Platforms for Dialogue

—

The Impact of Dialogue

BRITISH
COUNCIL

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Introduction

Project Mission and Objective

Mission:
Platforms for Dialogue (P4D), a European Union-funded project in partnership with the Cabinet Division, has worked to improve good governance and engage civil society organisations (CSOs) and citizens in government accountability mechanisms.

Vision:
By working with institutional and grassroots partners, Platforms for Dialogue has increased awareness of citizen rights, promoted democratic ownership, and supported government officials to improve accountability and responsiveness. Implemented by the British Council, the multi-year project is a unique initiative that has worked directly with both citizens and CSOs as well as the Government of Bangladesh to raise awareness of social accountability mechanisms, address reforms, and ultimately, promote dialogue and understanding between citizens, civil society, and government policymakers.
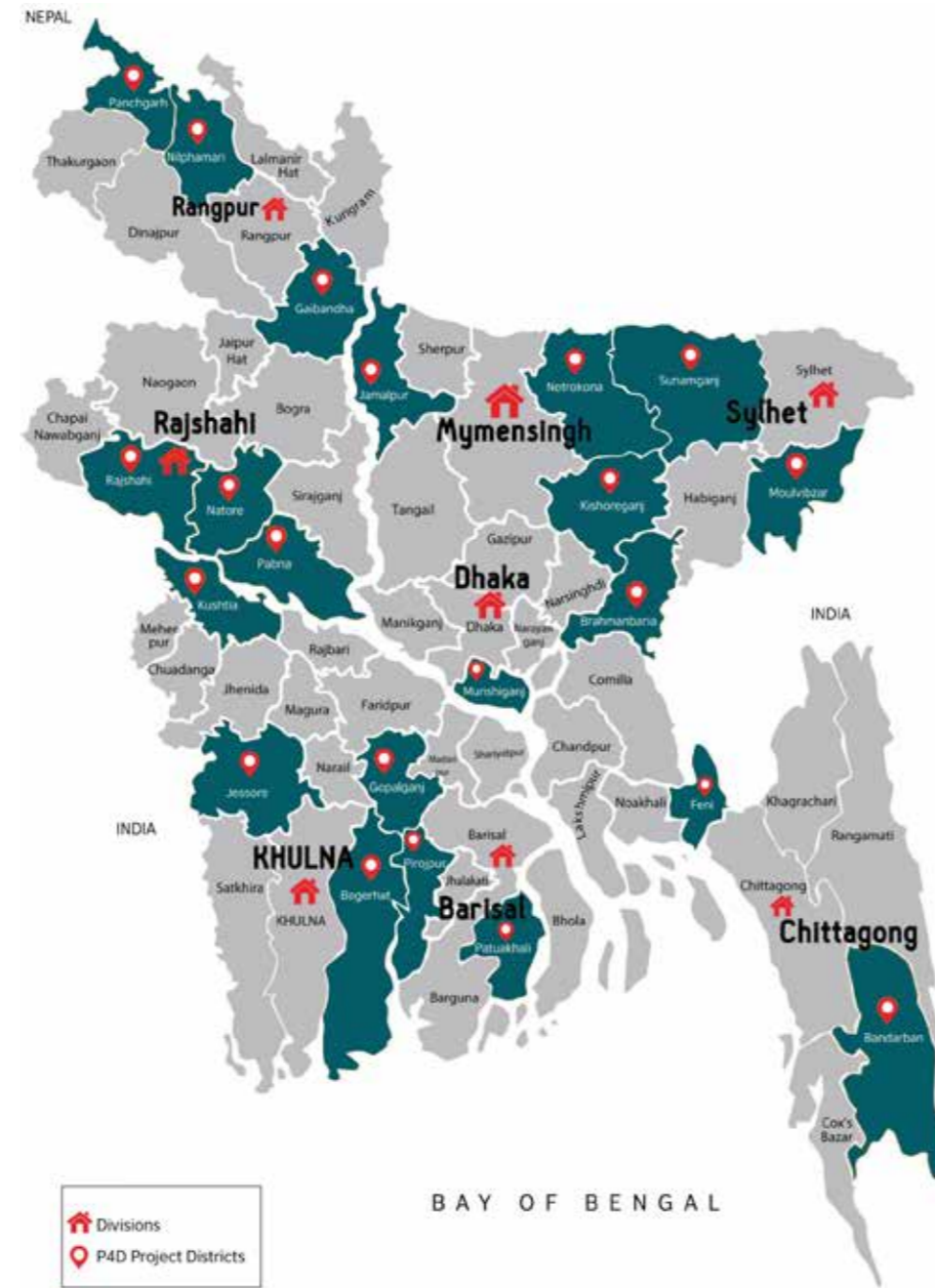
P4D's Approach

To achieve our mission, the project has maintained a bilateral approach. On one side, P4D has been propelled by a number of lively civil society organisations (CSOs) operating at the grassroots level. Along with citizen engagement and local-level advocacy, the project supports discussions on policy issues in 21 districts. On the other, it has provided foundational training to civil servants through institutional partners on accountability mechanisms. Through numerous local, regional, and national-level activities, P4D supports government institutions to deliver on ambitions set out in the 7th and 8th Five Year Plans, and our activities align with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 16. Through our three result areas, P4D is working to develop effective, accountable, and transparent institutions (SDG 16.6) and ensure responsive, inclusive, and representative decision-making (SDG 16.7).

P4D's key intervention has been capacity building for local civil society organisations and representatives of government bodies. This support enabled both civil society members and government officials to understand the essential mechanisms to meaningfully engage with one another at the policy level, support citizen rights, and uphold transparency and accountability mechanisms. Through the promotion of social accountability tools, specifically the National Integrity Strategy, Right to Information Act 2009, Grievance Redress System, and Citizen's Charter, the project approached its mission through the following result areas:

- Establish Stronger Civil Society: P4D has improved CSOs' ability to influence government policy, hold government accountable, and ensure better representation of citizens' interests.
- Improve Governance: Through enhanced capacity building for government officials and CSO engagement, P4D has improved government accountability and responsiveness.
- Facilitate Partnership for Dialogue: The project developed and introduced new tools and policy platforms to facilitate dialogue between the government of Bangladesh and its citizens.

Project Reach and Core Achievements

From P4D's inception in 2017, the project has worked at the local upazila and union level, regional district level, and national level. Through a metered yet ambitious scale-up of activities, Platforms for Dialogue has been able to achieve impressive awareness levels of policy tools and accountability mechanisms among citizens, civil society, and government officials at all levels of government and enable all project beneficiaries and stakeholders to meaningfully engage in policy discussions.

At the community level, P4D has worked with CSOs at the grassroots level in 21 districts, focusing on initiatives at the upazila and union level. Activities included Multi-Actor Partnerships (MAPs), Social Action Projects (SAPs), local government trainings, CSO capacity building, and sensitising the public on the social accountability tools.

- 70.2% of citizens perceive that CSOs represent people's interests (up from a 46% baseline)
- 69% of target CSOs increased their capacity due to P4D's interventions
- 96% of LG officials and civil society members claimed increased knowledge and skills as a result of P4D-led capacity building trainings

At the regional level, P4D focused on 12 districts with regional civil society organisations and government offices to establish and facilitate District Policy Forums (DPFs), MAPs, sensitisation campaigns, collaborative events, CSO capacity building, and government trainings.

- 170,000 project beneficiaries engaged via social awareness activities offline
- 2,471 LG representatives received capacity building support
- 99% of District Policy Forum members claim that the platform is effective at increasing dialogue between citizens and government

At the national level, the project focused on establishing National Dialogues to bring ministry-level government officials and CSO leaders from the local and district levels together to discuss important policy issues. This final stage of the project culminated at the end of 2022, when the project held three national policy dialogues on key thematic issues (child marriage, community clinics, and quality education), ran large-scale sensitisation campaigns, and worked to further promote democratic ownership and government accountability at the highest levels through additional trainings and workshops.

- 91% of journalists' knowledge and skills increased in strategic communication because of the P4D-introduced trainings
- 45% of the project intervention population were reached by the social media marketing campaigns
- 62.3% of the target population perceive that government officials became more accountable (up from a 38.8% baseline)

Challenges

Despite P4D's many successes, the project faced several obstacles as well. To start, the project endured a slow inception period which caused delays with institutional partners, promotional efforts, and creating critical mass among beneficiaries. Any project that deals with engaging a large population must take time to build relationships and trust. With the support of the project's field-level staff and civil society partners, momentum among stakeholders and beneficiaries aligned and P4D was able to overcome this challenge. By 2019, results areas addressing civil society capacity building and local-level interventions were well underway and producing results. Additional challenges such as management changes and contract delays with institutional partners and project vendors served as a good learning opportunity to set clear expectations and realistic timelines. With such a variety of priorities and partners, the project struggled at times to maintain momentum and achieve target deadlines. As most project activities depended on collaboration with implementing and institutional partners, the project adjusted its pace to better collaborate with our partners.

By 2020, P4D began to advance quickly, however it was just at this moment that the Covid-19 pandemic erupted, effectively pausing all progress. This moment lasted just a short time, as the project quickly pivoted to utilise online engagement tools. P4D implemented digital tool trainings to support CSOs and local-level partners and moved all project meetings and events online. While this shift was especially challenging in Bangladesh due to gaps in access to technology among project beneficiaries, P4D managed to recommence activities after a short adjustment period. This moment in the project's timeline possibly enabled higher levels of involvement, as many project collaborators were able to join remotely and, in some cases, had fewer competing priorities.

At this time, P4D saw a swell of enthusiasm and engagement among civil society members and government leaders. With the establishment of the District Policy Forums (DPF), district-level interventions expanded thanks to DPF leadership. Once safe, many DPF activities resumed in-person with great success, and DPFs began to actively engage with local government. This step in P4D's programming catalysed local-level beneficiaries to create productive working relationships with local policymakers and hold them accountable for changes community members demanded. Government leaders too began to feel the impact of P4D's capacity building and established effective communication and goals alongside civil society members. From district-level platforms, the project moved to the national stage, where National Thematic Forum (NTF) members joined senior policymakers to discuss three key thematic issues: child marriage, community clinics, and quality education. It was at this stage that P4D truly illustrated the culmination of our capacity building efforts.

Focus on Dialogue

Creating dialogue and fostering understanding between civil society and government officials has always been P4D's main goal. Enabling an environment where the two could collaborate and work together required many steps. First, P4D focused on skills building. Through trainings and workshops for both civil society organisations and government officials via the project's institutional partners, P4D was able to equip civil society members and public servants from all levels of government with the skills, knowledge, and know-how to properly engage with one another and support citizens' needs. Of course, there cannot be supply without demand. The general population also needed to understand their rights, available public services, and government accountability mechanisms. To achieve this, P4D ran numerous in-person and online campaigns to foster democratic ownership and citizen engagement.

P4D concurrently engaged with project beneficiaries at upazila, district, and national levels throughout the different stages of the project. At the upazila level, P4D was able to generate dialogue and exchange through partner CSO-led citizen engagement, Multi-Actor Partnerships (MAPs), Social Action Projects (SAPs), and Community Resource Centres (CRCs). At the district level, the project focused its efforts on 12 districts where District Policy Forums (DPFs) were established to further enable citizen and civil society engagement in local decision making on policy-related issues. DPFs focused on one of three thematic topics to engage in public discussions and community interventions: child marriage, community clinics, and quality education. Through these themes as well as other social issues affecting the districts, the DPFs held Public Hearings and dialogue events, raised awareness among community members through campaigns and special observance days, and successfully engaged local government officials and the local-level administration to address pressing local issues. This work later culminated with the National Dialogues, where select DPF members convened as National Thematic Forum (NTF) members to present their policy issues on the national stage.

Platforms for Dialogue's evolution has not only built individual capacity among beneficiaries to meaningfully engage one another, but most importantly, it has created a culture around civic duty, citizen engagement, and government responsiveness. Dialogue, naturally, is a two-way conversation. Without an informed and equal counterpart, no discussion can account for the needs of all citizens. With Platforms for Dialogue's support, civil society and government can now work together to ensure citizen needs are met and government accountability is upheld at all levels of the administration.

In the following pages, you'll find P4D's impact stories on activities from project start to finish. These stories showcase moments of opportunity, learning, and breakthroughs for project beneficiaries and stakeholders alike. Not only do these stories illustrate how project participants were able to create meaningful change, but most importantly, they show how P4D-led initiatives-built platforms for dialogue that will hopefully endure well into the future.

Skills Building for Civil Society

P4D's 63 partner civil society organisations (CSOs) played a vital role in helping the project reach citizens in our 21 project districts during the early stages of P4D. Once selected to partner with the project, P4D provided extensive capacity building to these organisations to enhance their ability to advocate for their communities and better engage with local government representatives to address social issues. With P4D's support, they implemented several field-level interventions to reduce corruption, enhance public services, and support citizens in need.

Timeline of Trainings and Workshops

- ● P4D-implemented training
- ● CSO-implemented training
- ● DPF-implemented training

63 CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS JOINED P4D AS STRATEGIC PARTNERS IN 21 DISTRICTS ACROSS BANGLADESH
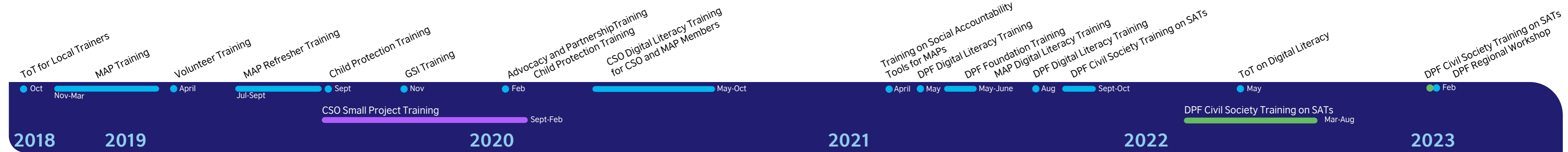
KEY IMPACTS:

70.2% OF CITIZENS PERCEIVE THAT CSOs REPRESENT PEOPLE'S INTERESTS

69% OF TARGET CSOs INCREASED THEIR ORGANISATIONAL CAPACITY DUE TO P4D'S INTERVENTIONS

92% OF CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS ARE AWARE OF THE PURPOSE AND IMPACT OF IMPLEMENTING CITIZEN'S CHARTERS BY RELEVANT GoB DEPARTMENTS

Timeline

- ToT for Local Trainers — Oct
- MAP Training — Nov-Mar
- Volunteer Training — April
- MAP Refresher Training — Jul-Sept
- Child Protection Training — Sept
- GSI Training — Nov
- Advocacy and Partnership Training / Child Protection Training — Feb
- CSO Digital Literacy Training for CSO and MAP Members — May-Oct
- CSO Small Project Training — Sept-Feb
- Training on Social Accountability Tools for MAPs — April
- DPF Digital Literacy Training — May
- DPF Foundation Training / MAP Digital Literacy Training — May-June
- DPF Digital Literacy Training / DPF Civil Society Training on SATs — Aug
- DPF Civil Society Training on SATs — Sept-Oct
- ToT on Digital Literacy — May
- DPF Civil Society Training on SATs — Mar-Aug
- DPF Civil Society Training on SATs / DPF Regional Workshop — Feb

2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023

Ensuring Rights for All: Kishoreganj CSO Teaches Citizens How to Curb Corruption

Civil society organisation (CSO) Meghborshon Samaj Kallyan Shangstha has been advocating for social welfare since its inception in 2009. The youth organisation, led by Aminul Huqe Manik, has been especially active in its efforts to eradicate child labour in Karimganj, a sub-district of Kishoreganj.

