



Save the Children



APPROACH PAPER

Turning Rights into Realities in Bangladesh:  
Child Friendly Local Governance

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Save the Children is the world's leading independent organization for children. It has been working in Bangladesh since 1970 and today reaches over 15 million people each year. With a staff of around 700 and a network of more than 100 partners Save the Children is one of the largest child-rights organisations in Bangladesh. It works in the areas of Health Nutrition and HIV/AIDS, Education, Child Protection, Child Rights Governance and Child Poverty.

For further information contact:

**SK. Rahamat Ullah (Rumi)**

Manager – Child Participation

Save the Children

Email: rahamat.ullah@savethechildren.org

Mobile: +880 (0)174 586 6037

**Ms Hagar Russ**

Director Child Rights Governance

Save the Children

Email: hagar.russ@savethechildren.org

Mobile: +880 (0)173 032 5146

<https://bangladesh.savethechildren.net/>

This paper was written by Suralini Fernando with valuable support from Save the Children staff members in Bangladesh (Hagar Russ and Rahamat Ullah (Rumi)).

Cover Photo: Suralini Fernando

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## WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

There are around 64 million children in Bangladesh (UNICEF, 2008), yet the current governance framework does not adequately or effectively include this important demographic. This leads to a significant political deficit: a large, young and ever-growing part of the population is excluded from democratic processes and insufficiently considered in development and fiscal planning by decision makers. In fact, there are very few participatory spaces for children (any person under the age of 18 years according to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child) and adolescents (those aged between 10 to 19 years according to the World Health Organisation) to meaningfully influence the decisions, especially financial decisions, which shape their lives. As Bangladesh consolidates its strong economic growth in line with Middle Income Country Status, tapping into the

youth bulge in a meaningful way should be a top priority.

The lack of institutionalized and systematic child participation negatively affects the quality of democracy and the political culture of Bangladesh. It perpetuates and entrenches the disengagement and disempowerment of children and adolescents from an early age. They observe a narrative of democracy that is regularly disrupted by hartals (strikes), blockades, and political tensions. This undermines their ability and desire to participate in the democratic processes of their country and contribute to its political culture as engaged citizens.

So, how can Bangladesh reap this demographic dividend and make greater economic and social progress by engaging its most youthful citizens? One answer is through the Child Friendly Local Governance approach.



Photo Credit: Shariful

*“I don’t want to be a chairman or a member because it is not big. We don’t like politics at the high level because there is too much fighting. One party is always fighting with another.”*

– Hamida Akhter, 15 years

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## WHAT IS THE CFLG APPROACH?

Child Friendly Local Governance (CFLG) comprises a rights-based child programming approach and a set of social accountability initiatives that, in concert, work to facilitate, promote and institutionalize the empowerment and participation of children and adolescents in the governance arrangements at the local level. The aim is to ensure better services and improve accountability of local government for the rights of children.

CFLG places children and adolescents at the centre of the development agenda of local government. It facilitates their inclusion in institutional mandates such as ward shovas (participatory council meetings) and open budget sessions as well as building their

understanding and capacity to effectively influence decision-making processes and monitor services and resources. Crucially, CFLG also supports the capacity of local government to better respond to the needs and concerns of children and adolescents in their communities through innovative youth focused social accountability initiatives, such as dialogue sessions between children and local government officials, as well as complaint and response mechanisms, and citizen's charters. In this way, CFLG enhances the responsiveness and the accountability of local governance actors to the most youthful members of their electorate for services delivered and resources allocated.

