

THE
HUNGER
PROJECT

A stand for a self-reliant Bangladesh



ANNUAL REPORT
THE HUNGER PROJECT-BANGLADESH

2015

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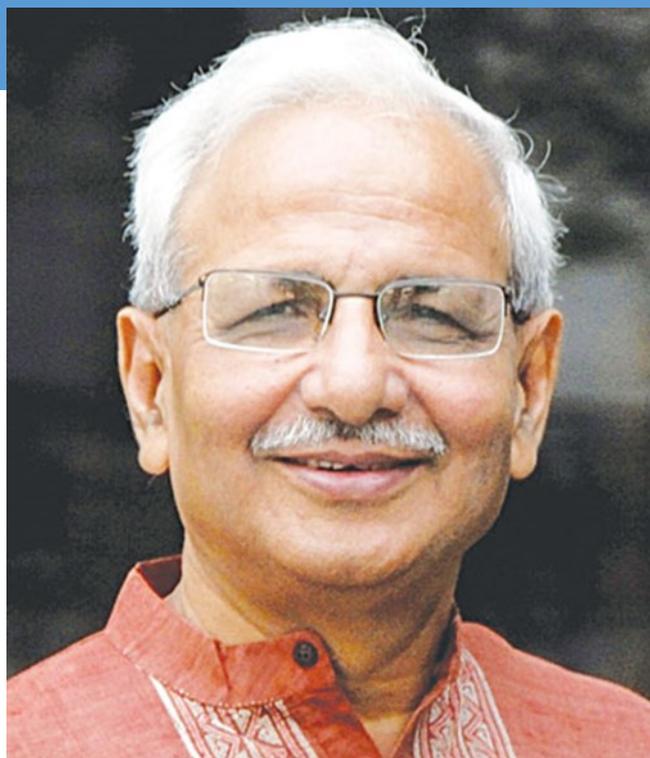
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MESSAGE FROM THE COUNTRY DIRECTOR



Badiul A. Majumdar

Dr. Badiul Alam Majumdar
Global Vice-president and Country Director
The Hunger Project

On September 25, 2015, world leaders adopted a resolution entitled “Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, which became the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as of January 1, 2016. Achieving the agenda set forth in the SDGs will require an integrated approach. The SDGs cannot be achieved by merely implementing projects in specific sectors like education and health; without also addressing challenges such as peace building, state building, human rights and good governance. It will require a holistic, bottom-up 'gender-focused community-led development' approach — a sustained process that enables women, men and youth to take control over their own lives. Such a process will require citizens to become active agents of change; grassroots organisations to enable voices to be heard; the creation of vibrant, inclusive economies; and an effective, accountable local government system, with all actors playing catalytic roles.

The Hunger Project (THP), the largest volunteer-based organization in Bangladesh, has been working since 1991 to create a self-reliant Bangladesh through a multipronged, non-partisan strategy of social mobilization. The top priorities of the organization are to promote poverty eradication, to establish good governance and human rights, and to build strong democratic values and practices from the bottom up.

In the year 2015, The Hunger Project-Bangladesh carried out a well-planned set of activities designed to work toward these priorities. There was great progress and achievements in each of the regions across the country where The Hunger Project implemented its community-led development programs.

The Hunger Project-Bangladesh is excited and proud to present its Annual Report 2015 to accumulate and uphold its successes and learn from its deep rooted programs. I hope that development partners, donors, supporters and friends will get an exciting glimpse of the organization and its programs that empower women, men and youth to take control over their destinies.

We are fortunate to have a committed and highly competent pool of staff. I would like to thank all staff for their support and guidance over the last year, as they have assisted me to carry out my responsibilities as country director. My special thanks to all the people, institutions, national and international agencies and government for their support and investments in The Hunger Project-Bangladesh's progress.

Still, we have to go long way to reach our vision and mission. We are ready for another year of achievements and successes. Your cordial participation with us will accelerate our journey.

THE HUNGER PROJECT-BANGLADESH

AT A GLANCE

185 MDG unions reaching
over **4.9** million people

156,000
Trained volunteer leaders,
40% of whom are women

8,000 Trained Women
Leaders
Forming the **Bikoshito Nari Network**

100,000 Youth
Leaders engaged in self- and
community-development activities



The Hunger Project-Bangladesh, established in 1991, is the largest volunteer-based non-government organization in Bangladesh. Our mission is to end hunger and poverty by pioneering sustainable, grassroots, women-centred strategies and advocating for their widespread adoption in countries throughout the world. Our vision is a world where every woman, man and child leads a healthy, fulfilling life of self-reliance and dignity.

Working in partnership with locally elected leaders and community members, The Hunger Project-Bangladesh catalyzes sustainable, inclusive, community-led development that eschews a culture of dependency. In order to be sustainable, this community-based work must take place at the level closest to the people – the Union. Therefore, the overall framework for The Hunger Project’s work in Bangladesh is the “Millennium Development Goal (MDG) Union Strategy.”

The MDG Union Strategy empowers both the local electorate and the elected Union Parishad, in order to build the capacity of the entire community and create truly participatory democracy. This bottom-up mobilization for self-reliance is combined with several national-level advocacy strategies designed to reform attitudes, policies and structures within society that block people in their attempts to build lives of self-reliance and dignity. This is done through volunteers and alliances, such as the National Girl Child Advocacy Forum (NGCAF), a country-wide advocacy movement for the rights of women in general, and girl children in particular; the Bikoshito Nari Network of women leaders; and SHUJAN, a platform of *Citizens for Good Governance*.

Throughout the rural villages in Bangladesh, The Hunger Project carries out its mission of ending hunger and poverty with strategies that are affordable, effective, replicable and sustainable, based on four pillars:

- 1 Mobilizing people at the grassroots level to build self-reliance.**
- 2 Empowering women as key change agents.**
- 3 Forging effective partnerships with local government.**
- 4 Building alliances and advocacy for community-led development.**

The centerpiece of The Hunger Project’s strategy in Bangladesh is the training and empowerment of volunteer leaders, called “Animators,” to mobilize their villages and strengthen the institutions of local democracy so that people can meet their basic needs. The Hunger Project-Bangladesh empowers and motivates people to work together to achieve results by challenging them to look at their situation differently, identify opportunities for change and take action.