"One of our first projects was to eradicate child labour. We scouted every commercial operation in the union and found 200 child labourers. We enrolled all the children in the local pre-school, and we threatened their employers with legal action," says Manik. The young CSO leader with other members of Meghborshon Samaj Kallyan Shangstha have virtually stopped child labour in Karimganj upazila. Their vigilance has had astounding results.

"Go visit the market. You will not see a single child working there. People know us for that."

In addition to their work protecting children's rights, reducing malnutrition, and supporting the underprivileged, Meghborshon Samaj Kallyan Shangstha joined P4D as a strategic partner at the local level. As part of the CSO's Social Action Projects (SAPs) with P4D, the youth group conducted anti-drug campaigns in schools, held local authorities accountable for lack of basic services, and coordinated with community clinics to ensure better healthcare.

"As a result of the SAP on government accountability, 150 households were able to talk to the Union Chairman

directly and express their concerns,"

says Md Abu Bahar, who led the SAP. He added that people were not even aware of what the Union Council's responsibilities were. *"The citizens were able to discuss the condition of the roads, pavements, and water supply, and the chairman promised that these problems would be solved."*

Another SAP volunteer, Mazarul Islam, mentioned that the social action projects have helped the organisation educate many local people on policy tools that can help them access their rights and public services.

"While conducting the anti-drug campaign in schools, we taught hundreds

of students how to file Right to Information (RTI) applications. I told them that having access to public information would help curb corruption in the community."

Mazarul also pointed out that people were eager to change the system, but they did not know how. Equipped with an understanding of RTI and other social accountability tools, they now have the resources to stay engaged with local leaders and decision-makers. Manik, the CSO leader, added that the P4D-supported SAPs have helped his organisation reach more people, and as a result, community members are learning about policy instruments and using them to establish good governance.

Manik said that local youth created the organisation so that they can contribute to building a better community.

"We were just a voluntary organisation. Now both the beneficiaries and the volunteers are aware of the policy instruments because of P4D's initiatives. This will help us all in the long run."

Using GRS to Improve the Quality of Public Services: CSO Success in Jamalpur District

As part of P4D's civil society capacity building efforts, we trained our partner CSOs on GRS and enabled them to teach citizens how to access this tool and help ensure better service delivery in their communities. Additionally, P4D-established Community Resource Centres (CRCs) have welcomed citizens to use their computers and helped them use the online GRS platform.

Mister, uniquely named after the English honorific for man, leads the CSO Unique Welfare Organisation, which is located on the banks of Brahmaputra River in the Guthail village of Jamalpur district. The first success story he shared following the project's local interventions was that his organisation had saved a village from government acquisition for a dam.

Mister says it happened because one of his volunteers was approached by a group of people after a P4D-led GRS campaign.

"They learned about the government's Grievance Redress System from one of our Social Action Projects. We helped them file the (grievance) application after the military wanted to build a dam on their land, and the authorities acted quickly. We saved their homes,"

says Fahad Hossain, who led the local campaign on GRS awareness.

"I have three grandkids who live with me, and if my house were to be taken from me, all of us would have been on the streets," said an emotional Morsheda, one of the land owners, while talking about how the P4D project helped them.

The organisation's SAP on the GRS was perhaps the most successful as it was able to directly help a group of people save their houses from forcible acquisition. However, this is just one of the success stories from the Unique Welfare Organisation.

Since becoming a strategic partner of P4D, members have utilised their experience to focus on SAPs designed to promote good governance tools like the Right to Information, Grievance Redress System, National Integrity Strategy, and Citizen's Charter.

The organisation has also worked on ensuring accountability of local Union Council offices, quality education, and reducing corruption in social safety net programmes. Mister says the experience of working with P4D has given them the necessary tools to carry on their good work.

"You know what they used to say after the Liberation War? They said, 'we gave back the weapons, but not the training'. That's exactly what I say about the P4D programme. Everyone learned from it, and we will use this knowledge in the future."

Communications Tools Training

Due to the heightened need to move our opertions online, P4D rapidly created a training programme to teach our partner CSOs how to use free online tools to build community, create beautiful graphics, stay internally organised, and create custom websites. The importance of this type of training not only allowed our partner organisations and beneficiaries to adapt to the new environment during the Covid-19 pandemic, but it also enabled them to grow and effectively reach their audience online.

P4D's Communications team designed a Training of Trainers (ToT) that provided in-depth, hands-on training for all P4D Regional Coordinators (RCs) and select P4D staff in mid-2020. The training covered how to create and manage Facebook Pages for CSOs or MAP groups; how to create Facebook Groups for community, volunteer, or MAP groups; how to create design graphics using Canva's online platform; how to use Google Drive to collaborate online, manage files, and keep an organised office in the cloud; and how to create custom-designed websites for CSOs or MAP groups. All the tools offered free versions, so our partner CSOs were able to easily access and utilise these resources. The sessions were comprised of instruction and demonstrations, followed by hands-on practice.

Once the RCs were comfortable with the new tools, P4D coordinated a training programme to provide instruction to District Facilitators (DFs) and project beneficiaries (CSO Leaders, MAP members, and Community Resource Centre Chairs). P4D also provided manuals in English and Bangla so that trainees could refer to these materials when practicing their new digital skills. Representatives from all 63 partner CSOs and their associated MAP members joined one-week long online trainings from July to September. In total, 200 beneficiaries were trained.

Panchagar CSO Leader, Akhtarun Nahar Saki, said,

"It's a befitting initiative to refresh the mind and develop the organisation during the Covid-19 pandemic situation. This initiative enriches our understanding of IT, and the online training has created career opportunities for youth."

Another participant, District Facilitator Khodeja Begum from Sylhet shared that,

"This online training is very important at the present time. We believe that this training will help us in the future and hope it will continue to build our IT skills."

While the training covered a large amount of information in a short period of time, beneficiaries made excellent use of their new skills as seen in engaging Facebook Groups and CSO websites. By providing these invaluable digital skills to CSO leaders around the country, they now have the means to promote their own work and exponentially increase engagement in their activities.

How One SAP Ensured Social Services for People with Disabilities: A Story of Integrity

In 2018, Bangladesh registered around 1.6 million persons with disabilities (PwDs) under the Department of Social Services to provide them with the means to access basic necessities. While the government has promised full support for those with disabilities, many are left behind amid policy loopholes and inaccessibility of services at the grassroots level, especially in the southern districts of Bangladesh.

"Rights of the disabled are often overlooked in the countryside. Have you seen a wheelchair ramp in any of the government offices in our union? These things are never taken into consideration,"

says Md. Zakir Hossen, head of the CSO People's Association for Social Advancement (PASA) in Patuakhali, an underdeveloped coastal district in southern Bangladesh.

PASA is the only CSO out of a total 63 partner civil society organisations under P4D that is working on a Social Action Project (SAP) focused on the rights of people with disabilities. The unique social action project is the culmination of previous experience, the drive to make a lasting difference, and the effort to enforce the integrity of public services for those in need.

Salauddin Ahmed Babu, the SAP leader, says the CSO has been working with the differently-abled for a long time, and the projects with P4D are an extension of that work. *"PASA currently operates a school for 120 students with special needs, and we also have a nursing college that specialises in elderly care. In addition, we have a nursing home where 20 elderly people receive full support. We have experience with the issue, so we decided to turn it into a SAP."*

After training on the social accountability tools and consulting with other volunteers and the P4D District Facilitator, CSO leader Zakir and SAP leader Babu decided they would focus the SAP on the government's identification process, fund disbursement, and local awareness campaigns.

The team then conducted six meetings with local government offices and the medical board that officially recognises Persons with Disabilities to discuss policy loopholes that make the process lengthy and troublesome for some.

"There's no ramp at the medical board office that decides disability status. How are people with disabilities supposed to reach them if they have inaccessible offices? So, we contacted the local authorities to make arrangements, and community members also assisted us."

This call for integrity of service and infrastructure put much needed pressure on local public service providers to ensure the National Integrity Strategy, check their work, and improve their service delivery.

Babu and his team also scouted the three unions under their jurisdiction to conduct a survey on the number of people with disabilities and prepared a list for ensuring proper distribution of social safety net funds. Through community meetings organised as part of the P4D programme, residents of the unions learned how to apply for safety net funds in the local government offices, a process generally unknown and thought to be inaccessible due to the lack of information.

Zakir says that lack of information is one of the biggest barriers for people who are in need of public support. *"Since the government offices don't have information charters or any clear direction on what to do, we decided to conduct rallies and distribute pamphlets with all the information in black and white. The residents are now fully aware of the process."*

"Members of People's Association for Social Advancement think their SAP made it possible for people with disabilities to access the support they are entitled to, despite all their difficulties."

CSO leader Zakir says his organisation has been working with the underserved population for a long time, and he thinks the P4D project could have been much more rewarding if he could cover more areas.

"We just covered three unions. If we were given the chance, I think we could have covered the whole district or maybe even the country. There are people in need everywhere."

Skills Building for Government Training Institutions

P4D's institutional partners have played a significant role in ensuring capacity building for civil servants, local-level government officials, national-level senior government officials, and journalists. Their understanding of the key social accountability tools has enabled them to better serve citizens' needs and meaningfully engage in dialogue platforms at all levels.

4 GOVERNMENT TRAINING INSTITUTIONS WERE PROVIDED WITH P4D-FACILITATED TRAINING PACKAGES ON ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS LEADING TO IMPROVED ACCOUNTABILITY PRACTICES AND BETTER GOVERNANCE OUTCOMES

KEY IMPACTS:

4,706 GoB OFFICIALS RECEIVED CAPACITY BUILDING SUPPORT ON GoB ACCOUNTABILITY POLICY AND MECHANISMS

2,471 LOCAL GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES RECEIVED CAPACITY BUILDING SUPPORT

6 IN-PERSON AND **2** VIRTUAL WORKSHOPS ON INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE AND SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY (IGSA) WERE HELD

78% OF ALL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS REPORTED INCREASED KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS AS A RESULT OF P4D-LED TRAININGS

Timeline of Trainings and Workshops

- ● CD-implemented training
- ● BCSAA-implemented training
- ● NILG-implemented training
- ● BPATC-implemented training
- ● NIMC-implemented training

GRS Training — Jan
Citizen's Charter Training — Feb-Mar
GRS and Citizen's Charter Training — Mar
ToT on Local Governance Accountability Strengthening
UP Chairman Training
UP Secretaries Training
ToT on Consultation, Facilitation and Management Techniques — Nov
Training on 4 Policy Instruments for Local Government — Jan
ToT on Annual Performance Agreement Training
Annual Performance Agreement Training — Feb-Mar
Annual Performance Agreement Training — Jun

UP Members Training — May-Aug
Consultation, Facilitation and Management Techniques Course — Jan-Feb
Strategic Communication to Ensure Good Governance for Journalists — Feb-Mar — Sept-Nov
Training on GRS Software — Feb-Mar — Aug — Nov

Strategic Communication to Ensure Good Governance for Journalists — Jan-Feb
Consultation, Facilitation and Management Techniques — June
Strategic Communication to Ensure Good Governance for Journalists
ToT for GoB Officials — Sept-Nov
Strategic Communication to Ensure Good Governance for Journalists
GRS Training — Jan-May
GRS Training — July
Dissemination Workshop on SA Tools for CD — Nov
Strategic Communication for Print and Electronic Media — Jan
GRS Training
Citizen's Charter Training — Mar-April

Consultation, Facilitation and Management Techniques — Sept-Nov — Feb
Training on SA Tools for Foundation Training Course — Oct-Nov
Training on SA Tools for District Administration — Feb-June
Training on SA Tools for Pourashava Officials — Mar-May

2019   **2020**   **2021**   **2022**   **2023**

National Institute of Mass Communication (NIMC)

1,916 trainees

5 training programmes

50 trainings on SATs (total workshops) for journalists

Journalists published more than 450 articles/ stories on the SATs in the last year alone following P4D-introduced trainings

KEY IMPACT:

91% OF JOURNALISTS' KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS INCREASED IN STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS AS A RESULT OF P4D-INTRODUCED TRAININGS

Media in a Good Governance Ecosystem: NIMC Media Awards 2022 and 2023

As part of P4D's mission to promote the understanding and use of SATs among citizens, our work with the National Institute of Mass Communication (NIMC) under the Ministry of Information has played a vital role in ensuring journalists from the local level to the national level have the know-how to report on and convey important information about these policy tools to the public.

Since 2019, the NIMC has been working with P4D to develop and implement Strategic Communication on Social Accountability Tools to Ensure Good Governance trainings. They first began working with District Information Officers (DIOs) and later with journalists from P4D's 21 project districts. In total, they have trained 1,916 journalists, and their influence goes well beyond the trainings. As part of their work with journalists, the NIMC has encouraged and supported trainees to report on the social accountability tools on their respective platforms (radio, newspapers, and television). These efforts resulted in hundreds of stories being published or produced on the key SATs over the past few years. To commemorate the impressive results of journalists' contributions to promote accountability mechanisms and integrity in national news outlets, the NIMC has hosted two Media Award ceremonies.

The first took place on 31 July 2022, where 20 journalists were recognised for their work promoting social accountability with a focus on the key SATs. In total, the jury, composed of members from the NIMC, Cabinet Division, and senior journalists from Bangladesh Television and Bangladesh Betar (Bangladesh Radio), reviewed 300 submissions. After a comprehensive evaluation, the jury identified 4 journalists in the video category, 7 journalists in the print media category, and 9 journalists in the audio category deserving of the award.

200 senior and mid-level journalists from both print and electronic media attended the ceremony, including representatives from the Cabinet Division of the Government of Bangladesh, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, the National Institute of Mass Communication, the European Union Delegation to Bangladesh, the British Council of Bangladesh, and Platforms for Dialogue.

Mr. Hans Lambrecht, First Secretary (Team Leader–Education, Human Development & PFM) from the European Union Delegation to Bangladesh expressed his optimism about the training outcome and shared his hope to see more journalists committed to promoting social accountability tools at all levels of the country's media outlets.

The second NIMC Media Award was held on 27 February 2023. This event marked the culmination of the three-year partnership between the NIMC

and Platforms for Dialogue to build the capacity of media professionals on social accountability tools and encourage them to promote good governance through their platforms.

Following additional Strategic Communications trainings, journalists submitted over 150 published pieces related to good governance and accountability tools for award nomination. A jury board consisting of senior media professionals, government officials, and media educators selected the winners. 10 media professionals from highly reputable press houses were awarded the honour in three categories: print, audio, and video.

Mr Tom Miscioscia, Country Director of the British Council, thanked the NIMC for their effort and contribution to building the capacity of media professionals to promote good governance practices in Bangladesh and emphasised the significance of gender inclusivity in the process. EUD Programme Manager, e-Gover-

nance, Ms Fani Farmaki shared her views on the power of storytelling as a communication tool and how writing with impact can incite change. She highlighted that objective and independent reporting on social accountability fosters mutual accountability by adding a multiplying effect through public awareness. Ms Fani was moved to see that project beneficiaries are applying the skills they acquired through the training to raise citizen awareness and serve as a bridge between the government and the people.