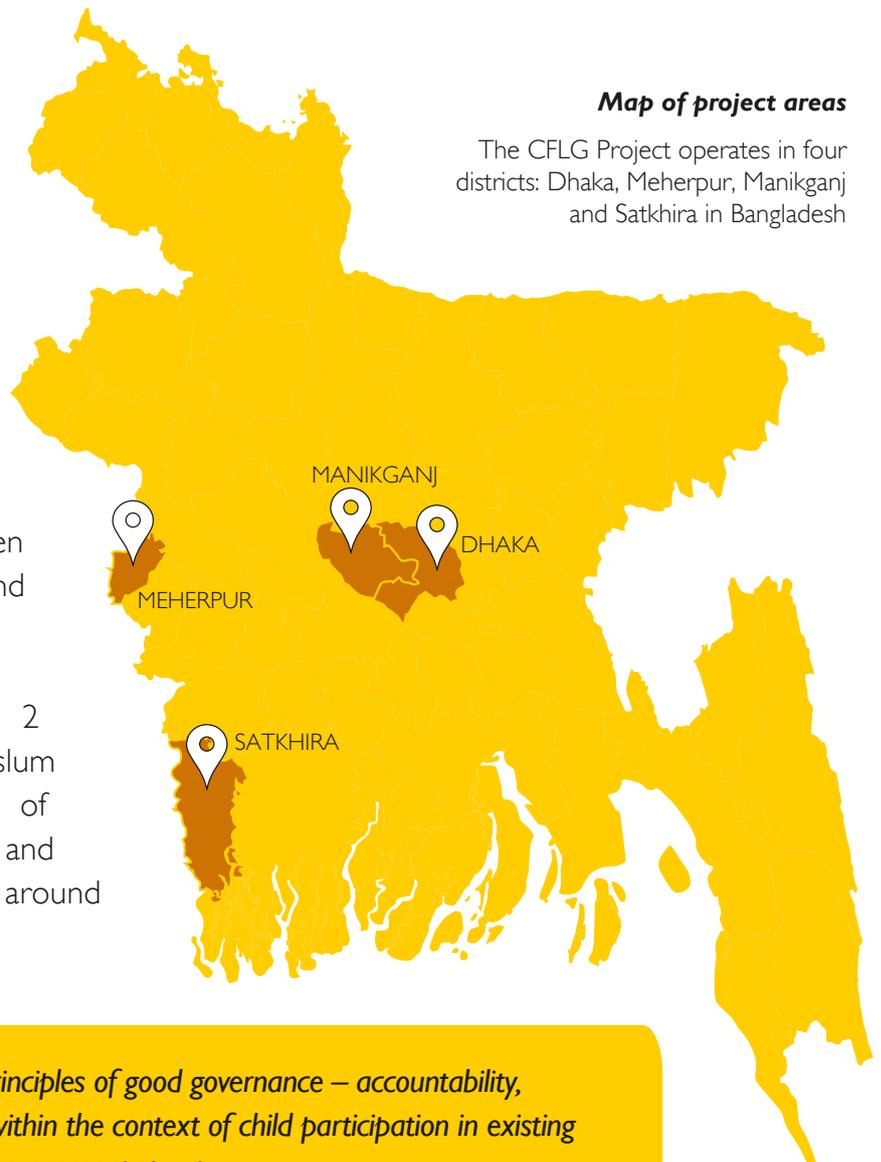


Photo Credit: Titu, Satkhira

## CFLG IN ACTION

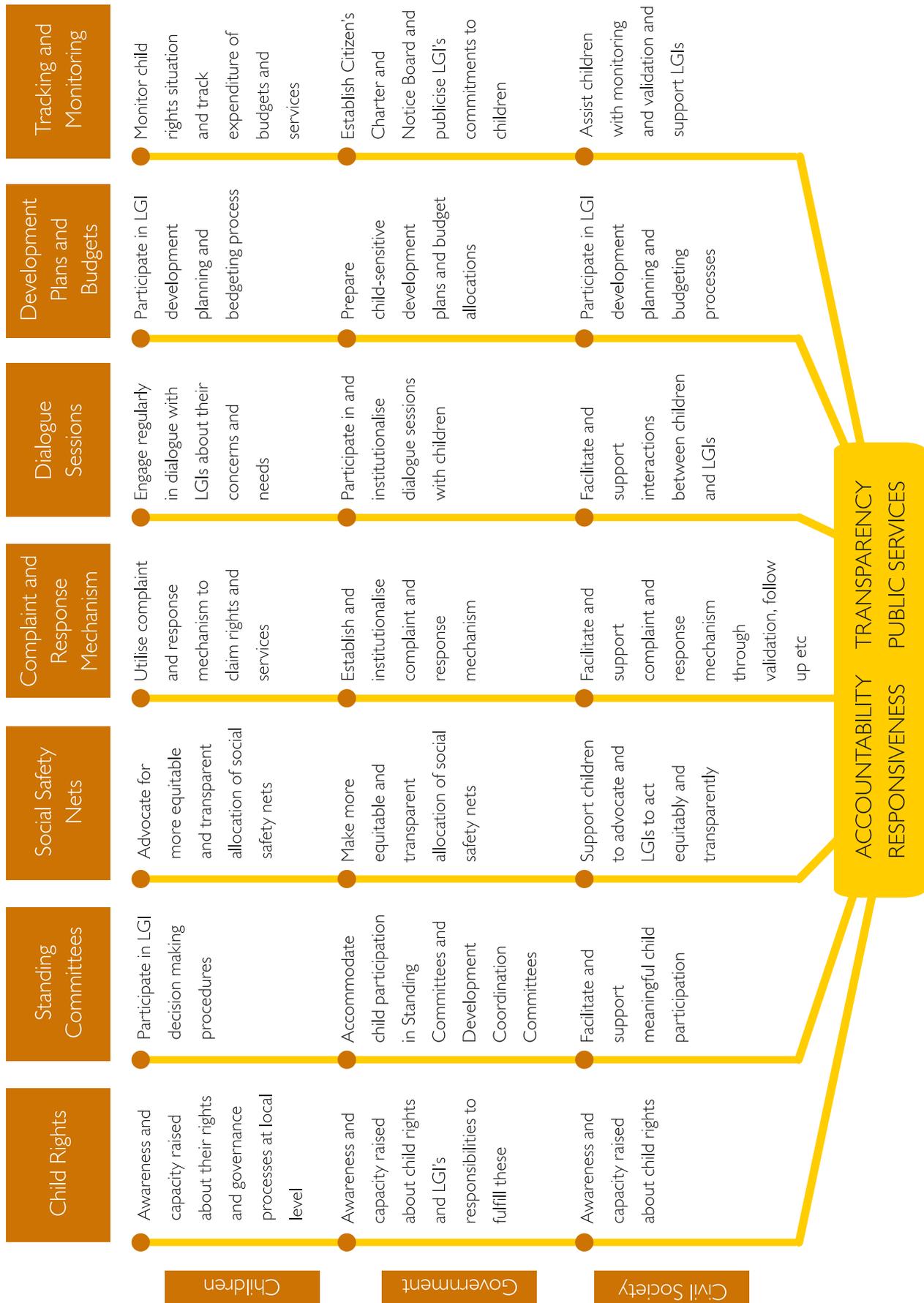
Shefali Khatun, from Boddipur Colony, in Satkhira Municipality, became a member of the CFLG child forum in Ward 3. She learnt about child rights, child-friendly local governance, the complaint and response mechanisms, the roles and responsibilities of the Municipality. She also became part of the CFLG team that monitors the child rights and service delivery situation, and then presents findings to the Mayor. Through CFLG, she and her peers now regularly engage in dialogue with the Mayor to bring their individual and the community's concerns to his attention. Examples include the need to repair a road, as well as high demand for a safe drinking water source in the community. These results can be directly attributed to CFLG engagement.

While a number of civil society and other organisations have supported the capacity of local government, no agency has systematically addressed the relationship between local government, and children and adolescents. In operation since 2013, Save the Children implements the CFLG project with partners Breaking the Silence (BTS), Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association (BNWLA) and Social and Economic Enhancement Programme (SEEP) in 34 Union Parishads (UP), 2 Municipalities, 2 Upazilla Parishads (UZP) and 1 slum area in a City Corporation of Manikganj, Meherpur, Satkhira and Dhaka district. CFLG works with around 16,350 children and adolescents.