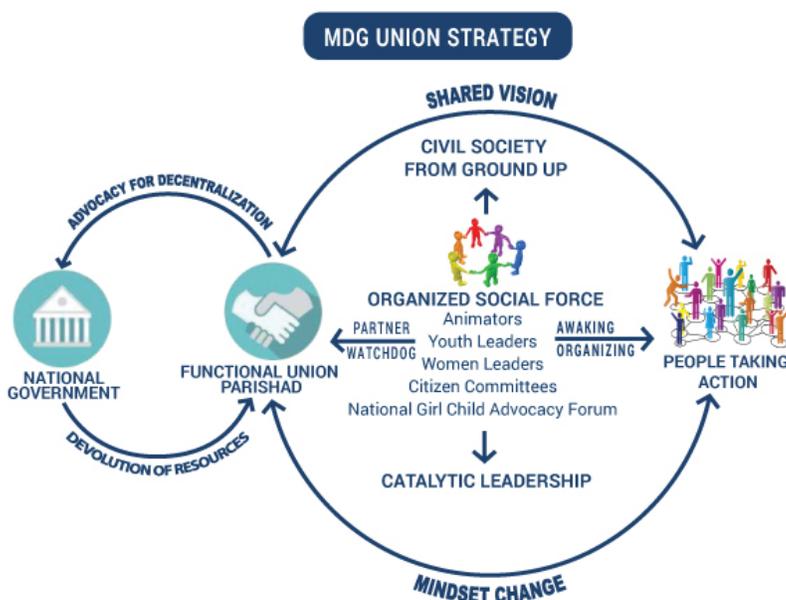
THE MDG UNION STRATEGY

As noted, the MDG Union Strategy is the framework through which both the local electorate and the elected Union Parishad build the capacity of the entire community to create truly participatory democracy. MDG Unions come into existence through a partnership among the people, their elected Union Parishad representatives and their government functionaries.

The Hunger Project has over two decades of experience in changing the mindsets of elected Union Parishad representatives, building the Union Parishad's capacity and forging a strong partnership between a responsive Union Parishad and a mobilized citizenry. This partnership results in a low-cost, sustainable process to support the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

The rural population of Bangladesh lives in over 4,500 Unions. Of that, The Hunger Project is active in 185. An MDG Union is distinct from other Unions. In MDG Unions, The Hunger Project sparks a fundamental mindset shift among the people – from that of dependency to one of confidence and action.

The shift is transformative. People collectively create a vision for a new future and commit to making it happen. Together, they fuel their own momentum— *through their own self-generating leadership, resources and actions*. This is the primary focus and result of The Hunger Project's approach: to mobilize people, empower women, and forge partnerships with government – until local, self-generating development is achieved. The people take it from there, delivering an extraordinary and massive set of secondary results.



To date, The Hunger Project has mobilized **185 MDG Unions** across all seven divisions of Bangladesh. In turn, those unions take responsibility for improving the lives of **4.9 million Bangladeshis**.

THE VISION, COMMITMENT AND ACTION WORKSHOP



The Hunger Project changes mindsets from one of dependency to action through its **Vision, Commitment and Action workshop (VCAW)**, created *by and for* Bangladeshis. In the VCAW, people are afforded the dignity and respect to be invited to create their own vision of a self-reliant future for their communities. They then analyze this vision – identifying areas where they could take individual action, areas they could impact with group action, and areas where they would need partnership from outside. This is the first point of breakthrough. People are shocked to discover that they are the key and that there are immediate actions they can take with no outside resources.

Through the workshops, people discover the power of their commitment, and take a stand to achieve their vision. Together, they set priorities for themselves and their communities that they can achieve with their own resources. This might include forming savings groups, direct action campaigns against early marriage or promoting primary school enrollment. It is the Animator's job to facilitate the community's achievement of this first self-reliant success.

This concrete success is the second point of breakthrough. The new sense of confidence and freedom that emerges from the VCAW becomes solidified through achievement. The VCAW also includes an examination of the severe gender discrimination in Bangladeshi society. People come to see that only through a new partnership of women and men, together, will Bangladesh achieve its golden future.

During the period 2013-15, **7,140** workshops were held reaching **137,022** people. In 2015 alone, **2,110** VCAW swere organized across Bangladesh.

THE ANIMATOR TRAINING



After participating in these trainings in 2015, these **3,279 animators** of whom almost **60% are women**, are now aware of their rights and responsibilities as citizens, and the importance of gender equality. The Animators are active in their communities, raising their voices against social injustice. More than **20,000 animators** have been trained during 2013-15.

The centerpiece of The Hunger Project's strategy is the grassroots training and ongoing support of more than 3,455 volunteer Animators were trained in 2015, 62% of whom are women, who organize mass action campaigns in their areas. The Animators focus their actions in their Unions and work closely with the UP representatives to achieve progress toward social goals such as eliminating child marriage, achieving sanitation coverage throughout the Union, and facilitating open budget meetings and ward assemblies to provide transparency and accountability.

Animators undergo an initial four-day training designed to give them a deep grounding in the principles of people-centered (versus donor-driven) development, and a thorough understanding of gender issues and how gender issues give rise to poverty and malnutrition in Bangladesh. Through this training, Animators break through to an authentic faith in the power of grassroots people and discover the skills to call forth and unleash people's capabilities.

Following their training, animators meet monthly with The Hunger Project staff, learning management and leadership skills to support actions on their community-based visions. The Animator Training, originally developed in Bangladesh, is now used in all countries where The Hunger Project operates.

THE ANIMATOR TRAINING

SUCCESS STORIES

“Now I do not pass the night without food and my family members can take full meals at night---nights without food have disappeared from our lives; we are happy and passing good times,”

Rijiya KHATUN: EXPLORER OF HIDDEN KEY TO SUCCESS

said Rijiya Khatun, an active member of ward action team and participatory action researcher. She expressed these feelings with a smiling face when Hunger Project staff visited her at her home.



Rijiya Khatun's suffering began when she was married off to an unemployed youth at an early age due to economic insolvency. She passed days without food and her sorrows knew no bounds. When she was blessed with one daughter, she did not welcome her child warmly due to her chronic poverty. Yet, Rijiya was not a woman to give up easily. She started to fight with what she had and searched for

an opportunity to overcome poverty. The year 2009 was a turning point in her life. It was the year that she participated in The Hunger Project Animator training and became an active member of a participatory action research (PAR) self-help group. ***“The animators’ training inspired me and showed me the right way of conquering poverty, thanks to The Hunger Project,”*** she said.