The Chief Guest and Honourable Minister of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Dr Hasan Mahmud, acknowledged the deep-rooted association of Bangladesh with the British Council and its contributions towards language, education, and culture over the past seven decades. He assured the audience that the Government of Bangladesh is committed to instilling integrity, accountability, and good governance practices to serve the nation. He added that the project is helping inform citizens of the benefits available to them at government offices and

how they can use SATs to improve their quality of life. Mr Mahmudul Hossain Khan, Secretary Coordination & Reforms Wing of the Cabinet Division, commented that not only is it important for the public to be aware of how to utilise SATs but also for government officials to fully adopt them in order to implement their benefits to the fullest. Later, Ms Shahin Islam, ndc, event Chair, NIMC Director, and steadfast supporter of P4D's partnership with the NIMC thanked everyone and reiterated the NIMC's commitment to a transparent and developed Bangladesh.

The effective partnership between P4D and NIMC is an important example of how government agencies, civil society, and media can work together to promote dialogue and communication between citizens and government officials at all levels. By facilitating active media engagement in discourse on transparency, accountability, and citizen rights, P4D is helping to strengthen democracy and good governance in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh Public Administration Training Centre (BPATC)

1,316 trainees

4 training programmes

BPATC Formally Includes Policy Tools in Orientation Module for New Civil Servant Training

P4D began working with the Bangladesh Public Administration Training Centre (BPATC) to provide foundational training on the key social accountability tools. After running several training programmes with P4D's support, the BPATC formally integrated and piloted P4D-advocated training curricula into the Civil Service Foundation Course. The thematic module on Public Administration now includes a specific component on Public Administration and Governance which will cover "Government Improvement and Different Tools and Strategies." The Citizen's Charter, Right to Information Act, Grievance Redress System, Annual Performance Agreement, and National Integrity System are all now formally included in the curriculum.

Bangladeshi Civil Service Administration Academy (BCSAA)

427 trainees

4 training programmes

BCSAA Enables Government Officials to Better Facilitate Public Consultations

BCSAA's extensive training in collaboration with P4D has helped to improve the skills of more than 400 government officials in consultation, facilitation, and management techniques. The training programme was tailored to the needs of government officials, with the goal of improving their ability to manage and facilitate dialogue with stakeholders. The training gave them the tools and techniques they needed to effectively communicate with the public and manage public consultations. As a result, government officials are now better equipped to respond to citizens' needs and concerns, as well as to promote greater transparency and accountability.

The collaboration between the project and the BCSAA pushed the institution to use innovative training methods that were outside of their usual scope, such as online learning and blended learning. This has aided in reaching a larger audience and providing flexible and convenient training programmes, while also increasing BCSAA's capacity to continue operating during pandemics such as Covid-19.

KEY IMPACT:

39% OF CITIZENS ARE AWARE TO RAISE AWARENESS OF

OF GoB COMMUNICATION CHANNELS ACCOUNTABILITY AND RESPONSIVENESS

National Institute of Local Government (NILG)

3,116 trainees

2,471 LG representatives received capacity building support

6 training programmes

Collaboration for Better Local Governance

P4D started collaborating with the National Institute of Local Government (NILG) to emphasise community engagement in local governance and improve local government accountability by enhancing their understanding of social accountability tools (SATs). NILG conducted extensive training from the Union Parishad (UP) level to the Pourashava level in three different phases. In the first phase, 53 UP Chairman, 731 UP members, and 63 UP Secretaries were trained on the Citizen's Charter. These trainings resulted in modifications to their Citizen's Charters to better support the local community. In the second phase, 600 local government officials received training on the key SATs. As these officials were responsible for responding to citizen service requests, this training equipped them with strategies and skills to respond more effectively. Even MAP members from project districts acknowledged how positive their social action project experiences were when dealing with UP-level officials who had received this training.

During the pandemic, 1,624 Pourashava representatives including Mayors, Councillors, and Poura Nirbahi Officers from 115 Pourashavas received extensive training on the SATs. This third phase provided capacity-building to local government representatives, resulting in them further updating their Citizen's Charters, following the 2017 guidelines. Almost all participants (96%) felt that their knowledge and skills of SATs enhanced, thanks to the trainings. Local government representatives shared testimonials stating that the training they received changed their mindset on how to respond to citizens using the SATs. Finally, this collaboration also enabled the NILG to conduct online trainings for the first time, as NILG officials demonstrated their new technical knowledge and ensured attendees' participation online.

KEY IMPACT:

96% OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS CLAIMED INCREASED KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS AS A RESULT OF P4D-LED CAPACITY BUILDING TRAININGS

Fostering Civic Duty and Citizen Engagement

P4D has catalysed citizen engagement and promoted civic duty through both in person and online campaigns. From special observance days to social media platforms, P4D has worked tirelessly to ensure project beneficiaries understand the key social accountability tools and feel empowered to use them.

40M PEOPLE SAW CONTENT ON THE SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY TOOLS THROUGH P4D'S ONLINE CAMPAIGNS

KEY IMPACTS:

45% OF P4D INTERVENTION DISTRICT POPULATION REACHED BY SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING CAMPAIGNS

170,000 CITIZENS ENGAGED VIA IN-PERSON SOCIAL AWARENESS ACTIVITIES

31.3% OF THE POPULATION IS AWARE OF THE OPPORTUNITY FOR CITIZENS' INVOLVEMENT IN GoB LOCAL DECISION-MAKING AND OVERSIGHT MECHANISMS

Timeline of Campaigns

- Online Social Awareness Raising Campaigns
- Social Justice Day
- Google Ad Campaign
- International Women's Day
- Right to Information Day
- Anti-Corruption Day

2019

2020

Anti-Corruption Day
Dec

International Women's Day
Mar

1st Social Awareness Raising Campaign
April-Aug
4.67 M Reached | 51.39 K Engaged

2nd Social Awareness Raising Campaign
Sept-Dec
5.7 M Reached | 418.72 K Engaged

Right to Information Day
Sept-Oct
3.24 M Reached | 79.15 K Engaged

2021

3rd Social Awareness Raising Campaign
Mar-June
4.62 M Reached | 475.42 K Engaged

Social Justice Day
Feb
4.67 M Reached | 51.39 K Engaged

International Women's Day
Mar
1.93 M Reached | 135.70 K Engaged

4th Social Awareness Raising Campaign
Sept-Dec
5.9 M Reached | 555.63 K Engaged

Right to Information Day
Sept-Oct
3.3 M Reached | 107 K Engaged

Anti-Corruption Day
Dec

2022

5th Social Awareness Raising Campaign
Mar-June
7 M Reached | 756.68 K Engaged

Social Justice Day
Feb
925 Reached | 76 Engaged

International Women's Day
Mar
1.7 K Reached | 815 Engaged

6th Social Awareness Raising Campaign
Aug-Dec
13.62 M Reached | 272.03 K Engaged

Google Ads Campaign
Aug-Nov
40.54 M Viewable Impressions | 209.94 K Clicks

Right to Information Day
Sept-Oct
2 M Reached | 9.7 K Engaged

Anti-Corruption Day
Dec

Social Justice Day
Feb

IWD
Mar
8.75 K Reached | 681 Engaged

2023

Right to Information Day Celebration: Online Campaign Reaches 1 Million

With in-person event restrictions due to the pandemic, P4D found a creative way to engage our community on Right to Information Day in 2020. One week prior to the International Access to Information Day on 28 September, P4D published a short video of project staff encouraging followers to join our "Information is My Right" campaign.

Followers were encouraged to write something about the Right to Information on a piece of paper in Bengali or English such as: "It's my right to know" and "Access your right to know with the Right to Information Act, 2009". Then, with the paper in hand, they were encouraged to take a picture of themselves and post it to their Facebook timeline with the hashtags #platformsfordialogue and #righttoinformation.

In an overwhelming turn out, nearly 200 individuals posted images on their social media profiles promoting the use of Right to Information. Between the promotional content on our Facebook page and the organic reach of those who posted their own image on the platform, one million users were reached in total. On the P4D Facebook page, visitors can see all the participants' images in a compilation album. In total, 187 citizens and 8 District Information Officers (DIOs) submitted their photos for the campaign. British Council Bangladesh also promoted this story on Facebook and re-shared the campaign to their followers.
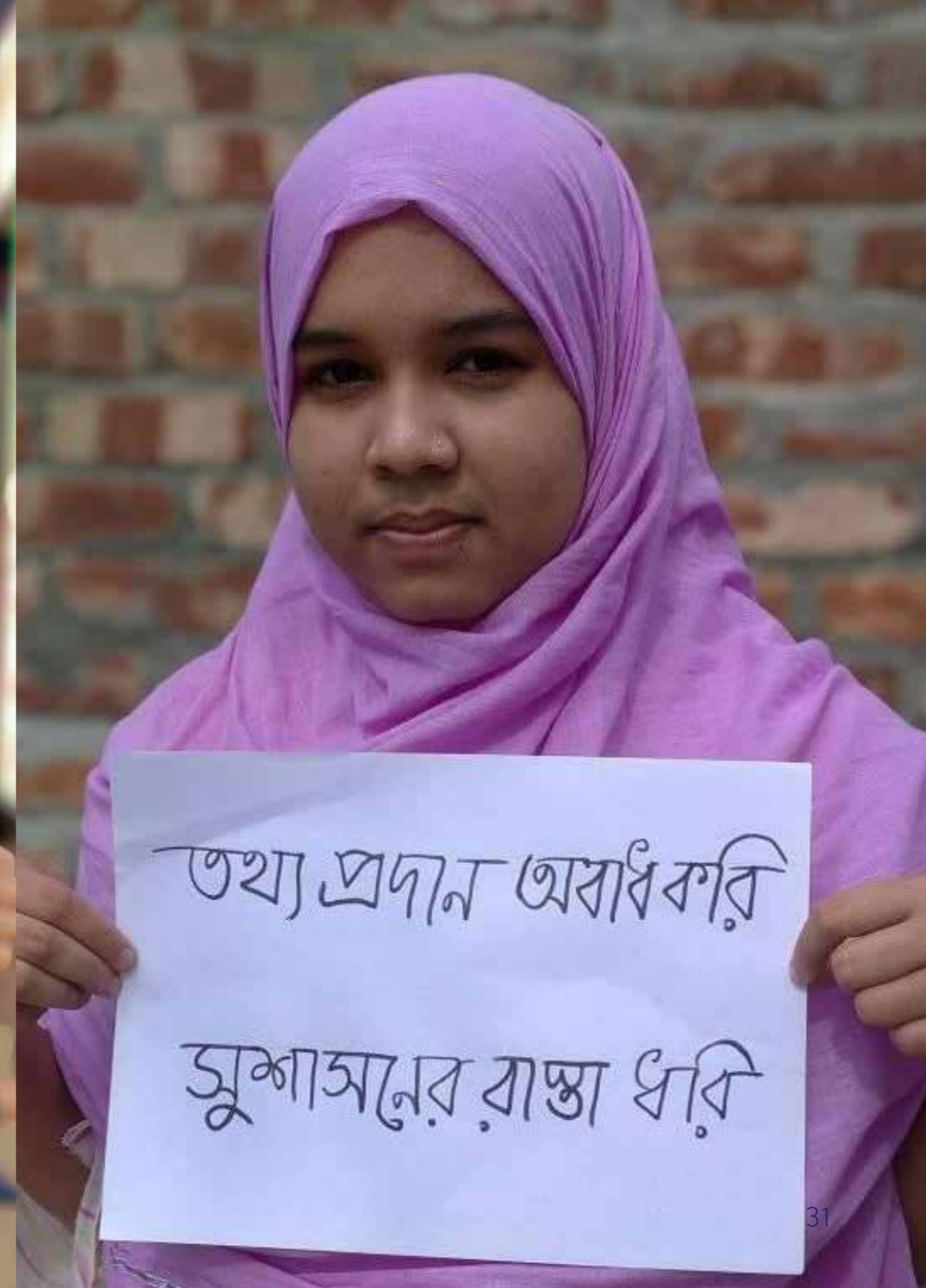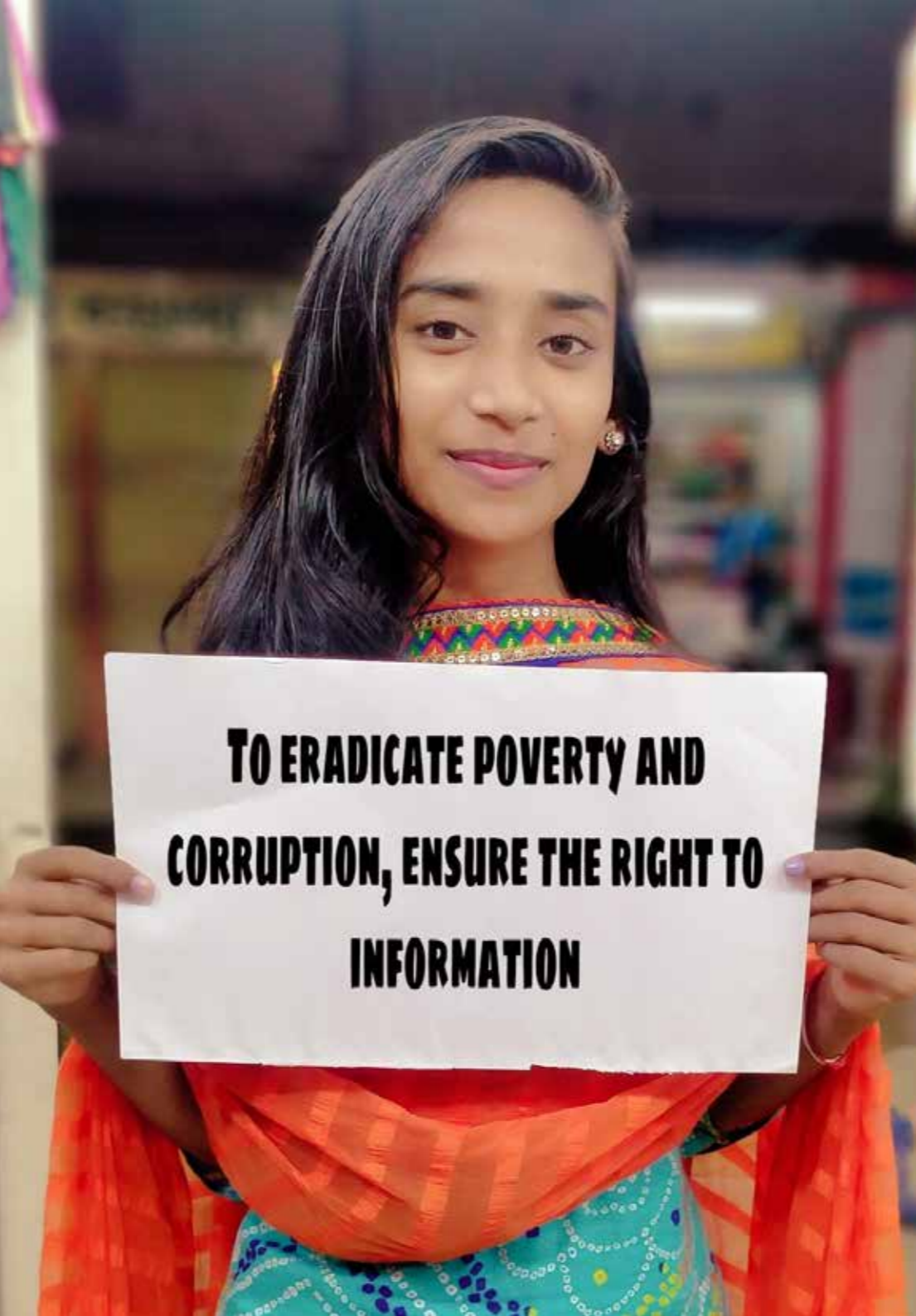
Promoting NIS and International Anti-Corruption Day 2021 Celebration

UN member countries around the world have observed International Anti-Corruption Day on 9 December every year since 2005. Celebrating this day raises awareness of corruption and promotes resilience and integrity at all levels of society. The 2021 International Anti-Corruption Day highlighted individual rights and responsibilities with the theme "Your right, your role: Say no to Corruption". Celebrating Anti-Corruption Day in Bangladesh bears special significance, as the government has taken measures to curb corruption in public and private spheres with the introduction of social accountability tools.