*CFLG: mainstreaming the principles of good governance – accountability, transparency, responsiveness – within the context of child participation in existing local government structures.*

# CFLG IN PRACTICE



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## LOCAL GOVERNANCE FOCUS

Local governance in Bangladesh is a dynamic and diverse landscape with many actors, agendas, aims and activities. At the community level, local governments play an important role in administering development and delivering services. Over the years, they have contributed to national progress in many areas, including rural infrastructure, social safety nets, primary education, birth registration, and provision of drinking water. In this local governments have been, and still are, supported by many actors: NGOs, civil society organisations, development partners, and private sector service providers. Their organizational presence and mandates have evolved with time, and local governments are now an indispensable institution in both rural and urban settings. However, challenges concerning the capacity, authority and resources of local governments remain. These are compounded by structural issues, for example coordination between local governments and central agencies on budgets and resource mobilization, plus decision making powers.

At the crux of the matter is the need to meet the demands of good governance – accountability, transparency, responsiveness, for example – while effectively delivering services which meet the needs of all citizens, including children. This is where CFLG can add real value. CFLG targets the working modalities of local governments with a social accountability approach. With tools such as dialogue sessions, complaint and response mechanism, citizens' charter, child participation

*“Before I became part of CFLG, in my family my parents were taking all the decisions but now I am also contributing. My parents listen to me now because when the UP organizes a meeting, my father goes to the meeting, and he listens to the UP officials talk about child rights. They can see that I am a mature person, because I think before I talk, and they can see that.”*

– Sonia Akhter, 13 years



Photo Credit: Suralini Fernando



*“I have been a UP member for 5 years and the Chairman for 13 years. It is only since CFLG began that children attend the Ward Shova. Through this process we also have gotten to know the children’s needs and have been able to better respond.”*

– Nurul Islam, Nobogram UP Chairman

in local government committees, CFLG bridges the gap between local government officials and children in the electorate to enhance the state-to-citizen flow of accountability and service provision. By institutionalizing these social accountability platforms, CFLG re-invigorates the multi-agent local governance landscape.

Moreover, children and adolescents know their situation and needs, and they make powerful advocates – not just for themselves, but also for others in their communities. They can help to make connections between local authorities and neglected citizens. Children and adolescents can also help highlight issues which affect the whole community, such as flooded roads or broken bridges, through dialogue with their local government representatives. In this

way, they enhance their own social and political capital, that of their families as well as communities.

The evidence from CFLG is that local government officials now listen and respond to children and adolescents. The officials have a better understanding of the problems and needs of more citizens within their electorate. They participate in regular dialogue with children and adolescents, who advocate for better services, investment and equitable safety net targeting. Moreover, they want to keep their communities happy because it enhances goodwill and accountability. Their efforts and achievements can be also publicized to the community which helps spread the word about their commitment to CFLG.

## 4 CHILD EMPOWERMENT AND ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

Child participation is enshrined under Article 12 in the Convention, and is thus one of the most practical tools to aide the democratic process, founded on the Convention's revolutionary underlying premise: a child is not simply an object of care or a subject of adult power but a citizen in his/her own right. Children who are capable of forming and expressing their views should have as much opportunity as adults to contribute to their community's development because they know their situation and needs.

In reality, however, there are limited institutionalized spaces in local governance arrangements which welcome children's participation. Related and equally important challenges include limited opportunities for children and adolescents to learn about their rights and their role in contributing to local governance decision-making processes.

CFLG works to facilitate children's empowerment by developing their knowledge and confidence through a host of capacity building and awareness raising activities so that they can participate in local governance mechanisms, enter into dialogue with decision makers and use simple social accountability and audit tools. With more information and raised awareness, they can highlight issues that affect their lives based on systematic monitoring, and can meaningfully contribute to local government planning and budgeting exercises.