Taking inspiration from the training, Rijiya set a plan to change her life and community. At first she took training on tailoring for six months. During her training she took orders for small jobs through her husband. At the end of the training, she started to work full time with the support of her husband. Soon she became very popular in her village. Besides her work, she trained women on tailoring so that they could become economically independent. Around 20-25 women became economically independent after participating in training with Rijiya. In addition, she became engaged in poultry and cattle rearing and homestead vegetable gardening. She is now economically independent. Rijiya's daughter is in school, enjoying the privileges of their new life, and they no longer experience food insecurity. Now her husband is also self-employed. ***“I want to see my daughter as a doctor who will render free medical services to the rural people,”*** says Rijiya of her dream.

TRAINING OF VOLUNTEER LEADERS AS TRAINERS: A SUSTAINABLE APPROACH



Initially, the intensive four-day Animator Training was led only by staff, but soon it was clear that to truly unleash the power of the people of Bangladesh, there would need to be hundreds of trainers who possessed both the deep knowledge of the principles of empowerment and the compassion and leadership skills to facilitate the transformation required in the Animator Training.

This posed a real challenge. Adding to this challenge was the need to “walk our talk” and ensure that women were in equal leadership roles with men, as Animators. This led to the creation of a multi-year “training of volunteer trainers” program. Now, our trained volunteer trainers provide a tremendous, decentralized capacity-building resource across the country.

During 2013-2015, 86 volunteers (21 women and 65 men) were trained. These trained volunteer leaders are now involved in carrying out their assigned duties for building a self-reliant Bangladesh.

PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCHERS FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT



In order to promote Participatory Action Research (PAR) as an empowering tool to reach the poorest of the poor, a group of volunteers are selected from the most engaged and active Animators. They participate in a four-day, residential PAR Foundational Course, facilitated jointly by members of The Hunger Project's staff and volunteer facilitators. These Animators learn how to analyze their own social reality and facilitate the same process within their communities among those people that are the poorest of the poor to identify and solve problems through their own actions, as well as form Gano Gabeshona Somittees (GGS) at the local level. The members of these 'self-emancipatory organizations' – called 'Barefoot Researchers' – undergo a process of reflection, coming together to identify their social, political and economic obstacles, and working together to develop solutions through their Gano Gabeshona Somittees (GGS).

The members of Gano Gabeshona Somittees work towards economic empowerment, by forming savings groups and starting income-generating activities. They also tackle social issues such as improved education or clubs for healthier life-styles. The PAR process is designed to develop leadership and dignity, stimulate social responsibility, and empower the poorest of the poor.

During 2013-15, 38 PAR workshops and 61 reflection workshops were arranged. During the same period, by forming 782 GGS groups across the country, PAR reached more than 21,000 people of whom 63% were women.

FOOD SECURITY AND LIVELIHOODS



During 2013-15, **1968 trainings of animators and volunteers of which 1250 in 2015 alone were conducted on various trades.** Through these trainings, rural community members are becoming self-reliant by launching income-generating activities.

To improve food security and sustainable livelihoods, The Hunger Project is working with community members through a bottom-up approach to developing individual strategies for overcoming income poverty. The Hunger Project works with people to identify and mobilise their potential and expertise by training Animators on skills development and nutrition. This program is well planned and runs on the basis of some key principles such as: training is needs based; training is done either by a supervisor or under his/her direction; learning is achieved by doing; and training is planned, scheduled, executed and evaluated systematically. Program beneficiaries are selected based on pre-designed criteria. After providing training for them in needs-based areas, follow-up meetings with these participants are held. At the end of the year, an assessment of the effects of the program on the community is undertaken.

TRANSFORMING GENDER INEQUALITY



The majority of those battling chronic hunger in Bangladesh are women and children, a result of longstanding discrimination and exclusion within Bangladeshi society. Traditional practices such as dowry, child marriage, and the relegation of being last and least to eat have created a discriminatory sociopolitical context for girls and women. The Hunger Project-trained Animators and Union Parishad representatives address this head on by building partnerships between men and women to stop the *cycle of malnutrition*, and by promoting the inclusion of women and girls in decision-making processes and leadership roles.

TRANSFORMING GENDER INEQUALITY

Women UP Members Have Voice in Public Forum

The role of female Union Parishad (UP) representatives has been defined in the UP Act of 2009. Yet, in most cases, women's role remains limited as a signatory. Women often do not have voice in decision making, and even if women



speak up, their voices are often lost among their male counterparts. The Hunger Project seeks to change this, so women are not only taking part in the decision making process of the UP more than ever before, but

they are also playing an important role in administering the various governance issues of the UP.

Kanak Rani, UP representative from the Damiha union parishad of Tarail Upazila under Kishoreganj district faced the reality described above – of not having a voice – before she had a very clear idea about her role. She could not play any notable role in the development process of the UP in general, or her electoral territory in particular, due to her own lack of knowledge and understanding. However, having participated in an animator training organized under the Strengthening Local Governance Program (SLGP), Kanak Rani became aware about her role in the development process, and is now more active in the overall governing process of the UP. She is assisting the UP in organizing monthly meetings of the UP and Ward Shobha, as well as their structuring of standing committees. Simultaneously, through regular campaigns, Kanakis also trying to increase community awareness about issues such as education, health, nutrition, sanitation, child marriage, prevention of violence against women and child, and alleviation of unemployment. Kanak is also working to support women in her community by serving as the general secretary of Tarail Upazila Women Development Forum. Her involvement in different activities has increased her self-confidence. She continues to be a positive leader for the development of her community, thanks to the knowledge gained from The Hunger Project's animator training.

TRANSFORMING GENDER INEQUALITY

Women have to move forward, not alone, but together...

“My stand against dowry has given me pain and suffering” boldly stated Anjuman Ara, a woman leader trained by The Hunger Project. In spite of being a daughter of a teacher, Anjuman Ara was married off to an illiterate man at an



early age. No sooner than two years into their marriage, her mother- and father-in-law tortured her both mentally and physically for dowry. But, her husband was always beside her. They separated from their family with a hope of a better life, with only Taka 250 in cash.

After separating from their family, Anjuman Ara struggled a lot against all odds with patience and gracious behaviour, which touched the hearts of the people in her community. As a result, she was unanimously elected as a member of Union Parishad(UP) in 2002. But, she did not have much scope to contribute her ideas and opin-

ion in the decision making process. Being a woman, the UP body tried to keep her on the sidelines as they undertook all their activities.

