accountability of the Education Officers
- Keep provision of stipends as soon as the schools get primary approval
- Ensure minimum allowance for teachers from the time schools get primary approval
- Raise awareness among people
- Sensitise the local government to play effective role in support of the schools
- Recruit eligible teacher according to government policies
- Ensure the requirements of government policies regarding school building, land, minimum number of students, distance between schools etc
- Ensure extensive cooperation from the government officials

We talked to DEO Mr. Abdul Kader about government plan for establishing schools in inaccessible and remote areas, registration procedure, NGO initiatives and integrating schools that got temporary registration in government plan. In his words, "These schools established by SAP's initiative assisted by ActionAid Bangladesh in chars were really essential. It is because government DEOs are not really intended to visit remote areas like Rangabali and Char Montaz. This is very positive that these schools have got registration; it will create better opportunity for the students of Char. I do welcome NGO initiatives in remote areas".

## Impacts of Establishing Schools in Remote Areas

Establishment of schools increased the tendency of higher study among excluded children. Children got the opportunity to play in school ground, which contributed to enhancing their intellectual growth. It paved their access to socialization and participation of children and women in social works. It also decreased the discrimination between boys and girls. Access of the people living in poverty to service providing institutions also increased. They are now well aware of the services they deserve to avail from government institutions. The figures in the chart below explain the changes more clearly:



## Conclusion

It is really positive that many of the students of the char areas are doing very well nowadays. Community initiatives to lead the establishment of schools played most significant role that helped some grassroots leaders emerge. It has been proved that given that grassroots people know what they deserve they can reach it struggling hard if needed through proper channel.

Leadership is there, hidden among them, they just need someone to let them know what quality they have and what do they deserve as human beings.

Habibur Rahman in 2005, Hafiza begum and Md. Ilias in 2006 and Shahnaz Begum in 2007, got scholarship in Class-V from Nayar Char Primary School. Shakhawat in 2007, Nishi and Matin in 2008, Nipa and Tamanna in 2011 got scholarship in class-V from Middle Char Montaz Primary School. Tania in 2009 got scholarship in class-V from North-West Char Montaz Primary School. Md. Rajib and Sania in 2011 got scholarship with GPA-5 from Char Bangla Adarsha Primary School. This school took 1st place in Char Biswash Union.

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Learning Document Series-13

# Lokokendra

A Centre for Sustaining the Empowerment of Grassroots People

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Lokokendra (literal meaning is people's centre, but operationally it is meant to denote grassroots organisations of the people living in poverty) is the organisation of marginalised and disadvantaged group of people, particularly of vulnerable women. 'Lokokendra' is named differently at local level such as 'development center', 'people's center', 'development collaborative', 'development forum', 'development institution' etc. Participants of the Reflect circles and the likeminded people at local level initiated these lokokendras across Bangladesh. It is remarkable that these lokokendras have significantly empowered people living in poverty, more specifically women economically, socially and politically, which urges wider replication of such initiatives. After realising the potential of it, a writeshop was organised in 2011 for two days to produce this piece. Members from ten lokokendras out of 97 participated in this writeshop. They are **Lovely Roy** from Kailasganj Lokokendra, Dacope, Khulna, **Gouro Chandra Barman** from Rashidpur Mukti Lokokendra, Panchbibi, Joypurhat, **Atiar Rahman** from Biswas Lokokendra, Jhenaidah, **Aleya Begum** from Guliakhali Lokokendra, Sitakunda, Chittagong, **Khaleda Jasmine** from Nabo Udayan Lokokendra, Dewanganj, Jamalpur, **Md. Khoybor** from Saduadamarhat Mukti Sangram Lokokendra, Ulipur, Kurigram, **Rasheda Begum** from Ekotai Mukti Lokokendra, Ulipur, Kurigram, **Ruhul Amin** from Naya Bhanguni Gram Unnayan Lokokendra, Galachipa, Patuakhali, **Nazma Begum** from Shildahabari Samaj Unnayan Sangstha, Gabtoli, Bogra and **Fazlur Rahman** from Society for Participatory Education and Development (SPED).