Photo Credit: Suralini Fernando

*“I want to support children, poor people in my communities, so I come to the UP and continue to try and help. In relation to the complaint and response mechanism, when we started the project, in the beginning people weren't complaining about eve-teasing but now they are opening up, and we encourage people to share their problems, and they all see that they will get a response.”*

– Rosina Akhter, 20 years old

Equally, CFLG supports children to monitor service delivery and budget allocations, and raise deficits with local government officials. Children receive training on how to use the simple service monitoring mechanism, conduct surveys using child-friendly formats, and then present their findings to the local government officials, at committee meetings, and also raise it with representatives from central/ministerial agencies. In response, officials can take action and provide remedies.

**CFLG IN ACTION**

The Collectorate Public School in Manikganj had been without a headmaster for some time. The students raised this through the complaint and response mechanism as their quality of education was undermined due to lack of leadership, teacher absenteeism, and poor enforcement of rules and regulations. In response, the Manikganj Sadar municipality officials arranged a dialogue session with the children. The Mayor of the municipality made a commitment to solve the problem. After another dialogue session, the Mayor escalated the issue to the next level of local government at the district level, being the Deputy Commissioner of Manikganj District. Within a week, a new headmaster was appointed to the Collectorate Public School. As a result of CFLG social accountability platforms and advocacy, there was a speedy resolution to the problem.

**5****ENGAGING CIVIL SOCIETY**

*“In CFLG, everyone is very motivated, they are doing it from their heart, it is their passion. It is not just another job for them. Even if the CFLG project no longer continues, we will still continue to work in this up but what about the other areas? We need support to take it to them.”*

– Jahangir, Community Journalist,  
Nobogram UP

Children cannot be empowered or mobilized in a vacuum, and need strong support from community and from civil society actors. They are key to successful social accountability initiatives, and can also support in budget tracking, mass awareness campaigns and equitable safety net targeting. Together, these concentrate local government attention on the social development and rights of children.

CFLG works to strengthen the capacity of the community and local civil society to support the processes described above. CFLG supports the community and civil society actors therefore to work hand in hand with officials from local government as well as to support the meaningful engagement of children in local decision-making and planning processes.

# 6 KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

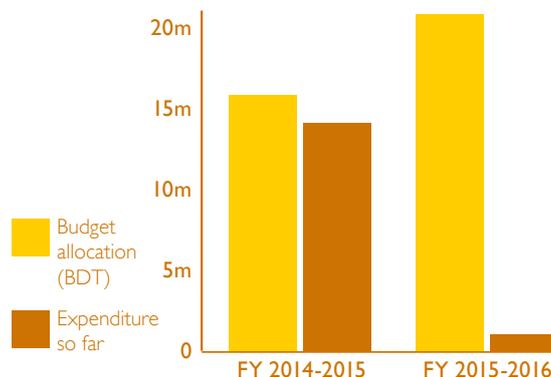
## PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE



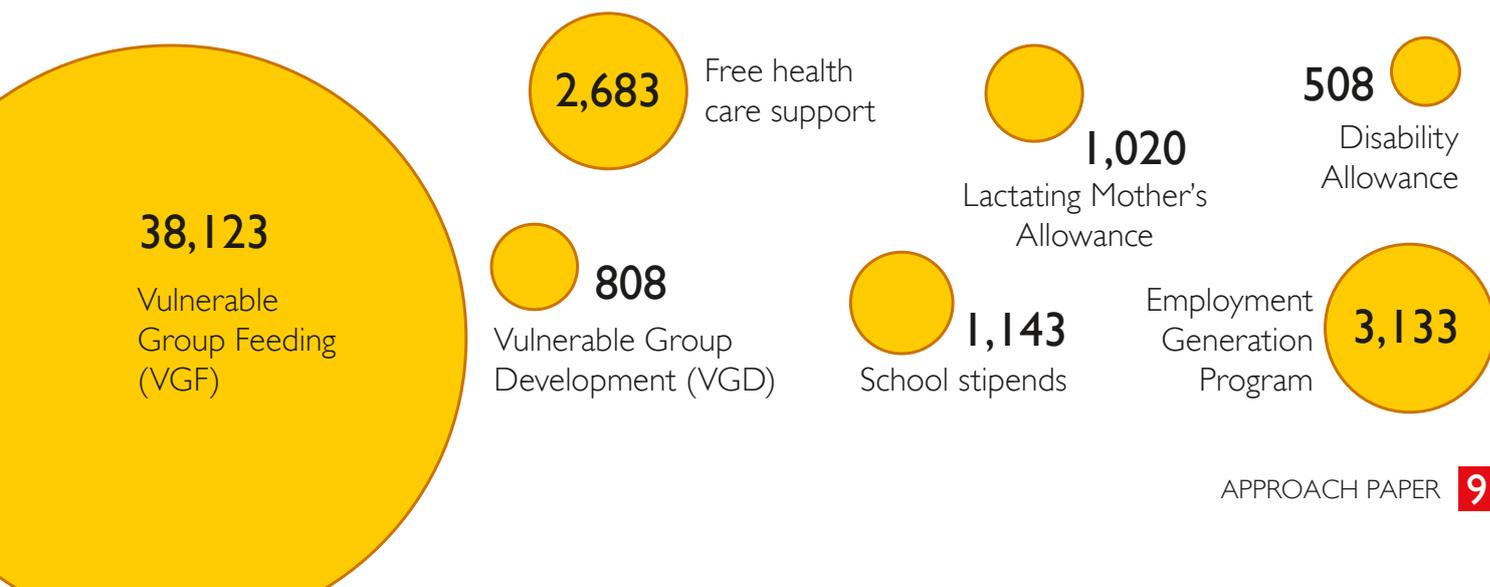
With increased awareness and knowledge, children and adolescents are now engaging more than ever in local decision-making processes through participating in ward shovas, UP's and Municipalities' planning and budgeting meetings, and open budget sessions. In most of the project working areas their participation in such activities occurred for the first time.

## CHILD-SENSITIVE BUDGET ALLOCATIONS AND PLANS

For the first time, local government institutions are explicitly considering and budgeting for children who live in their communities. The allocated fund in FY 2014-15 was spent to improve the wellbeing of poor and disadvantaged children and their families. This has improved the demand and supply sides of public service delivery.



## MORE EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION OF SAFETY NETS



## IMPROVED PUBLIC SERVICES



47 Bridges built

Photo Credit: Ashraf, Manikganj



4572 Children received school uniforms and educational materials

17 Solar panels provided

Photo Credit: Shariful, Satkhira



1481 Children received monetary support



Photo Credit: Ashraf, Manikganj

187 Sanitary latrines built

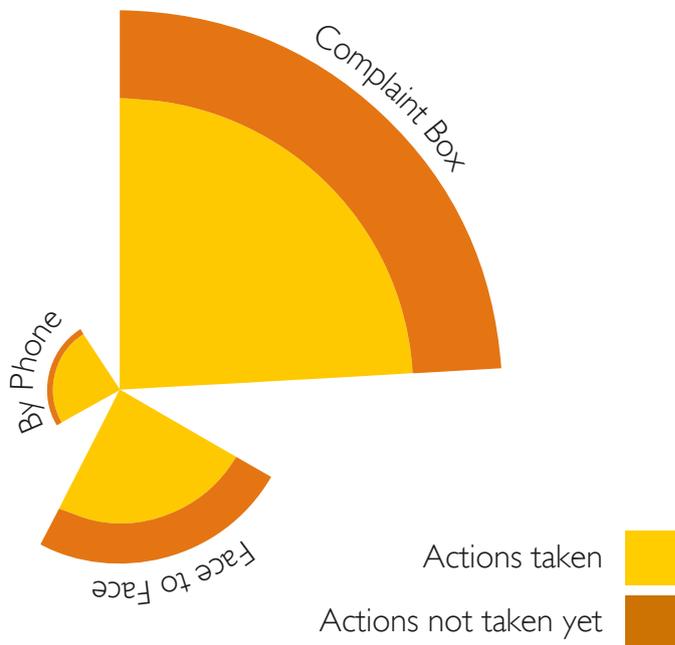


Photo Credit: Titu, Satkhira

294 Tube wells and water pipe line set up for safe drinking water



## USE OF COMPLAINT AND RESPONSE MECHANISM



Complaints of sexual harassment, physical and humiliating punishments, child marriage, violence, dowry, rape, lack of electricity, toilet, tube well, road repair, financial problem/support, need of solar panel etc have been submitted and resolved thus far.