Anjuman Ara became involved with The Hunger Project in 2008 when she participated in the 32nd batch of the **Women Leader Foundation Course**. The motto **“An unleashed person can never be poor”** touched her the most. She got the answers to many of her unresolved questions and realized that the main causes of women’s negative status are their own lack of awareness as well as the patriarchal society. **“Women have to move forward, not alone, but together, and must be mentally and economically independent. Otherwise they have no way of getting relief,”** Anjuman Ara expressed.

She formed a community development committee called **‘Sharbik Unnayan Committee’** which consisted of 15 men and 40 women. They started to save with the hope of bringing desired changes in the community. The present savings of the organization is 1,23,650 Tk. Moreover, Anjuman Ara, together with other community members, are determined to stop child marriage, practice of giving dowry, family violence, poor sanitation, and other social issues in her community. She led her community to achieve 100%hygienic sanitation through the formation of 12 Community De-

TRANSFORMING GENDER INEQUALITY

BIKOSHITO NARI NETWORK: WOMEN RISING IN BANGLADESH

The purpose of the *Bikoshito Nari* (“Unleashed Women”) Network is to organize, empower and inspire the women of Bangladesh by building their capacity and developing their leader-



ship skills to powerfully confront the issue of gender inequality. This special women’s leadership program trains women to take on initiatives such as stopping child marriage and violence against women in their communities.

Women Leaders are created through participation in a four-year empowerment process, at the end of which women feel empowered and able to advocate at the policy level as elected representatives and take a leading role in decision-making, both at home and within their communities.

The four-year period includes 26 days of training:

Year-1 Three-day residential Foundational Course, followed by monthly, full-day trainings for the rest of the year. Trainings are led by The Hunger Project-Bangladesh staff members and volunteer trainers.

Year-1 Full-day trainings every other month.

Year-1 Quarterly full-day trainings.

Year-1 Full-day trainings twice-a-year.

The Foundational Course addresses topics such as what gender is; the role of women in families and societies; patriarchy and women’s rights; and the development paradigm. Throughout the four years, there are scheduled trainings on particular topics, ranging from the role of women in their Unions to how to hold courtyard meetings and combat domestic violence. Women leaders gain a clear understanding of gender and their rights, and develop the necessary skills to advocate for their rights as well as to mobilize other women in their communities through courtyard meetings, campaigns and rallies.

The women also become development leaders in their communities, forming groups with other women to discuss gender equality and social justice, and to create solutions to the challenges they identify in their daily lives. They organize courtyard meetings on topics such as breastfeeding, health and nutrition; lead campaigns against child marriage; host human chains in honor of National Girl Child Day and International Women’s Day; and participate in other Hunger Project programs.

TRANSFORMING GENDER INEQUALITY

BIKOSHITO NARI NETWORK: WOMEN RISING IN BANGLADESH

During the period 2013-15, **3,106 new Women Leaders** participated in the **women's leadership Foundational Course**. Having participated in these trainings, the women leaders are now conducting campaigns on social issues (such as child marriage, dowry and gender discrimination) and environmental issues (such as tree plantations and sanitation). Moreover, through courtyard meetings, they are mobilizing other women in their communities to initiate income-generating activities. The Women Leaders are also raising their voices in public forums, e.g. Ward Shobha.

Tafura: an example of success

Tafura Akter was born on 2 February 1978 in Batora village of Choddogram Upazila in Comilla district. She is the youngest daughter of her parents. She passed SSC from Kalojoyee Bidyanekatan in 1993 and HSC from Sharifpur College in 1999. In spite of taking admission in BA class in Lalmai Degree College, she could not complete her graduation due to a financial crisis. Despite it, Enthusiasm Tafura did not give in. In 1999, she took a four-day Hunger Project Animator training in the 106th batch in Noakhali Rural Social Development.



This training changed Tafura's life. She learned that when one is unleashed, anything is possible. With the help of someone she met at the time, Dr. Hamida Khanum, she was admitted to a maternity training course in Health promotion. After her course, she came back to her village and with the assistance of Dr. Khanum, she established a village service centre. Within a few days, she was appointed as volunteer nurse in the Upazila health complex. But, Tafura realizes that she was not born for herself, and wanted to be sure that she engaged herself for the welfare of the community. As part of her service, she arranged free health check-up services, distributed free medicines and services for pregnant women.

Tafura was married in 2005 but her happiness and peace did not last long, when her husband died in an accident in 2009. Struggling, she continued at the health centre and engaged herself in various social services. As a result, she was elected as UP member for the reserved seat in 2011. Moreover, she participated in the The Hunger Project's Women Leader Foundation Course in the 73th batch in 2012 organized by Bikoshito Nari Network (BNN). Taking inspiration from the training, she arranged a weekly free medical camp in the health centre for pregnant women. In addition, she started weekend courtyard meetings in wards 1, 2 and 3. She led the observation of International Women's Day, National Girl Child Day and Begum Rokeya Day to create awareness among women as well as the entire community. In order to protect against child and polygamous marriage, Tafura is continuing courtyard meetings in wards 1, 2 and 3. As a result, she and community members stopped 12 child marriages.

One of the success for which she is most proud is the establishment of women's organization of 42 women in her Upazila. The total capital of the organization is approximately one lakh Tk. She was also selected as the best **Joyeeta** (winner) (special governments 'award for women entrepreneurs) by the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs in 2013 for her success. Tafura is now known as an enlightened woman in her society. Her dream is to organize and economically empower the women in her society so that no woman will be neglected and everyone will be equal.

NATIONAL GIRL CHILD ADVOCACY FORUM (NGCAF)



A key element in The Hunger Project's gender strategy is observance of the National Girl Child Day. In response to deeply entrenched gender discrimination, The Hunger Project, in 2015, created the National Girl Child Advocacy Forum (NGCAF), an alliance comprised of 182 organizations. The goals of the NGCAF are to:

- Build awareness of the importance of valuing girls.
- Create an enabling environment to secure girls' rights.

Advocate for policies that create opportunities to improve girls' lives.

NGCAF inaugurated National Girl Child Day on September 30th, 2000, in partnership with the government, and it has since been recognized by the United Nations as an international day of significance (the International Day of the Girl, on October 11). Each year, on National Girl Child Day in Bangladesh, activities take place nationwide through rallies, marches, and school-based activities.