The Government of Bangladesh formulated and approved a National Integrity Strategy (NIS) in 2012 as a comprehensive good governance strategy to prevent corruption and improve national integrity at all levels of society. P4D has been working with local and regional civil society organisations, youth groups, the media, and government officials to help facilitate the implementation of and raise awareness about four key social accountability tools. These include the NIS, the Right to Information Act, Citizen's Charters, and the Grievance Redress System. NIS sits at the pinnacle as a vade mecum to fight corruption and ensure good governance.

In December 2021, 12 partner District Policy Forums (DPFs) organised discussion meetings and cultural programmes to celebrate International Anti-Corruption Day. Government officials, DPF members, civil society organisation representatives, community leaders, teachers, college students, youth group members, youth entrepreneurs, indigenous community leaders, and local journalists participated in these discussion meetings. In total, nearly 800 participants joined the discussions which were mostly in person with a small number of participants joining online. Appropriate measures were taken at each event to ensure proper health and safety protocols. The par-

ticipants enthusiastically engaged in the discussion against corruption and expressed their views on how to fight corruption and promote a strong culture of integrity through a socioeconomic and sociocultural lens.

"We are moving forward to achieve the SDGs by 2030 and become a developed country by 2041. If corruption goes hand in hand with this effort, the momentum will erode."
- Farazi Ahamed Rafiq Babon, President of Natore Press Club

The Deputy Commissioner (DC) and District Magistrate of Jamalpur district, Ms Morsheda Zaman, said, *"we must try to change ourselves first by changing our own moral character. There is no alternative to build a corruption-free society or environment towards building a corruption-free Bangladesh."* Mr Hayat-Ud-Dowlah Khan, the DC of Brahmanbaria, emphasised the importance of reducing the gap between the service receiver- the citizens, and service providers of different government departments. He said, *"inspired by patriotism, a social movement must be formed to prevent corruption."*

Md. Zakaria, Deputy Director of the Anti-Corruption Commission in Kushtia, said,

"We must say no to corruption from an individual level. Every person must know and

understand the law and know the correct information. The Anti-Corruption Commission of Bangladesh works on legislation as well as raising awareness. Children are the future of our nation. Therefore, to engender a sense of anti-corruption in children, anti-corruption debates, discussion meetings, and rallies have to be organised at schools and colleges. This way, we will be able to create a corruption-free Bangladesh for the next generation".

Hearing from such prominent members of society throughout the 12 DPF discussion meetings have given these communities momentum to continue their work to promote social accountability and integrity. With the common goal of a corruption-free Bangladesh, communities that reinforce anti-corruption policies will continue to bolster good governance practices.

The DPFs also carried out online campaigns on Anti-Corruption Day through social media platforms to generate wider audience reach. The celebration activities organised by the DPFs were picked up by local and national news outlets and published in different newspapers and news portals.

Online Awareness Raising Campaigns

Between March 2020 and late December 2022, P4D ran 6 online awareness raising campaigns. These campaigns were created to educate our audience on the key social accountability tools via the popular social media platform, Facebook. Our content was designed to illustrate what each tool was, how it worked, why it was important, and lastly, to instill a sense of civic duty or citizen responsibility into our audience and encourage them to use these tools. We regularly updated our content, graphics, and approach according to our learnings, and throughout the course of the campaigns, we achieved impressive results. In total, we reached over 21 million unique accounts on the platform, with our final campaign achieving the highest results to date. Many of those reached repeatedly saw our content, further reinforcing their learning. Over 3.8 million engagements (comments and likes) were recorded, and over 15K posts were shared by our followers. While measuring the impact of online engagement is difficult to illustrate in terms of human impact, our Endline survey found that 45% of P4D's intervention district population was reached by social media marketing campaigns and 65.6% of people at the community level are aware of at least one of the key accountability tools promoted by P4D.

Do you want to use RTI? Visit infocom.gov.bd to download or fill out an information request!

Say no to corruption! Implement the National Integrity Strategy in your everyday life to build a better Bangladesh!

The GRS is a powerful Social Accountability Tool!! It can help you resolve service delivery problems in a formal and official manner. **Ensure your right to public services with GRS.**

Ever wondered how to get a public service, what it will cost, or who to ask for help? **You'll find the answers written on the Citizen's Charter at your local government office!**
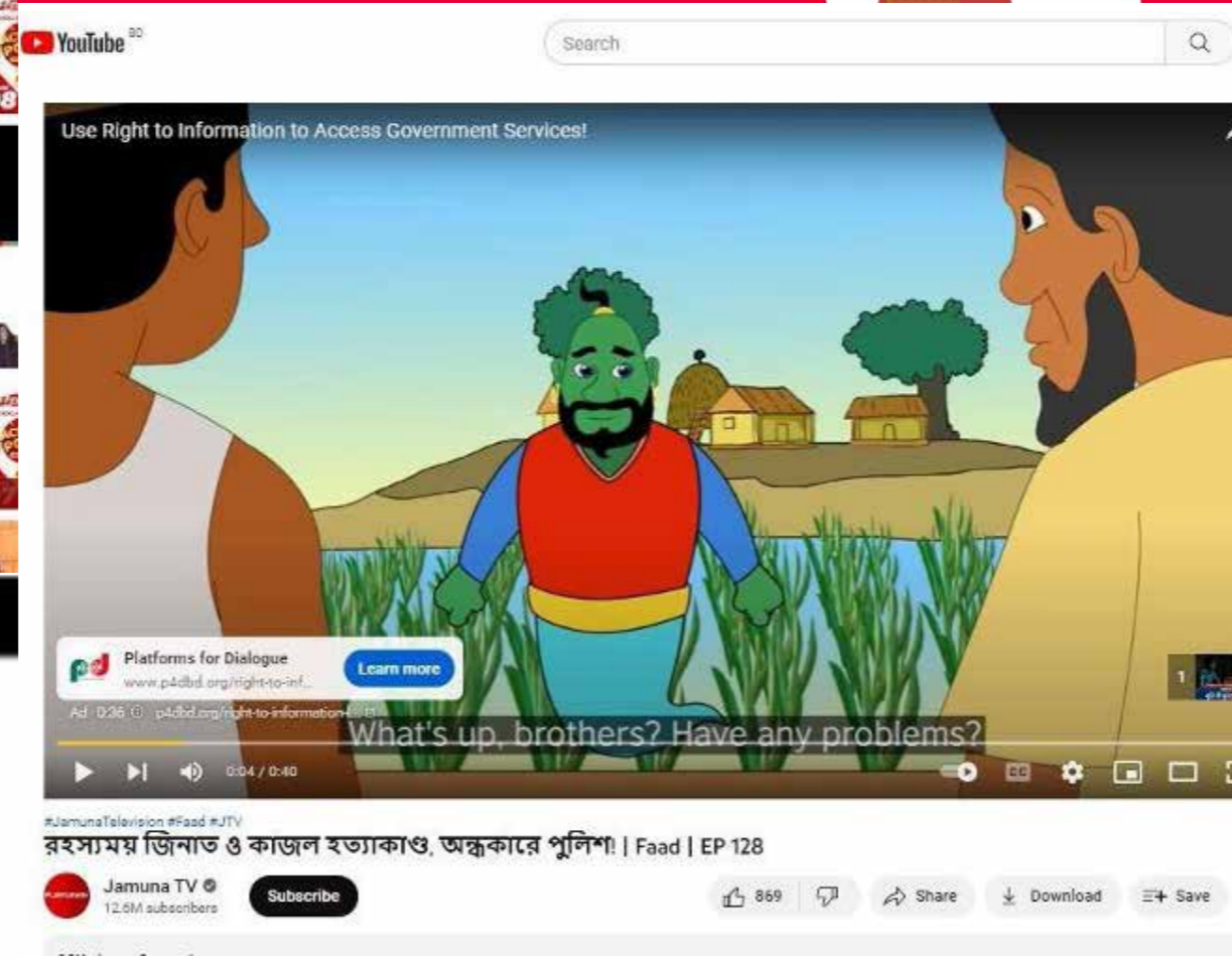
Reaching Bangladeshis via Google Ads

To close P4D's online campaigns, we wanted to make one last push to promote the SATs to the public in our project districts. While our in-person activities and social media campaigns have been effective methods to reach and engage P4D beneficiaries, we decided to scale up our efforts by using a more market-driven approach, Google Ads, to spread our message. P4D's Google Marketing Campaign started on 31 August and concluded on 17 November 2022. After initiating the 6th Social Awareness-Raising Campaign on social media, the Google Marketing Campaign was launched to complement the overall promotion of thematic issues and social accountability tools along with field-level activities. The campaign was divided into four parts according to the SATs: RTI, CC, GRS, and NIS.

Each campaign section lasted 18 days with 11 days focused on promoting static creatives and 7 days promoting our policy videos on YouTube. Our ads enticed internet users to click on our call to action, which led them to a landing page on the P4D website. There, they could browse resources on the specific SAT's landing page including more videos, graphics, publications, blog posts, and external government websites when applicable. These pages were designed to keep users engaged and interested in learning more about the social accountability tool, and we added Google tags to capture audience behaviour which helped us retarget interested visitors with longer video ads.

We set three audience categories for targeting and retargeting in our project districts with content specifically adapted according to our target groups' preferences and knowledge:

- The intellectual class: Mostly civil society members and opinion leaders with an interest in governance policy.
- The activist class: Grassroots activists working to ensure fair implementation of the policies such as government officials, NGO workers, and CSO volunteers.
- The general public: The general population across P4D project districts.

All content was targeted to people 18 and over within these categories, except for the GRS and Citizen's Charter campaigns which were targeted to people 30 and older.

The campaign focused on achieving maximum viewable impressions in P4D's 12 project districts. Our goal was to further educate people about the SATs and the three thematic issues our project is working on: ending child marriage, improving access to community clinics, and improving the quality of education.

We speculated achieving 35 million viewable impressions; however, we surpassed this by over 5.5 million.

Despite being the project's first attempt at search engine advertising, our strategy to target a wider audience and retarget those who showed more interest in the content proved to be very successful. We also focused on facilitating deep learning for the activist and intellectual segment of our target group, which was measured by the amount of time and actions (called events) they took on the landing pages. Based on the metrics, the RTI section of the campaign held the audience's attention for a longer period compared to the other policy tools, however, the NIS campaign section saw the highest number of unique visitors and the highest number of page events.

This campaign, while successful, also created a great opportunity to develop a search engine advertising for development strategy which could be useful and beneficial to awareness-raising campaigns for similar projects in the future. Citizen adoption of new policies and governance tools is often slow, even in the most developed democracies. Using modern advertising tools could prove to be very effective in speeding up this process, especially for the Government of Bangladesh, which is working to develop quickly and sustainably, better engage civil society, and encourage citizens to understand their rights.

Upazila and Union-Level Impact
CSO-Citizen Engagement

P4D started building momentum by establishing partnerships with civil society organisations in our working areas. Starting with 63 upazilas in 21 districts, the project connected with local leaders, civil society members, and curious citizens to educate them on the key social accountability tools and address relevant social issues with those tools. Through our work with our 63 partner CSOs, P4D has enabled active citizens across the country to promote good governance. Here are some of their stories...

70.2%
OF CITIZENS PERCEIVE CSOs REPRESENT PEOPLE'S INTERESTS, UP FROM THE 46% BASELINE

KEY IMPACTS:

65.6% OF PEOPLE AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL ARE AWARE OF THE KEY SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY TOOLS INCLUDING CC, RTI, NIS & GRS

63 PARTNER CSOs IN **21** PROJECT DISTRICTS RECEIVED TRAINING ON SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY TOOLS AND CAPACITY BUILDING

CSO QUALITY STANDARDS WERE DEVELOPED AND PILOTED THROUGH **60** CSOs

In Natore, CSO Shopno Shomaj Unnoyon Shongstha Changes Lives for Young Women

Bangladesh is ranked 4th in the world for highest child marriage rates, and nearly 4.5 million girls are married before the age of 18, according to a 2017 UNICEF study. Despite government efforts to ban marriage before the age of 18, roughly 22% of girls find themselves married before they turn 18 with a fifth of those being married off before turning 15.

A victim of child marriage herself, Parvin Akter of Natore wanted to give girls in her community a voice to fight this social malpractice and a means to stand on their own feet. *"I was married off when I was in the 6th grade. I don't want any other girl to have the same fate,"* said Akter. Now, her organisation, Shopno Shomaj Unnoyon Shongstha, is renowned not only in Natore, but across the country thanks to the Platforms for Dialogue (P4D) project.

In 1999, Parvin Akter founded Shopno Shomaj to curb violence against women and reduce child marriage. *"The beginning was not so easy, and I was lucky to have a supportive husband who stood beside me in all my endeavours,"* said Akter. Initially, Parvin Akter was running bamboo handicraft projects. Later, she began working with a tree plantation and opened a sewing school to help young women provide for themselves. Through these trainings, Shopno has created many job opportunities.

"I want people to stand on their own feet, especially girls. They don't necessarily have to get a job somewhere, but I want to help them create their own source of income,"

said a hopeful Akter. To date, the total number of beneficiaries of Shopno exceeds 7,000.

Besides preventing child marriage, Parvin Akter also runs a free school for underprivileged children named Shopno Shishu Bikash Kendro. *"No one has to pay a single penny. We provide them with books, backpacks, and stationery."* Shopno runs on membership fees, government funding, individual donations, and of course the hard work of volunteers.

Under P4D's initiative to help local organisations collaborate with other local leaders through Social Action Projects (SAPs), Shopno is focusing on three major topics– child marriage prevention, drug control, and land rights.

"When it comes to ending child marriage," Akter said, *"first, we have to convince the elders about how it affects young girls before we hope to succeed."*

Akter says that the British Council has helped her organisation have a voice among local people as well as gain useful advocacy tools to better promote the organisation's message. Gaining an understanding of social accountability tools has also helped the organisation access policies that support their mission to end child marriage. By association, Akter said,

"Our voice has gained huge credibility just because British Council is with us. We've also gained valuable experience and training though P4D projects which will help us grow in the future."

With this experience, Akter hopes to build a one-stop service centre under the name Shopno Shomaj Unnoyon Shongstha, where the people in her community can receive social support services in one place.

Youth Day Celebrates Social Accountability and Community-Led Initiatives

On 1 November 2019, Platforms for Dialogue joined forces with 63 partner civil society organisations (CSOs) and 63 Multi-Actor Partnership (MAP) groups across 21 districts to celebrate National Youth Day. Together, they hosted rallies, quizzes, and discussions to share information on social accountability tools and to demonstrate how important youth contribution is in helping communities gain access to public services and learn about their rights. The celebration especially focused on encouraging youth to help marginalised communities access justice and government services to foster inclusive participation at the local level. The festive day brought youth together to share stories of how their communities have already been impacted by social accountability tools and to teach others how to start using them to improve government accountability in their own communities.