Photo Credit: Suralini Fernando

*"I put a complaint in the complaint box that I needed money to attend school, then the UP officer talked to me about my financial need and that was how I started receiving the education stipend."*

– Rupa Akhter, 13, dreams of being a doctor

## 7 SCALING UP AND MAINSTREAMING CFLG

As a first step, and in the short-to-medium term, scaling up CFLG can be done by amending the Union Parishad operational manual, issuing circulars to Pourashavas or to City Corporations without amendment to legislation. The key changes would be to:

1. Ensure child/adolescent participation is institutionalized
2. Planning and budgeting processes should include an explicit mandate to focus on the social development of children
3. Funding for both child and adolescent participation, and social development of children is made available through local resource mobilization and Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives revenue streams

As a second step, and in the medium-to-longer term, CFLG can be scaled up by introducing a “CFLG Index”. That is, in order to monitor CFLG activities, and to attract funding for the performing CFLG authorities, a set of indicators that measure progress on the child-friendliness of local governance institutions. These could be additional indicators under the performance monitoring process of the Monitoring and Evaluation Wing of the Local Government Division. The index could be strengthened, where possible, with a function to enable the local authority to access a performance grant for achieving good CFLG outcomes.



### What is the CFLG Index?

-  Indicators on participation of children in the planning and budgeting process
-  Indicators ensuring allocation and expenditure in child focused social development projects which have been developed as a result of consultation with children during the planning and budgeting process
-  [ ]% decrease/increase of specific health/nutrition/education indicators

*“[What would make the CFLG process better is] if this is in the Government system like through a circular – at the District Committee or even Ministry level – then it will be better because it will be more systematic sustainable and institutionalized and then all the children will be able to benefit.”*

– Nurul Islam,  
Nobogram UP Chairman

There are also a range of other local government strengthening programmes which could benefit from CFLG and vice versa. Some examples include:

1. **Local Governance Support Project (LGSP) Phase 2**, which is jointly implemented by the World Bank and the Local Government Department (Ministry of Local Government Rural Development and Cooperatives) (MLGRDC). It aims to build capacity of local government officials as well as citizens for more efficient and equitable resource mobilization and poverty reduction at the local level
2. **Horizontal Learning Program (HLP)**, which is jointly implemented by the World Bank and the Local Government Department (MLGRDC). It aims to identify and replicate good practices which enhance good governance at the local level
3. **Upazilla Governance Project and Union Parishad Governance Project**, which is implemented by UNDP and the Local Government Department (MLGRDC). It aims to improve the capacities of local government institutions for effective and accountable delivery of pro-poor services and infrastructure



An efficient system of good governance that consistently upholds democratic values of participation, accountability, justice and respect for human rights should also be fit for children. There must be a sound legislative and policy framework, strong institutions, and effective monitoring and coordination. Equally, we need confident and capable children and adolescents, local government authorities, and civil society who can bring about good social services and development in communities. CFLG is thus a vital step forward in this direction.

*“My parents feel good about me being a part of this group because now I know my rights.”*

– Reefat Hossain, 12 years old, dreams of becoming an engineer

*“A few years ago, we couldn’t even come to the UP but through this process we have learnt about the responsibilities of the UP and we have come here. I have learnt that there are 9 wards in the UP, and how to take action from them. One of the big responsibilities of the UP is to support children and look after the needs and wellbeing of their community.”*

– Milon Hussain, 16 years old





Photo Credit: Ashraf, Manikgani



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