Local units of the NGCAF generate mass media coverage and an open discussion on the importance of providing better health, education and nutrition to girls. The NGCAF joined the Girls Not Brides Alliance in 2013.

During 2013-15, 87 committees of NGCAF were formed. Committees submitted a memorandum on ending child violence and early marriage to District Commissioner (DC) and Superintendent of Police (SP) in **32 districts**. In 2015, the NGCAF organized **420 events across the country to celebrate National Girl Child Day** and **425 events to observe International Women's Day**.

HALTING EARLY MARRIAGE



The Hunger Project works to foster the enabling environment that young girls need to flourish. This is achieved through a three-pronged strategy:

- 1 Multilevel awareness building through campaigns, courtyard meetings and extensive dialogues;
- 2 Capacity building through issue-based trainings and workshops;
- 3 Policy advocacy at the national level.

Volunteer Animators and Youth Leaders throughout Bangladesh have taken the initiative to form Halting Early Marriage clubs that raise awareness on the hazards of marrying young. The clubs comprise community members of all ages and backgrounds, working together to hold rallies, courtyard meetings and youth study circles to increase

For halting early marriage, The Hunger Project implemented a project entitled “Child Marriage Project” from June 2014 – June 2015. During this period, the trained volunteer leaders stopped over **366 girl-child marriages across the country.**

POWER (Political participation of Women for Equal Rights)



The POWER project was launched at Dumuria Upazia in Khulna district to empower women leaders who will effectively participate in local politics and address women's rights, and violence against women in their communities. The Power project aims to mobilize female political participation by ensuring active female political participation in ward shobhas: village council meetings. The ward shobha is a platform where stakeholders set their priorities to be incorporated in the Union Parishad development.

In 2015, 14 animator trainings were conducted in which 388 men and 454 women participated. 7 252 women took part in Women Leadership Development Trainings.

YOUTH ENDING HUNGER BANGLADESH



The Hunger Project-Bangladesh works to leverage the power of Bangladesh's educated, unemployed youth as an integral part of community mobilization. As the majority of educated youth face little chance for employment, this can be a breeding ground for frustration and even violence.

To channel the energy and skills of youth for the betterment of the nation, The Hunger Project-Bangladesh has carried out a Youth Ending Hunger (YEH) Program since 1995. These leaders work with about 100,000 other young people to support them in becoming active citizens.

Trained Youth Leaders bring the creativity and leadership of the youth to the forefront, while also stimulating a sense of social responsibility among their peers in universities, schools and communities throughout Bangladesh.

Together, YEH Leaders meet monthly in chapters across the country, planning activities to improve their communities with an emphasis on active citizenship and human rights. They organize campaigns in their communities throughout Bangladesh on issues such as nutrition, education, family planning, tree planting, environmental education and blood donation. They also arrange rallies and organize clubs against child marriage, hold debates, math Olympiads, writing competitions and study circles to develop their own creative potential.

In 2015, YEH organized 221 Vision, Commitment and Action Workshops, 47 youth leadership trainings (under the program of Active Citizens with British Council), 322 thematic competitions including 36 math Olympiads, Youth Units took 122 Social Initiatives, 488 study circles, two youth achievers' summits in Dhaka and Chittagong National Youth Conference, 167 follow-up meetings with youth leaders, 208 campaigns against acid and other gender based violence supported by Acid Survivors Foundation. Through these activities youth are mobilized to shoulder their own responsibilities and be accountable to society as a whole.

YOUTH ENDING HUNGER BANGLADESH

Youth Making a Difference

Before 2014, a major portion of youths of the nine wards of Jamalganj union under Jamalganj sadar Upazial of Sunam-



ganj district passed idle time. This posed an opportunity to utilize the potential of these young people by engaging them in local development. A total of 57 youths from the nine wards of Jamalganj union came into contact with its 'Animator' pro-

gramme. They are now motivated and encouraged to contribute to their community's development, feeling that they can solve many social problems, in addition to studying.

The motivated youths have identified and prioritized their local problems and have accomplished the following:

- With the support of the Union Parishad, they ensured birth registration for more than 700 children, resulting in 85% birth registration coverage in Jamalganj union.
- Whenever they heard of any news of child marriage, they rushed to the spot and convinced the parents not to go ahead with the marriage. This way, two girls were saved from child marriage.
- The youths also ensured four dowry-free marriages.
- Youths are supporting villagers in getting the information per the Right to Information Act (2009).
- The animated youths are working as catalyst to arrange timely Ward Shobha.
- They are providing free tuition to 50 poor students.
- To ensure that their Union has 100% sanitation facilities, they have so far supported the community in getting 180 sanitary latrines and 8 tube-wells from the UP.
- They supported 44 poor people to receive cost-free medication from the Upazila health complex.
- They are working to organize rural women to create income opportunities by supporting the formation 27 women organizations.
- Poverty forced 17 students to leave their education, but the animators re-enrolled them to school at their own cost.
- The motivated animators trained 60 local youths on income generating activities.

Anowar, an animator of this area says, "The animators are making the tasks of the Union Parishad easier. Youth from the other unions should also come forward like us for their own community's development."

STRENGTHENING LOCAL DEMOCRACY



By 2000, The Hunger Project’s experience had shown that grassroots development can only truly be sustainable when it is in partnership with accountable, transparent local government. Many great initiatives of the past did not take root because they depended on temporary structures parallel to the constitutionally mandated Union Parishads. Thus, The Hunger Project works to make local government functional and accountable at the level closest to people living in poverty: The Union. This work is carried out through the following three structures:

(1) Union Parishad. Each Union is governed by an elected Union Parishad made up of 13 elected members. The Hunger Project provides a four-day residential course for all members of the Parishad, training them in the principles of bottom-up development, decentralized democracy, accountable governance and the statutory specifics of their roles and responsibilities.

(2) Standing Committees. Bangladeshi law calls for each Union Parishad to establish Standing Committees to provide citizen participation and oversight in key areas such as health, education and economic development. In most Unions, these committees are rarely functioning. But, in MDG Unions, where The Hunger Project is working, The Hunger Project makes certain they are functioning and that they are equipped to do their jobs. Standing Committee members help to establish the priorities, agendas and budgets of the Union Parishad.