## Background

A lokokendra is situated at Horiana village of Koilashgonj union under Dacope upazila of Khulna district in Bangladesh. Tapon Mondol is a resident of that village. Tapon is a person with disability and a member of the lokokendra. He belongs to a family living in poverty consisting of six members. His father died during his early childhood. He passed secondary school certificate exam despite severe financial constraints but got into difficulty to continue education further. He informed the lokokendra about his situation and then all members of lokokendra met together to discuss the issue. In the meeting, the members decided to set up a library at lokokendra for twenty children in the area and Tapon would facilitate education among these children. He would receive 25 maunds rice per year. After sharing this plan, parents in the area agreed to employ Tapon in the library. Thus, the library began operating. In the meantime, the members came to know that upazila would provide allowance to the persons with disability. They enlisted Tapon's name at upazila for ensuring the allowance. As a result of these initiatives, Tapon became financially solvent to continue his education and support his family.

Lokokendra is basically originated for organizing marginalised communities, especially marginalised women. Participants of Reflect circle<sup>1</sup> and like-minded people at rural areas of Bangladesh had been the key players to flourish these lokokendras. The first center was established at Amtali village of Netrokona district. And till date there are 97 lokokendras in the country. These lokokendras are exemplary sustainable people's organisation in the world of development, which are built by people living in poverty, facilitated by ActionAid Bangladesh (AAB) and supported by its partner organisations.

Participants of reflect circles usually feel the need to continue development activities together once they regularly meet at circles for two years. Hence, Lokokendras were initiated at the end of Reflect project cycle to keep literacy activity on, uphold rights of the deprived, abused, and forgotten people in the area, and to continue

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<sup>1</sup> 'Reflect' is an innovative approach to adult literacy, empowerment and social change. Actionaid initiated Reflect between 1993-1995 through pilot projects in Bangladesh, Uganda and El Salvador. After the end of pilot phase, AAB had implemented projects between 1996-1999 and from 2000 to 2005 in two phases supported by DFID, Bangladesh. During these phases AAB had operated 1151 circles and later 2347 circles; total 3498 circles in two phases. Each circle consisted of 20 to 25 participants and the circles had been operated for 2 years at 'basic and post' circle level. Since 2005 after the Reflect project ends, AAB has been using Reflect method in its programmes through own financing. Reflect won UNESCO literacy prizes in 2003, 2005, 2007, 2008 and 2010 and the method is now used by over 500 organisations in over 70 countries worldwide. To learn more about Reflect, please visit, <http://www.reflect-action.org/>

infrastructural development of the locality. These organisations play significant role at economic, social and political empowerment of the underprivileged women.

## The Way It Began

Reflect has evolved over time to become more context specific for better utilisation. Although initially Reflect appeared as an innovative approach for adult literacy, later on the method is widely used as well as recognised as a useful participatory approach for empowerment and social change. In the second phase of Reflect project (2000-2005), the experiment took place with the idea of lokokendra through a longer term institutional structure for sustaining Reflect activities. At the initial stage these lokokendras became center for continuous education where Reflect graduates and other literates in the area could continue practicing their knowledge and skills besides operating social and cultural activities.

Around 60 lokokendras continued operating after project ended in 2005, which were initiated during the project. AAB and its partner organisations keep running activities of these centers using Reflect method besides creating 37 new centers. There was wrong perception about lokokendra as only continuing education center, which is now eliminated. In addition, grassroots communities, mostly the people living in poverty and particularly women have transformed these lokokendras into people's organisation.