The lack of access to government services stems partially from the lack of information and poor understanding of available public services. By educating the youth in their communities, we can empower them to take ownership of the changes they want to see. After a workshop on the Grievance Redress System (GRS), one youth stated,

> "I didn't know about GRS. This is a totally new thing for me. Now, I know how to raise any grievance through the online system."

During the day's celebrations, youth were also encouraged to use emergency numbers like 'Stop Child Marriage', 'Stop Domestic Violence', and the 'Anti-Corruption hotline' to keep community members safe and prevent crime. They also learned how they could

become more involved in community work with our local partner CSOs through community events and Social Action Projects (SAPs).

One girl expressed that the discussion forums helped inform her about how she could start her own business. *"We heard about some essential policy tools like the Citizen's Charter. I want to be an entrepreneur, so this information will help me in the future to easily get a trade license,"* she stated. Another young woman spoke about the justice system saying,

> "I received some information about the village court system. This will help me personally and my community get proper access to justice within a short time frame and at a low cost."

Altogether, over 7,200 youth participants joined events in 21 districts. The large turnout is a promising sign that the youth will not just be more aware of social accountability tools, but that they will be more proactive when engaging with local government. Thanks to our 63 partners CSOs and MAP groups who organised the event, education on social accountability tools in reaching youth in P4D's project districts.

Community Development through Social Dialogue: Work of a CSO

As the effects of climate change worsen throughout Bangladesh, Md. Golam Mostafa, founder of Prokash Manabik Unnayan Sangstha (PMUS), is working to buffer the impacts on his community. Established in 2000, PMUS is focusing its efforts on improving people's welfare in Varara Union, Pabna Sadar upazila through climate change mitigation and social welfare programming.

"Our upazila is a flood-prone area, and the people suffer a lot because of this. I wanted to do something to help them improve their standard of living," said Golam Mostafa.

A college teacher by profession, Golam Mostafa began to help the people of Varara become independent through micro-credit programmes, savings initiatives, cattle farming, sewing, agriculture trainings, and erosion mitigation.

"We are a small organisation, however, we're always determined to do our best in order to help our people," he said.

Some initiatives that PMUS runs in the community include tree plantation projects to protect the land from erosion during floods, the distribution of deep tube-wells for safe drinking waters, and teaching community members about taking sanitation precautions for improved health and hygiene.

Nearly a decade after it was founded, PMUS was selected as one of the civil society organisations (CSOs) to partner with Platforms for Dialogue. In coordination with P4D, PMUS runs three Social Action Projects (SAPs)– promoting the Right to Information, providing agricultural trainings, and raising awareness against sexual harassment.

The Right to Information SAP also incorporates the Grievance Redress System (GRS), so people learn that not only can they petition the government for public information, but they can also file a formal complaint if they are denied a public service at any government office.

PMUS holds meetings on the Right to Information at schools or colleges, and they integrate quiz competitions, workshops, and dynamic meetings to make the awareness campaigns more interactive and successful.

"People of all walks of life, literate or illiterate, go to public offices to receive services. They all need to know about this," said Golam Mostafa.

Under the Right to Information project, people are also taught about the Citizen's Charter; another key social accountability tool.

"Now, the people of our locality know what the Citizen's Charter is, and they actually follow the charter whenever they go to the Union Parishad Office,"

said Golam Mostafa. Learning about these social accountability tools has helped many citizens in this region learn how to access public services and ensure accountable service delivery.

The second SAP that PMUS is focusing on facilitates meetings between government officers and farmers on agricultural issues. Golam Mostafa stated that,

"

many of the farmers did not know how they could reach the officers to get necessary information, advocacy, or any other type of help before our campaign. We are trying to lift these barriers between the government officers and the farmers.

Community Champions: After 20 Years Helping Jamalpur District, Gaibandha CSO is Now Promoting the Right to Information

The name Amdad Al-Amin Tarun Shangathan, a proactive youth organisation in Jamalpur, was derived from two Arabic words meaning faithful helper. The youth organisation has kept true to its name; it has acted as a reliable helping hand for the people of Gaibandha Union in Jamalpur district since 2001.

Realising that the government's development endeavours would not reach their village if they did not lobby for themselves, a group of 40 youth from the Purarchar village formed a cooperative fund and established the Amdad Al-Amin Tarun Shangathan.

The youth group's first agenda item was to ensure the construction of a bridge and several roads in their Union. Jamalpur is fertile with silt from the Brahmaputra River, but it lacked the proper infrastructure to support an agriculture-based economy. Two decades

later, the villages in the Union are regularly yielding far beyond the expectations of agriculture officials, and locals are seeing their lives change for the better. *"All this change did not come in one day,"* said Nazmul Hasan, leader of the Amdad Al-Amin Tarun Shangathan.

As their lobbying efforts brought substantial change to the Union, the youth organisation shifted their priorities to other projects and worked intensively with the government's Social Development Foundation (SDF) to alleviate poverty in their Union. Since then, the organisation has been at the forefront of installing hygienic sanitation systems, supporting public health education in Gaibandha Union, and supporting relief programmes during floods.

The youth group has also transformed itself gradually into a financial assistance organisation for poor households and helped many villagers build concrete homes in flood prone areas. *"We provide loans for micro-entrepreneurs and our repayment policies are very accessible. The villagers know what we have done for the community, so we're very well known here,"* added Hasan while talking about the organisation's efforts to bring about change at the micro-level.

As a strategic partner with Platforms for Dialogue, Amdad Al-Amin Tarun Shangathan has used its good reputation and experience in the community to promote good governance policies. With P4D, the CSO is tackling issues like drug addiction, quality of education, and the Right to Information policy tool as part of P4D's Social Action Projects (SAPs).

Some volunteers shared that it was an amazing learning experience for the whole team.

> "We didn't know about the tools to make government officials accountable for their actions. Now we have handed over these tools to the people, and it is making a difference,"

added Md. Nazmul Ferdous, during a story about local resident Md. Saddam Hossain who was able to save his business from land grabbers by using the RTI tool that he learned about at one of the community meetings.

Local resident Saddam added, *"if I did not know how to use the RTI tool, those land grabbers would have taken all my land. Upon filing an RTI application, I knew that their claims of government order were false."* Saddam is just one of many who have been empowered by these educational campaigns on social accountability tools. Members of Amdad Al-Amin Tarun Shangathan hope they can continue to help people.

> "We are more experienced now since we have worked with P4D. Like our name suggests, we will continue to be the helping hand that we are,"

said Nazmul Hasan Ferdous with a smile on his face.

Upazila and Union-Level Impact
MAPs and SAPs

In association with grassroots CSOs, P4D formed Multi-Actor Partnership (MAP) groups at the grassroots level. MAPs are local-level groups comprising representatives of civil society, local government, community leaders, entrepreneurs, media, activists, minority groups, and youth who work closely with local CSOs to address local social issues through Social Action Projects (SAPs).

All the MAP groups received training on leadership, social accountability tools, evidence-based advocacy, and SAPs. These trainings helped MAP members develop their skills and knowledge to plan and implement SAPs. After the training, the MAPs formed 3-5 sub-groups and identified local issues in consultation with their community. Each sub-group identified one local policy issue, either linked to public service or social accountability tools and developed a SAP to address the issue lasting from 3-6 months. These projects aimed to bring about social change and worked to enhance community life. While working with P4D's 63 partner CSOs, the project encouraged CSO members and MAP groups to focus on SAPs that not only addressed community needs, but also reflected the utility of the key social accountability tools. These three SAP stories show how promoting these tools made lasting and impactful change in several communities.

58.3% OF THE TARGETED POPULATION (MAP MEMBERS) ENGAGE IN LOCAL DECISION-MAKING MECHANISMS, UP FROM THE 16% BASELINE

KEY IMPACTS:

P4D BENEFICIARIES (CSOs AND MAPs) IMPLEMENTED OVER **475** SAPs DURING THE PROJECT

21 SAP EXHIBITIONS ORGANISED

4 REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP ON SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY (PASA) WORKSHOPS ORGANISED

Know Your Rights: Policy Campaigns Ensure Good Governance and Propel the Next Generation of Active Citizens

The Platforms for Dialogue programme is based on the principles of four government policy mechanisms that promote good governance through account-ability and transparency in government offices. By introducing citizens to the Right to Information (RTI), Grievance Redress System (GRS), National Integrity Strategy (NIS), and the Citizen's Charter (CC) through Social Action Projects (SAPs), civil society organisa-tions (CSOs) have prepared the next generation of citizens who are aware of their rights as Bangladeshi citizens.

Out of 63 partner CSOs in P4D's 21 project districts, 33 CSOs have dedicated one or more of their SAPs to educating citizens on policy instruments that will establish a culture of accountability in public offices. The idea is that people can take control of what is rightfully theirs when they realise that government services are a right of tax paying citizens, not charity.

Public awareness of these policy instruments is the main goal of the SAPs, and each CSO has approached awareness building differently. HR Khan Smriti Sangha in Jamalpur, Isha Kha Samaj Kallyan Samity in Kishoreganj, and Mitali Samaj Kallyan Club in Netroko-na decided it was best to conduct campaigns among high school students to educate them on policy tools. It was their idea that thousands of students, with en-hanced knowledge on GRS, RTI, and CC, would talk to their parents about it, which would result in a commu-nity of aware citizens.

The results speak for themselves. As a resident of Purbadhala Village, Mahtab Uddin said he learned about GRS from his school-aged daughter, Husne Ara.

"Our roads are in very poor condition. Now I know how and where to file a complaint."

In another example, CSOs MAC Bangladesh from Sreemangal, Shober Shathe Shikkhbo from Kushtia and Unique Welfare Organization from Jamalpur decided they could educate the highest number of people by conducting community meetings with gov-ernment officials and distributing information cards on GRS and RTI instruments.

The Unique Welfare Organization, conducted 26 meetings with more than 1,500 people in Islampur upazila. The meetings had immediate results as some of the residents of Chinaduli union, namely Rafiqul Islam, Heluka, Sahar Ali, Jollukha and Hira complained that government contractors were trying to forcibly acquire the land of their fishing village. Farhad Hos-sain, one of the CSO volunteers from Unique Welfare Organization, helped the residents file a GRS com-plaint. Their village was saved because the SAP had shown the residents a way to demand good public service and protection. Farhad said the residents would have had no idea on how to save their homes if they had not come to the meetings and learned about GRS.

Though the CSOs have dealt with the policy instru-ments differently, the core purpose of SAPs involving social accountability tools has been to share informa-tion with the community. All CSOs have installed Cit-izen's Charters at more than one government office. The sturdy billboards spell out all the services avail-able at these offices, and therefore, service seekers do not have to depend on brokers for information. Such information-based campaigns have changed the face of many public offices as citizens can now hold public servants accountable for a service or address the lack of it.

KEY IMPACTS:

63 UNIONS IMPLEMENTED THE MODEL CITIZEN CHARTER

71% OF CSOs & CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS ARE AWARE OF THE PURPOSE AND IMPACT OF IMPLEMENTING RTI AND **92%** FOR THE CITIZEN'S CHARTER

Hotline Numbers SAP

"Once, a house nearby caught fire, and while people were busy finding the number for the fire service, the house was totally gutted," recounted Sharifa Khatun, leader of Hotline Number SAP from Social Projection Committee (SPC).

Promoting hotline numbers was a SAP undertaken by two civil society organisations (CSOs) – Social Projection Committee (SPC) and Magura Shadhin Bangla Jubo Krira Chakra in Nilphamari's Kishoreganj upazila. Both P4D partner CSOs have worked to raise awareness about government hotline numbers designed to help citizens in various emergency and critical situations.

SAP leaders like Sharifa worked with volunteers to implement various projects to improve public services and accountability in their community. *"Immediately, we noticed the impact of our work. When the hoax about the soaring salt price broke out, shopkeepers started selling salt at a very steep price to make a quick profit. However, one of the community members who had learned about the hotline number service from us called 999 and submitted a complaint. The police immediately came and fined that shop Tk 50,000,"* said Sharifa.

SPC president, Md. Zulfiqur Rahman said,

"it really encouraged us to see our work having an immediate impact. The entire community appreciated us. We made banners, posters, and stickers about the hotline numbers to raise awareness.

Our volunteers distributed the materials, however, many people came to us afterwards looking for more stickers. They'd say, 'Can you give me some stickers? There's a gang of hooligans doing drugs and gambling in my neighbourhood.' Then they'd go to those places and post the stickers. This was really fantastic! Our MAP members also did some wall painting with the hotline numbers. The UP Chairman oversaw our work and praised our efforts."

The other CSO focusing on promoting hotline numbers, Magura Shadhin Bangla Jubo Krira Chakra, focused their efforts solely on hotline number 106, the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC). Senior Assistant Secretary Md. Aynal Haque said,

"The rate of corruption in our area is very high. We chose to work on this hotline number in a bid to do something about this issue."

SAP leader Md. Shamim Azad Ripon said, *"we organised rallies and awareness campaigns to familiarise people with 106. We made stickers which we'd paste on the mirrors of women's dressing tables or on the back of their hand mirrors. We made small cards which would fit in men's wallets. We organised a big awareness campaign at the school in Shingergari where nearly 300 students, teachers, and guardians were present, and we saved 106 on the mobile phones of all the participants. Our work paid dividends almost immediately… One of the teenagers from our community, Asif Uz Zaman, has a story to share."*

Asif then continued, *"I was attacked by three muggers on an auto-rickshaw on December 6th. It was 8 am, and I could not do anything but give them whatever I had after they beat me up. Then they dropped me in a quiet area. I immediately got up, jumped on an empty auto-rickshaw, and followed them. I called 106. They redirected me to 999, and I gave the police the registration number of the first auto-rickshaw. Later, the police contacted me and to follow up on the case."*

SAP leader Ripon said,

"We're just glad that nothing serious happened to Asif. At least the local people are now more aware of the hotline numbers and how they can help. The hotline numbers have been introduced for our benefit. We should learn to use them."
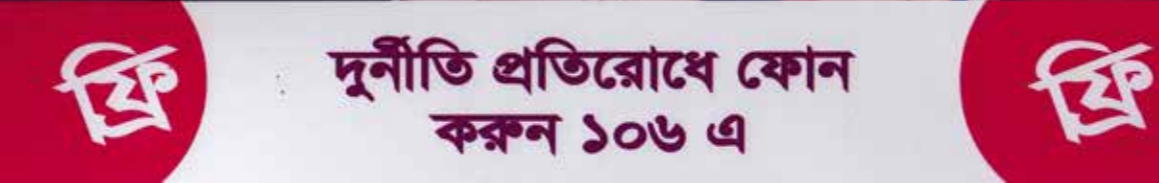
Corruption at Markets: How one SAP Brought the Community Together to Improve Accountability for All

"There was no Citizen's Charter or price list at Jholoi Bazar – the biggest market in the locality, and this allowed various types of price irregularities," said Social Action Project (SAP) leader, Md. Moktar Rahman, from Aima Jhulai New Star Club, a Panchagarh-based civil society organisation (CSO) working with P4D.

The vendors were charging exorbitant amounts claiming they were following government regulations and including government taxes. However, the taxes were four or five times higher than the actual rates. Correcting this price gouging has now been addressed by the Aima Jhulai New Star Club SAP.

"Jholoi Bazar is the oldest marketplace in Magura Union, Panchagarh Sadar. However, quarrels are an everyday occurrence at the bazar due to the absence of a Citizen's Charter or price list," said Moklesur Rahman, New Star Club President.