(3) Ward Shobha. Ward Shobhas are mandatory, twice-yearly assemblies of all voting-aged citizens. They are held in each of the nine Wards within a Union. The Ward Shobhas designed to provide a transparency and accountability mechanism, allowing citizens to engage directly with their

elected officials and allowing elected officials to transparently discuss ongoing and planned local government projects. The Ward Shobhas the most powerful forum for grassroots women to bring their concerns to the attention of the Standing Committees and Union Parishad Members. The Hunger Project ensures that Ward Shobhas are held in the MDG Unions where the citizens and representatives together set priorities and targets for what they want to achieve in the coming year and then plan and launch campaigns.

In 2015, The Hunger Project facilitated **56 “meet the voters”** events with Union Parishads (UP), **89 trainings of UPs’ Standing Committee** and **1436 Ward Shobhas**. The corresponding figures during the period 2013-15 are **216 (meet the voters)**, **241 (Standing Committee meetings)** and **4192 (ward shobhas)**. As a result of these interventions, Union Parishads are community oriented and peoples’ ownership of the UPs has been created.

STRENGTHENING LOCAL DEMOCRACY

Local Voice for Local Needs through Ward Shobha

Before 2014, the people of the Bhatiapara union under Dirai Upazila in Sunamganj district were not very interested in participating in Union Parishad activities. They didn't know what services were allocated for them from the UP or what their roles were in ensuring that those services were received. Moreover, ward shobha was not held regularly in



accordance with the UP Act of 2009. Yet, ward shobha is the forum for community people to raise their demands.

Under The Hunger Project's special animators training program, 13 representatives of Bhatiapara UP received training on how to ensure the UP was effectively functioning. The UP representatives were sensitized on the need for greater participation in ward shobha

from a cross-section of people, especially women, people with disabilities, minorities, and poor and marginalized groups. On 23 March 2015, Bhatipara UP arranged ward shobha in ward-3, consisting of Bhatipara and Nurnagar villages. Through courtyard meetings, animators and citizen committee members informed and motivated other community people to attend the ward shobha. The UP also issued an invitation letter to the stakeholders inviting them to the meeting. The scenario was quite different from any other ward shobha in the past. The participation of the community exceeded expectations. The UP representatives presented the previous six month's activities as well as income and expenditure of the UP. The people of the community shared their concerns about some activities, including whether the safety net programs such as Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) and Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) were reaching those who needed them, and whether development activities were based on needs. Moreover, they asked for information disclosure on allocated services, including social safety net programmes. For the next six months, villagers proposed a bridge reconstruction, a road reconstruction and many other local development activities. UP representatives, along with the community people, set a prioritized list of activities for their community. The UP representatives assured everyone that in the future they would be more transparent in selecting beneficiaries for various services. Since ward shobha is the centre of accountable, transparent and participatory planning, this transformation has increased the community's social cohesion.

STRENGTHENING LOCAL DEMOCRACY

Citizen Charter Increases Access to UP Services

Union Parishads (UP), in line with the UP Act of 2009, are required to post a citizen charter containing the list of services available, as well as the conditions and waiting periods for receiving such services. Before 2014, this requirement was not always implemented, leaving the community members, as service receivers, in the dark. Through the ‘Strengthening Local Government’ (SLG) program, The Hunger Project and BRAC supported the installation of citizen charters in the premises of Union Parishad offices for the purpose of ensuring transparency and building awareness among citizens regarding the delivery of services.



With active support from the SLG program, all UPs under the intervention areas have prepared a citizen charter and installed it at the UP premises, which is really encouraging as far as accountability and transparency of the UP governance is concerned. The citizen charter contains available services provided by the Union Parishad, service charges, eligibility of getting available services, duration of delivery and duties of the citizens. The available services of a UP include such things as citizenship/birth/death/character/inheritance certificates,

trade licenses, and building/construction certificates. On the other side, The Hunger Project volunteers are educating the community people about the different types of services being delivered from the UP and the process of getting those services. This has contributed to bringing massive changes in the service delivery scenario in the UP. An evaluation study revealed that 96% of the respondents confirmed that they made contact with the UP functionaries to get services as contained in the Charter. Among them, 100% have received services without harassment.

ADVOCACY FOR REFORMS OF LOCAL DEMOCRACY



SHUJAN--Citizens for Good Governance is an independent group for which The Hunger Project serves as secretariat. Formed with the help of The Hunger Project in 2002, SHUJAN is a non-partisan platform of committed, active and socially conscious citizens engaged in issues of democracy, development and good governance. SHUJAN aims to strengthen grassroots democracy, ensure transparency and accountability of local government, promote free and fair elections, and advocate for policy reforms and good governance at the national level.

The Hunger Project works to ensure government accountability in Bangladesh through SHUJAN. Since 2008, The Hunger Project has facilitated nearly 1389 SHUJAN Committee meetings with over 34,600 participating SHUJAN members across the country.

Members of SHUJAN are among the most respected citizens of Bangladesh. Many are representatives from academia and journalism, and many have public profiles as well-regarded leaders. SHUJAN chapters' influence extends from the Union all the way up through the national level.

In the run-up to an election, SHUJAN gathers background profiles of the candidates – including disclosures of criminal histories and sources of income and wealth. SHUJAN members organize meet-the-candidate gatherings, and perform all manners of outreach to voters including posters, newspaper articles, street plays, debates, human chains, marches, awareness campaigns and Democracy Olympiads.

During 2013-15, SHUJAN arranged **34 press conferences** on various national issues and held **14 committee meetings**. Further, **61 Roundtable discussions and Citizen's Dialogues were organized**. SHUJAN also published antecedents of candidates in Dhaka and Chittagong City Corporation elections, published antecedents of contesting mayoral candidates of **50 municipals**, and conducted a search project with Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) on voter awareness building.

PEOPLE AGAINST VIOLENCE IN ELECTIONS (PAVE)



**In 2015, 28 trainings
have been conducted with
560 participants
(173 women and 387 men).**

The aim of the People Against Violence in Elections (PAVE) program is to increase the number of peace-building events in Bangladesh in order to ultimately decrease Bangladesh's tolerance of violence. Program activities include: conducting PAVE training; building a network of Ambassadors for Peace; and engaging in and monitoring peace-building initiatives. Program activities contribute to transform the mindsets of the participants by increasing their knowledge and skills on electoral processes and conflict resolution. PAVE has created an opportunity to foster dialogue and engage people in peace-building initiatives within their communities, which represent diverse segments of the population across a large number of communities in Bangladesh. A network of ambassadors for peace is involved in advocacy initiatives and in taking action to mobilize people for peace-building in their communities.