## Goals and Objectives of Lokokendra

Members of each lokokendra usually set up their goals and objectives on the basis of their local context and requirements. Generally the common goal and objectives for initiating lokokendras are:

### Goal

Empowering the underprivileged including rights deprived women economically, socially and politically and participating in the development of local communities besides assisting the government and nongovernment institutions in this regard.

### Preparation before Launching a Lokokendra

Members build trust and unity through operating basic and post Reflect circle besides practicing participatory methods as well as developing mindset to provide everybody's opinions and attitude for respecting opinions of others in the circle.

Residents of a community and participants of circle join together through discussions. Sometime adjacent circles meet each other for a day observation or the cause of a social movement.



## Objectives

- a) To support government and nongovernment institutions at local development and to ensure accountability of these institutions;
- b) To participate in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of local development and motivating others in the area to participate;
- c) To protest all kinds of injustice, inequity, discrimination, inequality and torture;
- d) To build awareness on necessary law, policies, acts etc that uphold rights of the people living in poverty and to propose addition, deduction or induction of such laws and policies wherever needed; and to join movements demanding such laws that protect rights of the underprivileged.

Members of the circle work together on many occasions such as during implementing action point, exchange visit and solving family problems. Relatives and residents of the community also work with circle members to solve issues e.g. dowry, domestic violence, divorce, dispute at bearing expenses of wife and children etc.

## Lokokendra Formation Process

Members of more than one circle and the underprivileged people in the community discuss about their needs and requirements; and accordingly formulate lokokendras. Conditions for becoming members of lokokendra are:

- Spouse and guardian of circle participants besides women, widowed, persons with disability, and very poor persons in the area who are interested.
- Usually persons between 10 to 45 years of age are considered for membership; but elderly person more than 45 years of age, if interested, could join lokokendras.
- It is required to have experience with Reflect programmes to become member of lokokendras; but it is also allowed to participate at Reflect learning process for minimum a year after being member of lokokendra.
- Members are required to have trust on constitution/policies of lokokendra and they need to follow it.
- Interested persons should have the mindset for unity and harmony.
- To become a member of lokokendra, one has to fill up a form and pay enrollment fee. In case of inability to pay the fee, lokokendra considers him/her member without fee.

## Operational Process

Each lokokendra is directed by its own constitution. Thus, each lokokendra may differ from others in terms of operational procedure. From structural perspective every member of lokokendra is member of the general council by default. Executive committee is elected for two years on the basis of opinions of general council members. It is widely practiced to form advisory committee consisting spouse/guardian of members of lokokendra along with like-minded people in the community; but the advisory committee does not have decision making capacity. Executive committee operates lokokendra with opinions from general members; and while necessary this committee takes advice from the advisory committee.

Treasurer is responsible for financial management and executive committee plays role for planning, budgeting and implementing activities. Manager of lokokendra takes care of documentation and administrative work. When manager is not available or absent, a member of executive committee plays the role of manager.

Executive committee consists of 11 members. Majority members of the committee are women, for example,

- President (woman)
- Vice President (one woman and one man)

### Before Getting into Lokokendra

Mobility of women was mostly confined within family. They had never felt spontaneously to move around in their locality. They could not imagine working together for serving their communities. Before creating lokokendra, women and people at communities were disadvantaged.

- Elderly women did not have any space for learning.
- Women and people living in poverty did not have information about their rights.
- They did not have recognition and importance at their areas.
- They did not get justice.
- They have had poor conception about economic and social development.
- Women did not participate in activities outside their families.
- Women did not get opportunity to provide opinions in their families and they were ignored at decision making.
- Women were victims of child marriage and they did not have awareness about the negative side of child marriage.
- They did not have contact with government institutions.
- Training on income generating activities were absent.

- General Secretary (woman)
- Assistant Secretary
- Treasurer (man)
- Media Secretary
- Project Secretary
- 3 executive members

Media secretary followed by general secretary invite all members to join a meeting with date, time, and agenda of the meeting. Two general meetings take place, one in the first week and another in the last week of each month. Agenda of the meeting are selected according to the opinion of the members who were present in the earlier meeting. Decisions taken in the meeting are documented as resolution and later on activities are followed by it.