SAP leader Moktar said,

> "We started this SAP as the corruption at Jholoi Bazar was slowly crossing the limit. The corruption was hurting almost all stakeholders."

Md. Kamruzzaman, P4D Panchagarh District Facilitator said, *"when they started working on the project, they became really demotivated because nobody cooperated. Many of them felt that bringing clarity to trade at Jholoi Bazar would hurt them financially. However, the volunteers did not lose heart and conducted 3-4 meetings at the market premises with all stakeholders. They were able to convince many of the buyers, sellers, and lessees that ending this corruption* would benefit everyone. And so, the work began."

Rahman said, *"after three large group meetings, the volunteers went to Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO), Shahina Shabnam, for data collection. They returned with large stacks of papers and started sorting them out."*

They then conducted several meetings with the UP (sub-district council), local leaders, lessees and the UNO. These meetings proved to be major steps down the path to installing an official price list at Jholoi Bazar. After all the hard work, New Star Club members gathered all the stakeholders at the market and installed a large price list which included details of all kinds of goods sold at Jholoi Bazar.

"We handed out small leaflets to the people at the hearing too. Everyone was very happy with what we had done," said SAP leader Moktar. *"Before we installed the price list, the middlemen would charge the buyers/sellers anywhere between Tk 150-200 as a 'tax' for a goat or a bicycle which is four or five times the actual rate. When locals received the price list, they were surprised to learn that they only have to pay Tk 20 for a cycle and Tk 40 for a goat in taxes. This put a bright smile on everyone's face and people thanked us for installing the price list,"* said Moktar.

DF Kamruzzaman said,

> "As far as I know, this is probably the very first time that such a price list has been installed at a market. This is a great achievement for Aima Jhulai New Star Club and also for P4D."

SAP leader Moktar said,

> "Now people know exactly how much they are supposed to pay, and the disagreements and fights have almost vanished. This is really a great achievement. At first, we didn't think we'd be able to do it. But now that we have done it, it fills our hearts with pride and hope for a better future."

Thanks to the MAPs efforts and achievements, the market authority has since taken over their initiative and continues to maintain an accurate price list for all to see. In the face of inflation, locals know that they're getting the fair market rate and can make their purchases with peace of mind.

Upazila and Union-Level Impact
Community Resource Centres

For some, having a dedicated space for community to connect and access local resources and information is the best way to reach those most in need. With this in mind, P4D opened Community Resource Centres in 21 project districts in 2019. Local volunteers, CSO partners, and MAP members joined together to create spaces for community members to gather and learn about social accountability tools, access resources to utilise those tools, and seek support when they had questions. Today, 17 of the 21 still operate independently with the support of local leaders. The following are some CRC milestones…

37.5% OF THE POPULATION PERCEIVE KEY GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS AS EFFECTIVE, UP FROM THE 7.7% BASELINE

KEY IMPACT:

17 OUT OF 21 ORIGINAL CRCs ARE STILL ACTIVE

CRC Volunteers Trained on Effective Community Engagement

After the opening of 21 Community Resource Centres (CRCs) in January 2019, Platforms for Dialogue invited volunteers from each CRC to participate in a two-day training at the National Institute of Local Government (NILG) in Dhaka. In April of 2019, 42 volunteers gathered to learn how P4D is working to enable their communities and to receive training on their roles and responsibilities in delivering various services through Community Resource Centres.

The training was intended to give volunteers the necessary tools required to effectively run and operate their CRC. They learned basic behavioural codes, including how to attend to CRC visitors and how to assist them with social accountability tools and P4D resources. They were also trained in operational best practices, including administrative duties and record keeping. Ysemin Akter, a CRC volunteer from Panchagarh said,

"It was very useful for us as we now have a thorough understanding about the project, its resources, and how to properly direct visitors to access information."

The volunteers are mostly students, and more than 50% of them are female. Their involvement in P4D Community Resource Centres emphasises local ownership and resonates with P4D's intention to present the CRCs as a place for the locals by the locals. As Jessica Magson, P4D Project Director, said,

"As volunteers, you work from the front line in our working areas. In that sense, you are the face of P4D to others. I can't stress enough how vital a role you play to this project, not to mention what a great service it is that you provide for your community."

Virtual CRC Makes Access to Learning About Policy Tools Available Online

After months of research and development, P4D launched the first-ever Virtual Community Resource Centre (VCRC) on 5 January 2022. The VCRC is an interactive space where visitors can tour a life-like Community Resource Centre in rural Bangladesh and learn about each of the four key social accountability tools. In each room, visitors can find videos on the key policy tools, leaflets, photographs, infographics, and more. Animated characters from the online social awareness-raising campaigns are also featured in the VCRC, and each has a short speech when a visitor enters their policy room. The VCRC is designed for Bangla speakers, however, there are subtitles available for visitors needing English translation.

The VCRC was designed and launched during the Covid-19 pandemic, when in-person activities were limited. This platform allowed knowledgeable community members and newcomers the opportunity to explore P4D resources in an interactive and fun environment, online. To date, an estimated 6K visitors have spent time in our Virtual CRC.
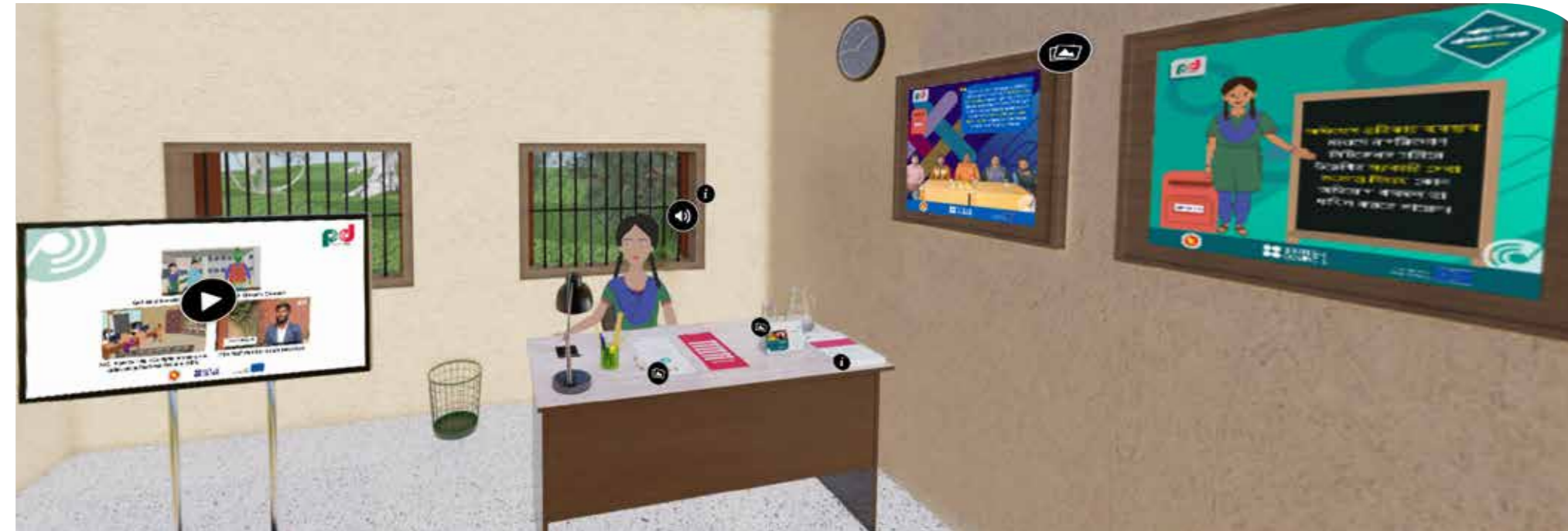
District-Level Impact
District Policy Forums

As P4D began to scale the project from the local to the district level, significant and distinct shifts in policy dialogue began to take place. The project formed District Policy Forums comprised of a diverse cohort of community leaders including CSO members, local government officials, students, teachers, professionals, women, and youth to work together and tackle the most pressing social issues through community-centred dialogue events. As DPFs formed and began engaging with district-level actors, beneficiaries and stakeholders alike began interacting more frequently and with noteworthy results. Here are some of their stories…

1,322 PEOPLE PARTICIPATED AND RAISED THEIR VOICE IN DISTRICT-LEVEL PUBLIC HEARINGS

KEY IMPACTS:

12 DISTRICT POLICY FORUMS (DPFs) FORMED IN 12 DISTRICTS

24 KEYNOTE/POSITION PAPERS AND COMMUNICATION MATERIALS DEVELOPED

99% OF DISTRICT POLICY FORUM MEMBERS CLAIM THAT THE PLATFORM IS EFFECTIVE AT INCREASING DIALOGUE BETWEEN CITIZENS AND GOVERNMENT

Government Services Become More Accessible: Bagerhat Public Hearing Prompts Government Action

Upazila Websites Get Updated Because of Civil Society Intervention at a Public Hearing in Bagerhat

Local government websites are full of useful information for citizens to understand and access public services. Despite the wide-scale use of smartphones and the internet, civil society representative Mr Shamim noticed that many of the upazila and district websites in Bagerhat were outdated. In an effort to improve public service delivery, Shamim raised the issue at a public hearing organised by local government and P4D's Bagerhat District Policy Forum (DPF) members.

The Bagerhat DC (District Commissioner) took the issue into consideration and instructed the responsible authorities to update the websites as soon as possible. The DC also called a meeting with the District Unnayan Samanyay Committee (District Development Coordination Committee) and requested their advice to implement the next steps.

Bagerhat District Policy Forum members actively participated in the meeting and shared their opinions. Their input, along with consultations with citizens and government officials, helped resolve the problem quickly and effectively. Thanks to civil society representatives raising important issues such as ensuring accessible information from local government websites, protecting public interest has become a focal point at public hearings like this one.

Monitoring School Management Committees (SMCs) in Bagerhat

At the same public hearing, another DPF member, Mrs Afroza Ahammed, claimed that some School Management Committees (SMCs) were not fulfilling their duties to ensure the quality of education.

Moreover, the Education Office was not monitoring committee activities, causing a lack of SMC accountability and oversight. Hearing the complaint, the DEO (District Education Officer) took the necessary steps to monitor the SMC meetings. Assistant Director of the District Education Office, Md. Abu Hanif, visited Khasherhat Secondary School to monitor activities and reminded the SMC of their duties and responsibilities. The DEO assured DPF members they will continue to monitor the SMCs in order to improve their performance across the district.

Education in Bangladesh has been improving over the past decade, and many stakeholders have proactively collaborated to educate the next generation. SMCs play a crucial role in ensuring well-rounded and comprehensive education for students, however, without proper monitoring and evaluation, they may lose direction and lack efficiency in managing school operations. Bagerhat DPF members are working with local government bodies to advocate for quality education in order to provide youth with the knowledge and skills they need to help develop the district.

Overall, citizens in P4D's project districts are seeing more proactive and responsive local government thanks to interventions like this public hearing in Bagerhat. Our recent survey also showed that the majority of citizens in P4D's project districts, 62.3%, perceive that government officials became more accountable in recent years. P4D's interventions, civil society-led campaigns and initiatives, and government efforts to improve accountability and transparency at the institutional level are making a difference. Citizen oversight is crucial to maintaining this kind of impact, and we hope that our field-level partners continue to work with local government to hold them accountable and promote citizen involvement in the democratic process.

Bandarban DPF Sees Quick Response After Public Hearing

The Bandarban DPF organised a public hearing in September 2021 where citizens asked and quizzed public officials about public services. DPF member, Usain Aung Marma, said,

> "In the policy dialogue meeting, we tried to make it clear to the DC that the government's efforts to achieve the SDGs would be greatly hampered if child marriage is not contained and the marriage registration is not made obligatory for indigenous people in this district."

Usain said that the DC pledged to take necessary measures to strengthen child marriage prevention committees in the unions.

Following the DPF campaign, schools have begun sending out anti-child marriage messages to guardians. Bandarban High School headteacher, Deepti Kona Dey, said, *"I shared the messages I received from the DPF events with my students,"* many of whom are becoming aware of the dangers of child marriage themselves. *"Recently, I heard an interesting incident. A mother of one of my students told me that her daughter threatened to get her arrested if she tried to arrange her marriage before she turned 18,"* said the teacher. Deepti's sister Smriti Kona Dey, the Headteacher of Bandarban Girls' High School, also shared the hotline numbers, like 1098, dedicated to prevent-

58

ing child marriage with her students.

Social Welfare Deputy Director, Milton Muhuri, said the DPF's efforts would bear fruit soon since it brought teenagers, their guardians, civil society members, and most importantly, local government officials, to a single platform.

He said,

> "We consider child marriage a sort of child abuse. We have a toll-free number – 1098. We use it to prevent this type of abuse."

Although the issue of child marriage is both sensitive and challenging in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the District Policy Forum's campaigns have showed promise to knock on the right doors and ensure collaboration from all relevant parties, including families, community social workers, and local government representatives.

The DPF members are motivated to work closely with the local community, teachers, students, and their guardians to realise their dream of making Bandarban a district free of child marriage in the near future.

Jamalpur DPF Encourages Community Members to Undertsand their Role in Community Clinics

When Abul Kalam Azad, a Jamalpur District Policy Forum member, pointed out that the road leading to Chandanpur Kabi Kafiluddin Community Clinic was dilapidated and that the clinic did not have running water because there was no deep tube well, the sub-district's top health official promised that he would look into it as soon as possible.

This happened at a meeting that the Jamalpur DPF organised as part of its campaign to improve services at local community clinics using social accountability tools. The forum is working to bridge the gap between government officials and local citizens, and DPF members are hosting activities geared towards raising awareness about the four key social accountability tools. The goal is to use them to influence the District Administrations and encourage action and improvement of local community clinic service.

"People know about all the community clinic services now, so there is a steady flow of patients at my community clinic," said Nazmul Alam, the Community Healthcare Provider (CHCP) at Kabi Kafiluddin Community Clinic. The policy forum has managed to make people aware that community clinics are in fact an initiative under public-private-partnership, which makes them responsible, in part, of the public clinics too. As soon as they realised that it was no different from the local mosque, temple, or school, they began raising funds for the clinic. Though it is not enough for major repairs, citizens are trying their best to contribute to the clinic. *"Even that is a good start,"* said Abul Kalam Azad, who also pointed to the increased flow of patients as a sign of the DPF's success.

This small clinic, besides having a Citizen's Charter, also has a complaint box where patients can submit their complaints and recommendations. The community group members, who constitute the steering committee for the community clinic, said they had learned about social accountability tools such as RTI and GRS thanks to the DPF.

Nilphamari DPF Promotes Quality Education with a Special Focus on Social Accountability Tools

Nilphamari has always been afflicted with monga, a near famine situation stemming from the lack of employment in rural areas. Poverty is a constant in this region, and along with that, comes child labour. For many families, the prospect of their children earning 200 taka per day seems more profitable than having them attend school. Moreover, since anyone can start working in the Export Processing Zone (EPZ) after the age of twelve or thirteen, children, especially female children, are joining the sector at an alarming rate. As a result, the quality and volume of education have become vulnerable in Nilphamari. For this reason, Nilphamari District Policy Forum (DPF) decided to focus its work on quality education.

In addition to focusing on quality education, the Nilphamari DPF has been campaigning to raise awareness about the key social accountability tools (SATs) and how the public can benefit from them. The district policy forum held several events including a dialogue meeting and capacity-building event to orient members on the four key SATs. After attending the meeting, Farhana Yesmin, a DPF member and a university teacher, decided that it was time to implement what she learned at her college. Along with the principal, she decid-

ed to appoint an Information Officer so that students, guardians, and teachers could have easy access to all kinds of information.