PEOPLE AGAINST VIOLENCE IN ELECTIONS (PAVE)

Small Steps towards Progress

The People against Violence in Election (PAVE) program have had a profound effect on the attitudes and behavior of the participants. One example of this was observed during training of participants from Sitakunda Upazila of Chittagong.

Before the training, rivalry between different political party members was so bitter that they refused to travel in the same vehicle. IFES and The Hunger Project-Bangladesh were forced to arrange separate vehicles so that the members of the two opposing parties did not have to travel to the training together.

Throughout the training, facilitators encouraged the opposing political party members to work together in activities and participate in discussions on the electoral process, democracy, unity in diversity, and issues related to peace & conflict. Trainees learnt the basics of conflict, conflict resolution and the electoral cycle. Participants gained a solid understanding of how violence hinders free and fair participation in the democratic process, and awareness about what individuals and organizations can do help reduce violence in the community.

The trainer team helped participants to realize that intra-party and inter-party conflicts cause harm to relatives and neighbors of the political leaders. Political leaders started realizing that they were harming their own societal bond-age and social harmony through unnecessary political conflict. Participants from the civil society requested their leaders to be united for the betterment of Sitakunda, their sub-district.

The team of trainers observed that the hostility in the participants' voices and body language slowly faded over the three-day training. By the end of the training, the participants were so friendly with each other that they chose to return home together sharing the same vehicle without a second thought about their political affiliation.

The participants committed themselves to holding a "tea meeting" for further discussion amongst the political party representatives and to plan a press conference against violence in their community. The PAVE training brought about a change in the mind set of the political activists to successfully bring about a significant change in the political culture and approach in Bangladesh.

PROMOTING SOCIAL HARMONY IN THE FACE OF ELECTORAL VIOLENCE



Electoral violence is an entrenched practice in Bangladesh, and is driven by the extreme “winner-take-all” approach frequently used within political parties. Since independence, Bangladesh’s elections have been marred by violence, both at the national and local levels, with the exception of a period of respite between 2008 and 2013. The cycle of violence which is currently ongoing is the most violent ever. Bangladesh currently faces the daily challenge of maintaining social harmony and promoting peace within an elevated state of national turmoil.

As a means to stop the current cycle of violence in Bangladesh, The Hunger Project-Bangladesh aims to establish sustainable social harmony at all levels of society and to celebrate the diversity of religion and culture of Bangladesh as strengths. This is achieved through:

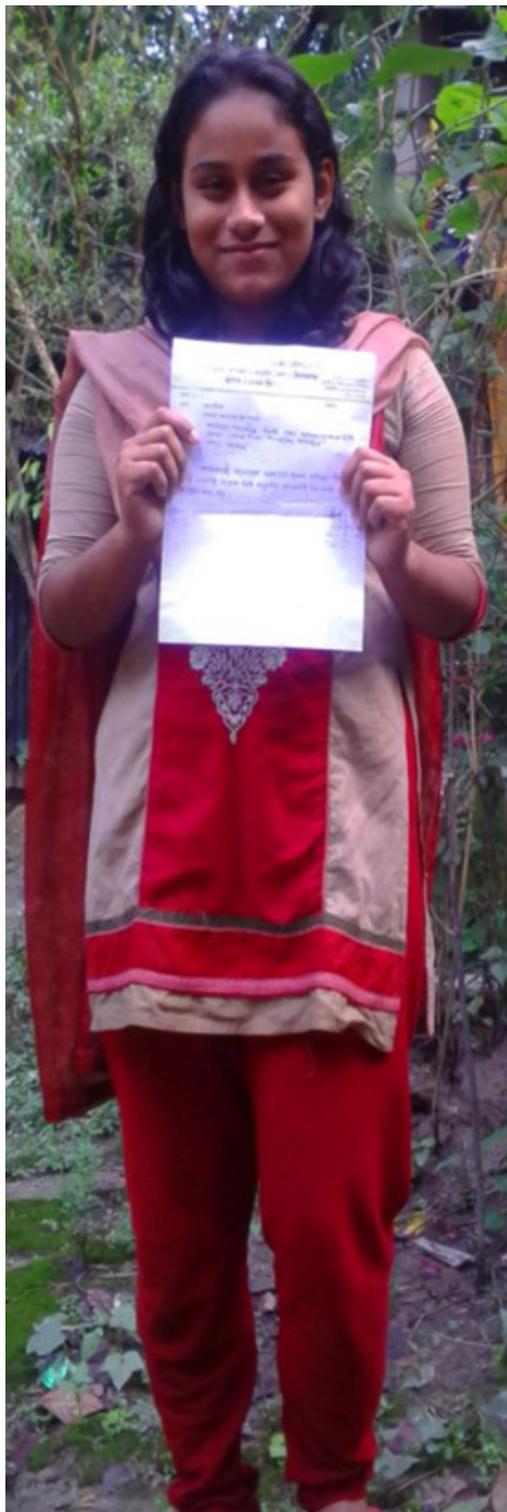
- Establishing platforms that create a shared understanding among Bangladeshi citizens
- Enhancing the capacity of local leaders and understanding of social cohesion, and
- Creating safe spaces for productive dialogues and discussions on issues fundamental to a pluralistic society.

Building upon the holistic community-led development work of the MDG Union strategy, The Hunger Project-Bangladesh is implementing targeted Social Harmony Workshops and Animator trainings, which are designed to foster social cohesion in rural communities and empower individuals within those communities to collectively advocate for preventing and mitigating political violence through peaceful means.

In 2015, 3,770 (9,555 during 2013-15) social harmony workshops reached 86,813 community people across the country. As a result, people’s awareness of social harmony, shared citizenship, and their rights and duties towards the nation has been increased.

RIGHT TO INFORMATION (RTI)

Infomediaries working for right to information



Tania Parvin, from Ghoshpara village under Taljanga Union Parishad (UP) in Tarail Upazila of Kishoreganj district, received training on Right to Information (RTI) under The Hunger Project's Strengthening Local Governance (SLG) project in partnership with BRAC in 2014. She is now playing an active role in her remote village, not only knowing information herself but also ensuring that the rest of her community is aware as well.