## Activities of Lokokendra

Annual plan is formulated at the beginning of the year with the assistance from all members and committees of lokokendra. It is done by selecting an issue through identifying, analysing, and prioritising problems in an area. After critical reflection on the issue, action points are identified, and eventually plans are prepared for implementation. Lokokendra in this way undertakes development initiatives to solve problems that have been identified. Action points are also taken while any problem arises suddenly. Usually plan for the implementation of action points are considered as decisions at lokokendra, and these are noted in the resolution book. Sometimes, these action points are noted at brown paper. In some cases, plans and activities exist orally and are not documented. Lokokendras commonly do the following activities:

- Organizing people at community to solve problem.
- Communicating with government and non-government service delivery organisations to better serve people living in poverty.
- Sending representatives at different committees of government and non-government institutions in the area.
- Encouraging and assisting lokokendra members to take part in the election of local government institutions, and eventually entering into power structure as well as leadership positions at local government level.
- Creating and operating mini-library at lokokendra to continue literacy programme.
- Operating savings programme to work towards financial solvency of members besides facilitating other income generating activities.

- Arranging training programmes from different organizations for members according to their requirement besides managing employment for them.
- Observing national and international day.
- Contacting service delivery organisations for infrastructural development of the area.
- Contacting members and chairmen of Union Parishads and arranging VGD, VGF, 100/40 days work programme for the lokokendra members.
- Communicating doctors and hospital authorities for improving health service in the area.
- Helping to enroll dropout children into school.
- Awareness building among local residents about dignity of persons with disability besides making respective authorities accountable for improving road infrastructure that support them.
- In possible cases providing financial assistance to very poor families for education, health and marriage purposes.
- Protesting torture against women and children, dowry and early marriages.
- Taking initiatives for repairing roads and planting trees.
- Organising events to entertain community.

### Change after Establishing Lokokendra

After establishment of lokokendra and working for community development, following changes are observed:

- People living in poverty most particularly women are grouped, united and organised.
- After having space and opportunity for education, members of lokokendras are aspired besides becoming capable to claim their rights.
- Now members participate at village court.
- They have become proactive at claiming rights and justice.
- Women are now able to work outside their homes.
- They have been also actively participating meeting, seminar, rally, and day observation.
- They can now communicate with government institutions and make sure services that they deserve from these institutions.
- Members of lokokendras are now able to relate with social organisations and committees of relevant institutions.
- They have gained strength and unity to stand against exploitation and pressure from local elites.
- They are receiving training from respective institutions.
- Some of them are now members and chairmen of UPs; thus, over the time, they have entered into local government institutions at the leadership positions.

- Supporting social work in the area such as village court, birth and marriage registration.
- Creating emergency fund with the contribution from members' own savings and spend accordingly during disaster.

## Implementation of Plans

Members of lokokendra plan to implement their activities after discussing among each other. One or more sub-committees are formulated consisting of lokokendra members and depending criteria of work; and then each committee is assigned for implementing respective activity. Members of lokokendra include local leaders and people into their activity with the support from advisory committee. In most cases local members and chairmen are contacted to solve problem. Upazila chairmen, UNOs, and Members of Parliament are also included while necessary.

We provide labor where possible to reduce spending for schemes. We also provide money from our savings to do some work. If 10 people provide 10 taka, it is easier to accumulate 100 taka.

Some of the activities are advocacy, lobbying, literacy campaign, writing application, human chain, procession, poster, reporting at local newspapers, which have been done by lokokendras for implementing plans. Spending for specific action is made from lokokendra's fund through discussion. In some cases, members of lokokendra along with community people work together to implement their plans. If any activity needs more funding, financial assistance is taken from rich people in the area and sometimes fund is raised from communities too. Sometime, members go to UP for fund raising. Nonetheless, after negotiation, UP chairmen divert needed labourers out of 40 days work scheme to implementing lokokendra's plans.