With Masum Sarkar's appointment as the Information Officer, a number of people now come to him to inquire about all kinds of information regarding the college including admission fees, exam fees, and how exactly these sums are spent or decided upon. According to Yesmin, this is a great example of putting the Right to Information into practice. She thinks this little step will yield rich dividends in the long run.

Salma Akter, another DPF member has been working to spread what she learned about the tools and their practical use. She began spreading information on the importance of GRS in education to the principals and teachers at different schools. After that, the head teacher of Kokoi High School in Borogacha, Ganapati Roy took the initiative to install a complaint box. At first, there were no complaints coming in as the students were hesitant to raise their voices against the teachers or the school committee. Then, one day in the assembly, Ganapati Roy renamed the box to 'suggestion box', and since then, there has been a constant flow of suggestions.

The box is opened once every two months, and the suggestions are read aloud in the presence of the student forum members. Konika, a member of the student forum, said that the forum constantly encourages students to be active in raising their voices. As a result, problems like lack of proper sanitation, poor facilities, or inadequate lessons were promptly addressed.

Golam Mostafa, Nilphamari Model College Principal and DPF President, has also installed a complaint box at his school, but students are still not motivated enough to come forward. Nevertheless, he remains hopeful about this new initiative. He believes that if he spreads knowledge of the SATs among the students, then they will become more aware of their rights and responsibilities and make use of the complaint box. He said,

> "If the school management committee is strengthened, a good number of problems can be solved. And to do so, we need to familiarise the committee members with the SATs as well."

The purpose of these tools is to ensure accountability throughout the system, which is what should be reinforced by officials at all levels, says Monju Sarkar. Despite being a member of the Nilphamari Kachari Government Primary School management committee, Monju was not sure about her duties before the DPF's intervention.

Common situations like this are clear examples that

such responsibility often requires citizen oversight and checks and balances. Journalist Md. Shish Rahman thinks that the SATs provide that very opportunity.

> "These tools help people raise their voices whenever they see something wrong. If that happens at schools, the management committee members will, in turn, become more aware of their responsibilities too."

Md. Azaharul Islam, the ADC (General) of Nilphamari, said,

> "Knowledge is power. The more people know about the social accountability tools, the more conscious they will be about their rights. And if the people are aware, the administration is bound to deliver quality service."

Upazila Education Officer, Md. Enamul Hoque Sarkar, said,

> "The tools are actually making changes. They

are slow but there are certain changes. For instance, teachers are becoming more receptive to suggestions and complaints they receive in the complaint box because they also know about GRS and RTI."

Akhteruzzaman, a DPF member and managing director of an NGO named CADAM, believes that working with SATs and implementing them to ensure quality education has opened up a new path of activism for citizens and a common platform for the local administration.

> "Gradually, people are becoming more conscious and informed. These small initiatives are bound to bring changes. We are hopeful about improving the quality of education in our district. Thanks to the DPF, we now know how to do it," he concluded confidently.
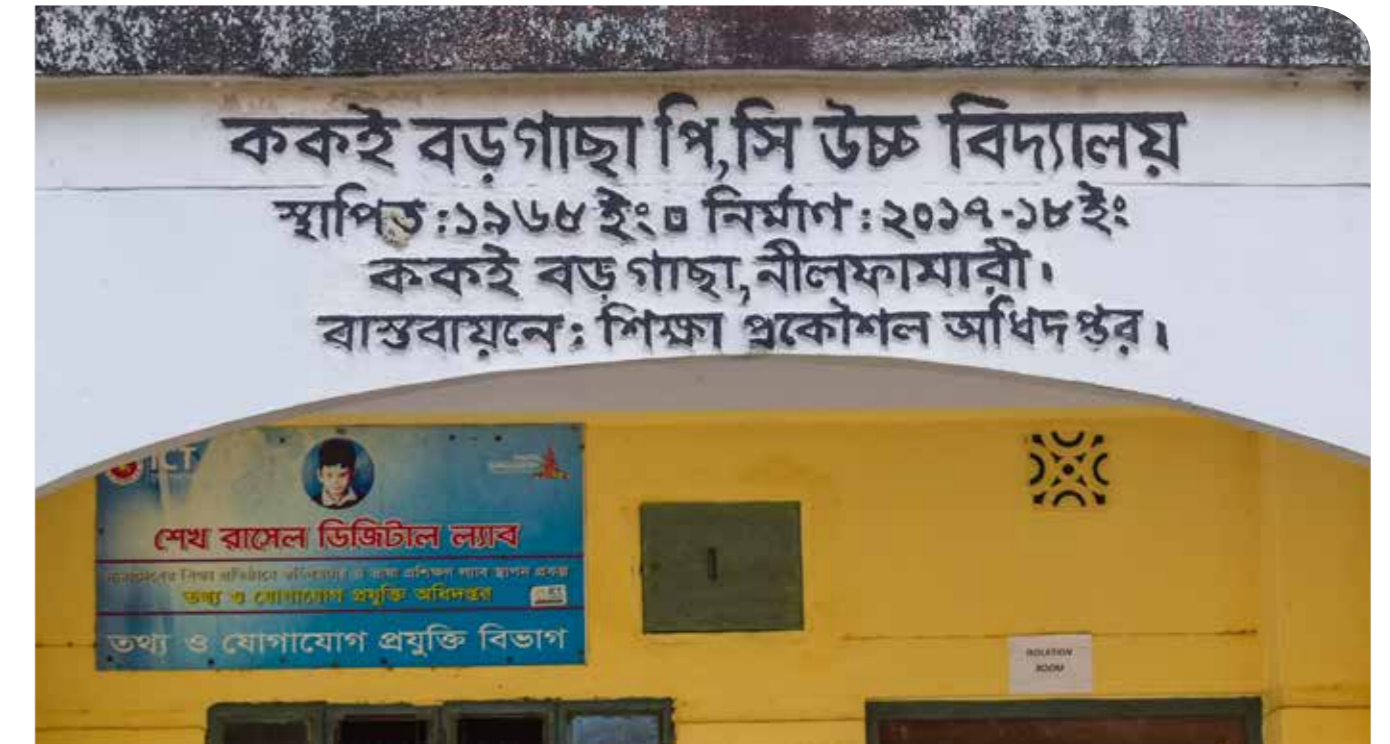
Brahmanbaria DPF Forms a Coalition to Take on Child Marriage

Child marriage is especially problematic in Brahmanbaria, which is why the DPF there chose to focus on tackling this issue. Mohammad Mahbub Khan, a DPF member, indicated that child marriage is still so common in the district because of, *"fanaticism and lack of education... In our district, we have people who are blindly obsessed with religion."* The ongoing pandemic also contributed to the shocking increase in child marriages. Many female students were married off during the lockdown. Vikarun Nessa, the Deputy Director (DD) of Women's Affairs, Brahmanbaria, blames poverty as another reason behind the stark numbers. She said, *"in many cases, migrants visiting their hometowns offer the guardians of young girls a lot of money in exchange for marriage. Sometimes when the girl's father is a migrant worker, the mother is worried about her daughter's safety. They cannot ensure maximum protection as they lack resources. Female children are continuously subjected to sexual harassment on their way to and from school or whenever they go outside. As a result, the family thinks it is best to marry her off."* Moreover, Vikarun Nessa said that no matter how much everyone tries, this problem will not easily dissipate until and unless the issue of poverty is addressed and resolved, at least to some extent.

Vikarun Nessa added, *"while the DPF's initiatives are quite commendable on this front, it is still at the grassroots level."* She also agreed that among the more notable accomplishments, the District Registrar of Marriage Office and all the kazis (marriage officiants) formed an alliance and pledged not to endorse or allow child marriage. They also agreed that if they had any suspicions, they would immediately notify the authorities. The imams (Muslim religious leaders) from the local mosques also made a similar pledge, since many guardians marry off their daughters with only the blessing of a religious cleric.

All these concerns were raised in the DPF's Dialogue Meeting, which was held on 16 November 2021. People from across the district, including DPF members, students, teachers, chairmen, DD of Women's Affairs, DD of Social Welfare, District Commissioner (DC) and the Additional District Commissioner (ADC) General, District Registrar of Marriage, kazis, and priests were present in the meeting. Afterwards, the District Registrar and the President of the Kazi Association, Mohammad Yahiya, promised not to register any underage marriages.

The DPF has also engaged directly with secondary schools to run awareness-raising campaigns and warn students of the risks of child marriage. In some parts of the district, school children have even begun taking an oath to stand against child marriage. As our future leaders, their understanding of this social injustice and their willingness to take action even from a young age will help ensure a better future for all. News of their pledge against child marriage circulated across local and national media, triggering discussions among prominent local stakeholders as well.

DPF President, Arzoo Miah, said that he is very hopeful about the forum's work. They are sensitising people about the negative impacts of child marriage, promoting good governance, protesting inconsistencies in public services, and informing people of their rights. He said,

> "Even if the P4D project does not continue, the forum members and I will keep working to remove this curse from our society. I believe that if the citizens are aware enough, it is possible to significantly reduce the number of child marriages."

Advocating for Quality Education: Munshiganj DPF Bridges the Gap between the Guardians and Schools

As a mother of a young student, Najma Akter, didn't know much about her role as a guardian with regard to how her child's school operated. However, after attending the meetings and discussion sessions conducted by the Munshiganj District Policy Forum (DPF), she realised guardians could have a more active role in their children's education, especially with the help of the Social Accountability Tools (SATs) like the Right to Information (RTI) or the Grievance Redress System (GRS). *"I used to feel very intimidated asking about my child's lessons or about things that are going on at school. But now, I know there are several ways to address these concerns,"* she said. The Munshiganj DPF decided to focus its work on quality education because, *"the UN announced this as the fourth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 4),"* said the forum president, Khaleda Khanam.

Md. Aynal Haque Shovon, member of two school committees, said the DPF is the first of its kind in Munshiganj.

> "Thanks to P4D, this forum informed many people about the SATs, especially RTI and Citizen's Charter."

Shovon also said that the two schools where he is a committee member provided the guardians with the headmasters' phone numbers to ensure accountability and access to information. *"This is something that we had never done before and probably would never have done had it not been for the DPF campaign."*

A university student, Wasiur Rahman Brinto said he did not know about SATs before attending a DPF-led event. *"The DPF helped us learn about the Right to Information, which is a very powerful tool. The meetings and training sessions also covered other tools that citizens could use to their benefit."* Brinto thinks that the next generation will be a smart one who can address corruption effectively.

P4D organised a 15-day online training programme for DPF members on advocacy and activism. During this time, DPF members also learned about their roles and responsibilities in ensuring quality education in the district. Based on that knowledge, they designed a six-month action plan beginning with a position paper by Ichhapura Government Model High School Headmaster, Nasir Uddin, which highlighted the challenges in the district's schools. DPF members then visited several schools including Ichhapura Government Model School, Malkhanagar High School, and Shonarong Government Pilot Model School to include teachers in their activities.

The district's Secondary Education Officer, Md. Benazir Ahmed, was also present at a DPF meeting. He said,

> "Quality education is a great theme to work on. Most importantly, using the government's own tools for activism is something quite novel and rather constructive."

The DPF's activities included several discussions, a monthly forum, and meetings to mark special observation days. The event they are most proud of, however, is the public hearing where citizens were invited to speak in front of government officials and raise awareness of their complaints, which was a rare opportunity. The meeting ended with a profound pledge.

The Additional Deputy Commissioner, who was present, assured the DPF that he would be directly involved in ensuring three crucial initiatives — parent-teacher meetings, multimedia classes, and strong and effective school committees — to improve education quality. DPF Secretary, Hamida Khatun, said the biggest challenge to ensuring quality education in districts like Munshiganj is that the guardians are not aware of their children's education.

> "You won't get the desired result of your advocacy if most of the guardians are not aware of their rights as citizens and their children's rights as pupils. That is something we are trying to change with our campaign,"

she said. Khatun pointed out that such initiatives take time to bear fruit.

Members of the DPF, however, are steadfast in their commitment to keep working to improve the quality of education in their district even after the P4D project ends. As stated in their own words,

> "Quality education is not a goal; rather, it's a process."

Improving Access to Community Clinics: Moulvibazar DPF Advocates for Community Health Care

In Moulvibazar, there are 179 community clinics that provide free basic treatment and medicine. Due to mismanagement, however, many of these clinics were often closed before the Moulvibazar District Policy Forum (DPF) began to address the issue. *"This clinic used to be closed most of the time, but now it is open every day, and a significant number of babies are born there every month,"* says Ahsan Habib, one of the Moulvibazar DPF members referring to Balikandi Community Clinic.

After the intervention of the Moulvibazar DPF at several clinics and engaging with community clinic management committees and community support groups, the quality of those clinics has rapidly improved. As a result, people are now receiving better services. The Moulvibazar DPF has partnered with P4D to raise people's awareness of community clinic services, galvanise community clinic management committees into action on their own, and educate the public on the key SATs. In addition to their work improving community clinic services, the DPF members have organised seminars, workshops, and special day observances (both online and offline) to spread awareness and literacy about SATs.

Many people in the district learned about community clinic services through the forum's workshops. The Civil Surgeon, the district's top health official, also started visiting community clinics. With these initial actions, clinic services improved and some clinics that had previously been closed reopened their doors. Moreover, the Community Health Care Providers (CHCP) began attending the clinics more regularly. As a result, in addition to better treatment, the rate of birth canal deliveries has increased from 32% to 48% in the district. Since the DPF's intervention, not only did the service providers become more sincere about their work, but also patients began to visit the clinics more regularly. Now, the people of Moulviba-

zar frequent the community clinics even for minor health problems, be it a headache or fever. Those with major health issues get referred to hospitals by the clinic CHPCs.

> "DPF Moulvibazar has created a bridge between the service providers and service receivers,"

states Md. Abdur Razzaque, Deputy Director of Family Planning (DDFP), Moulvibazar. Generally, people who are at the receiving end are not able to address their problems because they don't have a platform from which to speak. In the same way, those who are at the providing end cannot explain themselves and point out the limitations they have for the same reason. However, DPF Moulvibazar has offered a platform through which both parties have been able to communicate with each other, address issues, and find solutions to them. The DPF has engaged citizens, civil society, and local decision-makers which has strengthened civil society's ability to influence government policy. Through their dialogues and forum meetings, the DPF has also encouraged the practice of accountability and prioritised effective representation of citizens' interests.

Moving forward, Nazmul Islam Muhib, the President of Moulvibazar DPF, commented,

> "This is just the beginning of a great change that is going to take place in Moulvibazar, and we, the

> Moulvibazar DPF, have initiated this. I believe the community clinics will keep on improving even when our project ends."

In the same vein, Md. Abdur Razzaque, Deputy Director of Family Planning (DDFP), Moulvibazar, shared that,

> "the Moulvibazar DPF's work is the inception of something big as they have helped us overcome many obstacles related to our community clinics for more favourable outcomes."