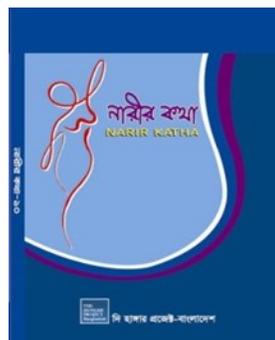
Tania started seeking information from the Upazila assistant medical officer to know how many doctors were supposed to be working in Tarail community clinic and how many are working at present. Initially, the authority was hesitant, but they were convinced when she referred to the legal obligations. Her initial success inspired her to seek out information from other government and non-government institutions. Next, she applied to a high school authority to know the eligibility criteria for receiving stipends and for teacher recruitment. The school authority co-operated with her by providing the requested information. After that, she applied to Taljanga UP to know how many women received Vulnerable Group Development (VGD), Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) and widow allowance cards during the years 2014-2015. Initially, she was denied the information by the UP secretary. Quoting the RTI Act 2009, Tania persuaded him to provide the information. And next, she sought information from the Upazila land registrar's office on how much *Khash land* has under their Union Parishad. She was again denied but convinced them as she had done in the previous instances. Later, Tania applied for information to the Upazila education office and Upazila krishi (agriculture) office. She is known as *Tathyabandhu* (Information friend) in her village, and has assisted many men and women in her community to get information from the Union Parishad and non-government organizations. There are now 560 such 'infomediaries' like Tania that have been mobilized through this project; and they are working for citizen's Right to Information in their communities.

Access to information is an important condition of good governance issues especially for ensuring transparency and accountability of the government bodies. A cadre of *inform diaries* was trained on RTI Act 2009, so that they could play an active role in accessing information themselves and on behalf of the community people. The *infomediaries* were preferably drawn from the trained animators, women and youth leaders, and citizen committees. Activities of this initiative included follow-up workshop for *infomediaries* at the sub-district level, popular theatre workshops and shows on RTI.

Sixty one RTI trainings were held in 2015 for creating infomediaries where 368 male and 230 female participated.

PUBLICATIONS

- 1 Amra Korbo Joy (We Shall Overcome: A Newsletter by Youth Unit), 26 December 2015, Youth Ending Hunger-Bangladesh.
- 2 Konnashishu (Girl Child), Volume 10, 30 September 2015, The Hunger Project-Bangladesh and National Girl Child Advocacy Forum.
- 3 Konnashishu Barta (Girl Child Newsletter), Issue: International Women’s Day, 25 April 2015, The Hunger Project-Bangladesh and National Girl Child Advocacy Forum.
- 4 Konnashishu Barta (Girl Child Newsletter), Issue: National Girl Child Day, 05 December 2015, The Hunger Project-Bangladesh and National Girl Child Advocacy Forum.
- 5 MDG Union, Volume 4, 10 April 2015, The Hunger Project-Bangladesh.
- 6 Narir Katha (Women’s Voice), Volume 10, 8 March 2015, The Hunger Project-Bangladesh.
- 7 Sthaniyo Unnoyon Barta (Local Development Newsletter), Volume 3, 15 December 2015, The Hunger Project-Bangladesh.
- 8 Ujjibok Barta (Animator’s Newsletter), Volume 56, Oct-Dec 2014, 10 February 2015, The Hunger Project-Bangladesh.
- 9 Ujjibok Barta (Animator’s Newsletter), Volume 57, Jan-March 2015, 10 May 2015, The Hunger Project-Bangladesh.
- 10 Ujjibok Barta (Animator’s Newsletter), Volume 10, April-June 2015, 15 August 2015, The Hunger Project-Bangladesh.
- 11 Ujjibok Barta (Animator’s Newsletter), Volume 59, July-Sep 2015, 15 November 2015, The Hunger Project-Bangladesh.



ACHIEVEMENTS OF 2015

In 2015, The Hunger Project-Bangladesh deepened support to communities through additional workshops, new content and continuous program learning. The Hunger Project-Bangladesh listens to community members, identifies priorities and dedicates its resources to ensuring that what needs to happen does actually happen, in spite of challenges.

Areas where this has made a difference include altering women's leadership workshops to ensure ease of women's participation, as well as working hard to fill rooms with diverse participants to make **social transformation** as **sustainable** and **inclusive** as possible. These priorities support the building of stronger ties throughout the community to support joint community development efforts and, ultimately, a more peaceful and harmonious Bangladesh.

PROGRAM REACH



8 Administrative Divisions of Bangladesh

10 The Hunger Project Region

185 Unions

3,803 Villages

4,901,035 Individuals

THE FUTURE OF THE HUNGER PROJECT- BANGLADESH

In 2016, the SDG Union Strategy will replace the MDG Union Strategy. Over the next several years, The Hunger Project-Bangladesh will be deepening its work in the SDG Unions to effectively demonstrate the sustainability and scalability of this unique approach, and promoting its widespread adoption throughout the country to reach a critical mass for community-led development. “SDG” refers to the Sustainable Development Goals, the United Nations’ seventeen, comprehensive goals for development which follow and expand on the Millennium Development Goals. The challenges of the SDGs – including halting stunting, empowering women, achieving inclusive economic growth and building climate change resilience – all require integrated and community-led solutions. Furthermore, SDG #16 calls for building participatory, effective, accountable institutions, “at all levels,” which must start at the level closest to the people; in Bangladesh’s case, the Union.

A Union is a cluster of about 15 villages, divided into nine wards with an elected body called the Union Parishad. In an *SDG Union*, the Union Parishad, through partnership with The Hunger Project, has committed to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals at the local level, and significantly improving living conditions for its citizens.

An SDG Union is distinct from other Unions. In SDG Unions, The Hunger Project sparks a fundamental mindset shift among the people – from that of dependency to confidence and action. The shift is transformative. People collectively create a vision for a new future and commit to making it happen. Together, they fuel their own momentum. The Hunger Project continues providing training and capacity building until the Union is “firing on all cylinders” – acting as the engine of their own development – *through their own self-generating leadership, resources and actions*.

This is the primary focus and result of The Hunger Project’s approach: to mobilize people, empower women, and forge partnerships with government – until local, self-generating development is achieved. The people take it from there – delivering an extraordinary and massive set of secondary results. *SDG Unions come into existence through a partnership among the people, their elected Union Parishad representatives and their government functionaries*. In this process, a grassroots level civil society composed of animators, women leaders, youth activists and the distinguished citizens, help mobilize the people and also play the watch-dog role.

Additionally, The Hunger Project-Bangladesh will be deepening its national advocacy programs, continuing to support social harmony in the face of political turmoil and promoting effective and transparent participatory local democracy.

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