## Engaging other Stakeholders

Members officially or personally invite people in the area to join lokokendra's development activities such as implementation of action points, road repairing, awareness building, and observing days. In addition, people in the area are updated about lokokendra's activities and eventually included them into development process. It is observed that people in the area spontaneously take part in implementing programmes because lokokendra plans activities that are of common interest in the locality. Sometime, lokokendras communicate with other groups, clubs, organisations, and cooperatives in the area and take their supports. Lokokendras while needed also join other organisations' programme.

## Challenge and Constraints

Lokokendras face following challenges in implementing action points:

- Family restricts joining at social activity
- Time management at lokokendra's activities while occupied at family's work
- Disagreement among members
- Personal and family disputes spread up to lokokendra
- Transparently maintaining savings
- More personal engagement with programmes/activities
- Fight over leadership position among members
- Reluctance among members to include new member at savings and credit schemes
- Fight over leadership between men and women
- Lack of transparency among committee members especially among male members to maintain accounts about loans.
- Disagreement among members about spending grants or investments.

The constraints are:

- Resistance and threat from influential people in the area
- Religious resistance, superstition, and fundamentalism
- Obstacles from local government institutions
- Negative views of political leaders and their supporters
- Influence of guardian, local residents, members and chairmen of UP in favour of early marriage
- Influential families do not support resisting dowry.

## Techniques to Combat Challenges and Constraints

When problem arises, the lokokendras usually discuss the issue among members to eventually find solutions. Through this process, unity grows among members and it becomes easier to find solutions. After building good relationship with people's representative in the area e.g. chairmen, members, and people in general, lokokendras engage them in their activities. After taking their advice and assistance, they gradually own the programmes of lokokendra. As a result, it becomes easier to solve difficult problems.



To implement bigger project, members of a lokokendra may take assistance from other lokokendras through lokokendra forums<sup>2</sup>. Members also do lobby and build relationship with like-minded other organisations, clubs, administration, journalists and political leaders to remove difficulties from lokokendra's programmes.

## Leadership building and empowerment of women

Marginalised members especially women have been working for their leadership and empowerment using Reflect technique at lokokendras. They have been gaining confidence by commenting and providing opinions on issues at lokokendras. By having such practices, members of lokokendras can spontaneously deliver their statements, arguments and opinions at bigger meetings, processions and at village court.

Some village court sessions take place at lokokendra where members actively participate. The village court session at UP also invites lokokendra members and gives importance on their opinions. Nowadays in some areas, victim does not want to appear before village jury without presence of lokokendra members.

Members are also attending several government and nongovernment committees such as school management committee, disaster risk reduction committee, village development committee, and different steering committees of the UPs. They have been directly contributing to the rural development programmes and, thus, gaining more public acceptance as well as recognition. Following this trend, members have entered into the local government structure through election by holding the positions as chairmen and members at UPs. For example, there are 19 members and 1 chairman out of lokokendra members who have been elected in the UP election in 2011. And now they have been successfully working for development of their respective constituencies.

Lokokendras spend money from their savings for income generating activities. In addition, they have received trainings to increase their skills and capacity for better income generation through contacting different institutions. Thus, they are advancing towards financial solvency. For example, 'Shapla Ekota Lokokendra'

<sup>2</sup> More than one lokokendra in an area usually create 'lokokendra forum'. A committee is formed consisting member of each lokokendra to operate the forum. There are 13 area wise lokokendra forums till date with a mission to work in collaboration on bigger issue, build awareness, do advocacy on rights issue and campaign.

from Soppara village got allocation of three miles of roadside blocks from Vogdanga UP in Kurigram district through negotiation; since then they planted trees on both sides of the road. Now members of this lokokendra have become owner of resources equivalent to one crore taka.