National-Level Impact
National Thematic Forums and National Dialogues

The culmination of P4D's efforts has been to develop a national platform for dialogue between civil society and government officials. After providing foundational training and guidance to CSO leaders, MAP members, DPF members, and government officials from the local to the national levels, P4D shifted focus to National Dialogues. This was the first initiative of its kind under P4D, and stakeholders from senior officials to district-level advocates to implementing organisations genuinely engaged with each other to address three key thematic topics: stopping child marriage, improving community clinics, and ensuring quality education. Here are some highlights from the National Dialogues…

1,075
PARTICIPANTS ATTENDED NATIONAL-LEVEL CSO – GOVERNMENT POLICY DIALOGUE EVENTS IN PERSON

KEY IMPACTS:

3 NATIONAL THEMATIC FORUMS FORMED AND PROVIDED CAPACITY BUILDING

3 NATIONAL DIALOGUE EVENTS COORDINATED

144 NATIONAL POLICY FORUM MEMBERS WERE ESTABLISHED THROUGH P4D'S DPFs

12 MEMBERS WERE SELECTED FOR THE AD-HOC COMMITTEE OF THE NATIONAL FORUM

National Dialogue on Community Clinic
Chief Guest: Mr Khandker Anwarul Islam, Cabinet Secretary
Chairperson: Mr Md. Shamsul Arefin, Secretary, Coordination & Reforms, Cabinet Division
21 November 2022
Pan Pacific Sonargaon, Dhaka

National Dialogue on **Child Marriage**
Chief Guest: Md. Shamsul Arefin, Secretary, Coordination & Reforms, Cabinet Division
Special Guest: Md. Hasanuzzaman Kallol, Secretary, Ministry of Women and Children Affairs
Chairperson: Ms Sanjida Sobhan, ndc, Additional Secretary, Reforms Wing, Cabinet Division
20 October 2022
Radisson Blu Dhaka Water Garden

> "Such a prestigious National Dialogue was attended by many resource persons and dignitaries whom we could not have met personally in other circumstances. I feel honoured and proud to have them join us.
>
> - Mst. Mahbuba Begum, Kushtia NTF member

National Dialogues

Bangladesh has a strong history of activism and social movements; however, district and grassroots civil society organisations and individuals rarely have the opportunity to engage in policy discussions with national-level decision-makers. No country can have an open dialogue about national issues if participation is limited to the elite minority, which is why Platforms for Dialogue has been working to change that.

In late October and November 2022, P4D held three National-al Dialogue events, one on each of the key thematic issues: child marriage, community clinics, and quality education. These events, which from an outside perspective may seem relatively minor, were, in actuality, the culmination of years of capacity building, advocacy training, and community mobilisation. For the first time, local leaders from upazila and district-level civil society organisations working with P4D were brought together to present their concerns regarding these key issues to senior government officials from various ministries and divisions including the Cabinet Division, Ministry of Children and Women's Affairs, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, and Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, among others.

Each event began with opening speeches by special guests followed by a brief position paper presentation on the dialogue theme, on behalf of the NTFs, by BIDS (Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies) researchers citing the primary problems, causes, and possible solutions. These presentations were followed by a stimulating discussion on the papers' findings, with participants sharing their opinions, asking questions, and seeking a deeper understanding. DPF Presidents from each participating district also shared their comments with the participants to provide further local context of the issues in their communities. Policymakers enthusiastically engaged in dialogue as well, clarifying the root of the problems and offering additional solutions that could work at the national and district levels.

Not only did senior government officials, policymakers, and DPF Presidents have the opportunity to speak, but various NTF members were also invited to hold the microphone and share stories from their communities. This active participation demonstrated the impact of the NTFs' local work and helped participants understand how deeply these policy issues affect people's lives. Human impact stories highlight policy issues in a way that statistics and legal frameworks simply cannot and sharing these stories on a national stage enabled decision-makers to think from a more human-centred approach.

The open dialogue and discussion proved to be very fruitful, with new ideas emerging from civil society members and policymakers. At each event, participants from all organisations and institutions showed enthusiastic support for the need to address the issues raised. Much consensus was reached in terms of both timing and action items that need to be pursued to achieve the main goals. The government was especially supportive of the NTFs' findings and took ownership of the issues while remaining open to coordinating with civil society and the NTF members. Candid interaction between participants was encouraging to


all, as everyone showed motivation and sincere interest in stopping child marriage, improving access to community clinics, and providing quality education to the children and youth of Bangladesh.

Leaving the National Dialogues, most participants felt hopeful that the work they had completed to this point would lead to more opportunities to address each policy issue with specific actions in a coordinated manner between civil society and government bodies. While this remains to be seen, it is undeniable that NTF members and government officials alike are inspired to take further action to address these problems swiftly and thoroughly. Following the events, a reflection meeting among NTF members was held where they shared more feedback, impressions, and future plans. Some participants felt that local civil society leaders didn't have enough time to share their inputs, especially those who could only join online, however, most expressed satisfaction with the events' discussions. Many NTF members said that even though the collaboration with P4D may be coming to a close, their work is just beginning. Several DPFs have set up mechanisms to continue their work independently, and plan to remain involved in community development. If more National Dialogues take place in the future, with or without P4D's involvement, the vast majority of participants hope that they will last for longer than just one day, as addressing such complex issues requires more time and attention. Lastly, all participants appreciated having the opportunity to connect with national-level policymakers and begin to form working relationships with various government ministries and divisions.

Levelling the stage for civil society members from the upazila and district levels and national-level policymakers to join together and share ideas, experiences, and concerns on these major issues is a huge step forward in and of itself. Democracies must create opportunities like these where leaders from the grassroots to the national level can speak to each other in a respectful, honest, and constructive environment. The only way to improve on major policy issues like the ones discussed at the National Dialogues is by working together.

In addition to the 1,075 in-person participants at the National Dialogue events, more than 600 individuals from P4D's project districts joined online
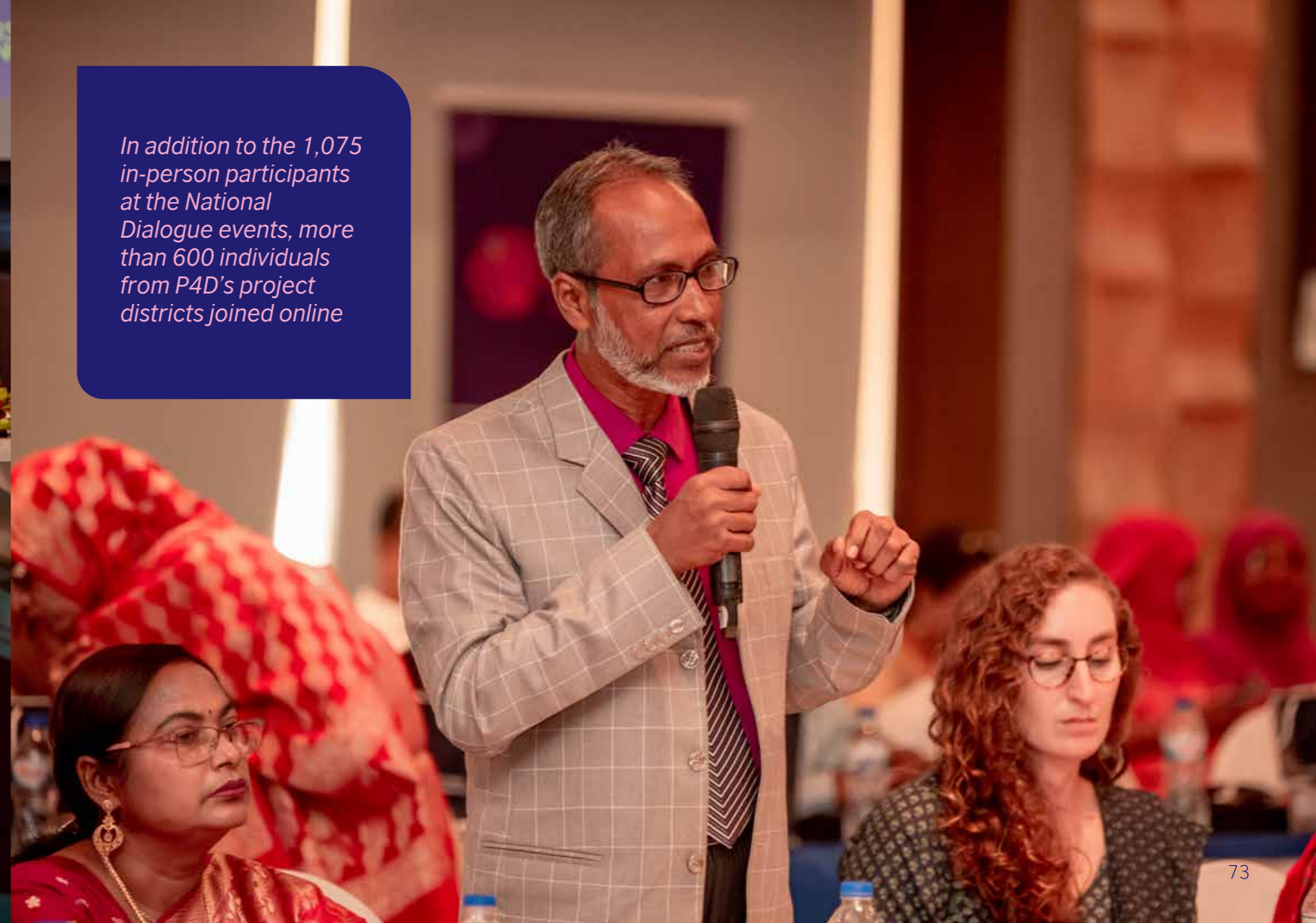
NTF Member Feedback

Following the three National Dialogues, P4D arranged a virtual reflection workshop on 2 December for National Thematic Forum members. The Presidents, Secretaries, and other available core group members from P4D's 12 DPFs participated in the workshop and shared their feedback. In summary, NTF members are happy that they had the opportunity to raise their voices and discuss district-level problems with senior government officials. Many noted how satisfying it was that senior government officials accepted them wholeheartedly and provided helpful guidance.

Ehsana Chowdhury, a DPF member from Moulvibazar said,

"We attended the National Dialogue, listened to senior government officials, and raised and discussed our district-level problems with them. They listened to our words attentively, gave us direction, and encouraged us to continue our work. We were grateful for the opportunity to participate because usually, they are far beyond our reach. It exceeded our expectations."

Some participants felt that some improvements could also be made by extending the dialogues to a full day or multiple days, and for those who joined the National Dialogues virtually, they felt that connectivity improvements would make the experience more beneficial for those who could not attend in person.

Overall, participants were optimistic about the future prospects of addressing local-level issues with national-level support. The vast majority of DPFs have committed to continuing their work beyond P4D, and they hope more events like the National Dialogues that took place in 2022 will take place in the near future.

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The dialogue was a success to some extent. However, a review meeting on the previous day to discuss NTF positions and the government plan should be required to make the event more useful.

- Professor Robindronath Chowdhury, Kishoreganj NTF member

P4D is Just the Beginning...

Policy dialogue is crucial for the success of the democratic process. The exchange of ideas and perspectives between citizens, civil society advocates, and policymakers can foster transparent governance and enhance the quality of decision-making for all. Inclusivity is equally essential as it provides government access to critical local information and perspectives, and grants all citizens equal access to opportunities, resources, and decision-making processes.

Platforms for Dialogue has been playing a crucial role in promoting democratic ownership, responsive governance, inclusive dialogue, and the use of social accountability tools in Bangladesh since its inception in 2017. P4D's efforts have helped encourage stronger democratic values among government officials and citizens alike, empowering all Bangladeshis to take ownership of their democratic processes, and enhancing the quality of governance in the country.

P4D's goals to improve citizen participation, civil society engagement, and government responsiveness and accountability align with the core principles of democracy and are essential for creating a more inclusive, participatory, and responsive democracy in Bangladesh. To maintain the progress P4D has made to date, P4D designed an ambitious sustainability and exit strategy for beneficiaries, institutional partners, and government stakeholders.

P4D's Exit Strategy and Sustainability Plan

Our exit strategy and sustainability plan are closely intertwined. To ensure project sustainability, we have designed closeout activities that ensure our partners and beneficiaries maintain the skills and knowledge they've acquired during P4D's intervention period and continue to work towards improving the use of accountability mechanisms while engaging in meaningful policy dialogue with one another.

P4D's interventions have created ample learning opportunities for civil society and government policymakers to continue to emphasise the importance of accountability and transparency, and our institutional partners have the tools to independently continue this important work. Our hope now is that all of our partners, from the local to the national levels, maintain their focus on the important democratic values imbued into our interventions over the course of P4D, even if political or circumstantial changes arise.

Key activities of our closeout plan that have already been completed include the following:

## Results Area 1: Stronger Civil Society

- Held DPF Regional Workshops to support relationship building among DPF and National Thematic Forum (NTF) members, increase DPF members' capacity, and address the process of combining 3 NTFs
- Published print materials to support DPFs with their future work including a DPF directory and visual reports on their achievements
- Supported local government through the National Institute of Local Government (NILG) and ensuring SAT training remains a part of the standard training practices for local government officials

Results Area 2: Capacity Building for Government Officials

- Conducted reflection meetings with partner institutions like the BPATC, BCSAA, NIMC, and NILG to collect their learnings and understand how they manage their trainers
- Created a Strategic Communications Working Group to study best communications practices for government policy and outline a plan to implement next steps post-P4D

Results Area 3: Improving Governance

- Sourced partners to implement sustainable practices for GRS operationalisation and 3rd party monitoring of Social Accountability Tools
- Prepared handover of all communications materials so similar or future P4D-like projects can benefit from the well-established network, visual content, and platform curation
- Documented learnings from project activities, partner institutions, and national dialogue events for government ministries and donor stakeholders to develop and improve upon existing systems
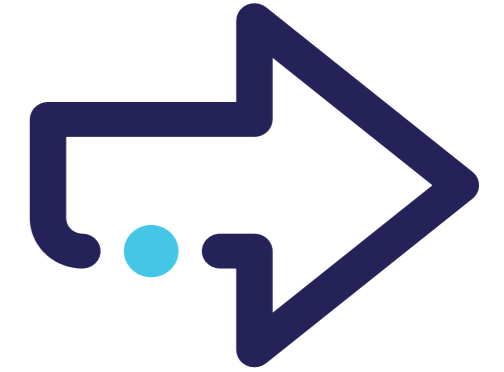
Sustaining P4D's Impacts

P4D's interventions have been centred around capacity building and creating platforms for continued connection. Enabling sustainable continuation of training, advocacy, and community engagement have been built into the structure of our programming. All of our strategic local, institutional, and government partners have the tools and blueprints to continue the necessary work to foster meaningful dialogue and consultation between community, civil society, and government policymakers.

As many of the chapters in the book recount, several beneficiaries and stakeholders from both civil society and government institutions are actively continuing this work by incorporating social accountability policies and engaging in meaningful dialogue with one another. Multiple District Policy Forums have set up mechanisms to collect member fees and continue their work independently, and the BPATC had incorporated accountability policies into their training programme for new civil servants to name a few. With sustained government support and continued demand for cross sectional dialogue from civil society, P4D's work can only expand from here to other districts and communities.

Looking to the Future

Platforms for Dialogue, designed to be a small-scale pilot project to promote inclusive governance and transparency through the promotion of Social Accountability Tools, has surpassed all initial expectations. With each additional project extension and new workplan, the project expanded its reach and successfully created opportunities for dialogue between citizens, civil society, and government officials.

Platforms for Dialogue's achievements are a testament to the hard work and dedication of both beneficiaries and stakeholders. Though there is still much to accomplish, Platforms for Dialogue has paved a path for the Government of Bangladesh and national institutions to pursue democratic policies that prioritise citizen engagement, civil society involvement, transparency, and accountability. As P4D comes to a close, we hope that these values will not only be upheld but expanded upon in the years to come, further strengthening the country's democratic institutions and participation.

Platforms for Dialogue