## Impact of Lokokendra Activities

Some impacts of lokokendra are infrastructural development of the area besides persistent resistance against child marriage, polygamy and dowry. People at rural communities are aware about public services; thus, they demand their rights from concerned institutions. Opinions of women are valued nowadays at village court. Women are capable to communicate with government and nongovernment institutions.

Women have gained decision making power at their families. Lokokendras have significantly worked for awareness building to eradicate discrimination against girls besides reducing domestic violence in communities. It has also taken initiatives for bringing financial solvency of the members as well as their families and neighbours. Different government bodies are now interested to work and assist lokokendras after being impressed by progress and transparency at the 'modus operandi' of lokokendras. Hence, UP and government offices consider proposals

Rahima Aktar, a member of lokokendra, was born in a poor family with two younger brothers and seven sisters. Her father died long ago. There was no bread earner in her family, thus, she and her family members used to work as domestic help to live from hand to mouth life. She was married to Jasim, younger son of Jalal Boli, a neighbouring house, in 2000. During these years Rahima's two brothers grew up. One of them went abroad with loan from relatives. Observing little solvency in the family, Rahima's husband asked her, 'Go to your father's home and bring cash, gold ornaments, and furniture'. They had often disputes on it.

At some point Jasim beat Rahima and sent her home. She then shared her pain with managers and members of lokokendra. A general meeting was called in the lokokendra about torture against Rahima. It was decided to have a village court session by village head, UP members and senior leaders in the area. People in the area were invited in the session next day where Jasim was called into. Jasim realised his wrongdoings and understood that taking dowry is a crime. He committed to take her wife back home. Rahima is now happily living with her husband, son and daughter.



from lokokendra with importance; for example, distribution of VGD/VGF, canal excavation, distribution of khas land, plantation and road repairing. People in the area spontaneously extend their support, thus, acceptability of lokokendra has widely been enhanced.

Member of lokokendra diligently work for human rights of the deprived people in the communities. They work together with people in the area for building society based on equity and justice. Members of lokokendra, most particularly women members have been gaining dignity at their families and society as well.

## Future Dreams about Lokokendras

Lokokendras mostly work to empower vulnerable people more specifically women and to ensure equality and justice for them by protesting discrimination against women. Programmes at lokokendra are action oriented. To make lokokendra's dream reality, members need to work closely with the like-minded people in the area and to unite them for practicing Reflect techniques. Towards that goal the following programmes should be undertaken:

- Establishing equal partnership of women at social leadership
- Lokokendras need to be well equipped with information and communication technologies that would eventually enrich the center with knowledge and information. Thus, underprivileged people in the community could access to required information to claim their rights.
- It would be quite different from conventional NGOs and this people's organisation would influence government's work and mindset and subsequently turn it in favour of poor and women.
- This people's organisation would do stronger advocacy as a catalyst for enacting pro-poor policies and work for implementation as well.

## Conclusion

Vulnerable and disadvantaged people at rural villages have limited space to express themselves and share their problems. They are often deprived of public services and other benefits in their communities. Sometime they do not have proper information how to access government and non-government institutions and where to claim their rights. In many cases they are marginalised by local elites and powerful people. Women are more vulnerable and they are victims of torture, discrimination, domestic violence, dowry, child marriage and so on. Lokokendras have provided space where vulnerable women and disadvantaged people group together to share their problems and look for ways out of poverty and injustice. They have the

opportunity to get literacy at these centers in the first place. In addition, they may further improve their analytical and problem solving ability through practicing Reflect.

Lokokendra helps building confidence of the members along with their family members and people living around them. It provides guideline, skill, training, and needed capacity from income generation activities to rights claiming capability. Lokokendras have the potential to work as people's organisation with a persistent mission to protect and promote rights of the underprivileged communities and uphold their human dignity eliminating all the injustice from their lives and societies.

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